

## Chapter 1. Introduction



### A. Why Did The Advocates For Human Rights Create This Manual?

We live in a changing world. Human rights advocacy takes many forms, and human rights activists can be found in every country on the planet. With advancements in technology and communication, activists have formed strong international networks and are often able to report many of the worst human rights violations as they occur. These advancements have changed the way human rights organizations work and provide access to information necessary for the broader community to engage in human rights advocacy. With the right tools, real human rights improvements are eminently possible.

The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) is uniquely qualified to present the human rights tools in this manual. The Advocates has deep experience with human rights fact-finding, documentation and advocacy. For more than 30 years, The Advocates has adapted traditional human rights methodologies to conduct innovative research and generate human rights reports and educational trainings designed to bring laws, policies, and practice into compliance with international human rights standards. The Advocates has monitored human rights

conditions and produced more than 75 reports documenting human rights practices in dozens of countries around the world.

The Advocates' experience with documenting human rights violations is also broad. The Advocates has conducted monitoring projects on human rights issues on the economic and social rights of children, rights in the administration of justice, harassment of human rights defenders, military and police abuses, restrictions on freedom of the press, and transitional justice. In the area of women's human rights, we have worked with partners in more than 25 countries to document human rights abuses against women, including domestic violence, rape, employment discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace, and trafficking in women and girls for commercial sexual exploitation.

Partnership on projects identified and led by local organizations is a powerful means to effectively implement human rights work in the field. The Advocates sees its constituencies as partners and forms enduring working relationships with organizations and community groups in the U.S. and around the world. The Advocates' participatory model of working with in-country civil society organizations to document human rights abuses and coordinate advocacy for change has also demonstrated to us the critical importance of using a wide range of human rights tools. There is no "one size fits all" human rights methodology. Activists need a full menu of strategies and resources so they can choose the ones that will work best in their specific context.

The Advocates also has a long history of promoting international human rights standards by creating high quality educational tools and resources to help people learn about and apply these standards to their daily lives, their families, their workplaces, and their communities. *A Practitioner's Guide to Human Rights Monitoring, Documentation and Advocacy* (2011) and the *Discover Human Rights: A Human Rights Approach to Social Justice* (2011) four-module training program reflect The Advocates' experience documenting human rights violations as well as its trainings for human rights activists. These resources provide comprehensive information and guidance on how to use a human rights framework and human rights methods to facilitate social change. Intended for United States social justice advocates, *Discover Human Rights* has also been used in an international context to train African parliamentarians and activists. The Advocates also provides training on legal reform related to violence against women and consultation on developing, implementing, and monitoring new laws to legal professionals and women's organizations in the United States and other countries.

The Advocates has been a pioneer in identifying and developing practical and sustainable new strategies to hold governments accountable for human rights abuses and strengthening institutions in the international justice system. For example, The Advocates recognized that diaspora communities are a critical link in changing social institutions and structures to hold governments accountable and promote the full realization of human rights. The Advocates' work with diaspora communities through the *Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project* and the *Oromo Project* proved the significance of involving these individuals in work to hold governments accountable and affect human rights in their home countries. Similarly, The Advocates worked with diaspora groups in



A member of the Liberian Women's Initiative of Minnesota testifying at the first ever public hearings of a truth commission held in a diaspora venue, the Diaspora Hearings of the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, in June 2008.

the United States to document their experiences after the 9/11/2001 attacks. The report *Voices from Silence* is an important example of how diaspora groups can have a powerful impact on the human rights culture in their adopted country.

Diaspora communities have an increasingly important global role to play as a bridge between individuals, governments, and international legal and political mechanisms. In particular, diaspora community members are in a unique position to raise awareness about, influence policy on, and advocate for individual survivors of human rights abuses. In order to bring about systems change and real human rights reforms, civil society needs to devote sustained attention to implementation—from within the country, as well from without.

Yet the role that diaspora communities can play in improving human rights around the world has been largely overlooked in the human rights field. To help tap the underexplored resources of diaspora involvement in human rights, The Advocates published *Paving Pathways for Justice & Accountability: Human Rights Tools for Diaspora Communities* in 2014.<sup>1</sup> *Paving Pathways* has been enthusiastically received by diaspora communities in the United States and Europe, but many of the tools are equally useful for human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and individuals throughout the world. For these reasons, The Advocates has created *Human Rights Tools for a Changing World*.

## **B. What is the Purpose of This Manual?**

The purpose of this manual is to provide practical tools and step-by-step guidance for individuals and community groups who want to use human rights monitoring, documentation, and advocacy in their work to change policy and improve human rights conditions in their countries of origin. The contents of this manual have been shaped by the requests for assistance and guidance that The Advocates routinely receives from human rights defenders and others seeking to change human rights conditions in their communities in the United States and throughout the world.

This manual is not just for lawyers or seasoned human rights activists. This manual was created with the express purpose of providing advocates of all backgrounds and experiences a full range of tools and resources to promote human rights in a changing world. From framing an issue in terms of internationally recognized human rights standards to submitting a detailed complaint to an international human rights body, advocates can use this manual to plan and implement their work. The manual is designed to aid advocates undertaking a variety of activities—from the relatively simple to the more complex. With background information, key questions to consider, case examples, and practitioner’s tips, this manual provides tools to combat human rights abuses and change social institutions and structures to promote the full realization of human rights.

The overarching goal of this manual is to facilitate the inclusion of as many voices as possible in efforts to hold governments accountable for human rights. This manual provides a full menu of useful tools that are grounded in the daily work of human rights defenders like The Advocates for Human Rights. We hope that this manual will benefit and be used by community members, human rights defenders and civil society organizations throughout the world.

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<sup>1</sup> *Paving Pathways for Justice & Accountability: Human Rights Tools for Diaspora Communities* is available for download at <http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/pathways>.

### C. How Is the Manual Structured?

The manual contains a background section on human rights and five practical sections focused in turn on monitoring, documentation, and advocacy. The background section is a brief primer on human rights and their application.

The practice-oriented sections help advocates to do the following:

- *Monitor*: identify ongoing human rights abuses and collect the information advocates need about these issues;
- *Document*: analyze, present that information, and make recommendations within the framework of international human rights standards;
- *Advocate*: choose and implement a strategy to bring the lived reality closer to the ideals proclaimed by international human rights treaties, including through advocacy at international and regional human rights mechanisms;
- *Address Impunity and Accountability*: identify strategies and legal mechanisms for holding perpetrators and governments accountable for human rights violations; and
- *Build Capacity to Improve Human Rights*: develop a better understanding of the international human rights system, identify strategies for applying a human rights framework, and develop competence in setting up and effectively running an organization in safety and security.

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### Chapter 1

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