



BOSTON COLLEGE LAUNCHES CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE WITH FORUM ON WORLD REFUGEE CRISIS

At Inaugural Event, Former President of Ireland and U.N. Human Rights High Commissioner Mary Robinson Calls for Attention to Plight of Labor Migrants, U.S. Deportation Policy

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (11-4-05) -- Boston College officially launched its interdisciplinary [Center for Human Rights and International Justice](#) this week with a public forum on the issue of worldwide refugees.

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and past president of Ireland Mary Robinson, featured speaker at the November 3 inaugural event, said that the new center -- with the distinctly holistic approach to human rights issues provided by leadership drawn from the College of Arts & Sciences, Law School and Lynch School of Education -- can play a critical role in addressing the plight of the world's refugees, and in particular that of labor migrants facing increasingly stringent deportation policies.



Mary Robinson, Fr. Hollenbach and BC President William P. Leahy, SJ. (Photo By Lee Pellegrini)

"A significant number of asylum seekers today are not necessarily genuine asylum seekers but are just desperate to get out of the extreme poverty they're in -- and all legal outlets are closed because of Fortress Europe, because of the shutting and harshness of the

borders surrounding this country and other developed nations," said Robinson, now executive director and chair of the Ethical Globalization Initiative, a human-rights organization she founded. "The climate has gotten tougher, especially since the terrible attacks in this country of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks around the world.

"There are so few avenues now for legal movement and authorized movement -- apart from trying to climb barbed wire fences and come through tunnels -- [that] there's an overuse of the refugee/asylum routes, and that tends to prejudice genuine refugees and asylum seekers," she said. "They're thought to just be 'trying to get

into our country.' It's sad to see the greatening populist exploitation of those who are very vulnerable in countries and the lack of leadership on these issues.

"I am pleased that one of the areas of particular focus for [Boston College's] center is on deportation from this country: how widespread it is, how harsh it is and the need for a more humane, human rights-based approach," said Robinson. "On that issue in particular, the center will be able to make a real mark on policy in this country probably at a relatively early stage."

Robinson, noted for humanitarian efforts during her seven years as Ireland's president, added that the new Boston College center is significant due to its interdisciplinary focus, which will enable it to "reclaim the true agenda of human rights" by addressing not only the political and civil rights of refugees but also "the economic and social dimensions of conflict and displacement and the harrowing realities of refugee status and camps."

"We want to be very deeply interdisciplinary," said center director Rev. David Hollenbach, SJ, a Boston College theologian who specializes in issues of global social justice. "We normally think of human rights as something that's concerned with the law, but it's really about suffering, and how we respond to that suffering in its multiple dimensions: physical, psychological and political, among others."

In addition to Fr. Hollenbach, the center's leadership includes associate directors Donald Hafner, a Boston College political scientist who specializes in international politics, U.S. foreign policy and national security; Daniel Kanstroom, a clinical professor at Boston College Law School and director of its Immigration and Asylum Clinic, whose book on the U.S. deportation system is forthcoming and who has extensive experience litigating immigration and asylum cases; and M. Brinton Lykes, a professor of social psychology at BC's Lynch School of Education, whose research includes the effects of state-sponsored terror and organized violence.

"Most of the human rights centers at universities in the United States today tend to be focused in law schools and political science departments," added Fr. Hollenbach, who has been a visiting professor in Africa and Ho Chi Minh City and has traveled to Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt to research religion and human rights in the Middle East. "We have law and political science very much represented in our center but we also have community social psychology, theology and ethics.

"We also have a very strong commitment to working very closely with practitioners in the field who are working on some of the major human rights and humanitarian crises of today," he said, citing the center's connections with organizations such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, operating in 50 countries around the world, as well as with Catholic Relief Services and a number of immigration organizations working to defend people faced with serious deportation orders in the United States.

There are some 35 million refugees and forced migrants worldwide – a number roughly equivalent to the populations of New England, New York and part of New Jersey, said Fr. Hollenbach. "The question is whose responsibility is it to take care of these people?" he said. "It's not just that these people become hungry, but their spirits and their psyches are wounded. How do we help fix that?"

"We want to take a very strongly humanistic approach to these questions and that's part of our commitment as a Jesuit university to approaching issues from a deeply human level," Fr. Hollenbach said, citing Boston College's religious and ethical tradition.

Among the questions the Center for Human Rights and International Justice also will examine is what roles international legal structures and organizations can play in a world where right seems increasingly identified with might.

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