

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Constitutionality of International Marriage Broker Regulation Act is Upheld

Falls Church, VA. March 27, 2007 – On Monday March 26th 2007, in an important legal decision, Judge Clarence Cooper (from the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia in Atlanta) rejected an international marriage broker's claim that the 2005 International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) is unconstitutional. IMBRA is a new law designed to provide greater protection for foreign women who marry men through what are commonly known as "mail order bride" agencies. Layli Miller-Muro, the Executive Director of the Tahirih Justice Center noted, "This decision sends an important message to the international marriage broker ("IMB") industry, which has worked to resist and evade its regulation, that it can no longer keep foreign women from poorer countries ignorant of the violent histories of the men who use their services and the legal rights available to women living in the United States."

The lawsuit defeated in Monday's decision was brought by a leading international marriage broker, European Connections ("EC"). EC alleged that the law's requirement that IMBs provide information to foreign women about their legal rights and the criminal backgrounds of their prospective American husbands infringed upon their constitutional rights. In a detailed 40-page decision, Judge Clarence Cooper found that "The rates of domestic violence against immigrant women are much higher than those of the U.S. population" and that "IMBRA is highly likely to reduce domestic abuse – and may actually save lives." When considering EC's arguments that the implementation of IMBRA would cost them money, the judge noted that "the Court is confronted with the classic 'blood-versus-money' analysis, and the safety of foreign women coming to the United States is clearly the more vital interest."

The lawsuit was an attempt to resist the regulation of the IMB industry, which derives its profits from pairing foreign women from poorer countries with American men. The requirements imposed by IMBRA seek to ensure that women who speak limited English, have no social ties in the U.S., and are unfamiliar with U.S. laws are given sufficient information to decide whether to enter into a relationship and know where to find help if the relationship turns abusive. IMBRA was passed in 2005 with wide bi-partisan support as a part of the Violence Against Women Act, after over a decade of examination by Congress of the special vulnerabilities of immigrant women to abuse and recent attention to concerns about abuse through the IMB industry.

Another lawsuit, brought in Ohio by a consortium of IMBs, made similar constitutional arguments and was dismissed in January 2007. The United States Attorney's Office and the Tahirih Justice Center defended both cases. The Tahirih Justice Center was represented on pro bono basis by the law firms of Arnold & Porter (Washington, DC) and Jones Day (Atlanta, GA). Lead attorney and partner at Arnold & Porter Randy Miller noted, "This is an important victory that decisively protects a historic law designed to protect extremely vulnerable foreign women coming to the United States from developing countries to marry American men through these agencies."

Through direct legal services and public policy advocacy, the Tahirih Justice Center works to protect immigrant women and girls seeking justice in the United States from gender-based violence.

For more detailed information on IMBRA go to www.tahirih.org.

Available for Interview

European Connections matched a young Siberian woman named Katerina with an American man named Frank Sheridan who soon after her arrival in the U.S. kept her a virtual prisoner in his home, taking away her identification documents and cutting all the phone lines to the house. During one violent rage, he beat Katerina and dragged her around the house by her legs. When she told him she was leaving him and going back home to Russia, Frank *stabbed himself* and then accused her of doing it to get her thrown in jail, only agreeing to post bail if she promised to return to him and be a dutiful wife. Katerina fled instead to a domestic violence shelter where she remained for nine months, and endured more than two years of harassment and threats. While investigating Frank for aggravated stalking, the police discovered he was in Russia looking for a new bride. Later, when a sheriff's deputy came to Frank's house to arrest him for another stalking-related crime, Frank opened fire, shooting the deputy in the face, chest, leg and back. The deputy returned fire and, after 25 rounds of gunfire, Frank was dead and Katerina's nightmare was finally over.

Katerina's saga unfortunately is not unusual. The Court's decision on Monday notes that many other "mail order brides" in the U.S. have suffered similar abuse at the hands of their American husbands, and that the "perpetrators of these crimes were often involved with multiple foreign women and were seeking to become involved with other foreign women at or around the time they committed the crimes."

Katerina is willing to talk to press about her experience and feelings about the legal decision against European Connections.