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Fifth Annual HHRP Lecture to Feature Michael Posner

3/11/04—The Owen M. Kupferschmid Holocaust/Human Rights Project is pleased to announce that the fifth annual Kupferschmid lecture, featuring Michael H. Posner, will take place on Thursday, March 25, 2004 at 4 pm in room 120 of the Law School’s East Wing.

Posner is the Executive Director of Human Rights First (formerly the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights). His talk will focus on post-September 11 legislation and actions that have compromised civil liberties, constitutional protections, and the status of human rights globally.

"It is a great honor for us to have Mike Posner give the annual Kupferschmid lecture," said BC Law Professor and HHRP Advisor Daniel Kanstroom. "He has been a world-renowned leader in international human rights work for many years. It is especially significant that he will address human rights concerns in the context of the U.S. government's so-called 'war on terrorism' as this has been a particular focus of our human rights program this year. We anticipate a great lecture and a lively discussion afterward."

Named for its founder, a 1986 law school graduate, the Holocaust/Human Rights Project helps to ensure that the precedential value of Holocaust-related law is fully realized and applied to state-sponsored human rights violations today. The project also organizes major conferences to address specific legal issues related to the Holocaust and other human rights violations, such as the annual Kupferschmid lecture.

The Kupferschmid lecture is co-sponsored this year by the American Constitution Society.

Michael H. Posner

Michael Posner, Executive Director of Human Rights First (the new name of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights), has been at the forefront of the international human rights movement for 25 years. Under his leadership, the Lawyers Committee has earned a distinguished reputation in the areas of political asylum law, international justice, refugee protection and workers rights.

When Human Rights First was founded in 1978 (as the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights), the bulk of volunteer work on human rights projects consisted of filing complaints and trying to persuade the United Nations to investigate or take action against human rights violations. Posner felt the next step was to have lawyers go to foreign countries and investigate the status of human rights firsthand. This was based on his own first experience as a law student, when he undertook a project researching the abuses of Ugandan president Idi Amin. Although he could not get into Uganda, he interviewed refugees throughout Europe, often clandestinely. The result was a well-documented report which directed the focus of the United Nations and the U.S. Congress on Uganda.

In the years since, Human Rights First has sponsored more than 50 fact-finding missions and issued reports on numerous countries, including El Salvador, South Africa and Cambodia. In 1980 Posner played a key role in proposing and campaigning for the first US law providing for political asylum, a provision added to the Refugee Act of 1980. He also proposed, drafted and
campaign for the Torture Victim Protection Act (TVPA) – a federal statute that was designed to give victims of the worst crimes anywhere a remedy in US courts. The TVPA was adopted by Congress and signed into law in 1992.

Posner has also been a prominent voice in support of fair, decent and humane working conditions in factories throughout the global supply chain. As a member of the White House Apparel Industry Partnership Task Force, Posner helped found the Fair Labor Association, an organization that brings together corporations, local leaders, universities and NGOs to promote corporate accountability for working conditions in the apparel industry.

Before joining Human Rights First, Mike was a lawyer with Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal in Chicago. He lectured at Yale Law School from 1981 to 1984, and has been a visiting lecturer at Columbia University Law School since 1984. A member of the California Bar and the Illinois Bar, he received his J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley Law School (Boalt Hall) in 1975, and a B.A. with distinction and honors in History from the University of Michigan in 1972.