IRAP REBRANDS AS INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROJECT TO BETTER REFLECT GLOBAL SCOPE OF IRAP PROGRAMS AND IMPACT

*New name and logo more accurately reflect how the organization’s work has evolved to address the world’s worst refugee crisis since World War II*

(New York, NY, September 21, 2015) – Today, the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) at the Urban Justice Center announced the organization’s new name and logo, reflecting a critical evolution. Founded in 2008 as the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project, the International Refugee Assistance Project serves displaced persons all around the world in an effort to help mitigate a truly global crisis.

The world currently faces the worst refugee crisis since World War II, with 60 million people displaced globally. This makes the work of IRAP all the more important. “Our objective has been, and remains, to extend legal services to those for whom legal assistance is vitally essential yet inaccessible,” said Becca Heller, Director of the International Refugee Assistance Project. “The current crisis arises from a collective failure to ensure meaningful, long-term solutions for those who flee their homes into neighboring countries. IRAP addresses precisely this systemic breakdown, connecting refugees directly to legal experts who can support them in navigating the bureaucracy that stands between them and safety. IRAP’s impact to date proves that, despite the unprecedented scale of displacement, there is hope. Now more than ever, we must deliver on this hope for the most vulnerable refugees wherever they may be.”

IRAP’s model and mission remain the same, though now operating on a larger scale. IRAP started with five students at one law school assisting a handful of families in Iraq. Today, the organization works with 1,200 students at 26 law schools across the United States and Canada, and with a global cadre of attorneys from over 60 law firms and six multinational corporations to serve thousands of refugees and displaced persons all around the world. IRAP works with the world’s most vulnerable refugees including LGBTI individuals, women at risk, religious minorities, and U.S. allies, primarily in the Middle East.

IRAP leverages every $1 donated into $10 in legal aid for clients from numerous countries including: Afghanistan, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. It works to register those individuals as refugees and win resettlement to one of 14 destination countries, including the United States.

To date, IRAP’s dual approach of direct legal aid combined with systemic policy advocacy means that it has helped resettle over 3,000 individuals to safe new countries, and has changed the lives of 120,000 others through systemic reform. IRAP will continue growing its impact as the International Refugee Assistance Project.
Experts who can speak on this issue include:

**Becca Heller**, Director and Co-founder of IRAP and a visiting clinical lecturer in law at Yale Law School, has received numerous awards in recognition of her work with IRAP, including a Skadden Fellowship and, most recently, The Charles Bronfman Prize. She was also named one of the *Christian Science Monitor’s* “30 under 30” change makers, and is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Becca’s interest in the legal challenges facing refugees began on a trip to Jordan during the summer after her first year in law school. During her stay, she visited with six different refugee families; each of them identified legal assistance as their most urgent need. Having just completed her first semester in Yale Law School’s Immigration Legal Services clinic doing asylum work, Becca believed that law students could assist refugees applying for resettlement. She returned to Yale and, together with others, founded IRAP in 2008.

Becca received her J.D. from Yale Law School in May 2010. She graduated summa cum laude from Dartmouth College in 2005.

**Walt Cooper**, Chair of IRAP’s Board, currently serves as Director of Veterans Experience, a newly created position at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Prior to joining VA in 2014, he spent 14 years as a U.S. Army Green Beret. During his military career, Walt served as the ground force commander of the U.S. mission to capture warlord Joseph Kony and defeat the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central Africa. Previously, he commanded a Special Forces Operational Detachment through two tours in Iraq. Walt’s service also included duty as an Assistant Professor in West Point’s Department of Social Sciences and as a speechwriter to General David Petraeus.

Walt graduated as Valedictorian and Distinguished Honor Graduate from West Point in 1999, earning a BS in Economics. He subsequently completed an MSc in Economic History from Oxford, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. Later, Walt continued his post-graduate studies at Harvard University, completing his PhD in Political Science in 2013. He is currently an adjunct professor in Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service.

Walt lives with his family in Bethesda, Maryland.
About IRAP: The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) organizes law students and lawyers to develop and enforce a set of legal and human rights for refugees and displaced persons. Mobilizing direct legal aid and systemic policy advocacy, IRAP serves the world's most persecuted individuals and empowers the next generation of human rights leaders. Follow us on Twitter: @RefugeeAssist or Facebook.

For additional information or to speak with an IRAP expert, please contact: Amy Weiss, Amy@Weisspublicaffairs.com or 202.203.0448.