

## **China Youth at Risk Activities**

The ABA's Rule of Law Initiative and Center on Children and the Law worked with the Chinese legal community to implement a series of activities to improve children's rights protection in China.

On Dec. 8-10, 2006, the All China Lawyers Association and the ABA co-sponsored a national conference in Beijing on "Youth at Risk." ABA President Karen J. Mathis, U.S. experts from ABA's Center on Children and the Law, and Missouri State Supreme Court Chief Judge Laura Stith joined Chinese children's rights lawyers and justice sector officials to discuss what lawyers and judges can do when they encounter youth who are at risk of criminal or other behavior that jeopardizes their future.

The China conference mirrors an initiative by ABA President Mathis to mobilize lawyers and others in the justice sector to help youth at risk in the United States. The topic is particularly pressing in China because mass rural migration to urban areas is visibly eroding traditional support networks for young people who are living in migrant families, or are without their migrant parents.

The 65 Chinese participants included leadership of ACLA, the Supreme People's Court, the Ministry of Public Security, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, as well as one or two representatives from virtually every provincial lawyers association that is active in children's rights protection.

Two roundtables on children's rights protection also were held in western and poorer regions of China. One issue that engendered greatest discussion at those events concerned sharing of best practices on how to protect the rights and interests of child victims of crime (in particular, victims of childhood physical and sexual abuse).

Further cooperative projects are planned to develop the Chinese bar's capacity to involve other stakeholders, including child psychologists, social workers, health professionals, and educators, in united efforts to help at-risk youth. Bringing together the legal and sociological/psychological worlds was crucial, in the United States, in developing more informed and effective advocacy and policy reform strategies for children's rights, and better coordinated responses to children's needs.

In addition, ABA will help lawyers engage judges, police, and prosecutors in developing training and guidelines to improve local criminal justice practices to better protect the interests of child victims and witnesses to crime.