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"Ways To Engage with The Advocates" cover art by Jennifer Edwards & Annie Luttropp

The Human Rights Observer
design by Annie Luttropp & Sophia Okotah
Letter from the Director’s Desk

Reflecting on 2020, I experience a range of emotions – like so many of you. We began the year with so much hope and energy. In a blog post in January, I outlined multiple ways to support the human rights movement and make a difference with The Advocates in 2020.

Looking back, many of those suggestions could not be implemented during the pandemic. Yet, you found other ways to show extraordinary acts of kindness and strengthen the movement. I am grateful for you and all the ways in which you support human rights and inspire us.

I am proud of The Advocates adjusting quickly to the stay-at-home orders and continuing to provide essential services and support to our clients and partners. I am aware, however, of the privilege we enjoy that allows us to work from home. We have provided screenings, consultations, trainings, and more via phone, text, Zoom, Teams, and other technology-mediated interfaces. Because of the nature of their work, many frontline and essential workers cannot do that and are exposed to much graver risks. This disparity in risk has a disproportionate impact on communities of color.

In May, the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police galvanized our community to end police killings of black people once and for all. Discrimination, racism, and extrajudicial executions violate the core principles of human rights. Racism affects communities of color in different ways including its intersecting impact on immigrants, women, the LGBTQ+ community, and members of minority religious groups.

Things must not go back to the way they were. We need changes in laws, policies, practices, and in hearts and minds. As an organization, The Advocates condemns racism in all its forms. We promote public policies that are grounded in human dignity and respect for all.

It will take all of us, working together, to find sustainable solutions. As the headlines of 2020 fade, our commitment to the hard work of actualizing human rights for all of us, will not. We commit to working with our community partners. We commit to using whatever access and whatever privilege we have to support concrete actions to change laws, policies, and public opinion to eliminate institutional racism.

Don Fraser, one of our founders, said, “Human rights should be the organizing principle of the planet.” Every person should live with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace. The Advocates mobilizes hundreds of volunteers every year to represent and protect victims of human rights violations, and we work to change the systems that allow those human rights abuses to occur in the first place. We fight injustice and improve laws. Thanks to advocates like you, more clients had access to legal advice and representation, local partners received support from our research and advocacy efforts, global partners participated in virtual trainings and consultations, and local laws and procedures were scrutinized with a human rights lens.

At The Advocates, we are deeply concerned about regulations by the current administration that would essentially eliminate asylum protections in the United States. We have focused our attention on responding to these proposed regulations and appreciate so many of you who have joined us in the fight. Despite inhumane immigration enforcement, we continue to see and celebrate life-changing individual victories: clients being granted asylum, families being reunited, and people beginning new lives in safety.

This summer also marked a slight bend toward justice in the moral arc of the universe when the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the protection of LGBTQ individuals from discrimination in employment. We know that the good in the world far outweighs the bad. In the face of the many threats to human rights that we have seen in 2020, we give strength to one another, dedicate ourselves to solving the most pressing issues of our times together, and commit ourselves to make an even greater difference in 2021.

Together we envision a world where every human being lives with dignity, justice, and equality regardless of where they were born, whom they love, how they worship, or the color of their skin.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Robin Phillips | Executive Director
HONORING ADVOCATES AND ACTIVISTS

2020–2021

NOVEMBER

03 Election Day #Election

25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women #StopVAW

DECEMBER

10 Human Rights Day #HumanRightsDay

18 International Migrants Day #InternationalMigrantsDay

JANUARY

24 International Day of Education #InternationalDayofEducation

FEBRUARY

20 World Day of Social Justice #WorldDayofSocialJustice

MARCH

01 Zero Discrimination Day #ZeroDiscriminationDay

08 International Women’s Day #InternationalWomensDay

In Memory of

Tom Johnson (1945–2020)
Co-founder of The Advocates For Human Rights

We honor and celebrate the life of Tom Johnson who tirelessly committed his time and energy to improving the justice system. Tom lived a life dedicated to freedom, peace, equality, dignity, and justice for all.
Nothing stops our community from celebrating individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the defense of human rights—not even a pandemic.

The Advocates For Human Rights came together virtually to honor outstanding volunteers, recognize the life-saving work of the Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives (MCC), celebrate the dedication of Kathy Lenzmeier, recipient of the inaugural Marlene Kayser Volunteer Award, and applaud the tireless work of Lee Gelernt, recipient of the 2020 Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award.

The virtual platform made this year’s Human Rights Awards Dinner a truly global event, with attendees from around the world. Partner human rights defenders from Ethiopia, Morocco, Nepal, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, shared their greetings. Human rights attorney and musician Larry McDonough kicked off the evening.

Lee Gelernt
Deputy Director, ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project

The Advocates recognized five outstanding volunteers in 2020. This year’s honorees have shared their time, expertise, and passion for human rights in a variety of ways. From working in the office to advocating in Geneva, they exemplify The Advocates’ belief that everyone has a part to play in defending human rights.

This year The Advocates gave special recognition to the Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives. MCC has implemented unique projects serving LGBTQ individuals, including legal services, psychosocial care, and art therapy. In 2017, they expanded their work when the anti-gay pogroms began in Chechnya, and have been providing shelter and services for Chechen evacuees ever since.

The Advocates presented the 2020 Don & Arvonne Fraser Award to Lee Gelernt. As deputy director of the ACLU’s

Volunteer Award Recipients

- Veronica Clark
- Amano Dube
- Joan Kuriansky
- Elise Overman
- Sarah Musgrave

Marlene Kayser Volunteer Award

Kathy Lenzmeier

Immigrants’ Rights Project, Gelernt has argued groundbreaking cases, including a nationwide challenge to the practice of separating asylum-seeking families at the border. In his keynote speech, Gelernt called people to action. During the pandemic, he noted, the ongoing plight of separated families, detained immigrants, and undocumented workers seeking relief from abuses is real, yet so is the mobilization of the human rights community.

Thanks to planning committee members Aviva Breen, Karen Evans, Loan Huynh, Mary Parker, and Mary Kariuki Ries for helping envision the virtual program and creating a fiercely competitive online auction. Thanks also to the host committee and event sponsors who invited friends and colleagues to join the growing human rights movement. Together we raised critical funds to protect human rights.
Quarantines and social upheaval have increased the risk of violence against women and has diminished the legal system response in many countries.

WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS

2020 Reflections

2020 has proven to be a year of fires that we try to put out, not one by one, but everywhere, all at once. The backlash against human rights and in particular women’s human rights continues unabated. Protections for women enshrined in the Istanbul Convention, the most comprehensive treaty on violence against women, are questioned and described as unnecessary in some countries. Advancements in women’s rights and LGBTQ rights are evaporating.

Opposition forces specifically target the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. For example, Bulgaria appeared on course to ratify the Istanbul Convention until the opposition challenged the convention in the Constitutional Court. In particular, opposition forces based their case on a distorted interpretation of the term “gender.” In a regressive ruling, the court decided that the Istanbul Convention was in conflict with Bulgaria’s constitution. Similarly, Poland recently announced its decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and the Polish government is trying to influence other countries to backtrack on their commitments to the convention. These legal challenges are generally compounded by harassment and threats of violence to human rights activists in the country.

The Advocates continues to partner with human rights defenders from nearly 20 countries to build a coalition that can address the backlash against human rights strategi-}

WATCH volunteers are going back to the courtroom. We are excited to resume our monitoring—both in-person and virtually—and bring the public back into the courts. To volunteer, please contact Elizabeth Montgomery at emontgomery@advrights.org.
As the COVID-19 pandemic brought mandatory stay-at-home orders, curfews, and other regulations, rates of violence against women escalated around the world. Calls to domestic violence hotlines surged, victims’ access to information diminished, available safe places to report or escape abuse decreased, and many resources were redirected to COVID-19 needs.

Following the Minnesota Governor’s Stay at Home order, The Advocates suspended WATCH, which engages in-person monitoring of gender-based violence court hearings. But we knew how important it was to continue monitoring the state’s response to domestic and sexual violence. A dedicated team of volunteers—Linda Foreman, Peggy Grieve, Rachel Hamlin, Julie Shelton, and Linda Svitak—stepped up to help us fact-find during the pandemic. During the pandemic, there is an urgent need to understand the barriers victims face as they try to stay safe and access justice. Our team worked swiftly to conduct as many interviews as possible so we could make our findings available immediately to local partners. We turned around rapid-response analyses of our findings to three partners—Violence Free Minnesota—Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault—and Standpoint, to help inform their advocacy and training in real time.

Nikki Engel of Violence Free Minnesota described how our information painted a fuller picture of the pandemic’s effect on victim/survivors and shaped their advocacy. “We discovered that economic challenges had skyrocketed for victims under COVID-19,” she remarked. Nikki used this information as well as concerns raised by others to ask the Minnesota Disaster Relief Fund for direct cash assistance for victims. The result? They received $240,000 to pass on directly to victims, making an incredible impact on the lives of many Minnesota victims and their children.

To date, the volunteer team has conducted more than 40 interviews with police, health professionals, advocates, lawyers, prosecutors, prison personnel, sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE), and judges. We have expanded our fact-finding to Nobles, Rice, and Beltrami Counties to assess the response in Greater Minnesota. Once our monitoring is concluded, The Advocates will produce a final report with recommendations.

“Thanks to our dedicated volunteers who collaborated with us to carry out this important work.

We were honored to present our COVID-19 research team with the 2020 Gold WATCH Award on September 30. Their time and commitment have made Minnesota a safer place for women and children during the pandemic.
I VOTE FOR HOPE

Sarah Brenes

An election observer from Central Africa received death threats when she agreed to testify in a court case challenging the election results. A judge from Central America learned his family was assaulted after he refused to attend political events for the ruling party. Political protesters from Syria were persecuted for speaking up, and political dissidents from Cuba were tortured for remaining silent. These are just a few examples of clients for whom The Advocates helped secure asylum in the United States in the past year. These are the clients who are front of mind as I head to the polls and vote for human rights this year.

With persistent determination, The Advocates provided pro bono representation and support to over 1,300 asylum seekers, unaccompanied minor immigrants, detained immigrants, and survivors of human trafficking. In fiscal year 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped demand for our services, nor has it stopped our robust response to the need. Despite moving to a remote work platform, The Advocates has kept pace in our client services and served even more clients than the previous year. Between March 15 and September 15, 2020, The Advocates opened over 225 new matters for clients seeking asylum, work authorization, or release from immigration custody—a 35% increase over the same period in 2019.

In fiscal year, 2020, over 100 new volunteer attorneys signed up to take on a pro bono case and over 100 new interpreters volunteered to assist with translation and interpretation. Training by The Advocates’ staff is critical to their preparedness. When offices moved to remote work in March due to the pandemic, The Advocates shifted its training to a remote platform and reached a record number of new volunteers. From January to September 2020, The Advocates reached over 3,000 volunteers, clients, and supporters through Know Your Rights presentations, Continuing Legal Education trainings, and multiple online advocacy events.

The pandemic has moved us online, demands for racial justice have brought us to the streets, and an intense election season will take us to the polls. We are at a critical moment in time when the health, safety and future of our country, our community, and our clients are at stake. We have no choice but to vote for hope.
Repairing Bikes to Repair a Community

Jenna Schulman

I first met Judy Corradi in 2018 on The Advocates For Human Rights' annual United Nations Study-Advocacy Trip to Geneva. During that trip, I was struck by Judy’s passion and sense of empathy, which were evident in the way she lobbied delegates on issues ranging from LGBTQ rights to the death penalty. Judy, who comes from the insurance world, was always eager to learn and her enthusiasm was infectious, motivating and inspiring the UN advocacy team.

When Judy became aware of our clients’ need for an alternative to public transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic, she became the project manager for The Advocates’ bike donation campaign. Clients’ needs for alternative transportation further increased after the killing of George Floyd as the ensuing protests disrupted many of the businesses in their neighborhoods. “There are a number of clients who live near East Lake Street and over in Saint Paul who have really struggled with the number of boarded up businesses in their neighborhoods,” noted Judy. “One of our clients had to ride ten miles on his roommate’s bike to his 10pm shift. When he could not get his roommate’s bike, he had to leave for work earlier because buses were not running late enough to get him to his job. He then would have to bike six to eight miles home at six or eight in the morning.” Judy shared. “For him, to get his own bike and to be able to control his own destiny was one of the biggest rewards of all.”

Judy handily organized and managed delivery of over 36 bikes to The Advocates’ clients and their families. All clients who received bikes were seeking asylum. “We were able to source a bike for everyone who wanted one!” Judy said proudly. Judy’s basement functioned as a repair shop for all of the donated bikes. Peggy Grieve, board treasurer and long-term supporter of The Advocates, Brenda Stiegel, and Nick Leszko were a part of Judy’s core group of volunteers who spent dozens of hours helping to repair the bikes and coordinate their pick-ups and drop-offs. Judy spent the better part of her summer ensuring that, in this time of uncertainty when transportation has become sparse and potentially dangerous, clients of The Advocates can maintain some autonomy in their daily lives.

Judy first became involved with The Advocates in 2015 working the front desk. “I got a flavor for what day to day operations were like, met a lot of volunteers who were coming and going, and developed relationships with the staff at The Advocates.” When I asked Judy about her favorite part of volunteering with The Advocates, she took a moment to reflect on all of her work over the past five years. “My favorite part has been lobbying [at the United Nations], all of the preparation, all of the excitement doing the research, and thinking through how we are going to handle various interviews.”

Judy has made a significant impact on the lives of not only clients but also other volunteers and staff at The Advocates. Her empathy, motivation, and passion make her a force to be reckoned with and an effective advocate. The Advocates is sincerely thankful, Judy, for all that you do!
Since 1996, The Advocates has had Special Consultative status with the United Nations, allowing active participation in the international human rights mechanisms responsible for the monitoring of human rights compliance worldwide. We have steadily increased our written advocacy since 2015, when we began regularly traveling to the United Nations in Geneva with human rights defender partners and volunteers for our UN Study Advocacy trips. Despite canceling our March 2020 trip due to the pandemic, we have been more productive than ever, submitting a record 52 written reports with 35 human rights partner organizations around the world on human rights conditions in 30 countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed where our staff works but it has not changed how we work—or the need for our work in building the capacity of our partner organizations to do international advocacy. We have also increased over time the number of partner organizations with whom we are working and have expanded our capacity-building training on UN advocacy.

Leading Efforts to Abolish the Death Penalty

As part of a four-year grant funded by the European Union, The Advocates is building the capacity of members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty to leverage the United Nations to press for abolition of the death penalty in their countries. The Advocates’ first partner is the Society for Human Rights and Development Organization (SHRDO), based in Sierra Leone.

In the lead-up to the UN Human Rights Council’s third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Sierra Leone in 2021, The Advocates prepared five in-depth training videos for SHRDO. Sierra Leone carried out its last execution in 1998, but it still holds at least 48 people on death row and the death penalty remains on the books. In the last UPR the government supported recommendations to abolish the death penalty, but it has not yet completed the constitutional amendments and other steps to finalize abolition. With the guidance of the training videos and the assistance of pro bono attorneys at Fredrikson and Byron, SHRDO and The Advocates submitted a joint stakeholder report and are developing a lobbying strategy to ensure that countries around the world press Sierra Leone to close death row and strip the death penalty from its legal system. SHRDO has been so delighted by the training videos and the opportunity to collaborate with the pro bono team that it has shared the videos with allied organizations in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Liberia. Senior Staff Attorney Amy Bengquist says, “Our work in Sierra Leone is a good example of how critically important it is to work in international partnership. We all have something to contribute to each other’s success in improving human rights.”

THE ADVOCATES’ UN AND OTHER SUBMISSIONS

2019–2020

- Death penalty
- LGBTQ rights
- Gender-based violence
- Asylum
- Other

- Civil and political rights
- Children
- Domestic violence
INSIGHTS ON THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINSBURG (1933–2020)

Amy Bergquist, Senior Staff Attorney with The Advocates For Human Rights’ International Justice Program and a former clerk to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, spoke at a vigil in Minneapolis, Minnesota honoring the life of Justice Ginsburg. Following are her remarks:

Thank you all for coming to celebrate the life and legacy of Justice Ginsburg. It was humbling to clerk for Justice Ginsburg and to see first-hand her brilliant intellect at work. She was tirelessly dedicated to the work of the Court, and to advancing the cause of justice. So tireless, in fact, that she sometimes asked me or one of my co-clerks to join her for a workout session with her personal trainer—she would run on the elliptical machine and lift weights while dictating line edits.

The words of another judge I worked for, Judge William Fletcher, speaking about his mother, Judge Betty Binns Fletcher, apply with equal force to Justice Ginsburg: “She spoke truth to power, and just as important she spoke truth in exercising power.”

On the wall just outside Justice Ginsburg’s office hangs a gift she received while I was clerking for her. It is a framed, official version of the 2-page Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, along with an autographed photograph of President Barack Obama signing the Act into law. The Lilly Ledbetter Act—the first bill President Obama signed into law—amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to clarify that the statute of limitations for filing an equal-pay lawsuit resets with each new paycheck affected by the employer’s discrimination. Two years earlier, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, with Justice Ginsburg writing the dissent, held that the statute of limitations began to run when the employer first made a discriminatory pay determination, thereby barring most women from bringing pay discrimination claims, because they usually uncovered the discrimination only years after it began.

This gift, and its prominence in chambers, point to an important lesson I learned from Justice Ginsburg. Sometimes the Court doesn’t or can’t get it right, either because statutes are written badly, precedent doesn’t give enough room to maneuver, or there just aren’t enough votes. But in her powerful dissents, she often sowed the seeds for achieving longer term social justice. Her dissent in the Ledbetter case called on Congress to take up the baton, and it did. Sometimes change comes through the courts, but sometimes the onus is on Congress, and in some cases we need to build social movements to lay the groundwork for social justice.

We mourn Justice Ginsburg’s death, but we must see it not as a defeat, but as a setback. She has sown the seeds for social justice not only in her opinions, speeches, and her life story, but also in all of us—from lawyers arguing at the Highest Court in the land, to children dressed up as the Notorious RBG for Halloween. She has left us a legacy, and that legacy calls on every one of us to mobilize—to nurture those seedlings in the courts, Congress and state legislatures, administrative agencies, and the ballot box, and yes, to build social movements to change hearts and minds.

As Minnesotans, we’ve learned these lessons over the last decade. When we confronted the setback of a ballot initiative that would change our constitution to deny same-sex couples the right to marry, we couldn’t rely on the courts or the legislature to set things right. We mobilized, working tirelessly to have difficult, heart-felt conversations with friends, family, neighbors, and perfect strangers. And we were the first state to fight back and defeat such an initiative. But in building that movement, we sowed the seeds for our legislators to enshrine marriage equality into law. Justice Kennedy eventually caught up to us.

I want to add that Justice Ginsburg’s first area of legal expertise was not gender equality—it was civil procedure. Civil procedure is about the rules—the legal framework that allows people to know where they stand and what to expect. It’s about fairness and the rule of law, but rules are also important for reinforcing the integrity and credibility of the institutions that articulate those rules. So when I learned of the Justice’s last “fervent wish,” I knew it was rooted in her belief that a rule is meaningless if it is good for one day only, to be discarded when it is not politically expedient. The political machinations that began before the ink was even dry on her death certificate are an affront to the rule of law and undermine the legitimacy of the elected branches of our federal government.

We must remember that whether we are bringing a lawsuit, lobbying our elected officials, protesting in the streets, voting, or having those difficult conversations with our relatives and neighbors, we too are speaking truth in exercising power. And we all have the power to speak our truth.

We stand here at the beginning of the Jewish New Year, but also at the start of the harvest season. It is time to begin the hard work of picking up where Justice Ginsburg left off. May her legacy flourish and bear blessings in—and for—all of us.
NEPAL SCHOOL UPDATE

The Sankhu-Palubari Community School (SPCS) was founded in 1999 in the rural Kathmandu Valley to serve the area’s most vulnerable children. SPCS currently serves 375 students in pre-K through 10th grade. By providing a completely free, high-quality education, the school makes the right to education a reality for hundreds of children.

Since 1999, Nepal has made improvements in some areas of education, particularly basic primary education. Public education at government schools in Nepal is technically free, but school fees and the cost of textbooks, uniforms, and supplies are barriers that keep children from the poorest families out of school. SPCS provides access to free education that helps children avoid being caught up in child labor. The school also welcomes all children regardless of caste or ethnicity; currently, 7% of students are Dalit and 55% are Indigenous, from families who do not speak Nepali at home. Girls make up 53% of the SPCS student body, even in grades 8-10. This is a significant accomplishment in Nepal, where more than 80 percent of girls are out of school by grade 11.

SPCS provides access to free education that helps children avoid being caught up in child labor.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal was under complete lockdown from March through June, and again from late August to September. Distance learning, which is never easy, has been extra challenging in the Sankhu-Palubari area. Most SPCS families do not have electricity in their homes, let alone internet access or computers. In spite of these challenges, SPCS teachers have distributed books and shared lessons with students through text and Facebook messenger. For families that do not have mobile phones, teachers have arranged to meet with their young students outside and socially distanced. Teachers have returned to school for planning meetings and the new kindergarten class has been admitted. Everyone is looking forward to returning to the classroom when they can safely do so.
Meet SHARMILA

In 2012, a volunteer from The Advocates talked with Sharmila, who was then in grade 8. She told us she is from Palubari, a small scenic village on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley. She lived with her parents, who are both farmers, and four other siblings. She began attending SPCS in kindergarten. Sharmila said eighth grade was her favorite so far. She was excelling in school and was second in her class. Her favorite subject was English, and she said reading and writing came easily for her. When asked what she liked to do after school, Sharmila was quick to respond, “I like to clean the library after school.” She also shared that she loved participating in the school’s speech competitions. At home, she helped her parents on their farm, and she helped with cooking and cleaning around the house.

Kathy Lenzmeier, board member and longtime supporter of The Advocates, and Jennifer Prestholdt, Deputy Director, had the opportunity to meet Sharmila again recently. She is now 21 years old and works as a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at the National Hospital in Kathmandu. After SPCS, Sharmila continued on to finish grades 11 and 12. She then completed 3 years of nursing training on a full scholarship. She hopes to go back to school because she wants to teach nursing one day.

When reflecting upon her time at SPCS, she said that she appreciated the teachers and how much they did for the students. “They did everything for us.” She felt she was lucky to be where she is and plans to come back and volunteer at SPCS to teach nutrition and hygiene. Sharmila advises current SPCS students to “Work hard!”

Meet RAJ

When The Advocates spoke with Raj in 2015, he was 15 years old and in class 9. He told us that he had a 9-year-old sister who also attended school at SPCS and that their mother and father were farmers. Raj told us he found it easy to learn at SPCS and the free education made it a very special place for him. He said his favorite subject was math. He liked all the teachers at SPCS, but especially his math teacher. He shared that he liked to play football (soccer) with his friends but he also had a passion for singing. During our conversation, he broke out in song, lulling us with a beautiful Nepali folk song.

In December 2019, Kathy Lenzmeier and Jennifer Prestholdt had the opportunity to see Raj again. He is now 20 years old and working as a civil engineer. After SPCS, he attended technical college for 3 years on a full scholarship. He also shared that he had attended a government school until fifth grade before transferring to SPCS. Academically, however, he was only at the first grade level when he came to SPCS. He worked hard to catch up and is thankful for SPCS because it gave him a chance to learn. He felt that there was good coordination between the students and teachers, and that contributed to his success.
RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY

U.S. Fails to Meet International Human Rights Standards on Police Use of Force, Extrajudicial Killings

The May 2020 killing of George Floyd sparked protests that spread across the United States and around the globe. Mr. Floyd’s murder is emblematic of pervasive and racially disparate police violence that plagues the United States. As policy makers respond to demands for transformation of policing, international human rights standards must take center stage.

These international standards seek to counter the risks of human rights violations which attend the deployment of armed state actors. Police—who are trained to use authorized and reasonable force against civilians when necessary—must be held accountable for human rights violations when they abuse that power.

U.S. jurisdictions, however, typically fail on two key measures, with overbroad use of force statutes and inadequate investigation and prosecution procedures, both impede accountability.

International standards on police use of force call for armed state actors to follow basic principles of necessity and proportionality. These standards derive from core treaty obligations which recognize the right to life, security of the person, equal protection, and non-discrimination. International handbooks and codes of conduct for law enforcement officials flesh out international legal standards.

Most U.S. jurisdictions fail to meet these international standards. The resultant accountability gap has contributed to impunity for extrajudicial killings and for sub-lethal human rights violations.

Investigative and prosecutorial practices which fall below international standards exacerbate this impunity. Updated in 2016, the Minnesota Protocol outlines the legal framework for effective investigation of potentially unlawful deaths caused by state actors. The government has a duty to conduct a prompt, effective and thorough investigation. Investigators must be—and must be seen to be—independent, both institutionally and formally, as well as in practice and perception, at all stages. Investigations must be transparent, open to scrutiny by the public and by victims’ families. Most fundamentally, international standards governing use of force must be the standard against which the conduct is measured.

Key International Standards for Police Use of Force:

International standards on police use of force call for armed state actors to follow basic principles:

1. In any use of force, the police and other law enforcement officials must respect the principles of necessity and proportionality.

2. Each use of force must be justified and justifiable.

3. Rules governing the use of force, including weapons that may lawfully be used, should be set out in national legislation and other administrative provisions.

4. Medical assistance shall be provided to any person, including a criminal suspect, who has been injured during action by any law enforcement official.

5. The police and other law enforcement officials shall be held accountable for their use of force.

6. Operations shall be planned to minimize the risk of death or injury.
Recommendations

- Redesign existing policing systems to ensure respect for and protection of human rights are at the center of mission, policy, and practice.

- Ensure federal, state, and local laws regarding police use of force meet international standards.

- Ensure federal, state, and local laws regarding investigation and prosecution of extrajudicial killings and other serious crimes meet international standards.

#SaveAsylum

The administration set its sights on asylum seekers in 2020, introducing a series of proposed regulations designed to eviscerate the United States’ asylum system. A massive regulation, published in June 2020, proposed sweeping changes. The rule attempts to redefine core concepts of asylum such as the definition of “political opinion,” strip discretion from asylum adjudicators, and make numerous other changes that limit who can be granted asylum. “The changes are unlawful under international law, contradict Congressional intent in numerous instances, can be struck down under administrative legal principles, and violate our moral traditions as a nation,” said The Advocates in a 116-page comment, prepared with the assistance of a multi-firm pro bono team.

Several other proposed regulations further undermine access to asylum in the United States by erecting procedural barriers, including, for the first time, asylum application filing fees. As The Advocates notes, proposed rules “which place unrealistic burdens upon people fleeing persecution, torture, and other gross human rights violations and render them vulnerable to deportation” violate U.S. international and domestic legal obligations.

The right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution is a fundamental safeguard against tyranny and oppression. Nearly 50 years ago, the United States joined the global community in recognizing this obligation to ensure that no one is returned to persecution.

“International law is clear and unequivocal: the United States is absolutely and without exception prohibited from deporting a person to a place where there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be at risk of irreparable harm on account of torture, ill-treatment, or other serious breaches of human rights obligations,” says Lindsey Greising, staff attorney with The Advocates For Human Rights. Greising has worked with multiple pro bono teams to respond to at least twelve proposed regulation changes in 2020.

In 1980, Congress passed the Refugee Act to enshrine asylum as part of federal law. People may apply for asylum if they are unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to “persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” A grant of asylum recognizes people as “refugees” and allows them to rebuild their lives in safety in the United States.

Asylum seekers today face long applications, strict filing deadlines, complicated legal standards, and high evidentiary burdens. Many must navigate the process alone, often while in isolated detention centers.

Learn more at TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/saveasylum
IMMIGRATION COURT OBSERVATION PROJECT: New Report

*Bearing Witness: Report from the Immigration Court Observation Project,* released in fall 2020, explores how inviting the public inside the workings of the deportation infrastructure can call that system into question.

“I see outrages in court, systematic racism, and a deck stacked against immigrants.”

Observers reported a significant disconnect between their notion of “justice” and what they observe while monitoring immigration court hearings. They identified serious barriers to justice that undermine the fairness of proceedings which result in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people from the United States each year.

Court observers also reported taking action. As one observer stated, “I am now able to have challenging conversations—people have a lot of misconceptions—especially about crime and about access to legal immigration. People are surprised to learn how long people are held in detention, how high bonds are and that detainees are shackled in court.”

The Immigration Court Observation Project draws on established human rights practice to simultaneously exercise and observe the right to a fair and public hearing and to identify systemic human rights violations arising in the context of civil immigration enforcement. The project has brought more than 600 individuals into the Fort Snelling Immigration Court in Minnesota to observe and document immigration hearings of people who are currently held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention.

The project is a collaboration between The Advocates For Human Rights, the James H. Binger Center for New Americans at the University of Minnesota Law School and Robbins Kaplan LLC in Minnesota.
“I was swept away” says Peggy Grieve, explaining that the volunteer experience at The Advocates is like no other.

Volunteers are at the heart of The Advocates. “They most definitely are not an afterthought, as can be the case in other organizations.” She learned that part of The Advocates’ mission is to expose individuals to human rights and provide meaningful opportunities for volunteers to make a difference in the lives of people here in Minnesota, nationally, and, through its unique status at the UN and with partner organizations around the world. “I love that The Advocates’ work in Minnesota. For example, The Advocates is the largest provider of immigration and asylum services in the Upper Midwest, and its research and advocacy has contributed to changing laws and approaches to victims of sex and labor trafficking. With the WATCH acquisition last year, The Advocates has expanded opportunities for volunteers to be court observers in cases of domestic violence and sexual assault and has started an immigration court monitoring program as well,” she added.

Grieve’s first introduction to The Advocates was a meeting with Rosalyn Park. After working as a Wall Street lawyer for more than 35 years, Grieve went back to school. While earning a master’s degree at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Grieve used new-found skills as well as those as a lawyer and Spanish speaker to conduct field research with Humphrey professor Dr. Friedemann-Sanchez on implementation of Colombia’s laws on violence against women—research that ultimately culminated in a book, Comisarias de Familia y violencia contra las mujeres en Colombia: Puerta de acceso y retos instrucionales—Family Commissioners and Violence Against Women in Colombia: Portal to Justice and Institutional Challenges.

“At the beginning of the project, I contacted Rose to learn about The Advocates’ approach to domestic violence research and advocacy involving a country other than the US,” Grieve explained. “Rose was impressive. She generously shared her experience and expertise and said she would be happy to continue as a resource for us.”

This led to further collaboration with The Advocates. Working with the Rose and others in The Advocates International Justice Program, Grieve and Friedemann- Sanchez used their research as a basis for a joint submission (UoM and The Advocates) in connection with Colombia’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and later in a review of Colombia’s implementation of its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). “It was quite a learning experience—something else I love about The Advocates. They expand my horizons.”

Grieve and Friedemann-Sanchez traveled with The Advocates to Geneva in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to discuss their findings with UN representatives. “One of my more memorable moments with The Advocates, which was also a personally gratifying experience, was our advocacy at the CEDAW session. Because of our advocacy, two of CEDAW’s four priority recommendations to Colombia were based on our research,” noted Grieve.

“Do you realize that because of the thousands of hours of volunteer time dedicated to The Advocates every year, every dollar effectively is leveraged a minimum of four times? That’s the equivalent of a permanent 4x match! This is an unheard-of return on charitable giving.”

Grieve has become involved in other projects for The Advocates. She joined the Board in 2018, where her background in finance and financial planning turned out to be an asset. In 2019, she was appointed treasurer. “Do you realize that because of the thousands of hours of volunteer time dedicated to The Advocates every year, ever dollar effectively is leveraged a minimum of four times? That’s the equivalent of a permanent 4x match! This is an unheard-of return on charitable giving.”

While Grieve gives credit to The Advocates for giving volunteers the chance to make a difference, The Advocates gives credit to Grieve for making that difference.
books

Kids
We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures by Amnesty International
Intersection Allies by Chelsea Johnson, Carolyn Choi
Sea Prayer by Khaled Hosseini (proceeds donated to UNHCR)
A is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara
What is a Refugee by Elise Gravel
I Have the Right to Be a Child by Alain Serres

Adults
The Tortilla Curtain by T.C. Boyle
Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson
The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander
Praying for Sheetrock by Melissa Fay Greene
They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak

podcasts

Rights on the Line
Justice Matters
Declarations
RightsUp
The Hum
Suburban Real Talk
The Rights Pod by the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Stanford University

films

Welcome to Chechnya
The Uncondemned
Immigration Nation
Andrés Cediel’s Frontline Documentaries

virtual art

www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/virtualarts
WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE ADVOCATES

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The Cares Act passed in 2020 allows taxpayers who don’t itemize to deduct up to $300 ($600 for a married couple) per year in charitable contributions made in cash to a public charity like The Advocates. Taxpayers who do itemize their deductions may deduct contributions up to 100% of their adjusted gross income for 2020 only. If you can, please give generously and help victims of domestic violence, trafficking, or sexual assault.

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A planned gift is the gift that you arrange in the present to be allocated in the future. The easiest planned gift is including The Advocates in your will or estate plan. Your planned gift generates hope for generations of human rights advocates.

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