PRESS RELEASE

**Winners of 2016 Legal Aid Practitioners Group Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards announced**

**Solicitor behind historic reversal over joint enterprise among winners, announced by Baroness Doreen Lawrence last night.**

Other winners included Newcomer Darragh Mackin, a 24-year-old human rights solicitor in Belfast, praised for his courage in standing up to police threats over interviewing material witness in case. This was the first time the awards have been opened up to lawyers in Northern Ireland.

The winners of the 2016 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards were announced in London yesterday.

Opening the event in front of a 500-strong audience, LAPG co-chair Jenny Beck said:

*'Every year, the LALY awards give us the chance to celebrate the life-changing, life-saving work of our profession. LAPG could not be more proud to host this event.'*

There were 12 award categories in total (see below).

The winners included:

Simon Natas, of Irvine Thanvi Natas, who won the award for Criminal Defence Lawyer, in recognition of his intervention in the Supreme Court case of Jogee, which overturned more than 30 years of common law authority on joint enterprise.

Accepting his award, Simon said:

'It was the only time in my legal career that I actually saw history being made in the court room. It was a truly extraordinary experience. I don't want to give the court of appeal a nervous breakdown, but there could be a very large number of people who will be able to argue their convictions are unsafe. JENGbA [Joint Enterprise Not Guilty By Association] are some 700 prisoners, but every case is going to turn on its individual facts, but there could be a very large number.'

Darrah Mackin's Legal Aid Newcomer award was accepted on his behalf by his colleague at Belfast-base KRW Solicitors Peter Corrigan, who paid an emotional tribute to the 24-year-old lawyer's courage.

*' I don't want to over politicise things but when we have public school boys posing as statesmen taking away our rights, we need young people like Darragh Mackin who are prepared to fight for the most vulnerable. He took a very sensitive case in Northern Ireland. Gerry Conlon, from the Guildford Four was present at the time, god rest him, and Darragh was seeing a material witness in a criminal case, and he was told that if he went in to take the statement, he could be arrested- and he walked right in there.'*

Also honoured was Simon Creighton from Bhatt Murphy, who has been instrumental in the development of prison law as a distinct specialism. His groundbreaking Vintner case established that whole life prisoners must have the 'right to hope' for release.

Accepting his award, Simon said:

*'It is important that we don't demonise people. If we don't respect the rights of the most vulnerable people, we don't respect the rights of anyone.'*

He added:

*'My clients taught me everything I know about prison law. When I first started, there were no text books. My clients educated me.'*

**Full list of LALY16 award winners:**

1. Legal Aid Newcomer - Darragh Mackin, KRW Law

2. Social & Welfare Lawyer - Lou Crisfield, Miles & Partners

3. Family Legal Aid Lawyer - Baljit Bains, Wilsons Solicitors

4. Family Mediator - Tracy Winstanley, Heaney Watson

5. Legal Aid Barrister - Elizabeth Callaghan, Dere Street Barristers

6. Mental Health Lawyer - Philippa Curran, Odonnells Solicitors

7. Children's Rights - Clare Jennings, Matthew Gold & Company

8. Public Law Lawyer - Simon Creighton, Bhatt Murphy

9. Criminal Defence Lawyer - Simon Natas, Irvine Thanvi Natas Solicitors

10. Legal Aid Firm/Not-for-profit Agency - Anti Trafficking & Labour Exploitation Unit

11. Access to Justice through IT - Crowdjustice

12. Outstanding Achievement - Hillsborough Lawyers (see below)

For photographs and more information, contact Fiona Bawdon, fiona.bawdon@blueyonder.co.uk; Carol Storer, carol.storer@lapg.co.uk

**Notes for editors**

1. The Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards are organised on a not-for-profit basis by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group, to celebrate the work of publicly-funded lawyers. They were founded in 2003.

2. LAPG is a membership organisation which represents lawyers delivering publicly-funded services. It operates throughout England and Wales, and members include private practice and not-for-profit organisations, barristers and costs lawyers. www.lapg.co.uk

3. The LALYs are funded by the generosity of our sponsors. Sponsors of the 2016 awards were: Tikit; Resolution; The Bar Council; DG Legal; Accesspoint; Irwin Mitchell; CILEx; The Law Society; The Legal Education Foundation; Matrix Chambers; Legal Action Group.

4. The 2016 Outstanding Achievement award sent to 12 organisations:

Bindmans Hillsborough Team

Birnberg Peirce Hillsborough Team

Butcher & Barlow Hillsborough Team

Broudie Jackson Canter Hillsborough Team

Doughty Street Chambers Hillsborough Team

EAD Solicitors Hillsborough Team

Garden Court Hillsborough Team

Garden Court North Hillsborough Team

1 Gray's Inn Square Hillsborough Team

Harrison Bundey Hillsborough Team

Mansfield Chambers Hillsborough Team

4 Paper Buildings Hillsborough Team