

Summerside Lawyer Heading to Kabul

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A public defender in Summerside is leaving for Afghanistan next week to join an international team mentoring lawyers there.

“The International Legal Foundation is charged with developing an independent, functioning legal-aid program in Afghanistan,” said Trish Cheverie, “starting in Kabul and hopefully branching out to the provinces.”

The ILF is a not-for profit public defender organization based in New York. Its involvement in Afghanistan began in 2000, working with refugees from the Afghan legal community in Pakistan.

Cheverie has been studying Afghan law in preparation for her trip, and is finding it relatively light reading compared with Canadian law. The constitution, the criminal code, the highway traffic act, the narcotics code and the juvenile code don't quite fill a large binder.

Cheverie will spend three months working with lawyers in the Afghan capital.

“This is really talking about basic human rights and trying to ensure that a whole population, for perhaps the very first time in a long time, has access to basic human rights,” Cheverie said.

A Dangerous Place

Afghanistan has proven to be a dangerous place for Canadians: forty-two Canadians have died there. But the worst of the fighting is in the south; Kabul, in the east, is relatively safe. Still, Cheverie is being instructed to take precautions.

“We're not encouraged to leave the compound where we're living without a driver, and without people knowing where we're going and what we're doing,” she said.

Cheverie expects it will be mostly work for her in Kabul, but she is looking to experience some of the culture there. There is one market, in particular, that she hopes to visit: it deals exclusively in songbirds.

“Kabul used to be a garden city and it was filled with birds,” she said.

“That's no longer the case because of the years of devastation and war. To me nothing could be

more poignant and powerful than that.”

Cheverie says she doesn't expect to make a big difference in just three months in the war-torn nation, but is hoping to come away thinking that she has done some good.