

Building a Bridge with our Ladies of Justice

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On the evening of April 9, 2016, the Decalogue Society of Lawyers and the Arab American Bar Association of Illinois (AABAR) came together to recognize six women who deserved recognition not only for their accomplishments as attorneys, but also for their deep appreciation of diversity within our communities.

The event proved to be exceptional. What was anticipated to be an intimate gathering became much more. With well over 100 guests in attendance, Chicago Lawyers Magazine covered the evening's success. The ultimate message was simple: Bridge the gap.

In the spirit of Lady Justice, our blindfolded goddess of the moral force within our judicial system, the political tension our media often magnifies simmered momentarily, reminding all that each of us is an important member of one unified family. Above all of the beautiful differences that shape us, we are brothers and sisters first. We dream similar dreams and we carry similar fears. We feel joy and we feel pain. We are, in the end, human beings embarking upon the journey of life together. It therefore behooves us all to combat every injustice we witness along the way in order to protect and support our great big family.

Decalogue and AABAR recognized the following women as our own Ladies of Justice for their valiant efforts in promoting justice. Dean Nina S. Appel, Honorable Nancy J. Katz, and Diane L. Redleaf of Decalogue, along with Sandra Frantzen, Donna Haddad, and Sana'a Hussien of AABAR. These honorees shared what it meant for them to be attorneys and how their individual paths and familial influences were in so many ways very similar despite their ancestries and the unfortunate conflicts between the two cultures of which we so often hear.



Diane Redleaf, Nina Appel, Donna Haddad, Nancy Katz, Sana'a Hussien, Sandra Frantzen

In accepting her award, Redleaf thanked Decalogue for “being at the forefront of drawing the connection between Jewish values and justice in the Chicago legal community.” For Redleaf, “It is a rare privilege to share this same awareness with women members of the Arab-American Bar Association, with whom we join to fight racism, intolerance, and the denial of due process of law” as well as “fighting for the rights of women as women and women as mothers, together.” Redleaf, Founder and Executive Director of the Family Defense Center, has brought more than three dozen major systemic reform cases on behalf of families in Illinois.

Fellow honoree Donna Haddad discussed her appreciation of “a[n Arab] bar organization with both Muslims and Christians working together and joining our Jewish legal colleagues to break bread and to honor women.” In reflecting on the evening, Haddad underlined that “our journeys are all very similar: Immigrants who came to America for a better life for their families, who despite having to overcome challenges, have been able to give back to our American community.” Haddad, current President of AABAR, is Senior Counsel for IBM Watson. She spent three years in Dubai and led a team of attorneys supporting forty countries, including the Persian Gulf, Middle East, Pakistan, Egypt, and Northwest Africa Francophone countries. She also served on the Board of Directors of International Orthodox Christian Charities, a U.S. international humanitarian aid agency.

In acknowledging her award, Judge Katz, an Associate Judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County's Domestic Relations Division, seized the moment to warn that "we are living in an era with increasing intolerance and divisiveness when politicians demonize minorities and immigrants, so it is very important that organizations like Decalogue and AABAR come together to celebrate what brings us together and not what tears us apart." Judge Katz previously served as Assistant General Counsel for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and dedicated over 10 years to the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago.

Award recipient Sana'a Hussien added to Judge Katz's sentiments that the event "was an opportunity to show that we have so much in common and that our collective and collaborative efforts strengthen our respective communities and enhance the legal community." For Hussien, "this is also how enforcement of liberties, stability, and equality is achieved—when we all advocate for each other and not only for ourselves." Hussien is the founder of the Law Offices of Sana'a Hussien & Associates. She served as a U.S. delegate to the Middle East North Africa Economic Summits held in Amman, Jordan; Cairo, Egypt; and Doha, Qatar. She also served as a member of Mayor Richard M. Daley's delegation to Amman, Jordan and led committees in the Arab American Business & Professional Association, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and the United Nations Association's Greater Chicago Chapter.

Joining Hussien was Dean Appel who touched on how both the Decalogue and AABAR communities have so much in common as immigrants and minorities, with similar goals and aspirations. Dean Appel served as a member of the ABA Council on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar. She is the former Dean of Loyola University Chicago School of Law and assumed the title of Dean Emerita, the first time such title has been awarded in the long history of the University, where she remains a full-time member of the faculty and administration.

Fellow award recipient and current Vice President of AABAR, Sandra Frantzen, inspired listeners as she asserted that "now more than ever, it is important that the Arab Bar join together with our brothers and sisters at the Decalogue Society to recognize and share our common experiences." Frantzen emigrated to the United States from Lebanon as a child at the onset of the Lebanese civil war. She is now a partner at McAndrews, Held & Malloy and was named to the Law Bulletin's list of "40 Illinois Attorneys Under 40," an achievement she emphasized would not have been possible had she been denied the opportunity to come to the United States.

As these accomplished women have demonstrated, we are obligated to educate against intolerance, for there is an insurmountable strength that comes in doing so. This is a lesson that transfers in a very real way to the practice of law and what it means to be an advocate: A relentless, conscientious representative for those who need our help. We must engage in action that represents the highest standards and virtues of humanity. Lady Justice reminds us to be fair and equal in the administration of the law, without corruption or prejudice, and knowing no differences. In honoring our own Ladies of Justice, Decalogue and AABAR helped forge a bridge that we hope will last for generations to come.