Contact: Susan Davies, Iraqi Refugee Project

518-392-9477 or susandavies22@gmailcom

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Becca Heller to talk on “Iraqi Refugee, An Ongoing Crisis, A Broken Obligation” at Albany School of Pharmacy on September 29**

On Thursday, September 29 at 7 p.m. Becca Heller, director of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), will give a talk on “Iraqi Refugees, An Ongoing Crisis, A Broken Obligation” at the Albany School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Student Union Room 202, 106 New Scotland Ave., Albany. Speaking from extensive experience advocating for Iraqi refugees, Ms. Heller will relate stories about the legal challenges and humanitarian hardships being faced by Iraqi refugees who fleeing the violence and persecution resulting from the war in Iraq have found themselves stranded for years in neighboring countries.

IRAP organizes law students and attorneys to provide legal representation to Iraqi refugees who have none. Currently The Albany Law School is in the process of establishing a chapter of IRAP, and Ms. Heller is in Albany to conduct a training for participating law students and supervising lawyers.

Approximately 4.7 million Iraqis were displaced by the war as refugees or Internally Displaced Persons. Many found themselves persecuted because they had worked for the US or US companies. Between 2003 and 2010, only 54,614 Iraqis were resettled in the U.S. Albany is one of the cities in the US which has become home for Iraqi refugees. Currently about 400 Iraqi refugees live in the Albany Capital District resettled here by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Albany Field Office (USCRI Albany) and Catholic Charities.

Ms. Heller’s talk is co-sponsored by the Iraqi Refugee Project of Albany (a coalition of Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace, Women Against War and the Women’s Association for Family Affairs), the Albany School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, the Albany Law School Chapter of Amnesty International, the Albany Law School International Law Society, and the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Albany Field Office. The event is free and open to the public.

The Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) helps Iraqi refugees navigate the rules and processes of resettlement in the US. Their work helps families escape from harm and persecution. War and sectarian violence in Iraq forced thousands to flee for their lives and become stranded in other Middle East countries. They cannot return to Iraq without risking their lives so are forced to seek refuge elsewhere. But the process of gaining admittance to the few western countries that accept them is difficult and can take years.

IRAP was started by graduate students at Yale Law School to provide legal representation and policy advocacy on behalf of Iraqi refugees seeking resettlement, and to assist those who have resettled. Eight other law schools and several hundred volunteers including students, lawyers and advocates have joined the effort to deal with this humanitarian crisis.

Becca Heller is the director and co-founder of IRAP. She has received both a Skadden Fellowship and an Echoing Green Fellowship in recognition of her work for IRAP. She is currently teaching IRAP as a seminar at Yale Law School, where she is a visiting clinical lecturer in law.

Ms. Heller’s interest in the legal challenges facing Iraqi refugees began on a trip to Jordan during the summer after her first year in Yale Law School when the refugee families she visited all identified legal assistance as their most urgent need. Ms. Heller believed that law students could assist refugees applying for resettlement so together with Jonathan Finer founded IRAP in 2009.

Ms. Heller received her J.D. from Yale Law School in May 2010. Prior to law school, she lived and worked in Sub-Saharan Africa for two years.

For more information about Ms Heller’s talk contact the Iraqi Refugee Project at 392-9477 or check [www.womenagainstwar.org](http://www.womenagainstwar.org). For more information about IRAP check [www.iraqirefugee.us](http://www.iraqirefugee.us). For information about USCRI Albany check www.RefugeesAlbany.org.