



# Chumir Ethics Forum

Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership



Phone: (403) 244-6666

www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca

Fax (403) 244-5596

## Thinking about Ethical Leadership

### “Ethical Leadership on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan”

By Janet Keeping, President



Like many Canadians I struggle over what I think Canada should be doing in Afghanistan. In the process of that agonizing I often reach the point where I lament that leadership on the issue seems to have been so inadequate.

Ethical leadership simply cannot be predicated on the macho posturing we hear from time to time from Ottawa on Afghanistan: ‘Canadians don’t cut and run’ is not an adequate argument for war, no justification for the expenditure of development dollars, and certainly nothing remotely resembling diplomacy.

What then would good – ethically good – leadership on Canada’s future role in Afghanistan look like?

#### **Ethical leadership would recognize that there is no moral obligation to do what is impossible**

I am not convinced that the task for Canada in Afghanistan is achievable within a time-frame that does not exceed both the attention span and level of commitment of the international community. What is do-able depends not only on what we are willing and able to do, but also on what is true of our allies’ intentions.

Time and time again I learn of instances where either Canada or

our allies in Afghanistan have not had the requisite resources to do the task they were confronted with right. Hugh Graham cites one example concerning Canadian Forces:

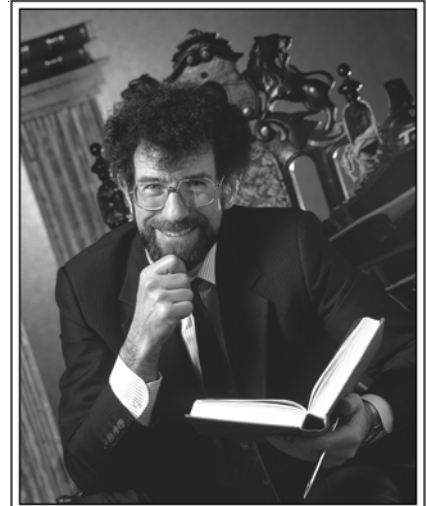
*Before fleeing last fall, many of the Taliban buried their weapons and returned as farmers to booby-trap the [Qalat-Kandahar-Panjwaii] highway and carry out ambushes and suicide bombings...Though Canada had the firepower to defeat the Taliban [in last December’s Baaz Tsuka (a.k.a. Operation Falcon’s Summit)], it didn’t have the troop numbers to hem them in and prevent them from escaping.<sup>1</sup>*

There is also the quite distinct possibility that the achievement of a significantly more decent society in Afghanistan through the NATO driven operation is not possible. After a thorough analysis of how we got to this point in Afghanistan, in their book The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar, Stein and Lang address the possibility that the task NATO has set for itself is not achievable:

*The debate about Afghanistan in Canada is part of a much larger conversation, a conversation about the shape of the world, its cracks and fault lines, about what is possible. Since the first troops went to Kandahar, Canadians suspended disbelief and took for granted that if they stayed long enough, if they spent enough money on the ‘right’*

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Sheldon M. Chumir

<sup>1</sup> “Road of Fire: The war in Afghanistan will be won or lost on Highway 1”, The Walrus, Dec. 2007, 36.

*kind of development – they could succeed, and the Taliban would be contained. But is that reasonable? Is it possible that any outside intervention, no matter what its purpose, no matter how principled its intent, is doomed because it will be seen as a white, Western expedition that forces its way where it is unwanted?...Is outside intervention doomed because it disrupts and destabilizes, with very limited capacity to replace what it breaks?<sup>2</sup>*

Or the impossibility of the task could stem from the unimaginably staggering difficulty of working within a failed – if it indeed ever did exist – state. Stein and Lang point to the “four critical problems that could put at risk all the hard-won gains: weak governance, corruption, the opium economy, and security”. Or the impossibility could flow from the chaos in Pakistan, whose long border with Afghanistan – which armed Taliban-supporting fighters cross with impunity – is thought by many to be ‘unmanageable.’



Photo Credit: Afghanistan Embassy to USA

If we believe that we ought to be in Afghanistan in order to improve conditions there, then it must be true that we *can* improve conditions there at a cost that does not outweigh that improvement. As the philosophers say, ‘Ought implies can’. Whatever the source of the difficulties, it is of overriding importance that Canadian leadership on our future role in Afghanistan ask itself the right questions, most importantly ‘Is there the capacity to do this job right?’ If not, then we should not be there at all.

### **Ethical leadership would be as careful as possible to be apprised of the relevant facts**

In answering the essential questions, ethical leadership would proceed on the basis of what actually *is* the case, not on what we *wish were* the case. Facts matter. Analysts have contended that the Canadian government went into Afghanistan without knowing much about the country and went into the Kandahar region later on a falsely optimistic assessment of the conditions there.

This is shoddy leadership of a most disturbing kind. Lives are at stake here – those of Canadians, Afghanis and others.

Were the relevant facts unknowable? Apparently not. The Dutch knew of actual conditions in Kandahar in 2006 when Canadians went into that area. But the Canadians were ‘surprised’ to find themselves in conditions of war, ‘surprised’ by the level of the insurgency. This kind of incompetence is not just unacceptable; it is unethical.

As we contemplate the future role of Canada in Afghanistan, how much confidence can we have that a sufficiently careful evaluation of the circumstances will be carried out before a commitment to extend beyond 2009 is made? Very little, I am afraid.

### **Ethical leadership would comply with applicable law**

Respect for the rule of law domestically and internationally is one of Canada’s greatest claims to fame in the global arena. It is then particularly appalling when Canada seems to ignore applicable law, as when our troops transfer prisoners to Afghani detention facilities where reports of abuse are legion: “These assertions of prisoner abuse are no small matter. Under international law, Canadian soldiers cannot knowingly hand prisoners over to authorities that engage in torture. If they do, they are liable under international criminal law”.<sup>3</sup>

If we cannot do the job in Afghanistan without lowering our ethical standards – in particular, without breaking the law – then it is pretty clear we have no business being, either now or in the future, in Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> Janice Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 301–302.

<sup>3</sup> Stein and Lang, 252.

### Ethical political leadership would always treat the citizens it serves with respect

The Canadian government has not always treated Canadians with full respect on the Afghanistan file. For example, when the government of the day went to Parliament for approval to extend our involvement in Afghanistan into 2009, it permitted only six hours for debate. Many felt that it was an insult to Canadians and our representative democracy to restrict Parliamentary discussion so severely.

Arguably the same attitude informed the Terms of Reference for the Panel struck by the federal government to make recommendations on Canada's future course in Afghanistan. The *Globe and Mail* story announced the solicitation of public opinion on the subject on November 6, with a deadline for submissions of December 1 – less than one month – with no public hearings. This is not good enough.

One manifestation of respect is honesty. There have been instances where the government has misled Canadians, for example, at the point when the Prime Minister and Cabinet knew our forces were engaged in war in Afghanistan, but ministers were forbidden to use the word 'war' in talking to the public about these matters.<sup>4</sup>

Another ingredient in respectful relations is transparency. On some significant issues connected with Afghanistan, the Canadian government has been much less than fully transparent, for example, on our forces' treatment of prisoners. It was only when the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association and Amnesty International took the federal government to court over that treatment that pivotal documents were released by the government side. The prisoner issue illustrates just how low our government has been willing to go to continue involvement in Afghanistan and to shield that involvement from full public scrutiny.

### Conclusions

Successive federal governments have served Canadians very poorly on the Afghanistan file. Even so, it does not automatically follow that Canada should not extend its commitment in Afghanistan beyond 2009.



Photo Credit: Defense Industry Daily

However, if one considers shoddy leadership to date, lack of confidence in future leadership, dubious commitment by our allies, and the possibility that the task is impossible, then it looks very much as if ethical leadership would extricate us from Afghanistan as soon as feasible.

If we do not extend our presence in the especially dangerous south of Afghanistan beyond February 2009, when our NATO commitments will have been fulfilled, we could still contemplate playing another, tamer role – one with perhaps less emphasis on defence and more on development – in northern or western Afghanistan where, we are told, conditions are more propitious. But ethically sound deliberation on this possibility would require consideration of several additional factors, including the opportunity costs of spending our (shamefully) few international development dollars in Afghanistan.

Might we not do more good elsewhere, where anti-development forces are less overwhelming?

Finally, a return to the more personal perspective: my heart breaks for the people of Afghanistan and especially the women and girls of that country. But even if the same is true of many Canadians, where does this sentiment get us? If failure (meaning that we will never do more good than harm) in Afghanistan is inevitable, then ethical leadership would not keep us there a moment longer than that February 2009 deadline.

Jeffrey Simpson's piece in the December 8 *Globe and Mail*- "[How we put our foot in it, in Afghanistan](#)"- is definitely worth a read. He too relies heavily on Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang's book [The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar](#), which he rightly describes as a "must-read".

<sup>4</sup> Stein and Lang, 289-290.

## Letter from Coventry, England

### ***“Investing in Freedom in Burma”***

On November 14, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier announced the ‘toughest sanctions in the world’ against the military regime ruling Burma/Myanmar in the wake of their brutal suppression of September’s Saffron Revolution. “The question is simple,” he declared. “What can we Canadians do? What can we do as Canadians to force change?” The answer is a ban on all trade and new investment, and financial measures to target those connected to the regime.

But can this laudable step ‘force’ change? Through direct economic pressure - No. Canadian trade with Burma/Myanmar last year was estimated to be a mere US\$9 million, primarily in fish and mining. The catch will be diverted through neighbouring countries and may still end up on the tables of Ottawa and Cranbrook. In mining, some of the few remaining Canadian companies largely divested prior to these new measures, with Jet Gold Corp. and Leeward Capital Corp. leaving in October. In this light, the move appears to be largely symbolic, and perhaps easily taken. Tellingly, Bernier continued:

*A strong foreign policy is one that is anchored in strong values - and in a clear-eyed assessment of our interests...In Burma there is no more room for compromise with this odious regime.*

Whilst it is tempting to be cynical about the ability of such symbolic actions to effect change – with few interests left, perhaps there is little need for compromise – I am not. It is not the West who will cut the ground out from under this regime, but their neighbours and primary trading partners – Thailand, China, India, Singapore, Japan. None advocate sanctions of any form, but the indirect pressure of a moral position may still yield results. ASEAN is increasingly vocal in their criticism of the regime particularly as the EU links the issue to new trade agreements, and India has suspended military aid.

And hope may also be found in an unlikely corner. Influence is being exercised by companies themselves, rather than through changes to the legislative framework within which they operate. Two instances stand out.

First, there are rumours that Singaporean banks, the main financial agents for the regime, have foreclosed a number of accounts held by highly-placed Burmese individuals despite the absence of sanctions.

Second, Canadian Ivanhoe Mining Limited, by far the largest and most controversial mining investor in the country, having resisted shareholder and other pressure for years, finally divested at the behest of Britain’s mining giant Rio Tinto as a condition of embarking on a joint-venture in Mongolia. As a Rio Tinto spokesman told the *Globe and Mail* in October, “Clearly, Myanmar was not a country that we as a company wanted to have an involvement with.”

The argument that ethically motivated and accountable companies can be ‘a light in an area of darkness’ has more merit than is generally recognized. The isolation of this country by the West, however, has meant that Asian firms in Burma have greater influence than their Western counterparts yet less civil society scrutiny of their operations. Whether acting from a point of reputation or operational risk, or a broadened sense of ‘enlightened’ self-interest, companies are influential in this context and it is particularly heartening to hear of Singaporean banks showing this type of leadership.

In our increasingly economically integrated world it is only through the values-driven action of all our institutions – private, public and civil – and their interaction that we can hope to develop a global market grounded in a shared ethical framework that can support people and planet. One in which the current situation in Burma/Myanmar is not accepted by anyone, and the power held by those in office and in business is exercised responsibly to that end.

Nicky Black  
*Research Fellow, Applied Research Centre  
 in Human Security, Coventry, UK  
 PhD Candidate, Waikato University, New Zealand*



*The roof of the new Coventry Cathedral taken from within the ruins of the original building.  
 Photo credit:CoventryPages.net*

## **Thinking and Feeling our Way Through Diversity Issues: Take the hijab, for example**

The hijab – a traditional Muslim head covering for women – has been in the news a lot recently. Until December 10, when an Ontario teenager was allegedly killed by her father for removing her hijab, most of the issues had centred around whether wearing it violated soccer rules. Now we have the death of a rebellious sixteen year old. Both have significant public policy dimensions, to which we need rational, ethically sound responses. But both also give rise to strong emotions, which cannot be ignored, but which must also not be allowed to dominate the public debate over right outcomes.

Let's take the soccer controversy first. Referees in some parts of Canada have refused to allow girls to play wearing the hijab because scarves are inconsistent with safety regulations. Amidst all the hype surrounding the issue, some perfectly good thinking has surfaced. If the hijab violates safety rules, can't the hijab be modified so that it does not pose a threat? But guess what? Such a thing already exists – the 'sport hijab'. Once soccer adopts the sport hijab, then we have an outcome that accommodates difference and simultaneously respects player safety.

But some very strong emotions have also emerged. One Calgary Herald writer called the soccer rules 'arbitrary', saying prohibition of the hijab is discriminatory, because we have no known cases of serious injury in Canada caused by it. But an American soccer player's neck was broken when his sweatband was yanked by another player. A hijab tied under the chin – the usual fastening – could do the same thing, or worse.

What is going on when someone leaps to the conclusion that such rules are 'arbitrary'? A journalist may be just stirring the pot (and selling papers), but a lot of people jumped to the same conclusion. Yes, they feel very strongly about exclusion of hijabs in sport, but what about relevant evidence, such as the sweatband example? And how we would feel if – in the interests of embracing diversity – we ignored safety and a hijab-wearing player were seriously injured? Wouldn't we feel we had failed that player in not protecting her safety?

On the other side are people who in exasperation ask "Why are 'these people' always asking for special rules?" or who insist it's all a matter of choice. Muslim women can choose – religion (wear the hijab) or soccer (don't wear the hijab). But we know that can't be the right approach. Canadians are committed to fair opportunity for all and this is a wonderful thing: the good Christian who cannot for religious reasons work on Sundays is entitled by law to have her/his employer try to arrange work schedules which accommodate this religious belief, that is, avoid Sundays. It might not be possible, but the employer has to try.



*Photo Credit: sketchythoughtsblog.com*

Similarly with the soccer rules: we have to try to find an outcome that satisfies the requirements of safety and religion (hence, the sport hijab).

Murder is of course a very, very different kettle of fish.

On the rational side, most Canadians are quite sensible: embracing diversity only takes us so far. You can't kill your daughter and think you'll get off. In both ethics and law, freedom of religion doesn't excuse murder. There must be people in Canada who think differently, but we aren't going to see letters to the editor defending 'honour killing', if that's what the December 10th murder was and not 'just' another domestic dispute gone fatal.

On the emotional side, many people feel revulsion at the very idea religion could be used to justify murder and this revulsion can carry over to the religion as a whole, in this case, Islam. But of course that would be to generalize in an unjustified, discriminatory and dangerous way.

In our struggle to find ways of living together ethically in the face of our many differences, emotions must be subordinated to the careful, rational consideration of which moral principles take precedence and why.

Janet Keeping

## What is Global Citizenship? What are our Ethical Obligations as Global Citizens?

### What is 'global citizenship'?

The term 'global citizenship' is increasingly heard, especially in Canada, but rarely defined. This leads to confusion because it is often not clear what a particular writer or speaker means by the term.

One thing leaps out at us though. 'Global citizenship' does not refer to a legal status. My Canadian citizenship gives me rights which are legally enforceable against the Canadian government, such as, to live in Canada, to vote here, to obtain a Canadian passport and to enter the country freely. There are no analogous rights at the world level: as Michael Byers says in "Are You a 'Global Citizen'?", "If such a thing as global citizenship exists, it clearly doesn't amount to the rights of national citizenship, transposed to the planetary level." Why? Because "[t]here is no world government ..."<sup>1</sup>

Consider this definition from Daisaku Ikeda, celebrated intellectual and Buddhism scholar:

- The wisdom to perceive interconnectedness of all life and living.
- The courage not to fear or deny difference; but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them.
- The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.
- These qualities are the essential elements of global citizenship.

Sometimes what people have in mind is no more than an attitude towards the rest of the world, an acknowledgement of global interdependence.

The following definition from Michael Byers comes closer to expressing what most of us mean by 'global citizenship':

*Global citizenship empowers individual human beings to participate in decisions concerning their lives, including the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions in which they live. ... It is expressed through engagement in the various communities of which*

*the individual is a part, at the local, national and global level. It includes the right to challenge authority and existing power structures, to think, argue and act with the intent of changing the world.*

This definition uses the language of involvement and action, with the goal of moving us towards greater social justice in all dimensions of our lives, including the global.

### The ethical core of 'global citizenship'

For most people, the notion of 'global citizenship' is strongly normative: because everything is interconnected, we should take our global, as well as other, impacts into account. Because we are all interconnected, the range of people to whom we have responsibilities is global in scope.

Without doubt, the 'should' here is the moral or ethical 'should', and the responsibilities to others – which flow from our interconnectedness – are moral or ethical responsibilities.

### Advocates of global citizenship cannot be cultural relativists

One of the most prevalent attitudes amongst Canadian social justice activists is the view that everything is relative to culture. As John Ladd puts it,

*... whether or not it is right for an individual to act in a certain way depends on or is relative to the society to which he [or she] belongs.<sup>2</sup>*

Many social justice activists look around the world and see that there are many different social practices: in Somalia, female genital mutilation (FGM) is nearly universal; in Canada it is anathema (and illegal). Many conclude such differences are irreconcilable. Many also think that in order to show respect for other cultures one must refrain from criticism of them. They also justifiably fear repetition of past mistakes, for example, when colonial powers imposed their standards on Aboriginal peoples with terrible results. They fear being perceived as imperialists if they make moral judgments about other cultures.

<sup>1</sup> Byers, Michael, "Are You a 'Global Citizen'?", *The Tyee*, October 5, 2005 <http://thetyee.ca/Views/2005/10/05/globalcitizen/>

<sup>2</sup> Ladd, John. *Ethical Relativism*. Wadsworth, 1973.

Moral evaluation is a two-way street: if we are relativists, we have no reason to take seriously criticisms which emanate from other cultures, for example, that we in the West use far more than our fair share of resources while roughly two billion people live on two dollars or less a day. And this is precisely the kind of inequity which global citizenship movements seek to remedy.

However, the most serious problem with relativism is that it is self-defeating. The global citizenship advocate believes we have obligations to people in other parts of the world. But a relativist cannot make any kind of moral judgment about practices in other cultures – too bad about FGM in, say, Somalia, but that is just what they do. So relativism undermines our reasons for acting to end practices we find repugnant.

### **What is the nature and extent of our ethical obligations as global citizens?**

There is no hope of answering such a question briefly, but here are some thoughts.

We need a principle according to which we can know whether we are fulfilling our duties as global citizens. We need to know, for example, how far are we obliged as a global citizen to go in supporting efforts to end FGM?

Kwame Anthony Appiah explores questions of this kind in Cosmopolitanism. He starts off with this example:

*If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out ... This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would ... be a very bad thing.*<sup>3</sup>

We can agree with this: we should rescue the child. But what is the general principle here? It can't be that trivial sacrifices – such as getting our clothes muddy – are sufficient to fulfil our obligations as global citizens. No, our obligations must be more onerous than this.

Appiah offers this as the ethical standard: “If you can prevent something bad from happening at the cost of something less bad, you ought to do it.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, this looks promising. But what is meant by ‘something less bad’? Is it less bad that Dan does not fix his front steps and is sued for a lot of money? Is it less bad that Janet does not honour her promise to pay her daughter's university tuition?

<sup>3</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. W.W. Norton, 2007, 158.

<sup>4</sup> Appiah, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Appiah, 165.

Isn't almost anything we can think of 'less bad' than that an innocent child undergoes genital mutilation? And yet we don't really believe that we are required to give up so much, do we? Perhaps we need to shift gears and take as our departure point basic human needs: people have a right to the satisfaction of their basic needs, such as: health, food, shelter and education. But even if true, what are our moral obligations to help others satisfy those needs?

Appiah has no definitive answers, but he offers several factors which put a limit on those obligations. One is this: the entity with primary responsibility for meeting basic human needs in any country is that country itself. Of course! But some states cannot satisfy those needs. There is no government in Somalia; hence it won't be the Somalian government that stops FGM in that country. According to Appiah, another limit is that each of us need do only her or his fair share. This sounds right. But think again: *why* only my fair share, and what in any event does “fair share” mean?

Appiah also argues that anyway our highest duties are to those to whom we are closest: “Whatever my basic obligations are to the poor far away, they cannot be enough, I believe, to trump my concerns for my family, my friends, my country”.<sup>5</sup> Family? Probably. Friends? Perhaps. But country? Isn't this precisely what global citizenship resists?

All we know for sure it seems is that global citizens have ethical obligations to people beyond their borders. The rest is a work in progress.

Janet Keeping and Dan Shapiro

## **EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **SYMPOSIUM 2008**

#### **Identity and Polarization: Implications for our ability to live well together**

**Friday, October 3, 2008 – Keynote Address  
Saturday October 4, 2008 – Sessions and Banquet**

Metropolitan Conference Centre  
333, 4 Ave SW, Calgary, AB

Watch our website for updates on speakers.

## Seeking Justice: Independence of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

Recent stories about the hijab/soccer controversy referred to the present Minister responsible for human rights, the Hon. Hector Goudreau, as the 'Recreation Minister', without any reference to the human rights aspect of his portfolio. This is an understandable omission by the media since there is no obvious link between recreation and human rights. Further, it makes it difficult for the Minister to remain impartial on human rights yet fulfil his mandate on sport.

This illustrates a structural problem in Alberta's human rights system. Currently, the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission (HRCC) reports to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. All other Canadian jurisdictions' HRCs report to Justice/Attorney General or the Legislature, except New Brunswick where the Commission falls under the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

Reporting to the Minister of Justice makes sense because HRCs are quasi-judicial bodies with the power to make legal rulings to award damages and remedy human rights violations.

Better still, the HRCs in the Yukon and North West Territories report directly to their respective legislatures. This ensures independence for the Commissions, particularly when a human rights case involves one of the largest employers in any jurisdiction—the government itself.

Changing the legislation to reflect the fundamental importance of human rights in Alberta and the independence of the Commission from the government would be easy. Reporting directly to the legislature would ensure the impartiality of the HRCC. It would have the added benefit of clearing up any confusion about who is responsible for provincial human rights legislation.

Dan Shapiro and Heather MacIntosh

### Announcements

#### JANUARY

#### Offensive Speech: What's legal? What's ethical?

Thursday, January 24, 2008 5:30-8:30pm  
2nd floor, Kahanoff Centre 1202 Centre St, S, CALGARY  
Supper served, FREE

*Words can offend. In diverse Canada, complaints about offensive speech are often linked to discrimination. But freedom of speech is the bedrock of our democracy. Where should the lines be drawn?*

#### Panel:

#### **Alan Borovoy**

General Counsel, Canadian Civil Liberties Association

#### **Stephen Ward**

Director, Centre for Journalism Ethics, UBC

#### **Micheal Vonn**

Policy Director, B. C. Civil Liberties Association

#### FEBRUARY

#### Dialogue on Democracy: Where are the women?



Saturday, February 9, 2008 11:30-3:00pm  
Galt Museum, 502 1St S, LETHBRIDGE  
Ticket Cost: \$20 Lunch will be provided

For more information:

Elaine Wojtkiw at (403) 244-6666, or by e-mail at  
[info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca](mailto:info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca)

Congratulations to: **Jody Lyn Sutherland**, the first winner of the **Sheldon M. Chumir Memorial Award in Ethics, Human Rights and Civil Liberties**, University of Calgary, Faculty of Law and, **Emily Anderson** for being awarded the **Sheldon M. Chumir Memorial Essay Prize in Human Rights or Ethics in Government**, University of Alberta, Faculty of Law.

#### Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership

Suite 970, Kahanoff Centre, 1202 Centre Street S. Calgary, AB T2G 5A5

tel: (403) 244-6666 fax: (403) 244-5596 [www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca](http://www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca) [info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca](mailto:info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca)