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Delegates at UWinnipeg Conference Call for Review of Anti-Terrorism Legislation, Recommend Naming Winnipeg a “Human Rights City”

WINNIPEG— Delegates to the Human Rights and Social Justice Conference at The University of Winnipeg have called on Canadian parliamentarians to initiate a review of Canada’s anti-terrorist legislation to ensure that its provisions do not undermine the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The declaration was one of several recommendations to emerge from the conference, which concluded Sunday, which attracted more than 325 participants including prominent dignitaries, students and experts on human rights issues from across Canada and abroad.

Other recommendations included designating Winnipeg as a “human rights city,” creating a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Rights; incorporating human rights education into the public school curriculum; and developing more internship and exchange programs for youth.

Given the level of interest on human rights issues in the community, and the pending establishment of the Canadian Museum on Human Rights in Winnipeg, it is a logical and synergistic step to establish Winnipeg as a “human rights city.” Our rich heritage and blend of people of all races and religions provide a vibrant tableau for change. By acting locally we can achieve global results.

Hosted by UWinnipeg’s Global College, the main themes of the conference focused on the rights of indigenous peoples, women and gender rights, and the rights of war-affected children. Invited speakers and panelists included Canada’s Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council Paul Meyer, former UN ambassadors Paul Heinbecker and Allan Rock, and Monia Mazigh, spouse of Maher Arar, who was instrumental in advocating for his release from a Syrian prison. Mazigh’s speech to the conference earned her a standing ovation and the support of delegates.



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“A nation is judged by how it treats its citizens, and the anti-terrorist legislation that resulted from the aftermath of September 11, 2001, cannot be allowed to continue to trample on individual rights and freedoms,” said UWinnipeg President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lloyd Axworthy. “The Arar case was such a case in point. A country has to have laws that provide protection but at the same time they cannot deny all Canadians the basic human rights that we have come to enjoy, for that is the first step on the road to being perceived internationally as a nation that has no protection for its citizens and no respect for their rights and the rights of the global citizenry.”

Following the conference, the next step for organizers will be to assemble the collective ideas and recommendations into a formal declaration that will be sent to both the UN Human Rights Council and the Government of Canada. “By seizing the momentum that was generated by the delegates, Manitobans and Canadians alike can start to make a difference with respect to human rights issues,” Axworthy added.

Sandra Altner, Executive Director of UWinnipeg’s Global College and conference coordinator, expressed her appreciation for the outstanding work that the delegates produced. “With the aid of world-renowned speakers on human rights issues, and dedicated participation of high school students, university students and academics, and representatives from our diverse population, we have achieved a body of work that will serve us well in the coming years” she stated.

As positive evidence of the need to educate current and future generations in this vital and dynamic field, The University of Winnipeg is establishing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Rights. This important step, will be the first of many on the road to achieving universal human rights for all human beings regardless of where they live.

Information on the Human Rights and Social Justice Conference is available at <http://humanrights-socialjustice.uwinnipeg.ca>. A formal declaration and other supporting documentation, including audio files from each of the keynote and panel sessions, will be posted on the site in the coming weeks.

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