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BYU law professor honored for religious freedom

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Durham joins past recipients Madeleine Albright, Garry Wills, Tony Blair, Vaclav Havel

PROVO, Utah -- Brigham Young University law professor W. Cole Durham Jr. will receive the 2009 International First Freedom Award for extraordinary advocacy of religious freedom. The First Freedom Center will recognize Durham on Jan. 15 in Richmond, Va., in conjunction with National Religious Freedom Day.

Each year, the First Freedom Center recognizes a Virginia-based, a national and an international recipient for advancing freedom of conscience and basic human rights for people of all faiths, traditions and cultures.

"We are so delighted to be able to honor Cole with this international award," said Isabelle Kinnard, vice president for education at the First Freedom Center. "Cole truly stands out amongst a group of esteemed internationalists as an exemplar for the international protection of religious freedom. He has helped countries from around the world make religious freedom constitutionally protected."

2009 will mark the 15th year the First Freedom Center has sponsored the annual First Freedom Awards. Past recipients include Madeleine K. Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State; Garry Wills, Pulitzer Prize-winning author; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain; Vaclav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic; M. Farooq Kathwari, chairman and CEO, Ethan Allen, Inc., and founder of the Kashmir Study Group; Abdelfattah Amor, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and the Honorable Richard C. Holbrooke, chief negotiator of the Dayton Peace Accords and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

"I feel honored to receive this award, because of my familiarity with the excellent work done by the First Freedom Center," said Durham, when notified of the award. "I am particularly humbled to receive this recognition in light of those who have been so honored in the past."

Durham is the Susa Young Gates University Professor of Law and director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School. He is a graduate of Harvard College (A.B. 1972) and the Law School at Harvard University (J.D. 1975).

He has distinguished himself since joining the faculty of the BYU law school in 1976 as a scholar of religious liberty and comparative law. In 2000 he was appointed director of the BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies.

Durham has been a guest professor at Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, and at the University of Vienna, and since 1994 has also been a Recurring Visiting Professor of Law at Central European University in Budapest.

He advises governments worldwide on laws dealing with religious freedom and religious associations, specifically on developing the legal infrastructure for the not-for-profit sector. He has been actively involved in consultations on laws dealing with religious freedom and religious associations in many countries, particularly in Central Europe.

Durham is an editor, contributor and author of many books and law review articles dealing with religious liberty, including "Religious Liberty in Western Thought" (1996, Scholars Press), "Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe" (2003, David Brown Book Company), "Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook" (2004, Brill Academic Publishers) and "Religious Organizations in the United States: A Study of Identity, Liberty, and the Law" (2006, Carolina Academic Press).