

HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER



Human Trafficking Law Reformed



Mary Ellison testified about The Advocates' research findings and recommendations on the trafficking law (Photo courtesy of the Minnesota House of Representatives)

Over the past several months, The Advocates for Human Rights has led the effort at the Minnesota Legislature to amend state laws to better protect girls and women who are victims of human sex trafficking. The Advocates worked in coalition with the Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, state legislators, law enforcement officials, advocates, and citizens, all of whom are dedicated to ending the sex trafficking trade that now devastates so many women's lives.

This work at the Minnesota Legislature was the first step in implementing the recommendations of *Sex Trafficking Needs Assessment for the State of Minnesota*, published by The Advocates last September.

Legislators leading the work at the Minnesota capitol were Sen. Sandy Pappas, chief author of Minnesota's sex trafficking law in 2005; Sen. Mee Moua; and Reps. Michael Paymar and John Lesch. Remarkably, this legislation passed *unanimously* in the House and Senate. The governor signed the "Bill for an Act to Combat Trafficking in Minnesota" into law on May 21, 2009.

The improved law provides a stronger deterrent for those who sell human beings for sex and a stronger tool for those enforcing the law. This progressive Minnesota law also complements the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

Specifically, the new amendments:

- Provide law enforcement and prosecutors with the ability to arrest and charge sex traffickers with higher penalties where an offender repeatedly trafficks individuals into prostitution, where bodily harm is inflicted, where an individual is held more than 180 days, or where more than one victim is involved;
- Increase the fines for those who sell human beings for sex;
- Criminalize the actions of those individuals who receive profit from sex trafficking;
- Categorize sex trafficking with other "crimes of violence" to ensure that those who sell others for sex are prohibited from possessing firearms; and
- Add sex trafficking victims to those victims of "violent crime" who are protected from employer retaliation if they participate in criminal proceedings against their traffickers.

The amendments send a strong message that Minnesota will not tolerate sexual slavery and involuntary servitude and that the perpetrators of such acts will be held accountable. The amendments took effect on August 1, 2009.

**The Advocates
expands immigration
legal services to
Liberians in New York**

See page 13 for the full story.



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The Advocates for Human Rights

The mission of The Advocates for Human Rights is to implement international human rights standards to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law. The Advocates was founded in 1983 by a group of Minnesota lawyers who recognized the community's unique spirit of social justice as an opportunity to promote and protect human rights here at home and worldwide. We are a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that investigates and exposes human rights violations; represents immigrants and refugees in our community who are victims of human rights abuses; trains and assists groups that protect human rights; and works through education and advocacy in Minnesota to engage the public, policymakers and children about human rights and cultural understanding. The Advocates holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations.

From the Director's Desk

"Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

While a college student in Germany, I suffered an appendicitis attack. I presented myself at the emergency room, and after a few questions about allergies and medical history, I received treatment. Germany provided universal health insurance, and the protocol of the hospital was to do paperwork after the care was administered. Ironically, later that year, I accompanied a young woman with similar symptoms to an emergency room in Chicago. We were turned away from two hospitals, where staff told us that they could not accept her limited health insurance. Finally, at a third hospital, the young woman was given treatment. Her condition turned out to be much more serious than it appeared, and she might have died had her treatment been delayed any further.

As the health care debate rages on in the U.S., many of our policy makers do not recognize medical care as a fundamental human right, and do not view universal health care coverage as the appropriate end goal. To sort through the rhetoric, we should focus on the fundamental human rights principles to which the U.S. is bound, and upon which our public policy should properly be based.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights boldly states that all human beings have the right to "medical care," and that this right must be respected without discrimination. The U.S. is bound by the provisions of the Declaration as a member of the United Nations, and it has committed to protect the "right to health" as a signatory to the American Declaration on the Rights of Man. The U.S. has also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of Race Discrimination, which prohibits discrimination in the realization of the right to health.

Unfortunately, the U.S. falls short of meeting its international obligations to protect this human right. In this country, 45 million people do not have health insurance. Some simply cannot afford it, while others are precluded from coverage because of pre-existing conditions. As a result, many people do not receive the medical care that they need and suffer negative health consequences – even death. Eighteen thousand people die each year because they are uninsured.

In the U.S., race is often an indicator of whether a person has health insurance. For example, while 13% of white Americans lack health insurance, 21% of black Americans and 34% of Hispanic Americans are uninsured. Research also shows that racial and ethnic minorities receive less care and lower quality care than white patients, even after accounting for income and insurance levels. The results are similar in research focused on mental health care for ethnic and racial minorities.

Even when insured, the cost of health care can devastate a family. Half of all bankruptcies in the U.S. are caused by medical bills, and three-fourths of this group has health insurance. Bankruptcy can then lead to a disruption of an entire range of other fundamental human rights, including the rights to housing and food.

A system of health care that allows for these forms of inequality is unjust. Policy changes in the U.S. should remedy these disparities and recognize the universal right to health care.



Robin Phillips
 Executive Director

For more information about health care as a human right and to learn about opportunities for advocacy, please see our Discover Human Rights website at www.discoverhumanrights.org.

Reach Millions with Your Mouse

The Advocates for Human Rights announces the launch of a new and improved website. The new site is designed to be an engaging and user-friendly place where visitors have the ability to download all organizational publications, including educational materials and curricula; learn about upcoming and past events; take action on contemporary human rights issues; donate to the cause; submit personal human rights stories; receive updates through RSS feeds; and share our human rights content with friends, family, and others via Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Digg, Delicious, Feed Burner, and other media.

The redesign will also carry through to The Advocates' educational websites: www.discoverhumanrights.org – an online institute with educational materials on many human rights issues; www.energyofanation.org – a website dedicated to providing accurate information about immigration to combat negative myths and stereotypes; and www.stopvaw.org – a forum for information, advocacy, and change in the worldwide struggle to end violence against women.



The Advocates would like to thank **Urban Planet** and **Loud Click** for their important pro bono contributions to these efforts. With more ways than ever to become part of the movement, we are expanding our collective efforts to support and defend human rights around the world.

What You Can Do Right Now to Promote Human Rights:

Facebook – Become a Fan of The Advocates for Human Rights on Facebook.

Twitter – Follow us on Twitter at [The_Advocates](#) and [StopVAWGlobal](#).

YouTube – Watch interviews of The Advocates' staff on YouTube.

Flickr – Look at photos from past events, house parties, and program work to learn more about who we are.

Website – Read about our work, bookmark it, and share it with your friends!

The Advocates Has Moved

We recently moved to the 12th floor.
Our current address is:

The Advocates for Human Rights
650 Third Avenue South, Suite 1240
Minneapolis, MN 55402 USA

The Advocates would like to thank **Hines Property Management** for providing our new office space at a non-profit rate. Because of their generosity, we are able to continue to expand our human rights programming.



The Advocates at the Minnesota State Fair

Join us at The Advocates' booth!
August 27 – September 7
Lower Grandstand, #69

To volunteer, please contact **Colleen Beebe** at cbeebe@advrights.org or 612-341-3302 ext. 114.

A House with Two Rooms Published



In June, The Advocates released *A House with Two Rooms* – a comprehensive report on the experience of the Liberian diaspora. The publication is the culmination of three years of work on the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Diaspora Project in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana. The report was submitted to the TRC of Liberia, the body charged with determining the facts of the human rights violations that occurred during the civil war. The TRC completed its mandate on June 30, 2009.

From 1979 to 2003, more than 1.5 million Liberians were forced from their homes to escape from the violence and destruction of a protracted civil conflict. Many Liberians eventually made their way to the United States in their flight from war, including some 30,000 who settled in Minnesota. Most of their stories have never been told before.

A House with Two Rooms documents the experience of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law that forced Liberians to leave the country. It is based on an analysis of more than 1600 statements, fact-finding interviews, and witness testimony at public hearings held in the United States. The report also tells the story of the “triple trauma” experienced by members of the diaspora during their flight through Liberia and across international borders, while living in refugee camps in West Africa, and in resettlement in the United States and United Kingdom. In addition, the report summarizes the views of Liberians in the diaspora on the root causes of the conflict and their recommendations for systemic reform and reconciliation.

Key recommendations from The Advocates’ report to the Liberian TRC include:

- Prioritizing the ongoing physical and mental health needs of victims;
- Addressing the immediate needs of refugees and the displaced, including those in protracted refugee situations in the sub-region, such as Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana;
- Adopting immediate measures to assist and protect children, women, and older persons;
- Ensuring that civil and political rights are guaranteed immediately;

- Ensuring justice and ending impunity;
- Eliminating corruption;
- Ensuring economic and social rights and development;
- Dedicating adequate resources, financial support, and political will to implement the TRC’s recommendations;
- Taking steps toward reconciliation; and
- Securing United States and international community assistance to Liberians through resettlement and family reunification, as well as support for peacebuilding and foreign aid.

Available online at http://liberiatrctrc.mnadvocates.org/Final_Report.html, The Advocates’ full report will also be published independently in the United States. The Diaspora Report is summarized in Vol. II of the TRC’s Final Report (available on the TRC’s website, www.trcofliberia.org), and will be published in its entirety as an appendix of the Final Report.



About the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project: At the request of, and under a Memorandum of Understanding with, the Liberian TRC, The Advocates coordinated the work of the TRC in the Liberian diaspora beginning in 2006. The Advocates recruited, trained, and supported the more than 600 volunteers who took statements from Liberian refugees in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana. The Advocates also assisted the Liberian TRC in holding public hearings in the U.S. in 2008, marking the first time any nation has ever conducted such hearings outside of their country. The Advocates did not receive funding from the TRC, but instead facilitated the contribution of more than \$10 million in *pro bono* services to the TRC. As the first TRC to include documentation and recommendations from a diaspora population, the Liberian TRC and The Advocates’ work will serve as an example for all future truth and reconciliation commissions. Apart from being an historic effort to fully engage a diaspora in a truth



commission, the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project has been a powerful opportunity for Liberians in Liberia, West Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom to strengthen and build new networks that will support diaspora communities and Liberia as a whole. It has also been an important opportunity for non-Liberian volunteers to develop ties to their Liberian neighbors. As the TRC process comes to a close, the work to weave these many connections into a more peaceful future is just beginning.

The Advocates is grateful for the many individuals, law firms, organizations, academic partners, interns, and fellows who volunteered countless hours and resources to allow the voices of the Liberian diaspora to be heard in the peacebuilding process of their home country.

Liberia TRC Diaspora Project Acknowledgements

Hundreds of individuals in the United States, United Kingdom, Ghana, and Liberia offered their time to make the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project a success. It would not be possible to list them all here, but The Advocates wishes to thank each of them for their efforts. The Advocates would not have been able to extend the TRC process to Liberians in diaspora without the valuable contributions of the Liberian Advisory Committee and the Pro Bono Management Team (especially Dulce Foster, Dianne Heins, Mark Kalla, and James O'Neal). In particular, The Advocates expresses profound gratitude to those individuals who volunteered as statement takers to document the stories of Liberians in the diaspora.

To those Liberians who shared their stories, either by giving a statement or testifying publicly at hearings, we are humbled by your strength and courage.

Liberian TRC National Conference

In June, The Advocates traveled to Liberia for the culminating event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) activities – a national conference to strategize on the “way forward” for Liberia. The conference was held in Virginia, a city located just outside Monrovia, the Liberian capital. As the TRC’s international implementing partner, staff member Ahmed Sirleaf and TRC Diaspora Project Pro Bono Management Team member Jim O’Neal of Faegre & Benson LLP represented The Advocates at the historic conference.

The national conference focused on reconciliation strategies and next steps for building peace and strengthening democratic institutions in post-war Liberia. Delegates from every county traveled to Monrovia to attend and participate. The Advocates made two presentations, highlighting information about the TRC Diaspora Project’s findings and recommendations from statement givers in the diaspora. The Advocates also contributed to the drafting of “The Virginia Declaration,” a formidable final statement from conference participants on their recommendations. On the last day of the conference, Mr. O’Neal and Mr. Sirleaf officially presented The Advocates’ final report to the TRC.

During the presentation ceremony, TRC chairman Cllr. Jerome Verdier Sr. thanked The Advocates for its partnership with the Commission. He lauded The Advocates and the U.S. community for what he called “their immeasurable contributions to the justice and reconciliation processes of Liberia.” Verdier summed up the work of The Advocates and its volunteers by saying, “Your involvement allowed us to give Liberians in the diaspora a voice.”



Jim O’Neal (center) and
Ahmed Sirleaf (right)
presenting the Diaspora Report

International Advocacy Updates

- The Advocates for Human Rights has made an informational submission to the **African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights** related to the situation of Liberian refugees in Ghana. The Advocates has worked with the Liberian refugee population in the Buduburam settlement near Accra, Ghana since 2007 as part of its Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project. In May 2008, Liberian refugees who were protesting a UNHCR-Ghanaian government plan to integrate them locally were arrested by Ghanaian security forces. Hundreds of women and children were held for days and some refugees were summarily deported back to Liberia. Ghana is due for its state periodic review before the African Commission in late 2009.
- Volunteer Penny Parker represented The Advocates at the 9th **Inter-Committee meeting of the UN human rights treaty bodies** from June 29 to July 1, 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland. Penny's daily updates from the session, as well as a submission on improving effectiveness and coordination of the treaty bodies, can be found on The Advocates' website. Penny also made a presentation during a general discussion on the participation of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) using the example of emerging developments in the creation of an NHRI in Liberia. Penny encouraged the Committee members to raise the issue with the Liberian government delegation and ask for assurances that the government will protect and preserve the independence and sustainability of the new Liberian Independent Human Rights Commission.
- Country condition information from The Advocates' *Liberia Is Not Ready: 2009* and *A House with Two Rooms: Final Report of the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project* was submitted to the **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**. Information and recommendations related to the treatment of women in Liberia were provided to expert members of the treaty body to assist them in reviewing Liberia's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women during the session meeting in New York from July 20-August 7, 2009.



Kazakhstan's Domestic Violence Law

The Advocates traveled to Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, in late May 2009 at the invitation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to provide further comments on Kazakhstan's draft law on domestic violence. At meetings with Members of Parliament, Staff Attorney Mary Ellison provided an overview of best practices on domestic violence legal reform, focusing on three key elements of successful civil domestic violence laws in various countries in the CEE/FSU: 1) an emergency order for protection, 2) a long-term or permanent order for protection, and 3) criminalization of the violation of an order for protection. She also spoke about The Advocates' experience with monitoring the implementation of recent laws in both Bulgaria and Georgia.

Invited representatives from the Czech Republic and Bulgaria provided input on their country's experience with the process of enacting and implementing similar laws. Ellison also met with representatives of various women's non-governmental organizations to discuss key elements of the draft law and their

concerns with how its implementation would impact victims and their families. The domestic violence law was introduced in Parliament in June, with possible passage by the end of the year. Kazakhstan will assume the chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010.



Map provided by the Central Intelligence Agency

UN Expert Group Meeting on Women and Girls

In May, Cheryl Thomas, director of the Women's Human Rights Program, participated in a United Nations Expert Group Meeting on good practices in legal reform to address harmful practices against women. The meeting was convened by the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa as a follow-up to a similar meeting in Vienna in 2008. The Vienna conference had resulted in a model framework that focused on domestic violence and sexual assault. The recent Ethiopia meeting was designed to carry on that work, with specific recommendations on a wide variety of harmful practices against women and girls.



Cheryl Thomas (back row, far left) in Ethiopia with international experts on violence against women

Harmful practices against women and girls persist throughout the world. They take many forms, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, forced and early marriage, dowry-related violence, acid attacks, honor crimes, the maltreatment of widows, and female genital mutilation (FGM). Many of these practices result in serious injuries and deaths, and there is often little recourse for victims and their families in the legal system. Practices such as early marriage impede girls' educational opportunities and leave them vulnerable to violence and abuse in marriage. Forced marriage can involve kidnapping, rape, and violent assault.

prohibiting it. Sixteen African countries have laws criminalizing FGM (as do at least twelve industrialized countries that receive immigrants from countries where FGM is practiced), but implementation and enforcement of such laws has proven very challenging.

Cheryl was one of 15 experts who gathered in Ethiopia to address these issues. Experts also came from Bangladesh, Belgium, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States. During the conference, experts presented papers on various aspects of certain harmful practices. Cheryl presented on forced and early marriage in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Participants also shared ideas for best practices during working groups, and are now continuing their work from their home countries. The expert group will publish a report with comprehensive recommendations for model legislation on harmful practices against women and girls in the upcoming months.



FGM is a critical concern of women's rights activists and of the experts at the meeting; the practice continues despite passage of new laws

Women's Human Rights Film Series - Season 5!

Co-presented with the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library



Free monthly screenings starting in September of documentaries from around the world, followed by a discussion hosted by staff and guests.

Details on our website:
www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org

International Advocacy against the Death Penalty

The Advocates has joined the World Coalition against the Death Penalty, an organization that aims to strengthen the international dimension of the struggle against capital punishment. Composed of 95 members from around the globe, it facilitates the constitution and development of national and regional coalitions against the death penalty, leads lobbying actions towards international organizations and States, and organizes events that have an international impact.

2009 Human Rights Awards Dinner



Program Director Cheryl Thomas and 2009 Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award recipient Dr. Sima Samar

The Advocates for Human Rights held its 2009 Human Rights Awards Dinner on June 23rd at The Marriott in downtown Minneapolis. The annual fundraiser was a great success, drawing a large crowd of committed human rights advocates. The Advocates is grateful to those who share our vision and entrust us with this critical work.

The Awards Dinner began with the beautiful sounds of the Zene String Quartet and participants browsing the international handicrafts, mystery boxes, and other interesting silent auction items.

The evening's program was emceed by volunteer consultant Sarah Vander Zanden, who gave her personal story of hearing about The Advocates' powerful work and wanting to help. "These are stories that will break your heart – and mend it again," she said.

Executive Director Robin Phillips told the audience a few such stories, which also highlighted The Advocates' recent

accomplishments. They included: the first ever public hearings for a diaspora community held outside of the country of conflict; changed laws across the world and in Minnesota to make women safer from violence; the distribution of our transitional justice curriculum *Road to Peace* to over 20 countries around the world; and lives saved and transformed by the security of asylum in the United States.

Advocacy Director Michele Garnett McKenzie joined Robin to recognize the individuals who had received Volunteer Awards throughout the past year. Awards went to Patrick Finnegan for his steadfast, professional volunteer interpretive services; Jeff Larson for his commitment to asylum seekers for over a decade; and Anne Lockner for her nine-year battle to win asylum for her client, Genet – who was present with her that evening.

Next, Robin presented the 2009 Special Recognition Award to the members of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project Management Team – Dianne Heins, Dulce Foster, Mark Kalla, and Jim O'Neal. Members were honored for their consistent leadership in every aspect of the project over the course of the past three years. Each leveraged countless resources and contributed hundreds of hours of pro bono services to ensure that the voices of the diaspora were included in the peacebuilding process. Robin said of the team, "they are extraordinarily talented lawyers with an unwavering commitment to social justice."

Continuing the theme of "building the movement," professional auctioneer Pat Brenna gave her account of learning about The Advocates' work and knowing she had to get involved. She then proceeded to engage the audience in a lively auction and invitation to fund human rights work that generated not only contributions, but also pride and enthusiasm.

Aviva Breen, chair of the board, introduced Dr. Sima Samar, Chairwoman of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the



Board Member Marlene Kayser, Dr. Sima Samar and Executive Director Robin Phillips



Board President Aviva Breen with Board Members Rachel Johnson Hamlin (event chair), and Sam Myers



2009 Special Recognition Award Recipients:
Jim O'Neal, Dulce Foster, Dianne Heins, and Mark Kalla with
Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (center)

situation of human rights in Sudan. Breen presented Dr. Samar with the 2009 Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award, describing her as having "unbelievable courage in the face of constant danger."

After receiving the award, Dr. Samar sat down with Cheryl Thomas, director of the Women's Program, for a conversation about the human rights of women during times of conflict. Dr. Samar explained that war affects women disproportionately. Women begin to withdraw in self-protection, leaving the home less often and retreating from public life. When they do go out, they are often targeted and raped. Girls are often not allowed to attend school. All of these realities have long-term consequences for society and the generations growing up in conflict situations.

"Some say 'human rights are a Western value,'" Dr. Samar said. "I reply, 'it is not a Western value; it's a human value.' When discussing women's human rights, they talk about respecting Afghanistan's religion and culture. I think it's wrong. If we do not involve and empower 50% of the population, we cannot bring democracy. Women's rights are *human* rights."

Dr. Samar encouraged individuals to tell their elected officials that at the center of U.S. foreign policy should be respect for human rights. She implored, "convince them that people living in a conflict zone are human beings." She also told audience members that they can help change the life of another by giving to organizations that are working on these issues. She closed with the words, "We have to be involved. We have to believe that we are all human beings and that we are connected."

Sarah Vander Zanden then left the audience with this farewell: "The fruits of these incredible volunteer efforts involve grand generosity of spirit and countless acts of grace and truth," she said. "Yet, right here in this room, this evening, in the stillness between all the words, is where the first act of will lives – in our individual intention and our courage to make a difference."

2009 Human Rights Awards Dinner Sponsors

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Thank you to the following Human Rights Awards Dinner Volunteers:

Pat Brenna
Bill Cameron
Little & Company
David Underhill
Sarah Vander Zanden
The Zene String Quartet

Thank You to Our Live and Silent Auction Donors!

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Faegre & Benson	Minnesota Renaissance Festival	The Splendid Table
Shareen Fakier	Minnesota Lynx	Ward Sutton
The Firm - a Workout Studio	Minnesota Timberwolves	Cheryl Thomas
The Fitness Zone	Minnesota Twins	Utne Reader
Dulce Foster	Moxie Hair Salon	Brad Vajgrt
Susan Gainen	Dipankar Mukherjee and Meena Natarajan	Valleyfair
Gameworks	Sam and Char Myers	Vertical Endeavors
Rachel and Tom Hamlin	Northern Lights Society	Walker Art Center
Maria Herder		The Wellness Center
Homeworks for Students with Sarah Dodge		Wild Mountain Taylor's Falls Recreation
The Hub Bicycle Co-op		Laura Young
		YMCA
		YWCA

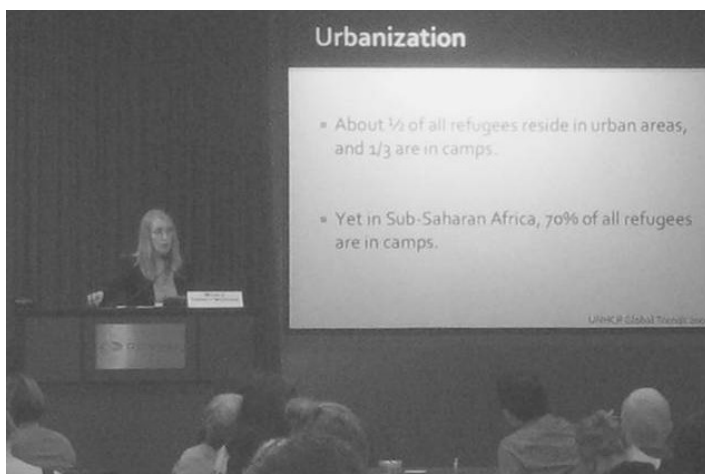
The following people have been remembered through *in memoriam* gifts to The Advocates:

Aaron Barnard
Karl Cooper
Dr. Nancy I. English
Arnold Goehring

The following people and occasions have been honored through gifts to The Advocates:

Alexander Cohen
Amira Cohen
The wedding of Beth Corrick and
Mike Herman
Siona Dev's birthday
Patrick Finnegan
Genet Hailemichael
Dianne Heins
Priya Jain
Tom Melchior
Kevin Morrison
Ron Ronning
Jonathan Rosen
Ellen Sampson's 25 years as
partner at Leonard, Street &
Deinard, P.A.
Isaiah Scharen's 11th birthday
Allen Schrero
The wedding of Becky Thorson
and Joe Donnelly
John Welckle
Kathryn Lillian White

2009 Human Rights Law and Policy Conference



Jessica Eby of Church World Service
presenting at the conference

On June 22, 2009, The Advocates for Human Rights hosted its seventh annual human rights law and policy conference, *Refugee Protection around the World: Durable Solutions or Durable Suffering?* Over 120 participants and speakers attended the conference, which was hosted by co-sponsor Dorsey and Whitney in Minneapolis. Recent events, including the extension of Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberian refugees in the United States and the refugee crisis in Pakistan's Swat Valley, highlight the ongoing challenges confronting people displaced by conflict, and the way these issues affect people locally as well as internationally. The conference topic is especially relevant in Minnesota, which has a large refugee population.

Colleen Beebe, director of the Education Program at The Advocates, opened with an overview of international refugee law. Mamadee Sesay then provided a moving personal story of the refugee experience, describing his flight from Liberia and his eventual resettlement in Minnesota. The morning concluded with a panel of experts discussing problems with refugee protections worldwide. Jessica Eby of Church World Service, Mark Hetfield

of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Jennifer Prestholdt of The Advocates for Human Rights, and Michael Barringer-Mills of American Refugee Committee International analyzed the challenges of durable solutions for protracted refugee situations, internally displaced persons, involuntary repatriation, and the complexities of the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

After lunch, Dr. Sima Samar, Chairwoman of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, spoke on the current situation in Darfur. To prepare for the afternoon working sessions, The Advocates' Deputy Director Jennifer Prestholdt presented on refugee protection mechanisms internationally and within Africa.

In afternoon workshops, participants analyzed the refugee situations in Sudan and in Liberia and generated ideas for taking action. The Sudan working session, led by Ellen Kennedy and Brad Lehrman, identified five needs for Sudanese refugees: 1) protection, 2) prevention, 3) prosecution, 4) human rights, and 5) reconstruction. The group discussion focused on the importance of education for those involved in the crisis and for people outside the crisis zone, especially those in a position to advocate for government action. In the Liberia working session, Laura Young of The Advocates led a discussion that identified two areas for improvement. First, the group discussed helping Liberians in Ghana find employment and easing integration for those who want to stay in Ghana. Second, the group identified family reunification, especially of minors separated from their parents, as the most critical issue within the United States.

Colleen closed the conference with a powerful reminder that the challenges confronting refugees and displaced persons affect people in all parts of the world. The solutions to violence and displacement – conflict resolution, mediation, and peaceful methods of resolving problems – have universal power, and do not apply only to people in conflict areas. Conference materials and session notes can be found on our website, www.discoverhumanrights.org.

Thank you to all of our co-sponsors for helping make this conference such a success!

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Lutheran Social Service
Midwest Coalition for Human Rights
Minnesota Interfaith Darfur Coalition
University of Minnesota Office of International Programs
World Relief Minnesota



2009 Upper Midwest Immigration Conference

Nearly 200 people, including 80 speakers from as far as Mexico and Alaska, attended this year's regional immigration and asylum conference. For the second year in a row, The Advocates co-hosted the two-day conference with the American Immigration and Lawyers Association.

Thank you to everyone who made this event such a success!

Asylum Victories

Students at the University of St. Thomas Law School Clinic, supervised by **Virgil Wiebe** and **Kathleen Lohmar-Exel**, won asylum for a young woman from Zimbabwe who had been targeted due to her support of the opposition political party.

Gabby Mead and **Joel Anderson** of Dorsey & Whitney won asylum for a family from Ethiopia who were forced to flee because of their Anuak ethnicity and vocal support for their rights of the Anuak people.

Rachel Hughey won remand from the Board of Immigration Appeals in a case for a gay Pakistani man with HIV; the case is now awaiting further hearing before the Immigration Court.

Roger Branigin at Zelle, Hofman, Voelbel & Mason won asylum for an Ethiopian man who had suffered persecution because of his Oromo ethnicity and political activism.

Bruce Mackenzie and **Andy Brehm** at Dorsey & Whitney won asylum for a young political activist from Togo; they are now working to bring the client's wife to join him in the United States.

Anna Horning Nygren, **William Gengler**, **David Asp**, and **Tinzing Artmann** of Lockridge Grindal Nauen won asylum for a Tibetan man and his family who were unable to live in China due to their Tibetan ethnicity, support of the Dalai Lama, and

political support for a free Tibet.

Students at the William Mitchell College of Law Immigration Clinic, supervised by **Paula Duthoy**, won asylum for a transgender client from Mexico before the Immigration Court.

Fordam Wara and **DeAnne Hilgers** at Lindquist and Venum won asylum for a man from Ethiopia based on his political opinion, opposing certain Ethiopian government policies.

Linda Close won asylum for a woman from Eritrea who had been targeted by the government of Eritrea due to her religious beliefs and practices, including being prohibited from practicing her religion.

Malinda Schmiechen, with the assistance of The Advocates' interns **Molly McLane** and **Jessica Grosz**, won asylum for a man from Cameroon who fled due to his political beliefs.

The University of Minnesota Law School Immigration Clinic, supervised by **Emily Good** and **Michele Garnett McKenzie**, won asylum for a young man from Liberia based on his family membership and imputed political beliefs.

Thank you to consulting attorneys **Lesley Guyton** and **Phil Fishman** who provided valuable support to these volunteer attorneys!

Thank you to the following volunteer attorneys, consulting attorneys, and interpreters who have recently taken new cases or completed interpreting assignments:

Karly Baraga
Julie Boemke
Max Bremer
Jeff Campbell
Karen Ellingson

Fredrikson Immigration
Law Group
Mark Frey
Shauna Holt
Amelia Jadoo

David Johnson
Nancy Johnson-
Maloney
Natalie Kadievitch
Jeff Larson

Wayne Popham
Joy Roepelle
Mardi Savage
Max Schott
Sarah Sjolholm

Jason Stover
Elizabeth Streefland
Mark Thieroff
David Woodward
Laura Young

Speak out against Bias

We have all heard the myths: *“Immigrants don’t pay taxes.”* *“All immigrants are on welfare.”* *“Immigrants cause crime.”* Despite the inaccuracy of these statements, they circulate freely and broadly in our communities, prohibiting productive dialogue about immigration, reinforcing negative stereotypes about immigrants, and even fomenting acts of hate.

With U.S. immigration policy again on the horizon, it is more important than ever to learn the facts about immigration and share them with others. The Building Immigrant Awareness and Support (B.I.A.S.) Project produces well-researched educational materials, designed for use by diverse audiences, to facilitate productive conversations about immigration that are based on facts instead of myths. Staff and volunteers teach people how to use the information they learn through workshops, trainings, and The Advocates’ online curriculum, Energy of a Nation (www.energyofanation.org).

Individuals can help to fight injustice in their communities by 1) learning more and talking to friends and family; 2) calling elected officials and telling them that immigrants have rights and contribute to our society and economy; 3) giving presentations at schools and community group meetings about immigration facts; and 4) volunteering at the State Fair with The Advocates (see page 3).

Since 1992, The Advocates has worked to reduce anti-immigrant sentiments and racism by confronting public misconceptions about immigrants and refugees through education. Its work is premised on universally recognized human rights principles that promote and protect the dignity and equality of all people, regardless of “race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

National AILA Conference



Emily Good with co-panelists at the conference

Three staff members presented at the American Immigration Lawyers Association national conference, June 3 - 6, 2009 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The conference is the largest immigration law education and networking event in the country. Michele Garnett McKenzie, advocacy director, presented on a panel entitled “Was This in the Cards? State and Local Involvement in Immigration Enforcement” and also co-wrote an article on the same topic, which was published in the provided materials. Colleen Beebe, director of the Education Program, spoke about advocacy strategies for combating anti-immigrant initiatives, drawing on The Advocates’ extensive anti-bias materials and training experience. Colleen also co-authored an article on the same topic. Refugee and Immigrant Program Director Emily Good led discussions in an asylum workshop focused on demonstrating harm.

Estimated attendance at the three sessions totaled nearly 600 people. In addition to presenting, all three staff members made connections throughout the conference with partner organizations doing similar work around the country, laying the groundwork for future collaborations.

Park Hill Clinic in New York

In an expansion of its direct legal services, The Advocates partnered with the law firm of Fried Frank LLP and the nonprofit African Refugee to launch a series of immigration legal clinics on Staten Island, New York.

The need for free, accessible legal services for Liberians living in New York became apparent during the statement-taking process of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Diaspora Project. The Advocates responded to requests for services by bringing our well established volunteer model to Staten Island, where attorneys are now providing pro bono services in the form of brief advice and referrals in a pilot clinic during summer 2009.

Access to legal representation is a cornerstone of ensuring respect for human rights – including the right to equality before the law – in immigration cases. Representation in immigration cases has a direct impact on an individual’s ability to seek asylum, reunite with family, and rebuild their lives in the United States.



Opposing Inhumane Death Penalty Regulations

As part of its national work opposing the death penalty, The Advocates for Human Rights recently submitted a letter to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), requesting rejection of the state's proposed lethal injection regulations. If passed, the regulations would be a first step toward California resuming executions, which were suspended in 2006 due to flawed procedures in the lethal injection process.

The Advocates argued that the proposed regulations would constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment under the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the U.S. Constitution. The procedures would also violate the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, ratified by the United States in 1994. Additionally, the proposed regulations would violate other specific human rights standards by:

- limiting the right to meet with religious advisors and potentially compelling advisors to violate confidentiality, thus interfering with the religious rights of persons to be executed;
- imposing unnecessarily burdensome and dehumanizing restrictions on persons to be executed and their families, thus failing to respect privacy and family; and
- restricting media access to certain stages of the execution, thus interfering with the public's ability to know the full truth behind the executions.

Furthermore, the proposed regulations would fail to adequately protect legal rights, particularly of persons to be executed who do not speak English. Such a change would have a large impact on the 57 foreign nationals on death row in California. Yet, it is unclear whether their national or consular representatives received notice of the proposed regulations and whether the relevant materials were made available in prisoners' languages.

The concerns with California's lethal injection process underline the broader problems with capital punishment, including racial bias, arbitrariness, cost, and innocence. In fact, thirty-five people to date in the United States have been found to be innocent and exonerated from death row.

If passed, California's proposed regulations would continue the pattern of inhumane death penalty and lethal injection regulations in the United States. Thirty-five of the thirty-six states with the death penalty still authorize legal injection under state-specific protocols. The Advocates stands firmly against this trend and opposes the death penalty, as well as all unlawful, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of prisoners. Preventing the proposed regulations in California – the state with the highest number of death-row inmates – would be a step toward more humane death penalty regulations nationwide.

Death Row Inmates by State

California	678	Oregon	35
Florida	402	Delaware	20
Texas	358	Virginia	18
Pennsylvania	226	Idaho	18
Alabama	207	Indiana	17
Ohio	181	Illinois	15
North Carolina	167	Nebraska	10
Arizona	129	Connecticut	10
Georgia	109	Kansas	10
Tennessee	92	Utah	10
Oklahoma	86	Washington	9
Louisiana	84	U.S. Military	9
Nevada	79	Maryland	5
South Carolina	63	South Dakota	3
Mississippi	61	Colorado	3
U.S. Gov't	55	Montana	2
Missouri	52	New Mexico	2
Arkansas	42	Wyoming	1
Kentucky	36	New Hampshire	1

Executions in the United States by State 1976 to Present

Texas	423	Mississippi	10
Virginia	102	Utah	6
Oklahoma	88	Maryland	5
Florida	66	Tennessee	4
Missouri	66	Washington	4
Georgia	43	Pennsylvania	3
North Carolina	43	Kentucky	3
South Carolina	40	Montana	3
Alabama	38	Nebraska	3
Ohio	28	U.S.	3
Louisiana	27	Oregon	2
Arkansas	27	Connecticut	1
Arizona	23	Colorado	1
Indiana	19	New Mexico	1
Delaware	14	Idaho	1
California	13	Wyoming	1
Illinois	12	South Dakota	1
Nevada	12		

Source: NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., *Death Row U.S.A.*, (Winter 2009), http://www.naacpldf.org/content/pdf/pubs/drusa/DRUSA_Winter_2009.pdf.



Volunteer Corner: Lauren Anderson

The Advocates carries out its work with the help of outstanding volunteers like Lauren Anderson. In between her busy work schedule as an assistant in the immigration department at Fredrikson & Byron, an administrator for the Alliance of Business Immigration Lawyers, and a server at El Meson Spanish-Caribbean Bistro, Lauren provided invaluable assistance with The Advocates' 2009 Human Rights Awards Dinner's live and silent auctions.

Lauren first heard about The Advocates through her work with Loan Huynh, former staff and advisory committee member. After attending a few lectures by The Advocates, Lauren decided to volunteer.

Lauren worked with staff on the project from start to finish, putting in many hours at the office, in addition to working from home and assisting the night of the event. Lauren's energy and positive approach to every task quickly made her an important part of the team. The Advocates is grateful for Lauren's help in creating one of The Advocates' most successful awards dinners to date.

Staff and Intern Update

Anna Donnelly is the new AmeriCorps VISTA in the Education Program. Anna is a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota. Welcome, Anna!

Margot Goodnow has joined The Advocates Education Program as an AmeriCorps VISTA. Margot was an intern in the Education Program previously, and a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota. Welcome Margot!

David Hamm finished his AmeriCorps VISTA year, and has now joined The Advocates as the Development and Communications Assistant. Welcome, David!

Madeline Lohman finished her AmeriCorps VISTA year, and has moved into a new role as a Program Associate in the Education Program. Welcome Madeline!

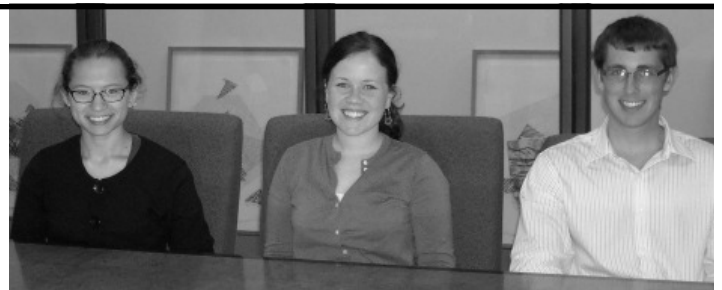
Rebecca Riedell has finished her year with the Education Program as an AmeriCorps VISTA. Thank you, and good luck Rebecca!

Malinda Schmiechen, Refugee and Immigration Staff Attorney, left The Advocates to open her own immigration law practice in St. Louis Park. Thank you, Malinda, for your hard work and dedication over the years!

Luke Wilcox has joined The Advocates as the AmeriCorps VISTA in Development and Communications. Luke is a graduate of Valparaiso University and Boston University. Welcome Luke!

Thank you to each of our very dedicated and talented interns and fellows!

Mai Hamdi (Freedom House Fellow, National Council for Human Rights in Egypt) and **Zuhra Khoyratty** (St. Paul Academy and Summit School) with Administration;



New AmeriCorps VISTAs Margot Goodnow, Anna Donnelly, and Luke Wilcox

Margot Goodnow (University of Minnesota), **Laura Guzman** (St. Olaf College), **Bassam Khawaja** (University of Minnesota), and **Emma Mondadori** (Macalester College), with the Education Program;

Sarah Kettler (University of Notre Dame), **Laurel Lawson** (University of Minnesota Law School), **Sam Manning** (St. Olaf College), and **Lindsey Wheeler** (Grinnell College) with the Refugee and Immigrant Program;

Kit Blanke (Stillwater High School), **Matthew Buechner** (University of Minnesota), **Meredith Bundul** (Northwestern University), **Kathie Carroll** (George Washington University Law School), **Will Heegaard** (University of California at Berkeley), **Steve Hench** (Vanderbilt University), **Nathan Madison** (University of Minnesota Law School), **Jonathan Moler** (University of Minnesota Law School), **Allison Radomski** (University of Chicago), and **Page Whitmore** (Bard College) with Special Projects; and

Hannah Bolt (St. Olaf College), **Sarah Goodell** (Hamilton College), **Jamie Kastler** (University of Minnesota Law School), **Sonja Manning** (St. Paul Academy and Summit School), **Tina Quick** (William Mitchell College of Law), and **Mary Rude** (William and Mary Law School) with the Women's Human Rights Program.



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