
The report was completed over a period of several years. What began as a simple attempt to respond to the trends The Advocates identified through its asylum project has, over time, become a part of new work on human rights and diaspora communities. In the years since the Oromo project was first envisioned, The Advocates for Human Rights undertook diaspora operations for the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), taking statements, holding public hearings, and producing a report to the TRC from the perspective of the diaspora.

Over the course of more than three years of intensive work with the Liberian diaspora, our understanding of the unique role of diaspora human rights reporting has matured. Our starting point, that asylum trends have something to tell the human rights community, remains valid. Beyond that, we have seen that the opportunity (continued on page 9)

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**16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence**

In November and December, The Advocates participated in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign with three events highlighting activism on women’s human rights issues. This international campaign originated with, and is coordinated by, the Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University and involves participants from around the globe taking action on violence against women as a human rights violation. The theme for this year’s campaign was “Commit – Act – Demand: We CAN End Violence Against Women!”

A noontime presentation on November 24th highlighted The Advocates’ recent work in Tbilisi, Georgia training lawyers and advocates on representing and assisting domestic violence victims under Georgia’s new law (2006) and in service and shelter programs. The training was a continuation of our partnership with advocates and NGOs in Georgia as they work to effectively implement their law to provide greater victim safety and increased accountability for violent offenders. The film screening on December 2 for our Women’s Human Rights Film Series was “Frontrunner,” a portrayal of Dr. Massouda Jalal’s campaign for the presidency of Afghanistan in 2004. Cheryl Thomas, Women’s Program Director, hosted the discussion following the film and (continued on page 8)
From the Director’s Desk

"[We] recognize that the United States' record on human rights is imperfect. Our history includes lapses and setbacks, and there remains a great deal of work to be done. But our history is a story of progress.”

This statement was made by Assistant Secretary of State Esther Brimmer in September as the United States took its seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. As we begin a new decade, we look forward to improved respect for human rights in the U.S. and increased engagement with the international community, including increased cooperation with the U.N. human rights mechanisms. The U.N. Human Rights Council was established in 2006 to replace the old Commission on Human Rights and create more accountability for the human rights practices of member countries.

One function of this new body is to review the human rights record of each U.N. member state every four years. The United States will be reviewed for the first time in late 2010 under this Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The Advocates is working with a national coalition to provide information to the Human Rights Council on human rights practices and will prepare a written submission and recommendations based on our work in the United States.

The United States has been reviewed in the past for its compliance with the treaties it has ratified, most recently the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2008), the Convention Against Torture (2007) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2007). In those reviews, The Advocates provided the U.N. treaty monitoring bodies with important information regarding the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, as well as the death penalty and disparities in access to education in the United States.

The UPR process is broader than the treaty body review process and encompasses all aspects of international human rights and humanitarian law. The United States has a mixed record on ratification of human rights treaties; it has failed to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The United States often explains its failure to ratify these treaties by saying that the laws in the United States are stronger than the protections set out in these treaties, so there is no need to ratify them. The UPR will provide an important opportunity to assess the protection of the broad range of human rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the implementation of national laws designed to protect these rights in the United States.

For example, the United States will be asked on to answer for its failure to comply with a whole range of economic, social and cultural rights outlined in the Universal Declaration. Among the most important are the failure to provide universal access to health care and the failure to adequately address well-documented discrimination in education in the United States. Another example is the well-documented failure to protect the fundamental human rights to security, adequate housing, and food of the people in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The UPR will be an opportunity to evaluate the improvements and protective measures put in place by the U.S. government to ensure that similar violations do not occur in the future.

The UPR is an important opportunity to highlight universal human rights standards and address the areas where protection of the human rights of people in the United States must be improved. Membership in the Human Rights Council and the corresponding willingness to have a dialogue with U.S. civil society and the international community about our human rights record is an important step forward. Now we must fully support the process. Join us in this new effort by following our participation in the UPR process on our website. We will post our written submissions, the U.S. report to the Human Rights Council, the questions the United States will be asked to address, and links for the live webcast of the U.S review on the “International Advocacy” section of www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.

Robin Phillips
Executive Director
The year 2009 brought significant opportunities for human rights work. The United States is newly engaged with the United Nations Human Rights Council, the international community opened itself to new prospective collaborations, and individuals locally and nationally expressed a deep desire to participate in meaningful work to advance justice and restore human dignity to those suffering from human rights abuses.

Responding to community need and opportunities for change, The Advocates led a coalition that changed Minnesota’s human sex trafficking laws, making victims safer and increasing penalties for perpetrators. The unanimous vote in the state legislature delivered a strong, clear message: selling human beings for sex will not be tolerated in our communities. The Advocates also worked with global partners to advance women’s right to freedom from violence by providing commentary on draft domestic violence laws; participating in United Nations expert group meetings; and training police, judges, and NGO staff on effectively using law reform to protect and empower women.

Additionally, after three intense years of taking statements, holding public hearings, and conducting in-depth research to allow Liberians living outside of their home country to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, The Advocates released its final report: A House with Two Rooms. This 600-page publication details the stories from over 1600 Liberians who fled the conflict after witnessing and experiencing egregious human rights violations. The report also provides recommendations for future peace and stability in Liberia, and was added to the TRC’s official report, which has the power of binding recommendations on the Liberian government.

The Advocates worked on behalf of other immigrant groups, as well, partnering with community groups across the state struggling with bias against foreign-born residents. The Advocates presented workshops to quash myths and mistrust and provide forums for open dialogue. Nationally, we continued advocacy around improving the immigration system, especially with regard to the treatment of detained persons. In response to enhanced efforts to enforce current immigration laws, The Advocates provided legal advice to increased numbers of immigrants seeking assistance at our local clinics, and staff and volunteers continued the longstanding work of providing legal representation to asylum seekers, handling approximately 1,000 cases this year alone.

Halfway around the world, 280 children were provided their basic right to an education through The Advocates’ school in rural Nepal. The school has become a stunning success, with recent graduates now pursuing higher level education. Locally, The Advocates worked with teachers to bring human rights education to students around the metro area.

To tell you and others about this work, we also revamped our website, www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org. Please visit our website to learn more, sign up to receive email updates, donate, or find ways to take action.

Thank you to each of our supporters and volunteers who helped us work for change to make 2009 a special year for human rights.

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You are invited
to The Advocates’ Open House
Wednesday, February 10, 2010
4:00-6:00 PM

Come see our new office space, meet the staff and board, and learn more about our programming.
Everyone welcome. Refreshments provided.
Advancing the Field of Transitional Justice

In an effort to document and disseminate information about The Advocates’ groundbreaking partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia, Research Director Rosalyn Park and International Justice Staff Attorney Laura Young recently published “Engaging Diasporas in Truth Commissions: Lessons from the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project” in the International Journal of Transitional Justice. The journal, published by Oxford University Press, focuses on practitioners of transitional justice as well as scholars in the field. The article was published in a special issue entitled “Whose Justice? Global and Local Approaches to Transitional Justice.”

Engaging Diasporas explores the process and outcomes of the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project, which enabled refugees and other Liberians living outside of Liberia to participate in the national truth and reconciliation process. The TRC of Liberia was the first of its kind to include a diaspora population in all aspects of this increasingly common post-conflict process. The TRC partnered with The Advocates to facilitate diaspora involvement in outreach, statement taking, report writing, and the first official public hearings of a truth commission ever held in a diaspora community. The article describes the rationale for diaspora involvement in the case of Liberia, provides an overview of the lessons learned from the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project, and provides legal and policy justifications for why other truth commissions and transitional justice processes should consider a strategy for engaging diaspora populations in their work.

The article can be accessed through The Advocates’ website at http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.

The Advocates’ report, A House with Two Rooms, may be ordered using the form below or from Amazon.com (U.S. $25.99 and free shipping), or it may be downloaded free as a PDF from The Advocates’ website: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Final_Report.html.

BOOK ORDER FORM: A House with Two Rooms

Name: ________________________________
Organization: __________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________________
City: __________________ State: ______ Zip Code: __________
Telephone: ____________________________
Email: ________________________________

Number of Copies Requested: _______

Cost: US $25.99 + US $5.00 shipping and handling within the USA. Please call for information about larger orders or shipping outside of the USA.

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Signature: ________________________________
In October, Education Program Associate Emily Farell was invited to attend an international forum on human rights education entitled “Living, Learning, Acting for Human Rights.” The forum was organized by the Council of Europe and was held at the European Youth Centre in Budapest, Hungary. The forum, held in English, Russian, and French, was the main youth event marking the 60th Anniversary of the Council of Europe and brought together over 250 decision-makers, young people, and practitioners in human rights education from over 50 countries.

The three-day program included contributions from prominent speakers and a series of workshops on specific themes, such as methods and networks for human rights education, gender equality and homophobia, and social rights through education. As part of the program, Ms. Farell shared The Advocates’ expertise and best practices in human rights education, specifically in the areas of youth work, domestic human rights issues and advocacy, immigration, conflict resolution and transitional justice.

Overall, the forum reviewed achievements and reflected on how to strategically consolidate and develop further measures so as to take into account the realities of young people, human rights, and non-formal education today. One outcome of the forum was a message to the Council of Europe highlighting human rights education as a fundamental human right and calling for greater cooperation, networking, and interaction between formal and non-formal education sectors – emphasizing the irreplaceable role of NGOs in this capacity.

The Advocates also attended the 89th Annual National Council for Social Studies Conference (NCSS) in Atlanta, Georgia in November. NCSS is the largest and most comprehensive gathering of teachers of history, geography, economics, civics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law-related education in North America. Emily Farell and Kathy Seipp, program associates with The Advocates’ Education Program, exhibited for two full days to over 3,000 educational professionals, introducing them to The Advocates’ innovative human rights education materials and resources.

In addition to exhibiting, Ms. Farell and Ms. Seipp had the opportunity to do a teacher workshop on The Advocates’ most recent curriculum, The Road to Peace – A Teaching Guide on Local and Global Transitional Justice. The workshop trained educators on how they can use the curriculum to teach about conflict, peacemaking, and the restoration of justice.

The Advocates was also extended a special invitation to be part of a roundtable discussion at the International Assembly, an associated group of NCSS that provides a forum for collaboration among members from the United States and foreign countries. Its members promote global education by creating linkages among social educators to share research, learning activities and teaching methods with global perspectives. At the roundtable, Ms. Farell presented on how teachers can empower students to become effective global citizens, and create safer, more informed, and inclusive classrooms by integrating human rights and service learning into their existing coursework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15th Annual International Women’s Day Celebration</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 6, 2010 at Coffman Union, University of Minnesota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free and open to the public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presented by The Advocates for Human Rights and the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota</td>
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<td>Keynote Speaker: Leymah Gbowee, Liberian activist, Founder and Executive Director, Women Peace and Security Network - Africa (WIPSEN-Africa), and central character in the film “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join us for this exciting day of workshops, film, performances, visual arts and resources from over 65 co-sponsoring organizations</td>
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In Austin, Minnesota, foreign-born residents make up 5.9% of the population, compared to only 1.3% in 1990. The fast-paced growth of the immigrant population and their employment by key local industries, especially Hormel and Quality Pork Products, have been accompanied by rising anti-immigrant sentiment. In the past year, the National Socialist Movement (NSM), an explicitly neo-Nazi group, has staged numerous events in Austin. The NSM members describe these events as being against “illegal immigration,” although the events are part of the NSM’s larger white supremacist agenda, which includes the creation of an all-white nation and the deportation of all non-Europeans from the country. The Southern Poverty Law Center classifies the NSM as one of eight hate groups active in Minnesota.

Some of the rallies attended by the NSM members attracted counter-protests, which, in one case, led to the arrests of three counter-protestors. Many residents of Austin feel that the issue of immigration in their community has been hijacked by extremists, and as a result they have been slow to engage positively around the issue of immigration.

In response to the polarized atmosphere surrounding immigration in their community, the Austin Human Rights Commission invited The Advocates to collaborate on a year-long series of educational events designed to create a forum where community members could voice their opinions on immigration and receive accurate and unbiased information about the topic.

The series kicked off in September with a joint workshop with the Resource Center of the Americas on “Immigration 101.” In evaluations and comments after the workshop, participants expressed their appreciation of having a respectful discussion on the issue that did not end in shouting or physical aggression.

The Advocates and the Human Rights Commission followed with a play in early November, “The Deportee’s Wife,” about one woman’s experience with the immigration system following her husband’s deportation. Audience members reported that they were deeply moved by her emotional performance, which caused them to re-evaluate their trust that the U.S. immigration system worked well and treated people fairly. Members of the NSM attended both events.

The appearance of the NSM in Austin and elsewhere in Minnesota, including at a recent anti-racism workshop in Minneapolis, reflects a national trend of polarization of the immigration debate by hate groups nationwide. Groups such as the NSM and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a frequently quoted anti-immigrant organization that the Southern Poverty Law Center also lists as a hate group, promote a simplistic, false view of immigrants as “illegal” criminals. The anti-immigrant agenda resonates with the Nazi message, and indeed the NSM identifies itself as neo-Nazi. FAIR also has documented ties to white supremacy groups.

The Advocates will continue to work in Austin and throughout Minnesota in 2010 to address the misinformation propagated by the NSM and other hate groups and to reach out to immigrant communities, which are being stigmatized and targeted by the inflammatory rhetoric of hate groups. We are hopeful that our support will help the Human Rights Commission and other community leaders build a sustained campaign to welcome and support their immigrant neighbors.

### Austin Human Rights Commission Joins One Voice Minnesota

The Austin Human Rights Commission is a new member of The Advocates’ One Voice Minnesota Network, which brings together organizations and individuals throughout Minnesota who are interested in building mutual understanding and healthy communities through education and outreach, especially around the issue of immigration. Members use the One Voice Minnesota Network to share their experiences, discuss common goals and challenges, and collaborate on events and activities. Many of the members are located in Greater Minnesota, where immigrant communities have been a rapidly expanding population in the last few decades.

On Human Rights Day, December 10, 2009, The Advocates for Human Rights partnered with the Austin Human Rights Commission to present *Which Way Home*, a documentary about unaccompanied child migrants traveling through Mexico to the United States. The film is the latest in a series of educational efforts that The Advocates is undertaking in Austin as part of our larger work to combat bias against immigrants and build communities that are welcoming and supportive of all their members.
Immigrant Rights at the 2009 MN State Fair

Over 5,000 people visited The Advocates’ booth at the Minnesota State Fair this year. Volunteers and staff educated visitors about immigration and migrants’ rights as part of the “Immigration Fuels Our Nation” campaign, which provides accurate information about immigration and works to build respect for human rights standards in U.S. immigration policy.

Visitors had the opportunity to ask questions, spin the immigration quiz wheel, take home a button or bookmark, send a Take Action postcard, or pick up a Migrant Rights Toolkit.

The Advocates engaged fairgoers and challenged their assumptions about immigration. “Even those deeply opposed to immigration may agree that the U.S. should treat every person with dignity and fairness,” says Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates. “By engaging people in discussion, we have a real chance to respond to people’s concerns with the facts about immigration to the U.S. and the rights of migrants in this country. Real discussion can change minds.”

Visitors expressed gratitude to The Advocates for its positive messages and presence at the State Fair. One visitor commented, “People are quick to forget that America is a nation of immigrants.” A parent wrote, “Thanks for being here. Too many mean people shout too loud. I’m trying to teach my children.” A local nurse told The Advocates, “Thank you for promoting justice for all people working and living in this country. I look forward to learning more from the resource list you provided.”

Overall, visitors learned about migrants’ rights and left after a positive experience, thanks to the help of our invaluable volunteers. Each year, the State Fair booth is energized by new and returning dedicated volunteers. This year, over 70 volunteers participated in the Immigration Fuels Our Nation booth. Thank you to each and every volunteer for their time, passion and expertise. As a volunteer-based organization, we depend on your contributions and thank you for your continued support!

New Human Rights Toolkits

The Advocates is proud to announce the addition of three new human rights toolkits to our online library that provide information on human rights, the death penalty, and the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Human Rights Toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of human rights in the United States, including a history and an introduction to human rights language. The toolkit also includes a summary of the basic principles that define human rights, an overview of the human rights system, and suggestions for how each of us can play a role in building a world where human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled for all.

Developed with the help of volunteers, The Advocates’ Death Penalty Abolition Toolkit offers new features, including a glossary of commonly used terms and testimonials from people who have worked on death penalty cases and for abolition. The toolkit was released on the seventh annual World Day against the Death Penalty (October 10th) and is designed to educate students and adults about the problems surrounding the death penalty. The toolkit focuses on the United States, which in 2008 was one of only 25 countries in the world to carry out executions and where, to date, 139 people on death row have been exonerated.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Toolkit was published to coincide with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd. According to international law, all persons with disabilities have a right to: safety and security, equal protection and due process, non-discrimination, accessibility, education, housing, health, and work.

The toolkits are part of the Discover Human Rights campaign to increase awareness of human rights in the United States. The campaign offers tools that help Americans understand the human rights implications of social issues and advocate for positive change. Each toolkit includes a factsheet, quiz, national resource guide, take action guide, lesson plans, and a PowerPoint presentation. All toolkits are available to download for free online at: www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkit.html.
Liberians Search for Reconciliation in the U.S.

In the past three decades, the Liberian diaspora community in Minnesota has changed from a relatively small group of students and business people to a large community reflecting the economic, ethnic and political diversity of the Liberian nation. That change was a direct result of the Liberian conflict, which forced political rivals, different social and economic classes, opposing rebel factions, and victims and perpetrators of war crimes to seek refuge in the same communities in the United States. Through the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Diaspora Project, The Advocates documented that issues arising out of the Liberian diaspora’s conflict experiences continue to threaten community cohesion and local integration. While the conflict in Liberia has ended, the transition to meaningful and fulfilling life in the U.S. is, for many Liberians and the community as a whole, far from complete.

As a direct outgrowth of its work with the TRC, The Advocates recently began a project to assist the Liberian diaspora in taking the first step in the extremely complex process of community reconciliation by working with them to identify common goals and strategies for working together for community change. Through the TRC process, The Advocates documented a consistent theme that was expressed by Liberians from all backgrounds: in order for community reconciliation to occur, Liberians need to begin to identify with the greater Liberian community rather than their tribal sub-groups. As a statement giver summarized: “Liberians should see themselves as Liberians first, not as divided tribe members with long-standing resentments or hostilities towards other groups.”

The Advocates began working with two community groups in June to promote community reconciliation and unification. One of these groups is the Liberian Women’s Roundtable. Liberian women played a critically important role in bringing an end to the conflict in Liberia and are playing powerful roles in leading their community in the diaspora. Members of the group, who are from a broad cross-section of backgrounds and ages, come together to discuss issues affecting the Liberian community in Minnesota, as well as potential solutions, resources and community actions. In addition to discussion and problem-solving meetings, the group has participated in a variety of skill-building trainings provided by The Advocates’ pro bono partners. The trainings requested by the participants have included the topics of conflict resolution (conducted by Community Mediation Services), reconciliation (led by an Andrus Family Fund Transitions Coach), and community engagement, organizing and capacity building (by Wellstone Action).

The Diaspora Community Forum, a parallel process in the broader community, also began this fall with a targeted group of leaders of county associations, youth groups and religious organizations. In 2010, The Advocates will continue to facilitate the mix of training and discussion of community issues and reconciliation with these groups, as well as beginning the strategic planning process for collaborative community action projects.

(continued from page 1)

updated the attendees on Dr. Jalal’s continuing commitment to women’s human rights through the work of the Jalal Foundation.

Every year, the 16 Days Campaign ends on International Human Rights Day, which commemorates the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. This year, on December 9, in celebration of both the 16 Days Campaign and International Human Rights Day, The Advocates partnered with the Human Rights Center at the University of Minnesota to host a screening of “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.” The film is a story of sacrifice, unity, and transcendence that honors the strength and perseverance of the courageous Liberian women who came together to end a bloody civil war and bring peace to their shattered country.
A New Law, New Hope: Domestic Violence in the Republic of Georgia

The Advocates traveled to the Republic of Georgia in October to train over 35 attorneys and advocates on representing and assisting victims under the new domestic violence law. The training took place over three days in Tbilisi, Georgia and was organized by the American Bar Association’s Rule of Law Initiative. The training focused on effective advocacy for domestic violence victims, legal representation of domestic violence victims in protective order proceedings in court, shelter management, and the positive and problematic ways in which the law has been implemented, as well as feedback on areas where new remedies are needed. Participants were eager to learn effective strategies for representing domestic violence victims in court and assisting them in service programs.

The Advocates has partnered with NGOs in Georgia since 2004, when The Advocates traveled to the former Soviet Union country to conduct trainings on our StopVAW website. In 2005, a delegation from Georgia consisting of lawyers, advocates, prosecutors, judges, police, and a Parliamentarian visited Minnesota to learn about domestic violence laws. The Advocates later participated in the drafting of the new domestic violence law that passed in 2006. The Advocates also traveled to Georgia to conduct research for its report, “Domestic Violence and Child Abuse in Georgia: An Assessment of Current Standings of Law and Practice,” which can be accessed on The Advocates’ website. In October 2007, The Advocates’ staff and volunteers conducted trainings for police, prosecutors, and judges on implementation of the new domestic violence law.

A presentation of the training, “Legal Reform on Violence Against Women in the Republic of Georgia,” was recently hosted by the law firm of Fredrikson & Byron, P.A.

(continued from page 1)

for members of the diaspora to share their stories – not for the purpose of being granted asylum, but for the purpose of bearing witness to their suffering – has great power. We have also come to appreciate the complex and symbiotic relationship between political leadership in the diaspora and politics in the home country. Increasingly, electronic communication makes it possible for the diaspora to stay in touch with and be involved in the events taking place in its homeland. Human rights violations are not only revealed through the internet, but often are reported by cell phone as they are happening. As we move forward, the model developed through our work with the Oromo diaspora will allow us to monitor and respond more effectively to the human rights violations identified through our work with our asylum clients.

The Advocates thanks the volunteers who helped produce Human Rights in Ethiopia: Through the Eyes of the Oromo Diaspora. Thank you to Laura Provinzino, The Advocates for Human Rights’ inaugural Wellstone Legal Fellow, who supervised research for this report and who continued to volunteer after finishing her fellowship, and to Anne Lockner and the research, editing, and layout team at Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P. Thanks also to the interview team: Lane Ayres, Amy Bergquist, Sarah Brenes, Timothy Ewald, Alan Goldfarb, Kerri Hermann, Jessica Hjarrand, Amy Schroeder Ireland, Anne Lockner, Suzette Schommer, Nancy Wolf, and the many others who volunteered on this project. (Map credit: CIA World Factbook)
Global Conferences Address Women’s Rights

OSCE Meeting in Vienna

Cheryl Thomas, director of The Advocates’ Women’s Program, gave the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), where the focus was ending violence against women. The meeting took place in early November in Vienna, Austria. Participants included approximately 175 government and NGO representatives from OSCE’s 56 member countries throughout Europe, Central Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Africa. The United States is also a member of the OSCE.

Ms. Thomas’s speech focused on legal reform to address violence against women and identified four important facts central to this effort:

- Laws and practices will best protect women and girls if they are based on the fundamental principle that violence against women arises out of the unequal position of women in society.
- Laws and practices that reflect the message of zero tolerance for violence will best protect women’s safety and security.
- Training and education are essential to an effective community response to violence against women.
- Women’s safety will be better protected when there is a coordinated community response to violence that involves monitoring of laws and practices.

Discussions at the meeting highlighted prevention, prosecution and protection as essential components of efforts to address violence against women. Other presenters included The Advocates for Human Rights’ partner, Genoveva Tisheva of the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, and Judge Sonia Chirinos of Spain, who described the implementation of the Spanish law on domestic violence.

UNIFEM/OSI Meeting in Istanbul

Leaders from 43 women’s human rights organizations from 20 countries gathered in Istanbul, Turkey in mid-November to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Women’s Convention) and share new strategies for using the Convention to promote equality and security for women. The United Nations’ agency UNIFEM and the Open Society Institute’s Human Rights and Governance Program (OSIHRG), both long-time partners of The Advocates for Human Rights, hosted the meeting. At the invitation of OSIHRG, Cheryl Thomas, director of the Women’s Program, attended the meeting to share The Advocates’ work on legal reform on violence against women. Many of our partner organizations throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union participated in the meeting, which offered opportunities for planning and collaboration for future work together. Presentations focused on using the enforcement mechanisms of the Women’s Convention to hold governments accountable for their obligations to prevent and punish violence against women and also to make progress towards women’s economic equality and the intersections of these goals. Highlights of the meeting were the presentations by three members of the United Nations committee that oversees the Convention, Dubravka Simonovic (Croatia), Victoria Popescu (Romania), and Feride Acar (Turkey). These women provided invaluable guidance and insight on how to use the Convention to effectively promote women’s human rights.

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

Bob Feldman
Norbert J. & Harriet Hennesey-Rohl
Kari Ann Koskinen
John Sisson

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

Briar Andresen & Sjur Midness
Sam Heins and Stacy Mills
Marlene & Tom Kayser
Janet Keysser
Heather Kunin
David Parker’s remarkable work
Sara Tollefson’s Wedding

Cheryl Thomas presents keynote address at OSCE meeting in Vienna (OSCE/Sarah Crozier)

Cheryl Thomas with Dubravka Simonovic, Croatian member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
On October 30, The Advocates for Human Rights and the Minnesota Justice Foundation co-sponsored a CLE on the death penalty. Hosted by Dorsey & Whitney, the panel featured several attorneys who shared their thoughts and experiences representing capital defendants. Robin Maher, Director of the American Bar Association’s Death Penalty Representation Project, moderated the presentation by Magistrate Judge Jeffrey Keyes, Mark Olson of Oppenheimer, Wolff and Donnelly, and David Schultz of Maslon, Edelman, Borman and Brand.

Judge Keyes provided information regarding the case of his client, whom he represented for 11 years. A federal court overturned the death penalty conviction of Martin Draughon, a Texas death row inmate, in September 2004 after ballistics evidence, developed and presented by a Briggs and Morgan, P.A. team, indicated that the victim was killed by a ricocheting bullet.

Robert Schnell of Faegre & Benson and Carl Warren of the University of Minnesota Law School discussed racial bias and the death penalty. The criminal justice system, particularly capital punishment, is fraught with racial disparities. Studies have shown that the strongest determinant of whether a defendant will face the death penalty is the race of the victim: where the victim is white, the defendant is far more likely to be sentenced to death. Homicide victims have included both black and white people in approximately equal numbers since 1977; however, 80% of executions were for murders involving white victims. Amnesty International noted in a 2003 report that African-Americans comprise only 12% of the general population but constitute 43% of prisoners on death row. Indeed, as Robert Schnell described, the Alabama death row case handled by Faegre & Benson involved a Batson claim, involving racial discrimination in jury selection.

Robin Maher concluded by stressing the massive need for representation for post-conviction death row inmates. There are several reasons behind the shortage of capital defense lawyers, including the absence of a federal constitutional guarantee for court-appointed counsel at the post-conviction level; the termination of federal funds for post-conviction defender organizations in 1995-96; and a one-year deadline for filing habeas petitions under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) of 1996. To learn more about the death penalty, download The Advocates’ Death Penalty Abolition Toolkit at www.discoverhumanrights.org.

The Advocates’ Wish List

Your donation of materials or services can promote positive social change:

Laptop computers • Graphic design software • Flip video camcorder • Blackberry Storms with international calling options • Membership in the American Bar Association

To see The Advocates’ full wish-list, please visit: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Donating_Items.html.

If you would like to make an in-kind donation, please contact The Advocates at (612) 341-3302 or hrights@advrights.org. Thank you!
Asylum Victories

Matt Ralph of Dorsey & Whitney successfully halted his client’s imminent deportation, won reopening of the case at the Board of Immigration Appeals level, and got his client released from detention pending a new hearing before the Immigration Judge.

David Johnson and Lisa Ellingson from Dorsey & Whitney helped a woman from Benin win asylum based on her opposition to a forced marriage and the repeated rapes she suffered from her husband in the marriage.

Britta Schnoor and Amanda Igbani of Dorsey & Whitney won asylum for a woman from Eritrea who had been persecuted by the government for practicing her religion.

David Johnson from Dorsey & Whitney also won asylum for a man from Cameroon who had been jailed and tortured because of his activities with a political opposition group.

Sarah Kerbeshian at Dorsey & Whitney succeeded in having a petition for her client’s wife reinstated after the Consulate in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia denied the application and sent it back for revocation.

Malinda Schmiechen (formerly of The Advocates) at the Schmiechen Law Firm received favorable decisions in three long pending cases. One, a woman from Liberia who had been held as a bush wife and subjected to physical and sexual harm as a young girl, was granted by the Immigration Judge. Another woman, from Kenya, was granted by the Asylum Office, based on her fear of female genital mutilation. The third case was a political asylum claim for a man from Ethiopia, who was also granted by the Immigration Judge.

Annie Huang of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi won asylum for a boy from the Democratic Republic of the Congo whose older siblings had been granted asylum. The children had all been imputed to share their parents’ political affiliations, which were in opposition to the government position and had resulted in the family being targeted.

Jake Zimmerman and Brad Engdahl of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi won asylum before the Immigration Judge for two siblings from Guinea. The brother and sister were opposed to the “adulthood” rituals to which they would be subjected — facial scarring for the men and female genital cutting for the women.

Peder Nestingen won Withholding of Removal for a woman from Somalia who had been subjected to female genital mutilation and feared harm to her and her children if she were forced to return.

The Advocates’ staff Emily Good and Malinda Schmiechen and intern Molly McLane assisted a man from Guinea who won asylum based on his political activities.

Give to the Max Day a Success

November 17 was “Give to the Max Day” — a one-day event on GiveMN.org encouraging Minnesotans to donate to nonprofit organizations. Thank you to everyone who supported The Advocates and helped us raise $20,000 for human rights!

Comments from donors on Give to the Max Day included:

“We are proud and feel fortunate that we have such strong leaders in the human rights movement here in MN.”

“Because human rights are for everyone. Or should be.”

“Thanks for your important work for those who have nowhere else to turn!”

Fall House Parties

Thank you to hosts:

Ted Irgens
Marlene and Tom Kayser
Andrea and Jim Rubenstein
Irfan Sandozi and Afshan Anjum

From left to right: Sharon Rice Vaughan, Gabrielle Pillman, Robin Phillips, and Fran Davis
Volunteers’ Work Wins Asylum for Domestic Violence Survivors

Recent news coverage, including an October 30, 2009 article by Julia Preston in The New York Times entitled “U.S. May Be Open to Asylum for Spouse Abuse,” has highlighted the issue of whether domestic violence can be a basis for seeking asylum. Matter of R-A-, a case pending for 14 years, initially raised the issue, and the Obama Administration has recommended asylum for the woman in that case. One aspect of the delay has been disagreement over how to characterize the social group, a necessary element of an asylum claim. A brief by the government agency prosecuting the case states that a social group of “women unable to leave a domestic relationship” could be a viable ground for asylum, and also indicated the government's willingness to grant asylum in the R-A- case.

The Advocates’ volunteers have been presenting cases for women who have suffered abuse from their spouses and domestic partners for the past few years. In one recent victory, volunteers Don Campell and Jeffrey Ehrich of the Leonard, Street and Deinard law firm successfully argued that a woman from Cameroon who had been abused by her husband deserved asylum. The woman’s husband caused her to suffer a miscarriage and have a premature baby as a result of his beatings. She was able to get a temporary divorce, but not a permanent divorce because her husband refused to agree and told the bailiff delivering the papers that she would be dead before he would agree. This summer, Mr. Campell and Mr. Ehrich learned that their client had been granted asylum by the Asylum Officer. They subsequently helped her apply to bring her children to the United States, and those applications were approved in November. The children will now be interviewed for a visa at the Embassy.

Allen Blair, a professor at the Hamline University School of Law, won asylum for a woman from Kenya who was forced into an arranged marriage against her will. The woman was subsequently physically and sexually abused while living in the U.S. with her husband. She could not return to Kenya as a single woman, because her family’s traditions dictated that she either be forced to return to her husband or be married again for a dowry. Additionally, she had been subjected to female genital mutilation and feared another cutting.

Cases like these demonstrate the need for volunteers to help articulate complex asylum claims in the face of developing laws and policies. It is also an example of how the work of The Advocates continues to advance the cause of human rights within the immigration system and for individuals.

Women’s Human Rights Film Series

The fifth season of our Women’s Human Rights Film Series, presented in partnership with The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, continues in 2010 with four compelling documentaries. The schedule includes: “Rough Aunties” (South Africa) on January 27th; “Sentencing the Victim” (U.S.) on February 16th; “Mrs. Goundo’s Daughter” (U.S. and Mali) on March 1st; and “Women of Tibet – A Quiet Revolution” on April 21st. The March screening, co-sponsored by Americans for UNFPA, will include special guest Agnes Pareyio, activist and Kenyan country director for V-Day. The Advocates’ staff and guests will host discussions following each film. The screenings are free and open to the public and will take place at various St. Paul Public Library branches. For details, see The Advocates’ website.
Volunteer Corner

Ellen Evans has been a volunteer with The Advocates for Human Rights since September of 2008. Ellen is a recent transplant to Minnesota, having moved here two years ago with her husband and three daughters: Lilly (8), Maya, and Paige (3-year-old twins). She is originally from the East Coast, where she went to college and eventually earned a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Boston College. Ellen taught composition for many years, but finally left academia to stay home full time with her girls when her family moved to Eden Prairie.

As an educator and curriculum writer, Ellen has been an invaluable resource to The Advocates’ Education Program. She has put in countless hours creating innovative, thought-provoking lesson plans to accompany The Advocates “Human Rights Toolkits” covering such issues as the right to health, the rights of women, and the rights of persons with disabilities. When asked about her experience Ellen stated, “I am so excited to put some of my teaching and learning experiences to work volunteering for this terrific organization!” The Advocates is extremely grateful to have such a dedicated and exceptional volunteer. Thank you for all your hard work, Ellen!

Interested in Volunteering?

The Advocates has launched regular orientation sessions for prospective volunteers. Held at The Advocates’ office, these sessions are an opportunity for individuals interested in volunteering with the organization in any capacity to get more information. The orientation lasts one hour and provides information on The Advocates’ work and upcoming volunteer opportunities. Volunteers can sign up for specific volunteer needs at each orientation. Volunteer opportunities vary, depending on organizational needs and include administrative tasks such as mailings and phone calls; research; legal representation; photography; videography; graphic design; party hosts; and more. The next volunteer orientation will be Wednesday, Jan. 13, at 7:30 am. No RSVP is required.

Individuals who are unable to attend the orientation are encouraged to sign up on one of the volunteer listservs available at http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/volunteer_opportunity_descriptions.html to receive email notifications of volunteer opportunities.

Fall House Parties

From left to right: Volunteer Award Recipients Mark Frey and Rose Grengs (seated) with guests; host Andrea Rubenstein with guests; and Volunteer Award Recipient Rose Grengs with Refugee and Immigrant Program Steering Committee Member Loan Huynh
Miranda Morgan has joined The Advocates as a Refugee and Immigrant Rights Program Assistant through the Lutheran Volunteer Corps. Prior to joining The Advocates, Miranda worked at Migrant Health Services, both as an advocate in the Hispanic Battered Women’s Program and as a medical interpreter. Miranda received her bachelor’s degree in social work and music at Concordia College.

Welcome, Miranda!

Thank you to our current interns:

Leah Agbor (University of St. Thomas) and Brittany Lynk (Macalester College ’06) with Development and Communications; Matthew Buechner (University of Minnesota), Jennifer Ernie-Steighner (Miami University at Ohio), and Morley Spencer (University of Minnesota) with the Human Rights Education Program; Laura Matson (Upper Midwest Human Rights Fellow) and Jon Moler (University of Minnesota Law School) with the International Justice Program; Bill Borene (University of St. Thomas School of Law), Federico Burlon (Macalester College), Uttam Das (University of Minnesota Humphrey Fellow), Laurel Lawson (University of Minnesota School of Law), Kai Redalen (St. Olaf College ’09), and Rachel Wisthuff (Macalester College) with the Refugee and Immigrant Rights Program; Lauren Tjernlund (University of Minnesota) and Sophie Link (Centre for Human Rights Ireland) with Research and Advocacy; and Katie Devlaminck (University of Minnesota Law School), Nicole Kligerman (Macalester College), and Christina Quick (William Mitchell College of Law) with the Women’s Human Rights Program.

Looking for Holiday Giving Ideas?

This year, give a unique and meaningful gift…

Give a gift to The Advocates in honor of someone special, and the recipient will be sent a beautiful holiday card, notifying them of your thoughtful gift.

You can give to a specific cause close to someone’s heart: advancing women’s rights; preventing child labor; abolishing the death penalty; teaching children about human rights; bringing peace to war-torn communities; or providing legal services to asylum seekers.

Connect with Us Online!

www.facebook.com/TheAdvocatesforHumanRights

www.twitter.com/The_Advocates

www.flickr.com/theadvocatesforhumanrights

www.youtube.com/ADVforHumanRights

From left to right: Dulce Foster and Mark Kalla; Korir Sing’Oei, James E.R. Townsend, Ahmed Sirleaf, and Kimberly Adelsman; George Norris and Ted Irgens; and John Gordon and Jim O’Neal
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