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Former Ontario premier to speak at Laurier conference on universities' role in humanitarian crises

WATERLOO – Bob Rae, the former premier of Ontario, as well as other high-profile guests from across Ontario and the United States, will speak at the Educators in Emergencies: University Responses to Humanitarian Crises conference, hosted by Wilfrid Laurier University's International Students Overcoming War (ISOW).

The day-long conference will examine how Canadian and American universities have responded to humanitarian emergencies, particularly the Syrian refugee crisis. It will be held March 5 in the Senate and Board Chamber on Laurier's Waterloo campus.

"Laurier has distinguished itself as a university committed to responding to the needs of people impacted by war. Over the years, Laurier has sponsored five refugee families, 19 scholars through ISOW and dozens of World University Service Canada scholars. Students, staff and faculty have all made a contribution," said Gavin Brockett, faculty advisor for ISOW and associate professor in the departments of History and Religion and Culture. "At a time when there is an ever-increasing need to facilitate post-secondary education opportunities for refugees and displaced people, Laurier is in a position to lead the conversation about how best to do so."

The conference will feature a series of panels, including one about how universities can support the mental health of students from countries in conflict and another on the role of student leadership in humanitarian action. A photo exhibit, *Transcending Borders, Transforming Identities?*, by current and former ISOW scholars, will be on display at the Laurier Library throughout the conference.

Rae's keynote address will be held at Lazaridis Hall at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. He will speak about the moral obligation of universities to respond to humanitarian crises and the current crisis in Rohingya. Rae will also interview two students from Myanmar currently studying in Vietnam about their experiences accessing higher education.

In 2017, Rae was appointed Canada's Special Envoy to Myanmar, in response to the Rohingya human rights crisis. Rae is a former chancellor of Laurier.

All events are free, but [registration for the conference](#) and for [Rae's keynote address](#) is required.

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About ISOW: ISOW is a student-run and student-funded initiative at Laurier that provides scholarships to students from areas of conflict. Since 2015, ISOW has sponsored 19 students to study at Laurier for the duration of their undergraduate or graduate degrees.