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## **Documentary Film Featuring Canadian Human Rights Lawyer Irwin Cotler Premiers in DC, as Cotler Receives Prestigious Human Rights Award**

Washington, DC, October 26, 2023 –The renowned Canadian human rights lawyer and former Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler received the Lantos Human Rights Prize at a ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on October 24. The following evening on October 25, the documentary film *First to Stand: The Cases and Causes of Irwin Cotler* had its DC premier at a special screening hosted jointly by Canada’s Ambassador to the United States, Kirsten Hillman, the Embassy of Canada, the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. The evening opened with welcoming remarks from Ambassador Hillman and Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, President of the Lantos Foundation. The screening was followed by a Q&A with Professor Cotler and filmmaker Irene Angelico, moderated by Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Israel’s Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism.

As the 2023 Lantos Prize laureate, Professor Cotler will join the distinguished ranks of awardees including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the late Professor Elie Wiesel, real-life hero of the film *Hotel Rwanda* Paul Rusesabagina, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, founder of the Global Magnitsky Justice campaign Bill Browder, and NBA athlete turned activist Enes Kanter Freedom, among others. Professor Cotler was honored at a standing room only ceremony for his lifelong pursuit of justice and his tremendous impact on the global human rights movement.

The film *First to Stand* offers an intimate look at the cases and causes that have defined Cotler’s human rights work. The film opens on the streets of Moscow with protesters chanting to bring Putin down and takes us to Iran, where courageous women dare to wave their hijabs like banners in the streets of Tehran. Against this backdrop, past and present, *First to Stand* follows Cotler and his team of young activists at the Raoul Wallenberg Centre as they advocate for political prisoners and human rights activists battling the world’s most repressive regimes.

A former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, as well as Canada’s first Special Envoy on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, Cotler began fighting for freedom and justice with the landmark case of Russian refusenik and political prisoner Natan Sharansky. Other human rights champions featured in the film cover the globe from Nelson Mandela, the late South African president who led the resistance to apartheid; to Iranian journalist and activist Masih Alinejad, who was awarded the American Jewish Committee’s Moral Courage Award last year; Saudi blogger Raif

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Badawi, who was sentenced to 10 years and one thousand lashes for promoting freedom of speech; human rights barrister and Britain's special envoy on media freedom, Amal Clooney; and more.

The film feels particularly timely and relevant amid current events. December 10 will mark the 75th Anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the need to stand up for the values contained within the Declaration has never been greater. *First to Stand* highlights historic battles for justice in places like South Africa, but it also features modern-day human rights struggles, such as the women's rights movement sweeping Iran. Above all, it offers a glimpse into Cotler's relentless pursuit of justice and the ways that his work has continually advanced human rights throughout the world.

*First to Stand* was created by the international award-winning "power couple" of Irene Lilienheim Angelico and Abbey Jack Neidik, known for their compelling documentaries, including *Dark Lullabies*, a film about the reverberations of the Holocaust on the next generations.

For more information about the Lantos Human Rights Prize, please contact Chelsea Hedquist via [press@lantosfoundation.org](mailto:press@lantosfoundation.org).

For more information about the film, please contact Suzan Ayscough via [suzan.ayscough@gmail.com](mailto:suzan.ayscough@gmail.com).

- Interviews available | Photos and video clips available | Screening link available on request
- EPK: <https://firsttostand.com/assets/epk.pdf>
- posters: <https://firsttostand.com/poster/>
- website: <https://firsttostand.com/>
- trailer: <https://vimeo.com/792032778>

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