FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EVENT: Meet the Director, Prof. Penelope Mathew
LECTURE: “Home again? Change and Continuity in Australia’s Refugee Policy”
DATE: Sep 12, 2008
TIME: 4:00 p.m.
LOCATION: UM Law School, 625 S State Street, 120 Hutchins Hall
CONTACT: Jaeyeon Chung, 734.763.5954, refugee@umich.edu

NOTE: This event is free and open to the public, reception to follow.

DESCRIPTION:

In 2001, the Australian government made world headlines when it interdicted the Norwegian Freighter ‘Tampa’ which was carrying 433 asylum-seekers who had been rescued at sea. The government then introduced a policy of offshore processing for refugees known as the ‘Pacific Solution’ that saw asylum seekers languish in detention in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. The new Director of Michigan’s Program in Refugee and Asylum Law will speak about the steady diminution of refugee rights that occurred during the 1990s, as well as the reasons that this policy was attractive to the Australian electorate. She will also talk about the reforms introduced by the Rudd government and the need for further reform.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Penelope Mathew, Visiting Professor and Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law

Penelope Mathew’s research interests are international law, human rights law and refugee law. She has published widely in the areas of refugee law and international human rights law, in journals such as the American Journal of International Law, the International Journal of Refugee Law and the Georgetown Immigration Law Journal. She is a past editor-in-chief of the Australian Yearbook of International Law (2005 – 07) and one of the authors of International Law: Cases and Materials (Oxford, 2005).

Professor Mathew’s particular expertise is in refugee law and she has worked with and for refugees in many capacities. In 2001, she advised the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ regional office for Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific concerning
the problems with Australian legislation underpinning the so-called "Pacific Solution" (i.e., the interception of and "processing" of unauthorized boat arrivals’ claims to refugee status in other countries in the Pacific). She was also a participant in the third expert panel on refugee law organized by UNHCR during the "global consultations" on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

She has written numerous submissions to parliamentary inquiries, particularly those relating to changes to Australia’s immigration laws and their impact on refugees and asylum-seekers. Her evidence to the Australian Senate’s Legal and Constitutional Committee concerning the Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006, a bill which sought to extend the Pacific Solution, was cited extensively by the Committee when it recommended that the bill should not become law.

Professor Mathew has also provided academic opinions to lawyers working on refugee cases before Australian courts, including the test cases for East Timorese asylum-seekers. She is a non-judicial member of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges and a member of its human rights working group. She was one of the faculty members, along with Professor James Hathaway and Rodger Haines QC, for the advanced refugee law workshop organized by the International Association of Refugee Law Judges in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2002. While maintaining a base in academia at the Australian National University College of Law, Professor Mathew has practiced as a human rights and/or refugee lawyer. Since the early 1990s, she has worked as a researcher, caseworker or adviser on a paid and unpaid basis with non-government organizations. One of her first and most enjoyable jobs was a three-month position as a volunteer lawyer with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the refugee camps in Hong Kong. There she learned some things about refugee law and the capacity of human beings to survive and flourish in the most unlikely places. Most recently, she has been the Human Rights Legal and Policy Adviser to the Human Rights Commission in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). (Canberra, the seat of the Australian government, is in the ACT -- a sort of Washington D.C. with voting rights in the national parliament.) During her time at the Human Rights Commission, Professor Mathew conducted the Human Rights Audit of the ACT’s Correctional Facilities -- a yearlong empirical project which monitored and assessed practices in the ACT’s remand centers against international human rights standards for the treatment of prisoners.