

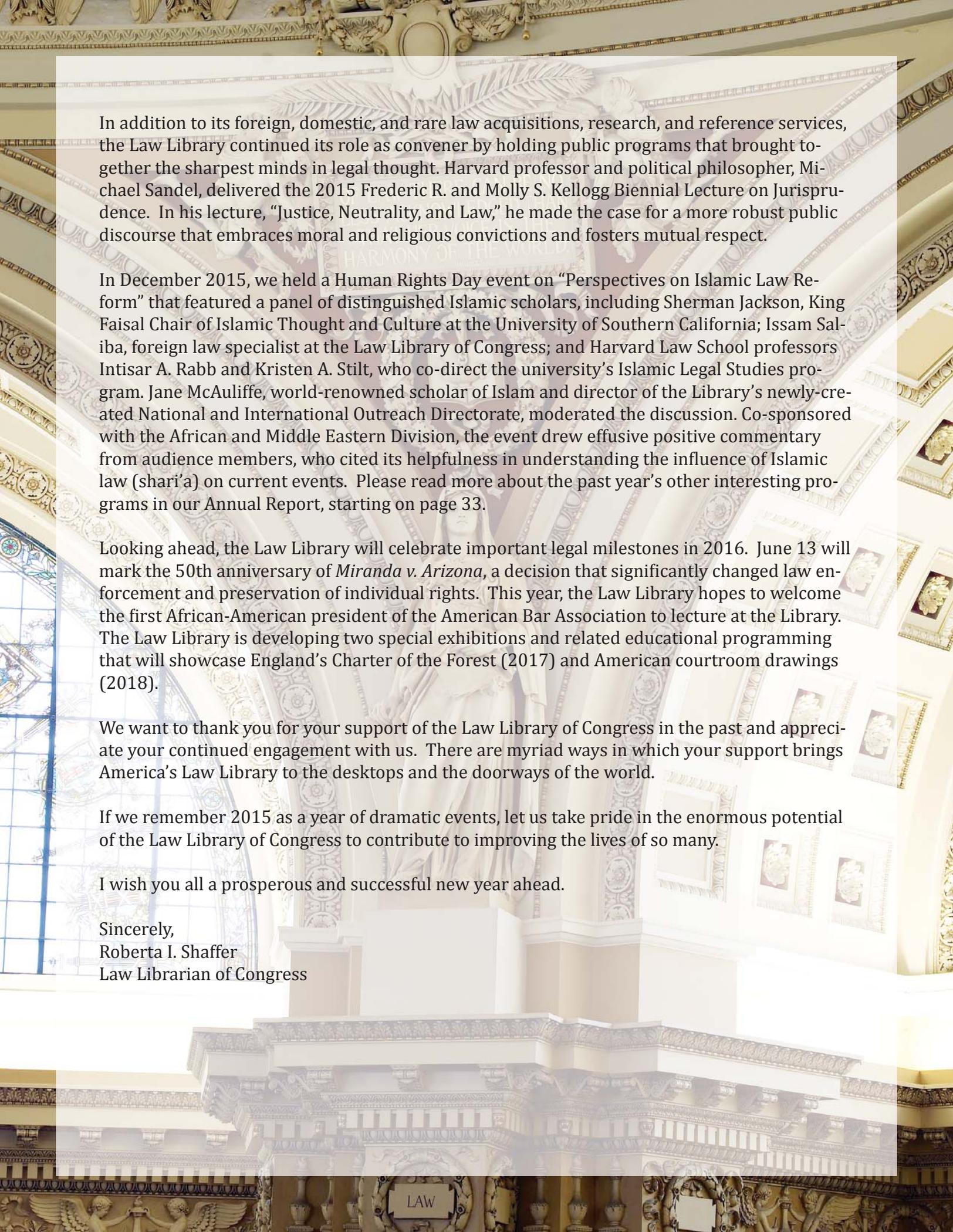
New Year's Letter from the Law Librarian of Congress

As I take down the 2015 calendars and pin the 2016 ones to the wall, I reflect on the events of the year past and revel in the optimistic promise of the new year. The year 2015 saw big leadership changes at the Library of Congress. The long-serving 13th Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington, retired after 28 years of service, and the former Law Librarian of Congress, David S. Mao, and former Assistant Law Librarian for Legislative and External Relations, Robert R. Newlen, ascended to the Library's number one and number two leadership positions, respectively. Their departure was a loss for the Law Library but a great benefit to the Library of Congress as a whole, as they oversee organizational changes to improve the Library's service to Congress and the American people.

I am also delighted to share the news of my appointment by David Mao on January 8th as the 24th Law Librarian of Congress. Being the Law Librarian of Congress was a dream that I had for almost all of my professional life. It began when I was a law student in the late 1970s. A special research assignment brought me to Washington to the Law Library, then located in the Jefferson Building. I could not believe what a wealth of materials I had full access to and the knowledge of the staff that welcomed me! I resolved then to be part of all that someday. Mid-career, I had the honor of serving as the first Special Assistant to the Law Librarian in the 1980s, and left the Library to strengthen my portfolio for the big job—Law Librarian. In 2009, I had realized the dream when I was appointed as the 22nd Law Librarian, but other opportunities within the larger Library made my tenure very short. I retired in 2014. I am now happy to return to work with the terrific Law Library staff, our extraordinary law materials, and colleagues and collections all over the world. I am very excited to serve with such a stellar Library of Congress management team. If the adage “third time’s a charm” holds true, then I am sure the best is yet to come!

Just as the Library saw its own upheavals in the last year, tumultuous events around the world punctuated the past twelve months. As the world experienced political turmoil, terrorist acts, and human rights abuses, I was struck by how the aftermath of these conflicts greatly depended on the rule of law to restore stability. Laws also provide the vehicle for our global society to adjust to changing times and new challenges. With the increasing interdependence of our world, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. government, and change agents and thought leaders from across America have a greater interest in benchmarking our own country's laws with those of other nations. The reliance on the Law Library's collections and staff expertise is testimony to the Library's relevance to contemporary life.

Recognizing the important role that foreign law should play in American judicial decisions, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer said in his 2015 publication, *The Court and the World: American Law and the New Global Realities*, that “... the best way to preserve our basic values is not to ignore what goes on elsewhere, but the contrary. ... [L]istening to those who understand the content of relevant foreign law is perfectly consistent with the democratic formulation and interpretation of our own law.” The Law Library uniquely contributes to this by providing reports that inform the legislature and the judiciary on current legal topics in foreign, comparative, and international law.

The background of the page is a photograph of a grand, ornate interior space, likely a library or a legislative chamber. The ceiling is high and features intricate architectural details, including a large central statue of a woman in classical attire. The walls are decorated with framed pictures and ornate moldings. At the bottom center, there is a sign that reads "LAW".

In addition to its foreign, domestic, and rare law acquisitions, research, and reference services, the Law Library continued its role as convener by holding public programs that brought together the sharpest minds in legal thought. Harvard professor and political philosopher, Michael Sandel, delivered the 2015 Frederic R. and Molly S. Kellogg Biennial Lecture on Jurisprudence. In his lecture, “Justice, Neutrality, and Law,” he made the case for a more robust public discourse that embraces moral and religious convictions and fosters mutual respect.

In December 2015, we held a Human Rights Day event on “Perspectives on Islamic Law Reform” that featured a panel of distinguished Islamic scholars, including Sherman Jackson, King Faisal Chair of Islamic Thought and Culture at the University of Southern California; Issam Saliba, foreign law specialist at the Law Library of Congress; and Harvard Law School professors Intisar A. Rabb and Kristen A. Stilt, who co-direct the university’s Islamic Legal Studies program. Jane McAuliffe, world-renowned scholar of Islam and director of the Library’s newly-created National and International Outreach Directorate, moderated the discussion. Co-sponsored with the African and Middle Eastern Division, the event drew effusive positive commentary from audience members, who cited its helpfulness in understanding the influence of Islamic law (shari’a) on current events. Please read more about the past year’s other interesting programs in our Annual Report, starting on page 33.

Looking ahead, the Law Library will celebrate important legal milestones in 2016. June 13 will mark the 50th anniversary of *Miranda v. Arizona*, a decision that significantly changed law enforcement and preservation of individual rights. This year, the Law Library hopes to welcome the first African-American president of the American Bar Association to lecture at the Library. The Law Library is developing two special exhibitions and related educational programming that will showcase England’s Charter of the Forest (2017) and American courtroom drawings (2018).

We want to thank you for your support of the Law Library of Congress in the past and appreciate your continued engagement with us. There are myriad ways in which your support brings America’s Law Library to the desktops and the doorways of the world.

If we remember 2015 as a year of dramatic events, let us take pride in the enormous potential of the Law Library of Congress to contribute to improving the lives of so many.

I wish you all a prosperous and successful new year ahead.

Sincerely,
Roberta I. Shaffer
Law Librarian of Congress