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CIELAP's New Report Reinforces Importance of Growing Ontario Greenbelt

(Toronto, April 10, 2008) -- The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) today releases its report entitled *Ontario's Greenbelt in an International Context*. The report examines the tough lessons learned by five other greenbelts in Europe and North America where pressures forced erosion or compromising of the original plan. The paper makes recommendations on how to sustain a viable and healthy Greenbelt in Ontario -- one that can withstand outside pressures for compromise.

"The Ontario government is moving in the right direction by determining how to consider municipal requests to grow the greenbelt," states Anne Mitchell, CIELAP executive director. Ms. Mitchell is submitting the Report to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing which is holding the second of six consultations on "Growing the Greenbelt" in Guelph today. Expanding the area covered by Ontario's Greenbelt is seen by a number of municipalities, including Guelph, as an important step in the protection of agricultural land and natural environments.

Maureen Carter-Whitney, CIELAP's research director and author of the report, highlighted the following insights from her research:

- **Efforts should be made to grow the Greenbelt in size.** Unless the Greenbelt is expanded and receives further government investment, this protected land and its role in Ontario's economy and society are at risk of being weakened and degraded. CIELAP saw strong evidence in the other greenbelts studied that development pressure had eroded their size and quality.
- **Strong centralized government planning is needed** to ensure that Ontario's greenbelt is protected. In British Columbia's experience, decentralizing decision-making in the Agricultural Land Commission led to the removal of productive agricultural land for development.
- The Ontario government should **swiftly build the infrastructure for efficient rapid rail in the Greenbelt** and resist the pressure for highway and road expansion in the Greenbelt. Experience in jurisdictions such as the Netherlands has shown that new roads and highways can degrade farmland and the rural character of the landscape.

The Greenbelt provides local food, supports the agriculture sector and rural communities, contributes to a healthy sustainable environment, and is an easy-to-reach tourist and recreational destination for the six million people living in Southern Ontario. The Report was funded by a grant from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

Public consultations on "Growing the Greenbelt" are being held throughout April in Walkerton, Guelph, Niagara Falls, Peterborough, Barrie and Markham. The deadline for public input is April 30, at which time the Ministry will determine criteria to assess municipal requests to expand the Greenbelt.

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The executive summary and full report are available on www.cielap.org and www.ourgreenbelt.ca

Founded in 1970, the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) is an independent environmental law and policy research and education organization.