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March 24, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The ILF Advises the World Bank on Justice Reform

ILF Urges Increased Focus on Criminal Defense for the Poor in its Justice Reform Portfolio

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This week the ILF responded to the World Bank’s official request for consultation on its approach to justice reform, encouraging the Bank to focus more resources on criminal defense services for the poor.

Over the past two months, the Bank has been soliciting feedback as it reviews its justice reform on its portfolio and develops a strategy document tentatively titled, “Directions in Justice Reform. The ILF advised the Bank to redress the historical imbalance favoring support for the judiciary by adjusting its justice reform portfolio to ensure that a proportionate share of resources is allocated to indigent defense reform.

The ILF called attention to the Bank’s unique position to advocate for the millions of poor people accused of crimes who are often illegally detained without access to effective legal representation.

“Only with the assistance of donors like the Bank can developing nations meet their obligation to provide criminal defense services to the poor,” said Jennifer Smith, the ILF’s Advocacy Director. “Without quality criminal defense services for the poor there can be no rule of law; accused persons will be vulnerable to arbitrary detention, coerced and tortured confessions and wrongful convictions.”

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Among other things, the ILF suggested the Bank strategically partner with experts in the field, as many justice reform projects involve skills that fall outside the Bank's core area of expertise. The ILF also urged the Bank to collaborate with legal specialists to develop reliable goals and indicators measuring the function and quality of legal representation.

The ILF has established public defender programs in Afghanistan, Nepal and the West Bank.

“While many people understand that representation is necessary, few understand the work that must go into providing quality indigent defense services,” Smith said. “The ILF looks forward to continuing to work with the World Bank to ensure that governments prioritize their obligation to provide criminal defense services to the poor.”

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About the International Legal Foundation:

Created in 2001, the ILF is an international nongovernmental organization that assists post-conflict and transitional countries in establishing public defender systems that provide effective, quality criminal defense services for the poor. It is guided by two fundamental principles: that laws must be drafted with an appreciation of the cultural realities of the country in which they will function; and that defense lawyers—as guardians of due process—are indispensable to any fair system of justice and must be provided to anyone accused of a crime.