Across the United States, there are thousands upon thousands of communities that represent the wide-ranging, rich cultures of the world and a legal system designed to protect the expression of religious and cultural freedom for these communities. Unfortunately, along with this amazing diversity, the United States has serious problems of discrimination in accessing justice as well as all of the extraordinary rights we are promised in our democracy. The United States is plagued with endemic institutional racism impacting all aspects of its society.

As we work toward The Advocates’ vision of a country — and a world — in which all people live with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace, we must listen and call out discrimination wherever, whenever we see it. We must act with vigilance to eliminate it at its core until this vision is realized.

Part of listening is educating ourselves on the issues of discrimination infecting our communities. In this issue, we address discrimination from several points of view, with essays about the problems of racial discrimination written by Professors Duchess Harris and Erika Lee, two extraordinary women working toward a bigger vision of equal justice for all, and Professor Harris’s student and young human rights defender, Ayaan Natala.

Also in this issue of the Observer, The Advocates describes its long history of work responding to the world-wide epidemic of violence against women, another form of discrimination experienced by many women in this country.

The United Nations recognizes the right to be free from discrimination in all major human rights treaties. We highlight some of our work at the United Nations to hold the United States accountable for the human rights violations affecting immigrants, asylum seekers, and death row inmates.

Much of the work of United Nations’ agencies focuses on eliminating systemic discrimination and addressing the devastating results of various forms of discrimination around the world. There are many ways to support international human rights work to address the negative impacts of discrimination in the world. We can, and should, engage where we have the opportunity and the heart to alleviate this suffering.

In the United States, we must recognize our various positions of privilege to determine where we can have the greatest impact. There is hope if we listen, hope if we act with integrity, and hope if we recognize the humanity of the people directly affected by the discrimination and the positive intentions of allies working to fight this discrimination.

As we focus on the issues of discrimination we are experiencing in the United States, we recommit to a world in which every person can live with dignity, starting here at home.

Robin Phillips,
Executive Director
It is such an honor to speak about David Weissbrodt’s impact on the international human rights movement. While I hope I can do it justice, I am sure there is no way to overstate it. As many of you know, David was instrumental in the creation of The Advocates for Human Rights, originally called the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee. It has been my great privilege to be part of the organization for more than 20 years.

I learned early on that David had reached icon status in the human rights world. When I first started doing this work, I met people around the world working on a variety of human rights issues. When I said I was from Minnesota, I would often hear, “Oh, then you must know David.” David, like Cher and Madonna, only needed a first name.

It was David’s idea to launch the Minnesota Protocol project, a project to develop a forensic procedure for suspicious deaths to investigate whether human rights abuses had occurred. The United Nations adopted the principles of the Protocol in 1989. Because of the advancements in forensic science since then, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions is working with an international team — including several Minnesotans who were part of the original project — to update the manual created from the principles. David’s legacy on this important project will continue far into the future.

David has also been a mentor to countless students, lawyers, and advocates, many of whom are here tonight. In asking some of my colleagues who were his students about David’s impact, I heard stories about what a great teacher he was, how he inspired a whole generation of human rights activists, and how he is legendary for his effective use of the Socratic method. I see his impact first-hand every day in working with so many talented individuals who are his former students.

David has been an important mentor to me, preparing me, with our team, for the first Advocates’ women’s human rights fact-finding trip in 1993. He taught me how to write human rights reports and coached me through my first years as executive director.

David is also willing to explore new territory and new ideas. One year he co-taught the women’s human rights course at the law school with me. He was willing to ask provocative questions and engage in “he-said/she-said” debates on evolving women’s human rights issues. He was able to hold his own, even when things got heated with well-schooled feminist studies students. I was very impressed!

We have heard about some of the extraordinary things David has done throughout this event. He was the first U.S. citizen since Eleanor Roosevelt to chair a UN human rights body. He was a trustee for the UN Trust Fund for Contemporary Forms of Slavery. He had a hand in starting several important human rights organizations, including two here in Minnesota, along with the Human Rights Center at the Law School. We are all very proud of David’s many important, visible accomplishments.

But also like Eleanor Roosevelt, he understands that human rights start here, in small places close to home. David not only did the exciting work of starting organizations, he rolled up his sleeves and did the hard work of keeping them going when it was necessary. I have never seen him shy away from a difficult challenge. Like most organizations, The Advocates for Human Rights has had some bumpy transitions over the years. David was there at every step. During one particularly difficult time, he stepped in to help with some of the day-to-day problems. He met with the staff to assure us that the organization had strong community support and he would make sure we would get through the pressing challenges we were experiencing. And he did — and we did get through it — and it is no exaggeration to say that The Advocates for Human Rights would not be here without both his vision and his commitment to real world human rights advocacy.

It is such a pleasure to be in the company of so many people who have worked so hard to improve human rights conditions around the world and to build this extraordinary community with a world-wide reputation for its commitment to human rights. I stand on the shoulders of human rights giants here in Minnesota. David’s shoulders are the broadest and we are all better for being part of his community.
Addressing Torture in Our Own Backyard

“Black Americans matter. We deserve to be in the international human rights discussion.” — Professor Duchess Harris & Ayaan Natala
On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old Mike Brown was fatally shot by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Officer Wilson received no legal repercussions for killing an unarmed African-American teenager. In the aftermath, police officers used excessive force on peaceful protestors who were demanding justice for Brown. In response to media coverage of law enforcement intimidating and coercing protestors, the UN Committee Against Torture criticized the U.S. federal government for not investigating human rights abuses in the United States. Despite this high-profile call for accountability, killings of unarmed African-Americans by police officers have persisted at an alarming rate throughout 2015.

In Geneva, Brown’s parents testified at a hearing of the UN Convention Against Torture — a convention defining torture and setting forth procedures to eliminate it — to address the deficiencies of the U.S. federal government with respect to protecting their son. While the right to be free from torture is a human right belonging to all, neither the U.S. government or the international community fully considered the killing of Mike Brown to be an act of torture. The complicated definition of torture resulted in the UN committee declaring Brown’s killing an act of domestic battery instead of an act of torture.

Article 1 in the Convention describes an act of torture as one that is committed when a public official is acting in a public capacity. Officer Wilson’s occupation as a police officer makes him a public official acting in a public capacity. However, Article 1 states lawful sanctions cannot be considered torture. This elaborate distinction of torture made it challenging to argue that a police officer killing Brown was a torture violation. Regardless of how the Committee defined the case, Officer Wilson’s killing of Brown demonstrated a distinct example of the U.S. legal system not holding perpetrators of torture accountable.

Article 1 in the Convention also asserts that governments must work to eliminate torture. Brown’s parents’ decision to testify that their son’s death was a form of torture is justifiable. Even though police brutality might not be considered torture under the Convention’s definition, Article 1 still claims each state has the duty to make torture a federal offense. Brown’s case exemplifies many ways in which the U.S. government failed to investigate discriminatory practices that violated human rights. The UN criticized the lack of responses and investigations into police brutality, urging the United States to develop policies against police using excessive force on citizens. So far, the federal level’s only attempt has been to equip police officers with body cameras. Shortly after this action, the U.S. federal government ceased its investigations into the Mike Brown case. A year after the UN hearing, few federal attempts have been made to define — much less implement — a federal commitment to fighting the torture of African-Americans.

The aspirations of the UN Convention Against Torture to protect the international community should be admired. However, due to the constricted legal definition of torture it puts forth, the Convention periodically fails to maintain justice in the world. The United States’ refusal to confront the human rights abuses against African-American citizens proves the arbitrariness of the Convention. The Mike Brown case highlights that the United States is in a state of denial about the realities of American domestic policies. While members of the UN can argue that the killings of unarmed African-Americans do not conform to the legal definition of torture, the practice of state-sanctioned violence against African-Americans is a direct affront to the principles of human rights and justice articulated in the Convention. If stopping the police killing of unarmed African-Americans does not become a priority in the human rights international community, the practice of torturing African-Americans in the United States will continue. The international community, as well as the U.S. community, must demand a federal response to the violence against African-Americans, including holding perpetrators of torture accountable.

By Duchess Harris (top right), JD, PhD, Professor and Chair of American Studies, Macalester College; and Ayaan Natala (bottom right), a Macalester sophomore who plans to work in human rights to improve the conditions of African-Americans.
The Immigration Act of 1965

A Contradictory Legacy

At a time when immigration has become a polarizing and toxic topic in our politics, it’s worth remembering that 50 years ago President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act into law at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. Part of the trilogy of civil rights acts that outlawed discrimination in American life, the 1965 Immigration Act transformed America. Record numbers of new immigrants have arrived in the subsequent five decades—along with border fences, detention centers, and xenophobia. A look back at the 1965 Act helps us understand how we got to where we are today and how we might move forward in the future.

The immigration system that was in place prior to 1965 was highly discriminatory. A century of immigration law had excluded several categories of people, including criminals, prostitutes, paupers, lunatics, idiots, those likely to become public charges, contract laborers, polygamists, anarchists, illiterates, and aliens convicted of a crime involving “moral turpitude,” a clause aimed at gays and lesbians. Asian immigrants were also mostly barred through specific exclusion laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the 1917 Immigration Act with its “Asiatic Barred Zone,” and through diplomatic agreements. Based on blatant race prejudice that considered the so-called “Nordic” and “Anglo Saxon” “races” to be the “purest” types of immigrants, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act restricted immigration even further. It created a system of numerical annual quotas that allowed in greater numbers of immigrants from northern Europe while restricting immigration from southern and eastern Europe and barring even more immigration from Asia. Immigration plummeted, and by the 1960s, immigration to the United States was at a historic low.

The road to immigration reform began during World War II when some of the most egregious laws excluding Asian immigrants were repealed to reflect our new alliances with China, India, and the Philippines. Token numbers of immigrants from those countries—around 100 each—were let into the U.S. Some limited reform measures were also enacted in the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. By the 1960s, strong leadership on immigration reform came from the White House under President John F. Kennedy, whose 1958 book, A Nation of Immigrants, was an unabashed celebration of America’s immigrant heritage and a call for immigration reform.

Kennedy presented Congress with his proposal to revise and modernize the country’s immigration laws in July 1963, just over four months before he was assassinated. The bill was meant to “serve the national interest and reflect in every detail the principals of equality and human dignity to which our nation subscribes.” Foreign policy was also a consideration: At a time when the United States emphasized its virtues of freedom and democracy over the totalitarianism of communism, the unequal treatment of immigrants based on race exposed America’s hypocrisy. Following Kennedy’s death, President Johnson embraced the cause of immigration reform and declared the current system to be “incompatible with our basic American tradition.”

Passed in the aftermath of the landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the Hart-Cellar Act) had four major provisions. It abolished the old quota system that unequally distributed immigrant visas based on national origin; explicitly prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence in the U.S. government’s decisions to issue immigrant visas; established a new preference system based on professional status and family reunification; and, lastly, set global and per-country ceilings on the annual number of immigrants that were the same for every country. For the first time, however, restrictions were placed on immigration from other countries in the Americas. In other words, the law diversified the sources of immigration while allowing the U.S. to continue to pick and choose which immigrants it wanted, but instead of using race and nationality as the primary criteria for admission, the law placed a premium on skills and family ties.

When President Johnson signed the bill into law, he praised its egalitarianism while downplaying any massive societal change it might cause. The new law, he claimed, repaired a “very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice,” and as such, was “one of the most important acts” of his administration. But

Will the U.S. live up to its values with the new age of global migration?
the president also hinted that no dramatic increase in immigration would result. This was not a “revolutionary bill,” he declared, and it would “not affect the lives of millions [or] reshape the structure of our daily lives.”

The president would be proven wrong: A half-century later, the United States has been transformed, and millions of immigrant lives have been affected—if in very different ways.

America’s foreign-born population now numbers nearly 41 million, or around 13 percent of the total population, not far off the historical high of nearly 15 percent in 1890. Immigrants are settling in places that have traditionally welcomed newcomers like New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago, as well as in other cities and areas where such large-scale immigration is new: Atlanta, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Charlotte, and Salt Lake City. Our immigration patterns have also shifted decisively away from Europe and towards Asia and Latin America.

No group has benefited more from the ’65 Act than Asian immigrants. Taking advantage of new pathways into the United States through family reunification and professional skills, Asian immigration has increased exponentially. After decades of being separated from loved ones, Asian immigrants sponsored family members in such large numbers that the 1965 Act was nicknamed the “brothers and sisters act.” Many are also recruited to work in certain industries, such as the high-tech sector. Asian immigrants receive about three quarters of H-1B visas granted to highly skilled “guest workers” today, and Chinese are now the single largest group of new arrivals coming into the country.

On the other hand, the new restrictions on immigration from the Western Hemisphere dramatically reduced other immigrants’ access to the United States. The 20,000 spots granted to Mexico were just a fraction of the more than 400,000 immigrants and temporary workers who had been admitted into the U.S. each year from Mexico in the decade prior to 1965. Mexicans could still apply for admission through the family reunification clause, but demand outweighed supply. The waiting list for visas grew quickly and was soon years-long for applications of Mexican citizens. Nowadays critics of unauthorized immigration complain that immigrants need to stand in “line” like others, without necessarily acknowledging that the line is almost 4.5 million people long.

The new law also left few options for unskilled and low-skilled workers to enter the U.S. just as global demand for such labor (in agriculture, industry, hospitality, and service) was increasing. The result was a perfect storm of conditions that allowed unauthorized immigration to grow to unprecedented levels by the end of the 20th century. The latest statistics from the Department of Homeland Security estimate that there are around 11.6 million immigrants living without authorization in the U.S. today, mostly from Mexico and Central America. In 2013, the Obama administration deported a record 438,421 unauthorized immigrants, continuing a trend of increased enforcement that has resulted in more than 2 million deportations during his administration.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 remains the cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy today, heralding a new era that was simultaneously more inclusive for some and more exclusionary for others. It’s now time to decide which of these legacies to advance into the future. We have not yet achieved President Johnson’s goal of establishing an immigration law that helps the United States create “a world without war [and] a world made safe for diversity, in which all men, goods, and ideas can freely move across every border and every boundary.” But the need has never been greater. As we become increasingly interconnected to each other across national borders through technology and transportation, we are no longer isolated from events halfway around the world. The current refugee crisis in Europe is likely not a singular anomaly, but rather a sign of things to come. As was the case in 1965, how the United States will respond to this new age of global migration will be another test of how it lives up to, or fails to live up to, its values and its reputation as a “nation of immigrants.”

By Erika Lee (pictured on opposite page), University of Minnesota’s Rudolph J. Vecoli Chair in Immigration History and Director of University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center (IHRC). This article was originally written for “What It Means to Be American,” a project of Zócalo Public Square and the Smithsonian. The Advocates regularly partners with the IHRC and Professor Lee.
Ending Human Rights Abuses Against Women in the U.S. & Around the Globe

Every day around the world countless numbers of women and girls are subjected to violence simply because of their gender.

This violence takes many forms. Women and girls are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, genital mutilation, child marriage, and other brutality. The UN recognizes this violence as a human rights violation and a prohibited form of discrimination.

The UN calls upon the world’s governments — including the United States — to not only refrain from committing violence against women, but to “take positive measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women” by private actors. Measures to eliminate violence against women include reviewing and changing laws and policies, monitoring systems, and working with professionals to more effectively respond to violence against women in their communities.

The Women’s Human Rights Program at The Advocates for Human Rights applies international human rights standards to advocate for women’s rights in the United States and around the world. Using research, education, and advocacy, The Advocates partners with local organizations in the United States and throughout the world to review current laws, advocate for new laws as well as modifications to existing laws, monitor systems and recommend changes, and work with professionals so they use available tools to more effectively protect women from violence and hold violent offenders accountable. So far, The Advocates has worked with partners in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as in Nepal, Mexico, and Mongolia. At the same time, our work here at home continues to expand and strengthen its impact.

Holding up a human rights lens, The Advocates publishes extensive, comprehensive reports exposing violence against women and governments’ responses to it. Our most recent reports dig into domestic violence in Mongolia, Croatia, and Moldova. And we continue to work with partners and explore the issue of domestic violence in Serbia and Montenegro. We consult with change agents around the world who are drafting and beginning to implement new laws to prevent violence against women.

Our efforts succeed. For example, our partners in Moldova use the monitoring reports and legal commentary to advocate for new amendments to their domestic violence law. In Bulgaria, The Advocates continued its longtime partnership with non-government organizations in that country by participating in extensive trainings of young lawyers as well as Bulgarian prosecutors and judges.

Here at home, we are expanding our efforts to increase awareness and capacity to respond to sex trafficking. Beginning with the publication of our report on sex trafficking in Minnesota in 2008, we have focused on effective government responses to this human rights abuse. We recommended to Minnesota elected and appointed officials to center attention on improving services for victims and holding traffickers accountable. The Advocates’ voice is loud and clear to all that, to prevent trafficking, demand must end and risks that make people vulnerable in the first place need to be addressed. The Advocates accomplished the move to increase penalties for sex traffickers in Minnesota, and prosecutors now have stronger tools to hold traffickers accountable.

The Advocates also wants to ensure that laws are implemented appropriately. We worked with Ramsey County (Minnesota) and prosecutors throughout the state of Minnesota to train prosec-
“Partnering with a multi-sector coalition committed to ending sex trafficking in Minnesota, we are engaging the entire community — police, prosecutors, teachers, health care workers, and so many others — to help bring an end to sex trafficking,” said Beatriz Menanteau, staff attorney with The Advocates’ Women’s Human Rights Program. “The coalition worked together to pass the Safe Harbor Act in 2011, a law that protects the youngest victims of sex trafficking — those under the age of 16. Then in 2013, we successfully advocated for expanding the law’s protection to all youth under 18, ensuring that all children who have been trafficked are treated as victims, not criminals.”

The next step for the coalition was to team up with stakeholders statewide to develop the “No Wrong Door” model, an innovative, victim-centered response to sexually exploited and trafficked youth. This model ensures communities across Minnesota have the knowledge, skills, and resources to identify sexually exploited and at-risk youth, so they can get the services and safe housing they need.

“Partnering with the Minnesota Department of Health and the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office to develop trainings for community members and professionals to equip them with the knowledge needed to identify trafficking’s red flags and to respond when they sense something is not right,” said Menanteau. “We also created critical training resources about sex trafficking for professionals, including teachers, healthcare workers, license code compliance officers, community members, the hospitality industry, and other front-line personnel.” This resource, entitled the “Sex Trafficking/Safe Harbor Resource Pack” is available on The Advocates’ website, and it includes handouts and a full PowerPoint presentation on the topic, including a suggested script to aid in sharing this vital information.

“Looking for the latest news on violence against women? Click our “What’s New” section.


Want to learn about harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, honor-related violence, and forced marriage? Turn to the website’s “Gender Violence Worldwide” section.

Wondering about laws and policies related to sex trafficking? Check out the section, “Trafficking in Women.”

“We continue to add sections to StopVAW,” said Rosalyn Park, director of The Advocates’ Women’s Human Rights Program. “We recently added the section “Our Work” to describe the cutting-edge work we’re doing to bring a halt to violence perpetuated against women.”

StopVAW is a tremendous resource for women, advocates, and stakeholders worldwide, thanks to the hard work of volunteers and staff, reported Park. • • •

Receive our StopVAW newsletter, The VAW Monitor, by visiting StopVAW.org/the_vaw_monitor.
When most Americans think about human rights abuses, they consider countries in Africa and the Middle East, or China and North Korea. They often ignore human rights abuses at home. Discrimination is an endemic human rights violation experienced in all levels of society in the United States. The Advocates for Human Rights has focused the UN’s attention on discrimination in its review of human rights practices in the United States.

Death Penalty
Racial bias is pervasive in the use of the death penalty in the United States. A defendant is more likely to be sentenced to death if the victim is white than if the victim is African-American. Eighty percent of all people executed during the past 37 years were executed for murders of white victims even though the numbers of white and African-American victims in capital cases were virtually equal, The Advocates’ reported in its July 2014 submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

While African-Americans make up only about 13 percent of the U.S. population, they constitute 42 percent of the total death row population, reported the Equal Justice Initiative in Racial Bias, June 25, 2014. While 20 white defendants were executed for killing African-American victims from 1976–2013, 259 black defendants were executed for murdering white victims during that period, reveals the Death Penalty Information Center in its 2013 report, Facts About the Death Penalty. And a prosecutor is more likely to charge and seek the death penalty when a defendant is African-American and the victim white when compared to a defendant being white and the victim African-American.

Immigrants & Refugees
Discrimination creates barriers for immigrants and refugees seeking to integrate into communities. Moving from Exclusion to Belonging: Immigrant Rights in Minnesota Today, a report The Advocates released in March 2014, details how federal policies implemented at state and local levels fall short in protecting the human rights of Minnesotan’s newest residents. Although focused on Minnesota, Moving from Exclusion to Belonging highlights problems common across the United States.

In general, Minnesota is plagued by some of the nation’s worst racial disparities in employment, health, civic engagement, and educational outcomes. On top of this, migrants of color face disparities in accessing justice and housing, just two of the issues detailed by The Advocates’ report. Lack of immigration status, language, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. legal system create barriers to our newest neighbors’ access to justice. Major issues include:

- limited availability of free civil and immigration legal services;
- disproportionate consequences for criminal convictions;
- perceptions of bias in the criminal justice system;
- restricted access to high quality interpreters in proceedings;
- lack of understanding of how the court system works;
- significant delays in cases causing hardship; and
- fear of deportation, acting as a barrier to those needing remedies for discrimination in housing, employment, public benefits, and other matters.

When it comes to housing, immigrants and refugees struggle to find safe, well-maintained places to live. A shortage of affordable housing, restrictions on public benefits, immigration status, exploitation by landlords, and outright discrimination in renting and approving mortgages fuel the problem. Lack of housing affects all migrants, regardless of their countries of origin, immigration status, place of residence in Minnesota, or ethnicity.

Detention of Refugees
The United States’ immigration detention system has evolved without regard for international human rights standards. It is based on a penal model of corrections which fails to address the needs of a population detained for civil status violations. Consider the mothers and children fleeing violence in Central America and arriving at the U.S. border claiming a fear of return and asking for asylum. How do we treat these refugees? We jail them.

Ensuring that people fleeing persecution have a chance to be heard before being deported back to torture or death is a basic human right. “But we have a system that increases pain all around,” said immigration attorneys Michelle Rivero and Kara Lynum. “Mothers and children are detained indefinitely in a remote location where legal access is barely available and family visitation virtually impossible. Families are jailed in for-profit detention facilities that value profits over providing a basic level of care to children.”
What is your background with immigration law?
I am honored to have worked with non-profits, educational institutions, and private attorneys during my career in immigration law. I started, right out of college, as a summer paralegal with the Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, staffing a small office servicing migrant farm workers. I then went to work as a paralegal for Richard Breitman, a private immigration attorney who taught me what it means to be a zealous advocate.

I completed a masters program in human rights and peace education at the National University in Costa Rica. Frustrated by the barriers 9/11 brought to immigration law, I studied global migration and human rights issues. Then, I went to law school and clerked with the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota and Centro Legal, serving low-income clients. I also had the opportunity to participate in a number of projects at The Advocates for Human Rights.

I joined the University of St. Thomas Immigration Practice Group of the Legal Services Clinic, working alongside Professor Virgil Wiebe, who has the unique ability to help students see the importance of even the smallest detail in a case while, at the same time, appreciate how one client’s case fits in the broader fabric of our nation’s immigrant history.

What do you look forward to the most about being the director of the Refugee & Immigrant Program?
I look forward to continuing to work with our amazing team of staff, interns, and volunteers that support The Advocates’ work. We continue to explore opportunities to support asylum seekers nationwide, and I look forward to fusing more connections with partners across the country and within our midwest region.

What do you want to see accomplished?
With the help of dedicated volunteer attorneys and interpreters, we will continue our work of providing free legal services to low-income asylum seekers.

The Advocates has more than 30 years of experience serving asylum seekers. There are hundreds of former clients who have gone on to contribute to our communities and woven themselves into the rich fabric of our nation. I hope to call on them to provide insights and perspectives of their experiences to help inform our work and to share their thoughts with current clients just beginning the process.

I want to continue to expand our training and support opportunities, particularly for attorneys working as part of our service area in greater Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. I would also like to deepen our connection with national partners as we continue to explore our ability to support asylum seekers nationwide.

What is the most rewarding part about working with refugees on their asylum cases?
I am humbled by the courage and perseverance of our clients. In order to make their way to the United States, most have to part with family, risk their lives, and travel with the hope that remains despite suffering abuse and torture. Seeing a client after a case is granted is akin to meeting a totally new person — a weight has been lifted and a new chapter is beginning for them.
Using art as a catalyst for exploring human rights, The Advocates for Human Rights and the Minneapolis Institute of Art presented “Art Illuminating Human Rights,” a three-part series held this fall. Participants delved into race, celebrated immigrant communities, and explored issues of the LGBTI community. Here, we are honored to feature spoken word artist Abdi Phenomenal’s work, “Say It!,” which was performed at the October event.

Artist’s note: “Say It!” urges Somali youth in the diaspora to fight war with ideologies instead of with bombs and guns. It aims to uplift them and get them thinking before considering being recruited by Al-Shabaab, ISIS, and others using Islam for political gain. Creativity and ideas are tools for revolution that can empower youth to express themselves through their voices rather than through violence. Too often the Somali people’s narrative is plagued with extremist groups, famine, identity crisis, a generational gap, and pirates. Overlooked is the beautiful, humanistic value of the Somali story. It is vital to use art as a tool to change that narrative, instead of contributing to it. We are human.

Say It!, by Abdi Phenomenal

Say it!
It is you.
Who have led some to become numb to the marginalized sum
Ones who let them undone what heroes have done
And those of you who threat them, fear of rebellion
Insight pain, and preach change is seldom
Forgetting you are human too, just like the oppressed one

Are you tired of elders that give themselves permission
To speak on your behalf, because they have wisdom
And represent you in public, like they are the victims?
Did you feel neglected only when suicide listens?
Are you trying to balance both worlds but lost transition?
Do you try and mold your dreams with no belief of conviction?
Do you think disabilities discourage you from your mission?
Are you trying to find happiness, and just out of prison?
Do they sell you heaven in basements that are hidden?

Because the most dangerous thing in the world
Is an idea whose time has come
Youth that fight war with ideology, not bombs and guns
The radical minds, that democracy wants
Who shift the status quo, into what it can become
Is the revolution of youth, that many of us want

Why have bombs forgot all the places to hide to
and give birth to ideas, and religion to divide you?
Why doesn’t happiness live inside you
and looks for causes to confide to?

Your heart has grown tired
from how your mind fabricates
As it finds happiness it can no longer navigate
That poisonous movement and ideas that advocate
How do you define destiny for the life of a man you take
Playing god, but you search for him in others
Empty inside, desperate for change
Afraid to discover, the real you

We know you

We don’t need saving, or your god to free us
You believe in leaders that believe they complete us
Leaders that mislead believers in the name of freedom
Leaders who believe that god has deceived them

And you know us

We are freedom
A generation that fights injustice and promotes equality
A generation that
A generation that demands change
A generation of creativity innovation
A generation of ideas and critical thinkers
A generation trying to heal
A generation that has no tolerance for extremism and violence
Because we know the price we have paid to be where we are.

Because the most dangerous thing in the world
Is an idea whose time has come
Youth that fight war ideology, not bombs and guns
The radical minds, that democracy wants
Who shift the status quo, into what it can become
Is the revolution of youth, that many us want

About the artist > Abdi Phenomenal (Mogadishu, Somalia) has been featured at the White House and Nobel Peace Prize Forum, and in the New York Times and Al-Jazeera. A member of the Minnesota Spoken Word Association, he wants to encourage youth to promote peace and be a voice for themselves, and tell their stories to the world. Through years of hardships, alienation, and finally reluctant assimilation, he found inspiration in poetry.
Art Illuminating Human Rights

The Minneapolis Institute of Art and The Advocates for Human Rights partnered this fall to present the thought-provoking three-part series “Art Illuminating Human Rights.” Participants delved into race, celebrated immigrant communities, and explored issues of the LGBTI community. The kick-off event, held in September, explored race and civil rights in the United States. Featured were a gallery tour and a discussion led by Jonathan Odell, author of the popular novel *Ms. Hazel and the Rosa Parks League*, and Macalester College professor and author, Duchess Harris.

Celebrating the Twin Cities diaspora communities in October were spoken word artists Abdi Phenomenal, born in Somalia; Fres Thao, a Hmong-American; and filmmaker and installation artist Essma Imady (Syria). The final event in December featured artist Andrea Jenkins, author of *The T Is Not Silent*, and an exploration into the issues surrounding the LGBTI community.

“This series provided a platform for human rights awareness-building,” said Robin Phillips, The Advocates’ executive director. “One of the most effective ways to advance human rights is to deepen people’s understanding of one another’s experiences.”
Louis Smith and Nadia Najarro Smith, long-time advocates for human rights and justice, have a tradition to celebrate their June wedding anniversary each year that fits their commitment to social justice. “Our gift to one another is to host a table for our friends and family at The Advocates for Human Rights’ awards dinner,” Nadia said.

Their twenty-fifth anniversary this year made the event extra special. So did hearing the event’s speaker Sonia Nazario talk about her book, *Enrique’s Journey*, which brought much-needed attention to the issues of human rights in Central America.

The couple’s anniversary custom is tied to their special connection with The Advocates. It began in 1987, when Louis and other volunteers for the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee (The Advocates’ earlier name) traveled to Guatemala. There, the group investigated allegations of a dramatic increase in violence, the unexplained disappearances of people, unlawful government and military behavior, suspension of justice, and pervasive human rights violations.

After the mission, the group published a detailed report to document their findings and recommendations, and then testified before U.S. Congress and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. It was on that trip to Guatemala when Louis first met Nadia, an attorney and law professor. She was working as the chief of staff for a special court the Guatemalan Supreme Court had established to address the cases of people who had been “disappeared.”

A year later, Louis traveled back to Guatemala to help children left behind in the country when their parents had fled for their lives to the United States. He reached out to Nadia for guidance. Not only did they succeed at rescuing the children, the experience brought them together as a couple. After a long-distance courtship, Louis and Nadia married in 1990.

They each continued to volunteer for The Advocates. Louis, who specializes in representing watershed districts, provides pro bono legal services to asylum seekers. Nadia provides The Advocates with pro bono interpretation and translation services, expertise she used to build her professional interpreter practice. She counts immigration and district courts and the University of Minnesota among her clients.

“Volunteering with The Advocates has been very formative and meaningful,” said Louis. “The experiences I had in Central America working with the consequences of war, human rights abuses, and poverty powerfully influenced my life.”

Nadia agrees. “Whether it’s working as an attorney or interpreter, we’re dedicated to issues of justice and human rights.”

Interns Create the Future for Social Action

Thank you to The Advocates for Human Rights’ interns who served during summer 2015.

Bowdoin College
Michaelle Yeo

Breck School
Thomas Dickstein
Taylor Hendrickson

Carleton College
Sophie Buchmueller

Hamline Univ.
Larissa Thom

Macalester College
Hannah Pollard-Garber
Emma Soglin

Minneapolis South H.S.
Gabriela Ayana

Highland Park H.S.
Talief Ticker

Sarah Lawrence College
Juan Sucre

St. Olaf College
Kaija Montaine Hedger

Univ. of Edinburgh
Natalie Baumgartner

Univ. of Minnesota
Margaret Vohs
Alexandra Benson
Alexandra Steinkraus
Delaney Broberg
Ceena Idicula
Max Zimmerman (Law School)
Sanaa Assa (Law School)

Univ. of North Dakota
School of Law
Kelly Johnson

Univ. of St. Thomas
School of Law
Christina Espey-Sundt

Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison
Madeleine Wolfe

Univ. of Jyväskylä, Finland
Sharon Natt

Yale Divinity School
Ellen Koneck

Yale Univ.
Analia Cuevas-Ferreras
Crowds of people gathered in the yard and home of Marlene and Tom Kayser on a lovely September afternoon to celebrate the Women’s Human Rights Program’s latest successes to make the world a better, safer place for women.

Rosalyn Park, the program’s director, and Beatriz Menanteau, a program staff attorney, heralded the strides made to end sex trafficking in Minnesota, which are efforts and models that can be replicated across the United States. “The average age of entry into prostitution for a juvenile is 12-14 years old, and they’re subjected to terrible harms, including murder,” Park told the audience. “We’ve been working to end this, starting in 2008 when we published a report on sex trafficking and documented the need for Minnesota to improve victim services, hold traffickers accountable, end demand to prevent trafficking, and address the risks that make people vulnerable.”

The Advocates’ report targeted one of the biggest gaps in Minnesota law — holding sex traffickers accountable. “Prosecutors now have stronger tools and increased penalties to use with traffickers,” according to Park.

The home of Andrea and Jim Rubenstein burst at the seams when supporters of the The Advocates’ Refugee & Immigrant Program gathered in October to protect people fleeing their home countries because of violence and persecution.

Two clients, recently granted asylum, told the crowd their stories of bravery and desperation when they each had to flee the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In a follow-up note, thanking The Advocates for inviting him to speak at the event, one client said, “It was an honor to tell my story, and a pleasure to give back to an organization that has given so much to me.”

It was powerful to hear from clients, according to guest Carol Hayden, a member of The Advocates’ board. “It drove home the importance of The Advocates work.”

In addition to continuing to provide free legal services to people seeking asylum in the United States, staff and volunteers in 2015 focused attention on the plight of Central American families, including launching a National Asylum Help Line.

Credit for photos of house party guests, upper right: Volunteer Kathy Brown; Jesuit Volunteer Corps’ Chelsey Armstrong
Human Rights Award Dinner’s success due to supporters

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The Advocates for Human Rights would also like to thank its anonymous silent auction donors.
Snapshots >

Human Rights Awards Dinner

The Advocates’ board members Kathy Lenzmeier (l) & Carol Hayden.

Meena Natarajan, Vijaya Jayaraman, & Liliana Espondaburu (l to r).

Volunteer attorney and The Advocates board member, Anne Lockner, Robins Kaplan LLP, introduces her refugee client from Central America who had recently been granted asylum.

Jeff Kolnick, Rosa Tock, Nadia Najarro Smith, & Louis Smith (l to r) catching up with friends.

The Human Rights Awards Dinner is a family affair for The Advocates’ Jennifer Prestholdt (l), two of her children, and her parents.

Tom Fraser enjoying the evening.
Snapshots > 2015 Award Winners

Sonia Nazario receiving the Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award.

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha’s Hilario de Leon (l) & Brian Merle Payne after receiving The Advocates’ Special Recognition Award.

The Advocates’ Rosalyn Park (l) presenting a Volunteer Award to The Honorable Elizabeth Cutter.

Carreen Heegaard (r), Volunteer Award recipient, with The Advocates’ Sarah Herder.

Mary Diaz, Ali Tews, & Barbara Weissberger (l to r) on stage to receive Volunteer Awards for their translator & interpreter work.

Jörg Pierach, representing the marketing firm Fast Horse, moments before receiving a Volunteer Award for creating The Advocates’ website.

Teresa Mesa about to receive a Volunteer Award for her translator and interpreter work.

Photo credits, pages 17-19: Bill Cameron
“We support The Advocates for Human Rights because the stability of our world depends on giving voice to those who cannot speak for themselves.”

— Dulce Foster and Joe Muretta