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High-powered workshop and conference examine international refugee law

York University hosted two major international events in the field of refugee studies, one of its widely recognized areas of research excellence, during the week of May 17 to 20.

On May 17, the War Crimes and Refugee Status Research Workshop took place, followed by a welcome reception to launch the York 2010 International Conference on Forced Displacement, Protection Standards and the Supervision of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and Other International Instruments held over the next three days. Both international events featured distinguished senior jurists, legal scholars and academics, government officials, intergovernmental officials, non-governmental organization officials, advocates and students.

The idea for both the international research workshop and the conference grew out of discussions at the [Research Workshop on Critical Issues in International Refugee Law](#), held at York's Keele campus in May 2008. The War Crimes and Refugee Status Research Workshop was the result of a concerted effort to continue work begun at the 2008 research workshop with a wider international collaborative and comparative research project. The international conference came out of a proposal by Justice Tony North of the Federal Court of Australia, immediate past-president of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges, for the establishment of an International Judicial Commission for Refugees.



Above: Conference participants from around the world gather for a group photo

The conference's opening [keynote address](#) was delivered by Volker Turk, director of the Division of International Protection for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who outlined seven points for enhancing the monitoring and supervision of international protection standards for those forcibly displaced in the world today.

Among Turk's seven points were two substantive proposals: the establishment of an expert advisory committee on the implementation of international instruments, and reconstituting a special committee of the Executive Committee that would focus specifically on international protection.

James Simeon, professor in York's School of Public Policy & Administration in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies and a former Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada judge, is leading both initiatives, supported by David Dewitt, York's associate vice-president research & innovation, and Susan McGrath, director of the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) at York University.

In addition to Turk, the international conference featured two other keynote speakers, Justice Nicholas Blake, president of the Asylum and Immigration Chamber, Upper Tribunal, UK, and Professor Sriprapha Petcharamesree of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and Centre for Human Rights Studies at Mahidol University in Thailand.

Panel presentations covered a variety of topics on current monitoring and supervisory practices and experiences of the UNHCR and states party to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as possible ideas, proposals and reforms for enhancing the supervision of international protection standards in the context of forced displacement. The international conference also considered the effectiveness of legal instruments and remedies in the Global South and the Global North. The final day was devoted to presentations on International Protection and Public Accountability: The Role of Civil Society.



Above: Participants at the research workshop gather for a photo. Front row seated left to right: Professor Sharryn Aiken, Queen's University; Barbara Harrell-Bond, OBE, UK; Professor James Simeon, York University; Professor Jane McAdam, University of New South Wales, Australia; Justice Anthony North, Federal Court of Australia; First row standing: Professor Ian Greene, York University; Susan Davis, Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy; Professor Susan McGrath, York University; Professor Elspeth Guild, Radboud University, The Netherlands; Kees Wouters, UNHCR, Geneva, Switzerland; Judge-President Bernard Ngoepe, South Africa; Justice President Ana Calzada, Costa Rica; Second row standing: Nico Mol, European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France; Justice Professor Dr. Harald Dorig, Germany; Justice Dr. Bostjan Zalar, Slovenia; IRB Chair Brian Goodman; Joseph Rikhof, senior counsel, Justice Canada; Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill, University of Oxford; Dr. Alice Edwards, University of Oxford; Mary Teresa Glynn, Canada Border Services Agency; Geoffrey Care, Shetland Islands, Scotland.

The War Crimes and Refugee Status Research Workshop was divided into two panel presentations and roundtable discussions. The morning panel session on the war crimes and refugee status research project, funded by an International Opportunities Fund grant from the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada, included presentations from Professors Geoff Gilbert, School of Law, University of Essex, UK; Kate Jastram, Berkeley Law, University of California Berkeley; and Simeon.

The afternoon panel focused on the developing content on exclusion under Article 1F(a) of the 1951 Convention, which included presentations from Joseph Rikhof, senior legal counsel, Justice Canada; Justice Professor Harald Dorig, Federal Administrative Court, Germany, and Kees Wouters, senior refugee law adviser, Division of International Protection, UNHCR.

Canadian government officials in attendance at the research workshop or the international conference included: Chief Justice Allan Lutfy of the Federal Court of Canada and fellow Justices Luc Martineau and Russel Zinn; Brian Goodman, chair of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), Ken Sandhu, deputy chair of the IRB's Refugee Protection Division, Sylvia Cox-Duquette, senior general counsel, and other IRB officials; Kristen Mlacack, director of Citizenship and Immigration Canada; and officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canada Border Services Agency.

Among York faculty members who participated in one or both events were: Nergis Canefe, associate director of the Centre for Refugee Studies, a political science professor in York's School of Public Policy & Administration and adjunct faculty member in the Faculty of Law at Turkey's Istanbul Bilgi University; Obiora Okafor, professor in York's Osgoode Hall Law School; Michael Barutciski, professor and director of graduate studies in Glendon's School of Public & International Affairs, and Professor Emeritus Howard Adelman, founding director of the CRS.

In addition to visitors from across Canada and the United States, the research workshop and international conference participants came from such countries as Australia, Costa Rica, India, Japan, Thailand and South Africa. European participants included representatives from France, Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom.

Both the research workshop and international conference were chaired by Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill, senior research fellow, All Souls College, University of Oxford, England. A Canadian, Goodwin-Gill is one of the world's leading authorities in international refugee law.

For further information on the [research workshop](#) and the [international conference](#), visit their Web sites.

