

HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER

Fall/Winter 2023 | Volume 35, Issue 1
TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org

*Celebrating 40 Years of
Defending Human Rights*



Contents

Director's Desk.....	1
A+ Results.....	2
2023 HRAD Award Winners.....	3
UN Experts on Racial Justice.....	9
In Memoriam.....	10
New Report Details Due Process Failures.....	11
Leaving a Human Rights Legacy.....	13
1983-1992: Setting the Global Standard for Accountability.....	15
Migration in the Americas Reaches Record Levels.....	16
Congratulations to the Afghan Legal Clinic Team.....	16
1993-2002: Turning Rhetoric Into Reality for Women's Rights.....	17
Strategies Of Civil Society.....	17
Driver's Licenses for All.....	19
Minnesota Legislature Passes Labor Trafficking Reforms.....	19
The Advocates Celebrate PRIDE.....	20
My Transformative Journey to the UN.....	21
2023 And Beyond: Making the Vision a Reality.....	22
HRAD Acknowledgment.....	23
Faces of The Advocates.....	24
Defending Human Rights Since 1983.....	26

Director's Desk

This year we celebrate the 40th anniversary of The Advocates for Human Rights. We have taken time to reflect on successes and important lessons learned over the past 40 years.

Since our founding in 1983, we have grown, expanded our reach, and increased our impact. We celebrate major policy victories in our home state, from the 2011 Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act that revolutionized Minnesota's approach to human trafficking, to the long-awaited restoration of driver's licenses for all in 2023. Internationally, we celebrate victories with our partner organizations including new laws against domestic violence, protections against sexual assault, and building momentum to abolish the death penalty around the world.

We also celebrate thousands of individual lives saved over the past 40 years. Lives like our client who was recently granted asylum after fleeing Uganda to escape persecution for his perceived sexual orientation. Lives like our client who, after being trafficked to Minnesota to work for a construction company, was successfully reunited with his family and is now living safely here in the United States.

The organization is thriving. We have grown from a staff of one and a tenacious handful of volunteer board members to a staff of nearly 40 and more than 1,500 volunteers last year. The strength of the organization can be attributed to many things, but I think there are three important factors:

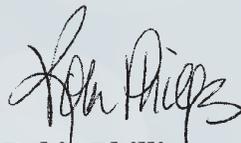
First, human rights are the essential building blocks of individual dignity and a healthy society. As Don Fraser said, "human rights should be the central organizing principle of the planet."

Second, the proposition upon which The Advocates was founded, that we all have a part to play in making human rights a reality, has proven to be powerful and visionary. It will take all of us, working together, to achieve our vision of a world where every person lives with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace.

Finally, we are a success because of you. We would not exist without you. We rely on your volunteer efforts, your moral support, and your financial investment. Because of your in-kind contributions, we were able to deliver more than \$20 million dollars in human rights work on a cash budget of approximately \$3 million dollars in our last fiscal year.

Because of you, we are stronger than ever, but there is still much work to do. The challenges are great, but as we look to the future, I am certain that together we are up to the challenge.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment and thank you for being an Advocate for Human Rights.



Robin Phillips
Executive Director



A+ Results

With a school year full of activities and engagement, students thrive at the Sankhu-Palubari Community School (SPCS).

“When human rights are met, children flourish,” said Jennifer Prestholdt, deputy director of The Advocates for Human Rights. At SPCS, that means a year-round school year filled with academics, athletics, and activities.

Extracurricular activities at SPCS focus on child development, giving students in all grade levels a chance

to show off their talents in drawing, handwriting, singing, and spelling. Senior (upper grade) debaters pondered the question, “social media: boon or bane?” while the junior (lower grades) speech contest focused on the topic, “my goal and my school.” Parent engagement continues to grow and health initiatives, including free dental, eye, and vaccine clinics, are a regular part of SCPS.

Meanwhile, academic excellence continues. With their teachers’ dedication and support, students this

year have made up pandemic learning deficits and achieved outstanding marks on the national Secondary Education Examination, with 42 students clearing the exam with very good, excellent, or outstanding results.

Since founding the school in 1999, The Advocates for Human Rights has partnered with the Sankhu-Palubari community to end child labor by making high quality education a reality for children, regardless of economic status, caste or ethnicity.

2 • 0 • 2 • 3 VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Each year, The Advocates for Human Rights celebrates the volunteers and partners who have made an **extraordinary impact in advancing our mission** at our Human Rights Awards Dinner.



Christin Eaton & Linda Svitak

Delicious food brings people together and connects us to our loved ones near and far. Volunteers **Linda Svitak** and **Christin Eaton** are inviting new people to the table with their work on a cookbook that tells stories of resilience, hope, and celebration through recipes shared by clients and members of our immigrant communities in Minnesota. Through their work, Linda and Christin are building communities and understanding, one meal at a time.



Amy Fiterman

Before dawn on February 24, 2022, Russia attacked cities across Ukraine, beginning an invasion that continues to cause destruction, displacement, and death. Shortly thereafter, **Amy Fiterman** answered the call to volunteer and conducted dozens of interviews with Ukrainian human rights defenders to record what they had seen and heard that would fall within the scope of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. These first-hand accounts informed our report to the Prosecutor to the International Criminal Court for the investigation into the situation in Ukraine. Amy's expertise as a litigator was invaluable in documenting these experiences and in advocacy to the UN to magnify Ukrainian voices.



Brittany Knutson

For more than three years, **Brittany Knutson** has interned and volunteered with the WATCH court observation project. Brittany initially connected with The Advocates in early 2020, and the first part of her internship did not turn out as expected. Minnesota courts switched to remote hearings, creating changes and challenges for everyone. Yet Brittany was still there, monitoring proceedings for access to justice for victims of gender-based violence. Despite now living on the West Coast, Brittany continues to volunteer, consistently creating court calendars for WATCH.

*Photo Credits: Christin Eaton, Linda Svitak, and Amy Fiterman photographed by Bill Cameron.
Photo provided by Brittany Knutson.*

Volunteers Make It All Possible

The Advocates mobilizes volunteers to address some of the most pressing issues of our time because we believe that everyone has the power to advance human rights. Volunteers engage in hands-on human rights work, helping The Advocates accomplish critical research and advocacy while transforming themselves into advocates for human rights.

In 2023, volunteers contributed **\$17M** in in-kind services.



Afghan Evacuation Response

After the fall of Kabul in August 2021, thousands of individuals were evacuated from Afghanistan. Of these, 1,400 resettled in Minnesota and North Dakota. With only temporary status, however, they fear return to a Taliban-controlled country. Congress has failed to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, leaving asylum as the best pathway to safety for many evacuees. In response to this unanticipated and unprecedented legal need, hundreds of attorneys and legal professionals have volunteered to provide pro bono legal representation. We appreciate every volunteer who has contributed to this effort.

Volunteers at our law firm partners **Faegre Drinker** and **Lathrop GPM** have represented asylum seekers for decades. Their responses to the legal needs of our Afghan neighbors were extraordinary: collectively representing 36 families seeking asylum. Their representation not only benefits clients in Minnesota and North Dakota, but also family members abroad who were not able to participate in the evacuation. Overall, these two firms will impact more than 110 lives. We are grateful for their exceptional contributions.



Faegre Drinker: Back row, L to R: John Mandler, Kelvin Dionel Collado, David Koontz, Mingli Wu

Front row, L to R: Tina Schiffman, Robin Rank, Allie Jo Mitchell, Maureen Maly, Kiara Covarrubias

Lathrop GPM: First row, L to R: Robin Swingley, Rachel O'Connor, Dean Eyler

Second row, L to R: Sandra Bodeau, Wade Hauser, Michael Ewald, Loren Hansen, Lee Bennin, Liz Dillon, Julia Reiland

Photo Credit: Bill Cameron

Innovative Engagement of Paralegals

We celebrate **Fredrikson's** commitment to pro bono and involving all professionals in pro bono opportunities. Specifically, we recognize Fredrikson's paralegals and other professionals who have worked on immigration cases and helped The Advocates for Human Rights respond to increasing legal needs and an ever-changing landscape of laws and regulations. Most recently, these team members have made essential contributions on asylum cases, helped us increase rural access to legal services, and assisted with emergency legal screenings for labor trafficking victims. We are inspired by Fredrikson's outstanding contributions.



First row (by railing): Kirsten McMahon, Anna Krupp, Kaitlyn Chambers, Roselin Victor, Maria Vela, Ma Tao, Sophie Ball, and Malinda Maier

Second row: Tessa Lynch, Jodi Gustafson, Chris Tarbox, Claire Ziller and Ryan Garrett

Photo Credit: Bill Cameron

“We are so grateful to our volunteers, who engage in every aspect of our work. Every day, your efforts impact lives and human rights near and far - in Minnesota, across the U.S., and in countries around the world.”

Theresa Dykoschak
Pro Bono Counsel

Make a
One-time
Gift:



2 • 0 • 2 • 3
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AWARD

Greater Caribbean for Life

The Advocates presented this year's Human Rights Defender Award to **Greater Caribbean for Life** (GCL). Since 2013, GCL and its 49 members have been working to achieve the permanent abolition of the death penalty in every country in the Greater Caribbean region. GCL advocates nationally, regionally, and internationally to change hearts and minds to eliminate the death penalty in law and in practice. In a region that retains strong opposition to abolition, GCL is a beacon for human rights.

As fellow members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, The Advocates has partnered with GCL for several years and collaborated on international advocacy relating to eight countries in the region. Last year, GCL members and The Advocates joined forces at the UN in Geneva to advocate for recommendations relating to Barbados and the Bahamas and to inform the international community about the status of the death penalty in the region. We also expanded our collaborations to include UN submissions highlighting issues for women on death row.

We thank GCL for its partnership and its work advocating for human rights and join GCL in celebrating its 10th anniversary!



Khaleem Ali and Leela Ramdeen, Greater Caribbean for Life

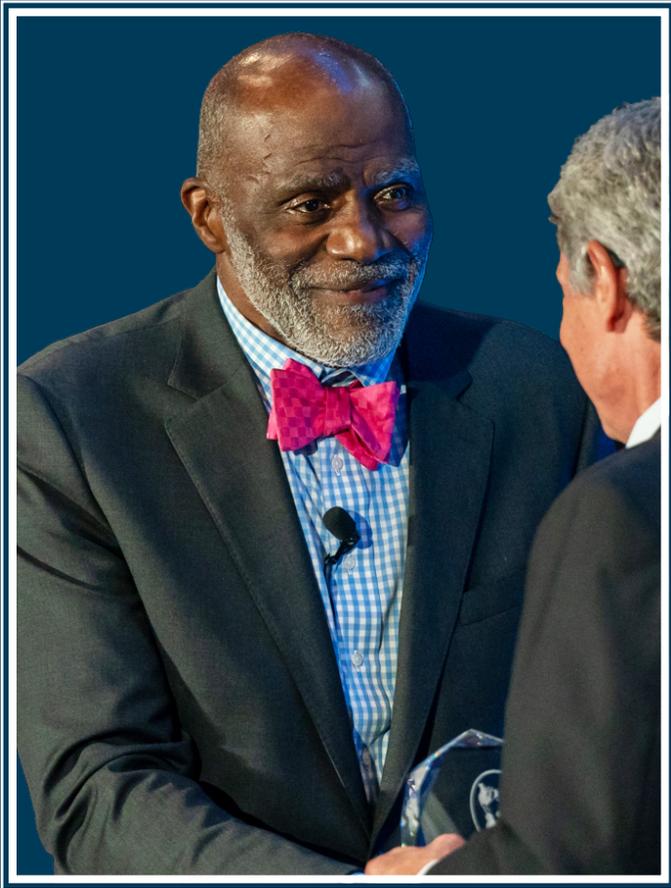
Photo Credit: Jennifer Prestholdt

Justice Alan Page

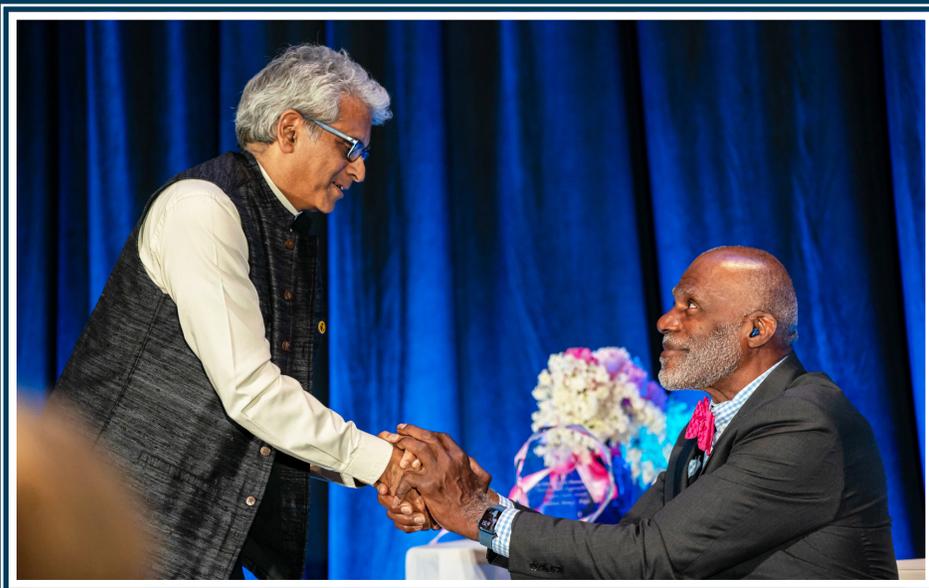
The Advocates presented **Justice Alan Page** with the 2023 Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award for his life-long commitment to human rights. Justice Page has actively advocated for human rights, equality, and social justice throughout his career as a Supreme Court Justice, attorney, and professional athlete.

As an attorney and later as a judge on the Minnesota Supreme Court, he was known for his strong leadership on criminal justice issues, such as the need to reduce racial disparities in sentencing and address systemic inequalities in the legal system. He has long recognized the right to education, and he worked to include the right to education in the Minnesota Constitution.

Through the Page Education Foundation, Justice Page and his wife Diane have helped thousands of students of color in Minnesota pursue their dreams of higher education, providing not just financial aid, but also guidance and support. In 2018, Justice Page received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, for his work in civil rights and education.



Keynote Conversation



The evening's Keynote Conversation was moderated by **Fred de Sam Lazaro**. He is executive director of the Under-Told Stories Project, a program that combines international journalism and teaching at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. He has served with The NewsHour since 1985 and was a regular contributor and substitute anchor for PBS' Religion and Ethics Newsweekly.

*Top: Hon. Alan Page
and Hon. Tom Fraser*

*Bottom: Fred de Sam Lazaro
and Hon. Alan Page*

Photo Credit: Bill Cameron

UN Experts on Racial Justice in Policing Visit Minnesota

While international standards on police use of force and solitary confinement exist, Minnesota fails to meet these international standards.

On May 2, the Twin Cities welcomed the United Nations Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement (EMLER). EMLER was created after the global outcry over the murder of George Floyd turned the eyes of the nation and the world to Minnesota in the summer of 2020.

The visit was a result of coordinated efforts of community members, activists, and organizations that united to call the Expert Mechanism to Minnesota. In organizing a wealth of responses to the Mechanism's call for input, the Twin Cities community expressed a strong desire to meet with international human rights experts and share their stories, experiences, and expertise concerning systemic racism in law enforcement.

While international standards on police use of force and solitary confinement

exist, Minnesota fails to meet these international standards. The resulting accountability gap has contributed to impunity for State-involved killings and prolonged solitary confinement.

Black and minority people who have lost their life at the hands of law enforcement in Minnesota and thousands around the United States. Just as George Floyd was the face of those victims, Derek Chavin was the face of not all, but many police officers serving in our Black and Brown communities.

During the public meeting, community leaders shed light on the lived experiences of Black and Brown communities by sharing their testimonies on police violence and solitary confinement. In the afternoon, the experts met with government officials and other stakeholders to discuss systemic racism and police violence in Minnesota.

"It was an incredibly powerful space to be in. To sit in solidarity with numerous Black-led civil society organizations and organizers in the Twin Cities who have been doing this kind of work for years really spoke volumes," said Richnetta Parker, who helped support the visit.

This was an unprecedented opportunity for the Twin Cities community to address the systemic state-sanctioned violence against Black and Brown communities in Minnesota. Time and time again, Minnesota's elected leaders have failed to make meaningful change in the state's law enforcement practices and accountability mechanisms. In amplifying the voices of those most impacted by police violence, EMLER's visit empowers the Twin Cities community to be at the center of calls for just solutions.

The Minnesota visit was organized by Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence, Atlas of Blackness, Urban League Twin Cities, University of Minnesota Law School Human Rights Center, Center for Victims of Torture, Minnesota Justice Research Center, UN Antiracism Coalition, and The Advocates for Human Rights.

From left to right: Richnetta Parker, Silene Ravayrol, Katia Galambos, Ingrid Kubisa, and Jennifer Prestholdt

Photo Credit: Verónica Cadavid González



In Memoriam

The Advocates remembers the Honorable Mary Lou Klas, a fierce advocate for human rights

The world lost a dedicated champion of women's rights when Judge Mary Lou Klas died on June 9, 2023. Mary Lou was a pioneering judge, an expert on domestic violence, and a long-time volunteer of The Advocates for Human Rights.

Mary Lou was the first woman appointed to the Ramsey County Bench. The Advocates' Robin Phillips recalls appearing before Mary Lou on pro bono cases as a young lawyer: "Mary Lou was fair, tough, and intolerant of attempts to avoid liability on domestic violence cases."

"We did a lot of work on domestic violence in our early years," Phillips said. "When we had foreign visitors, partners from overseas, we would bring them over to Mary Lou's court and she would talk to them about how she treats domestic violence cases and how serious they were. After we did a few of those visits, we knew she would be an amazing addition to our international training team."

Mary Lou was a wonderful trainer and inspiration to women around the world.



She showed that it was possible for judges to interpret the law and protect the human rights of survivors of domestic violence even in the absence of specific legislation. Mary Lou also focused on dispelling harmful stereotypes held by judges or police that interfered with protecting the human rights of survivors of violence.

Rosalyn Park, director of the Women's Human Rights Program for The Advocates, accompanied Klas on some of those trips and contends that she left a "global imprint" on the development of domestic abuse laws. "She could bring Minnesota's history and long years of practice implementing its domestic violence laws and the changes we've seen to other countries that were just starting out. She really played a huge role in standard setting based on what she knew first-hand here in Minnesota and what she had seen work and not work. These countries were just starting to pass domestic violence laws and order for protection laws."

Genoveva Tisheva, executive director of the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation in remembering Mary Lou said, "She was so committed to the cause and contributed so much to our work in Bulgaria."

In later years, Mary Lou continued to volunteer for The Advocates, reviewing content for its StopVAW.org website and serving on the Advisory Committee of the Women's Human Rights Program. Rosalyn Park recalls how, "I would call Mary Lou to ask her about how to strengthen the legal response to domestic violence in countries where the laws were woefully inadequate. Invariably, she had effective solutions on what police, judges, or prosecutors could be doing to protect women within the scope of those laws. She was always approachable, creative and knew what was needed to defend women's safety."

Hon. Mary Lou Klas at the Inter-Balkan Conference on Legal Strategies to Combat Domestic Violence Bulgaria, Nov. 1997

New Report Details Due Process Failures for Kids in Immigration Court

“No child can be expected to get to court on their own, let alone navigate the immigration legal system.”

Despite thousands of children appearing in immigration courts each year, immigration law and immigration courts treat children like adults.

A new issue brief from The Advocates for Human Rights’ Immigration Court Observation Project details some of the systemic problems witnessed during the first year of resumed deportation hearings for unaccompanied children.

Observers noted systemic failures, including an underfunded immigration court with little time or legal authority to make accommodations needed for children appearing in court.

Underlying many of the due process failures is lack of guaranteed access to counsel. Like adults, children in removal proceedings have the right to legal representation at no expense to the government. If a child cannot find an attorney, they must navigate a complex, adversarial process on their own. The law and the courts provide no safeguards to ensure children’s rights are protected. “This is an outrageous denial of due process,” says Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights. “No child can be expected to get to court on their own, let alone navigate the immigration legal system.”

Concern with due process violations for unaccompanied children in immigration court is not new. A 2022 report by the Vera Institute of Justice

found that “more than 90 percent of unrepresented unaccompanied children were issued an order of removal or voluntary departure. Unaccompanied children who had the benefit of legal representation at some point during their cases were more than seven times more likely to receive an outcome that allowed them to remain in the United States than those who did not have attorneys.”

The report notes that immigration

judges presiding over unaccompanied child cases face an unenviable task. Courts face long and growing backlogs, with grossly insufficient funding. Court rules permit judges to make some accommodations when children appear in court, but they

Key Findings:

Child respondents do not understand why they are in court, what the judge is asking, or what the consequences will be.

Due process requires age-appropriate, trauma-informed hearings.

Lack of access to legal counsel undermines due process.

Crowded dockets undermine due process.

have no authority to consider the best interest of the child when determining whether a child should be deported or to appoint guardians or counsel to

children appearing in their courtrooms.

“The U.S. fails to meet basic international standards when it comes to kids in immigration court,

and that leaves immigration judges to adjudicate these cases with their hands tied behind their backs,” says Michele Garnett McKenzie, deputy director of The Advocates for Human Rights.

Recommendations Include:

- The Department of Homeland Security, when prosecuting children for removal, must ensure children have access to protections provided under law.
- The Office of Refugee Resettlement, when releasing children to sponsors, must ensure children and their sponsors know what they need to do including when and where to appear in court and how to find competent legal counsel.
- The Executive Office for Immigration Review must ensure it has an adequate budget to provide full and fair hearings for children. This means ensuring enough court staff to provide courtroom orientations and identify language and other child-appropriate accommodations. It means ensuring enough immigration judges so that docket sizes are reasonable and judges and other court personnel have time to receive the specialized training required to adjudicate these cases.
- Immigration judges can maximize children’s ability to understand what is happening in court by using clear language and checking for children’s understanding of explanations and expectations.

“Reform is desperately needed, but absent that reform, every effort must be made to improve justice for children in our immigration courts,” says Amy Lange, Immigration Court Observation Project Coordinator.

The report provides the immigration court and immigration judges with concrete steps that can be taken to improve children’s access to justice. These include making docket sizes more manageable, providing courtroom orientation to children ahead of their hearings, and ensuring court personnel receive training on effective communication with children.

The current system fails to ensure due process for unaccompanied children in removal proceedings. It leaves judges to adjudicate high-stakes cases, replete with trauma, for children who cannot be held legally responsible for their actions in any other setting. Tragically, it results in harm to the thousands of unaccompanied children who have turned to the United States for safety.

IRA: if you are 70 ½ or older, you may make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) and reduce your tax liability. If you are 73 or older a QCD can help you meet minimum distribution requirements and reduce your tax liability.



Including The Advocates for Human Rights in your will is one of the most effective, long-lasting ways to support the mission. Since 1983, The Advocates has worked to ensure that all people live with dignity, justice, and equality. Your gift ensures the future of The Advocates' work in Minnesota, the U.S., and around the world and creates a legacy for you and your family. A gift from your will allows you to make a gift from your assets and include human rights in your legacy.

Your gift will build a better, stronger future for us all and prepare the next generation of human rights advocates.

For more information on becoming a legacy giver, please contact Thekla Rura-Polley at 612-746-4678 or email trurapolley@advrights.org.

Ways to become a Legacy Giver:

1. Bequest: leave a gift in your will or trust.
2. Beneficiary Designation: name The Advocates as a beneficiary of your retirement account, life insurance, annuity, or donor-advised fund.

Leaving a Human Rights Legacy

“I have included The Advocates for Human Rights in my will because I want to continue supporting its work into the future. The Advocates provides a unique service to people who cannot always speak for themselves and makes life better for them. The Advocates has local impact with their work on migrant rights, trafficking, and ending violence against women, as well as impact around the world with other communities that need its help.”

Janet Leslie, Legacy Giver



Janet Leslie was a long-time supporter, volunteer, and friend of The Advocates. Janet was committed to women’s human rights, including reproductive rights and freedom from violence. Janet traveled to the United Nations in Geneva with our team to advocate for women’s rights. She brought a keen observation of global women’s rights issues from her travels, as well as a quick wit and a talent for storytelling. She was deeply committed to women’s equality and gave both her time and resources to making the world a better and safer place for women in the United States and around the world.

Learn
more
about
Legacy
Giving



The Advocates is celebrating 40 years of defending human rights. We continue to share stories and projects spanning the decades to shed light on the history of the organization and the issues we work on.



1983-1992: Setting the Global Standard for Accountability

Although international law clearly prohibits extrajudicial and summary executions, human rights activists and investigators lacked the tools to build a case against state actors when bodies were found.

The newly formed Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee (now The Advocates for Human Rights) teamed up with experts in law and forensic science to fill a critical gap in accountability.

The resulting protocol became the global standard for the investigation of State-involved killings. It has been used in investigations throughout the world, including in Rwanda, Bosnia, Guatemala, East Timor, and Peru.

Today the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death continues to provide detailed procedures for crime-scene investigations, interviews of suspects and witnesses, the excavation of graves, post-mortem examinations, and the analysis of skeletal remains.



Investigators exhuming mass graves in Peru in 2002 using the Minnesota Protocol. These investigations play a vital role in holding state actors accountable for unlawful deaths.

As Migration in the Americas Reaches Record Levels, Demand for Legal Help Skyrockets

The Advocates for Human Rights saw a dramatic uptick in demand for legal help during 2023, as record numbers of people arrived in the United States. Handling cases involving asylum, trafficking, unaccompanied children, and detention, The Advocates is at the center of the region's legal response.

"Last year The Advocates provided legal help in more than 3,000 cases," said Hanne Sandison, who directs the organization's legal services team. "With hundreds of newly arrived people contacting us for help each week and an increasingly backlogged immigration system, we're being challenged to provide meaningful help in an unprecedented number of cases."

Migration patterns continue a decade-long trend. The proportion of children and families in immigration court began to escalate in 2013. Today, the numbers are staggering. The Washington Office on Latin America recently reported, "In August 2023, U.S. authorities encountered 232,972 people seeking to migrate at the U.S.-Mexico border. Fifty-six percent were children, or parents and children. Most were seeking asylum: 145,278 were released into the U.S. interior with notices to appear in immigration court."

Amongst the most challenging cases are those involving unaccompanied children. "It takes a village to ensure access to justice for kids," said Supervising Staff Attorney Kim Boche. Describing one recent victory, Boche detailed a complicated legal journey starting in 2017 and involving three pro bono attorneys, each of whom handled a critical step that resulted in permanent legal status. "Each



step helped stabilize that kiddo's immigration status, and their life," said Boche. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement reports that more than 1,000 unaccompanied children have been released to Minnesota alone during each of the past three fiscal years.

Like all immigration cases, access to counsel is a pivotal factor in whether a person wins protection or faces deportation. A 2022 report by the Vera Institute of Justice found that "more than 90 percent of unrepresented unaccompanied children were issued an order of removal or voluntary departure. Unaccompanied children who had the benefit of legal representation at some point during their cases were more than seven times more likely to receive an outcome that allowed them to remain in the United States than those who did not have attorneys."

Volunteer Today:



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AFGHAN LEGAL CLINIC TEAM!



The Afghan Legal Clinic was recognized by the Minnesota Commissioner of Human Services with the Commissioner's 2023 Circle of Excellence Award. The award recognizes the work of the Clinic, which launched in the fall of 2021 to ensure that the nearly 1,500 Afghans arriving in the region with temporary legal status would have a clear plan for remaining permanently in the United States. Today the collaborative effort between Volunteer Lawyers Network and The Advocates is providing immigration legal services to hundreds of Afghan evacuees in Minnesota.

Katherine Veldhuizen, Kristin Gill, Zack Albus, and Casey Schultz Bruning

Photo Credit: Tom Dunn



1993-2002: Turning Rhetoric Into Reality for Women's Rights

When Hillary Clinton called for the world to recognize women's rights as human rights at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, few international human rights organizations were ready to act.

Minnesota Advocates was already leading the way. In 1993, the organization was challenged to respond to violence against women in Romania and invited by a partner organization to document the problem. A volunteer-led delegation spent twelve days interviewing judges, lawyers, doctors, human rights groups, women's groups, students, and government officials about the government's response to domestic violence. Analyzing the interviews through the lens of human rights, the groundbreaking report found that by failing to respond to domestic violence, Romania violated its international obligations. Invitations from partners in Bulgaria, Albania, and other countries soon followed, launching our **Women's Human Rights Program**.



In recent years, human rights defenders have begun facing increasing challenges to human rights, including: growing laws and practices designed to suppress civil society; rollbacks to progress made on women's human rights; attacks and threats by private actors against human rights defenders; and growing public misunderstanding of their work and human rights overall. This backlash, carried out by actors referred to as the anti-gender movement or far right well-resourced and globally networked, as documented in our 2021 report, **A Rollback for Human Rights - The Istanbul Convention Under Attack**.

Yet in the face of such attacks, civil society has proven resilient, creative, and resourceful in its strategies to counter the anti-gender movement and continue safeguarding women's human rights. Based on interviews with human rights defenders, **Strategies Of Civil Society To Counter The Far-Right Backlash Against Human Rights** describes the innovative strategies undertaken by civil society in response to anti-gender activity.

Our report also describes the needs of civil society to continue working effectively and with enjoyment of freedom of association and assembly.



Download the report
from our website:



Strategies Of Civil Society To Counter The Far-Right Backlash Against Human Rights

A

Re-thinking strategies on ratification of the Istanbul Convention

F

Finding allies with smaller, sympathetic groups within the opposition

B

Focusing on the training and education of new activists and supporters, as well as wider stakeholders and actors

G

Determining alternative, innovative ways to engage with politicians and navigate the political system

C

Increasing visibility in creative ways

H

Establishing new creative ways to counter harmful messaging from the anti-gender movement

D

Monitoring and data collection to protect women and counter disinformation

I

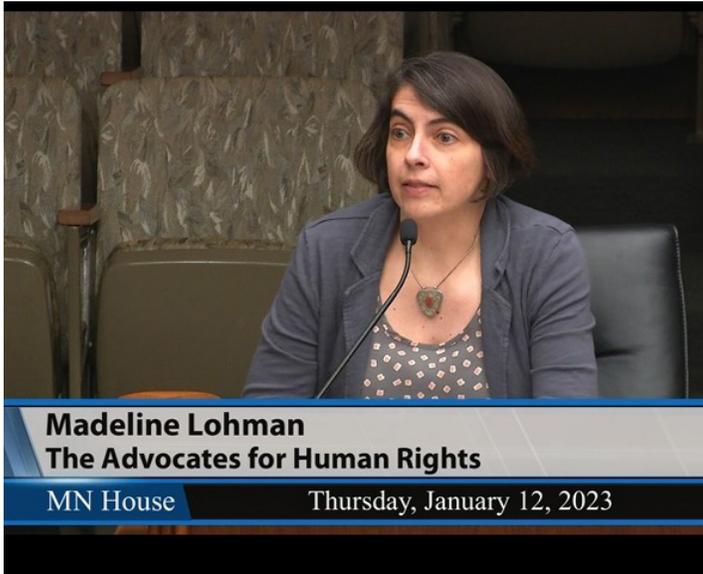
Considering alternative, more flexible ways for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to incorporate and assemble

E

Building coalitions as well as creating unconventional alliances

J

Staying resilient



“My name is Madeline Lohman. I’m an associate program director with The Advocates for Human Rights, and we are very pleased to testify in support of the bill today.

We’ve done extensive work on labor trafficking in Minnesota. For people who aren’t familiar with the entirety of what labor trafficking is, the heart of it is when an individual uses control or manipulation or coercion to get some kind of labor or services from the victim and the victim believes they’re unable to leave or stop.”

Madeline Lohman
Associate Director, Training & Tech Asst.

Photo Credit: News Source

Read her full statement online:



The Advocates Celebrate PRIDE

In recognition of Pride Month, The Advocates recommitted itself in defending the human rights of the LGBTIQ+ community around the world.

We work across programs to uphold the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and others who are experiencing violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics. The Advocates helps LGBTIQ+ migrants fleeing persecution find safety in the U.S. We partner with LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders to promote equality in their countries. We empower our LGBTIQ+ clients to share their lived experiences by participating in advocacy at the United Nations.

On May 17th, in honor of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT), The Advocates presented United in Diversity: Fighting the Anti-Trans Movement. In it, we looked at the anti-trans movement in the United States, the impact of these laws on transgender people’s lives, and how international human rights law addresses issues of gender identity and expression.

For additional resources please visit https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/LGBTI_Rights

Watch the United in Diversity recording online:



My Transformative Journey to the UN

By Louise Rosenbaum, International Justice Program intern. Louise is a rising senior at St. Olaf College majoring in Psychology and Political Science, with minors in International Relations and Public Health. She is also currently St. Olaf College Model UN President.



This spring, I found myself amidst the striking beauty of Geneva, Switzerland working with The Advocates for Human Rights. Our destination was the heart of international human rights discourse — the United Nations Human Rights Council. Here, hope and reality coalesced, presenting a world full of promise but not without its fair share of obstacles. The environment felt familiar, reminiscent of my time in Model UN, where harmonious collaboration and intense disputes go hand-in-hand.

I was privileged to stand before global dignitaries, delivering two significant speeches: a statement to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the other to the full UN Human Rights Council (HRC), including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the HRC President, and delegates from UN member States. On behalf of The Advocates, I vocalized the pressing

concerns related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war's impact on people with disabilities caught in the conflict, including the potential for disability-based persecution. I realized the power of my voice and the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in exposing and confronting human rights abuses.

Engaging in direct dialogue with HRC delegates on contentious topics like the death penalty, torture, and women's rights was equally impactful. Our team included international partners from Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, Croatia, and Botswana. The Advocates staff taught us how to use their sophisticated system of prioritizing and securing meetings with country delegates, as well as recruiting attendees to The Advocates side event, a panel on the abolition of the death penalty. We came together as a powerful team, working effectively to accumulate research and set up critical meetings with HRC

delegates to share information and recommendations in advance of the HRC's Universal Periodic Review of several countries. We also were able to meet with UN staff and brief members of several UN treaty bodies.

I appreciated the chance to use my personal experiences and skills, while learning from the team to make a meaningful difference in advancing human rights. I learned from our discussions about the prominence of conflict-induced problems that lead people to need to find resources or a place where people can freely express their concerns. Often it is only the human rights defenders in diaspora who are safely able to voice their concerns.

However, our time at the UN also revealed underlying systemic issues, including ageism, ableism, and racism that exist within the institution. Challenges related to accessibility surfaced, particularly for older individuals and those with disabilities who had difficulty with being able to physically access the UN Office in Geneva. We also saw discrimination, unfortunately, in the way that some of the young people of color on our team were treated by UN Security. Despite these unsettling experiences, we witnessed promising steps towards greater inclusivity, such as providing opportunities for virtual participation, recorded video statements, and accommodations for the differently-abled, particularly by the CRPD.

My time in Geneva deepened my understanding of the role of in-person advocacy in strengthening civil society. Observing the respect garnered by The Advocates from UN staff and the significance of our work

— from firsthand victim testimonies to presentation of extensive research and recommendations was incredibly inspiring. These experiences reshaped my perspective, encouraging me to consider graduate school or law school

as avenues to further my involvement in protecting human rights.

Ultimately, my journey as a volunteer with The Advocates was transformative. It imprinted on me the

profound potential of international law and human rights norms, igniting my ambition to contribute to a world where justice prevails, accountability is upheld, and the rights of every individual are respected.



2023 And Beyond: Making the Vision a Reality



The vision that launched The Advocates for Human Rights in 1983 holds true today. Everyone has a part to play in making human rights the organizing principle for the planet.

Human rights are interconnected and interdependent. And now more than ever, the human rights movement must be too. The Advocates works across movements and around the globe to build a world where dignity, justice, freedom, equality, and peace are a reality.

Today, recognizing the inherent **dignity of our clients** means providing the legal help needed to win asylum. And it means providing the opportunity to advocate to change the conditions which forced them to flee.

Recognizing the **strength of our partners** means documenting what they are experiencing. And it means providing the training and tools for them to change the systems that violate human rights.

Recognizing the power of our volunteers means providing a chance to do hands-on human rights work and become advocates for human rights.

Join us for the next 40 years and help us change the world for good.

Rosalyn Park (staff), Leela Ramdeen (partner), Robin Phillips (staff), Loan Huynh (volunteer), Elif Ozturk (volunteer), Amy Bergquist (staff), Gretchen Piper (volunteer), Aviva Breen (volunteer), Khaleem Ali (partner), Verónica González (staff), Louise Rosenbaum (volunteer), Nathan Madson (staff), Julie Matheka (partner), Kristina Kulić (partner), Kgosietsile Ngakaagae (partner), Jennifer Prestholdt (staff)

Photo Credit: Volunteer

2023 Human Rights Awards Dinner

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Pam Wandzel and Theresa Dykoschak

Faces of The Advocates

How we continue to change the world for good.

Party in the Park

The Party in the Park continued our 40th Anniversary Celebration. Our friends and supporters were able to connect with fellow advocates, learn about pressing human rights issues and opportunities, and raise essential funds for the mission.

Thanks to Nashville Coop for donating the amazing food!



Michele Garnett McKenzie, Rich Thomas, Therese Gales, and Jennifer Prestholdt



Danny Ribeiro, Kristin Gill, and Ingrid Kubisa



Jesse Crosby and child at the quiz wheel



Char Myers, Mary Parker, Sam Myers, and David Parker



Elena Sut and her son, Sebastian



Pat Schaffer, Susan Bradford, James Weissbrodt, and Peter Kafta



Christina Baldwin



Rosalyn Park



The Paul Family

2023 In Review

Thanks to our extraordinary hosts and co-hosts who make our house parties so amazing. The warm hospitality and engaging program bring long-time and new friends together for a great cause. Please join us at house parties throughout the year.



Board Member Cheryl Olseth and Board Chair Karen Evans join supporters at the International Justice house party



Volunteer youth activist Elif Ozturk presents to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva



Amy Bergquist presents the 2023 Human Rights Defender Award to Khaleem Ali and Leela Ramdeen from Greater Caribbean for Life at a death penalty abolition convening in Nairobi, Kenya



Supervising Litigation Attorney John Bruning joins the Fairness to Freedom campaign for universal legal representation in Washington, DC



Board Member Peggy Grieve welcomes former board members from the past 40 years to celebrate The Advocates' anniversary



The Advocates joined in the celebration as Governor Walz signed the Driver's License for All bill into law



Lindsey Greising connects with the Minnesota congressional delegation during the AILA National Day of Action in Washington, DC



Board Member Jill Field, Deputy Director Jennifer Prestholdt, and volunteer Nathanael Berhanu at the International Justice house party



Supporters Kay Thomas and Jim Rustad at the Migrants Rights house party

Many thanks to volunteer photographers Bill Cameron & Anaid Plascencia. Your keen eye and dedication to The Advocates is truly appreciated!

Defending Human Rights Since 1983



The Advocates for Human Rights started with a group of lawyers seeking to leverage Minnesota's spirit of social justice to promote and protect human rights worldwide. The Advocates believes everyone has the power to advance human rights.

By engaging volunteers in hands-on human rights work, we not only accomplish critical research and advocacy, we transform volunteers into advocates for human rights. With a dual focus on systemic change and direct services, we ground policy work in real-life experiences, bridging the gap between advocacy and action. When our clients experience injustice, we help them and advocate to change the systems

that perpetuate those injustices. When our partners report barriers to safety and security, we identify the gaps in legal protections and develop solutions. Rooted in deep expertise and strong relationships, The Advocates works in partnerships in our home community and around the globe to address some of the world's most intractable human rights issues.

For 40 years The Advocates have been building the human rights movement. We will not be deterred by attacks on human rights or the backlash to past human rights victories. Because of your ongoing support, we are stronger than ever and ready to take on the challenges of the future.

1983 - 2023 Board of Directors

Photo Credit: Bill Cameron



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