Now Is the Time for Humane Immigration Reform

Fixing the broken asylum system and charting a route to citizenship for people in the United States without documentation are positive changes contained in the bipartisan legislation the United States Senate introduced in April to reform the country’s immigration system.

The bill, the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” shifts the immigration focus from a punitive, enforcement-only model to one that begins to use a humane approach.

“The legislation is a positive starting point,” said Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates, the main provider of free legal services to asylum seekers in the Upper Midwest. “It responds to some of the most pressing human rights concerns facing immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.”

The proposal, S. 744, includes commonsense fixes to the asylum system, including repeal of an arbitrary one-year filing deadline for asylum-seekers. The bill also seeks to establish much-needed oversight of immigrant detention in which over 429,000 people were detained in 2012 alone. The bill would, for the first time, allow for the appointment of counsel in immigration cases, including cases involving unaccompanied children and people found to be mentally incompetent. The Senate proposal would strengthen due process protections by restoring judicial discretion in limited cases and by providing additional training and resources for immigration courts and appeals board.

The bill would establish a roadmap to citizenship for an estimated 11 million people in the United States without documentation and would make significant changes to the U.S. immigration system. However, under the proposal, U.S. citizens would no longer be able to petition to reunite with their adult married sons and daughters or with their siblings and the Diversity Visa program would be eliminated.

“We look forward to working with U.S. Congress and Minnesota’s congressional delegation to create a just and humane immigration system that reflects our most deeply-held American values that everyone is equal in dignity and rights,” said Phillips.
Dear Friends,

This spring we kick off the 30th anniversary celebration of The Advocates for Human Rights, a time in which we honor the founding members' vision of a world in which all people live with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace, both in the United States and around the world.

We honor our energetic volunteers, committed donors, and extraordinary board and staff.

The Advocates has worked tirelessly for three decades with the belief that each of us plays a part in making human rights real and that good, smart, committed people can make a difference in the lives of those experiencing human rights violations.

We celebrate that our leadership and innovative programming changed laws, developed international standards, and saved lives.

We celebrate the thousands of asylum clients who fled persecution and now live in safety and security in the United States, building new lives and enriching our communities.

We celebrate the millions of women in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who now have legal protection because of laws we helped draft and pass, as well as the legal professionals we trained to implement these laws effectively.

We celebrate the millions of women and girls in Minnesota now safer because of changes we worked to secure in trafficking laws, including increased penalties for traffickers and the Safe Harbor Act that ensures trafficked children are treated as victims, not criminals, and provided services they desperately need.

We celebrate the thousands of children who learned, through our curricula, about human rights and responsibilities, as well as the realities of immigration in the United States.

We celebrate the thousands of Liberians who fled Liberia's civil war and participated in the Truth and Reconciliation process with a commitment to build a peaceful future for Liberia.

We celebrate the diaspora groups living in the United States that partnered with us to improve human rights conditions in their home countries.

We celebrate the thousands of volunteers who worked alongside our staff and board to improve human rights conditions around the world.

As we mark our 30th anniversary, we celebrate our community of thoughtful, committed advocates and our future possibilities to change the world together.

As Margaret Mead famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Robin Phillips
Executive Director
Kindling Change in Moldova

The Advocates is sparking action in the Eastern European country of Moldova, giving women in that country promise that their government is serious about ending domestic violence.

The Advocates, together with the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation and the Women’s Law Center (WLC), launched in November a report, “Implementation of the Republic of Moldova’s Domestic Violence Legislation,” featuring more than 100 recommendations to effectively respond to domestic violence.

Following the report’s introduction, The Advocates conducted a train-the-trainers workshop with Moldovan police officers, detailing riveting, real-life examples and identifying best practice protocols. St. Catherine University’s director of public safety Laura Goodman and Minneapolis deputy police chief Kris Arneson were part of The Advocates’ team.

The Moldovan officers will, in turn, work throughout the country to train more than 500 of their law enforcement colleagues about the best practices to implement the law. The WLC is also training police throughout Moldova based on the curriculum prepared by The Advocates.

“The energy and commitment in Moldova to end domestic violence will effect real change,” said Mary Ellingen, a staff attorney with The Advocates who has played a critical role in the work for Moldova. “It is a privilege to work with dedicated partners like the Women’s Law Center.”

The Advocates and the WLC are teaming up in other ways to implement the report’s recommendations. The organizations submitted a List of Issues to the United Nations Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in January for the committee’s review session held in March.

The WLC is contributing to a shadow report to the United Nations, highlighting The Advocates’ findings and recommendations. The WLC plans to travel to the United Nations to present the report, and The Advocates will be there to support WLC’s efforts.

Moldova is one of the first countries in the Central and Eastern European region to address domestic violence with specific legislation in both its civil and criminal systems, as well as to write into law comprehensive provisions for a coordinated community response.

Advocates Come in All Sizes

The Robbinsdale Middle School classroom bubbled with excitement as students turned human rights concepts into action, such as raising money for the homeless and rapping about racism.

Human rights education for young people works best when it connects students’ sense of justice and personal experience with the language of human rights. Teacher Kathy Seipp, a former staff member of The Advocates, is doing just that for her sixth graders at Robbinsdale Middle School.

“For my students, human rights is anything but a set of legal principles,” said Seipp. “They are very familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and use it to talk about their lives, their school, and their city.”

Seipp’s classes have selected service-learning projects and are working to fulfill the human rights of students in their school, as well as those experiencing poverty in their community.

“I like working on the human rights project because I know I’m helping the world with one small act,” one student said.

The projects do a lot for students’ future sense of empowerment and community participation and for the type of citizens they will become, according to Sarah Herder, The Advocates’ education program director. “For students, it is about being a part of positive change.”
Fleeing a forced marriage and sexual assault, Ms. S, a citizen of Guinea, came to the United States and her asylum application was submitted shortly after her arrival. Ten years later, through the successful representation by Shauna Kieffer, attorney with the Ford Law Firm, Ms. S was granted withholding of removal.

Mr. R, a citizen of Ethiopia and victim of torture, was targeted by the Ethiopian government because of his Oromo ethnicity. He was granted asylum after an affirmative interview with representation by University of Minnesota law students Claudia Vincze-Turcean, Justin Erickson, Willy Madeira, and Lindsey Greising, with assistance from Professor Steve Meili and The Advocates’ Emily Good.

Mr. L, a former professor and citizen of Ethiopia, was tortured because of his perceived political opinion. He was granted asylum, represented at the affirmative level by University of Minnesota law students Gordon Knoblach, Jenna Nand, Edmond Ahodome, and Kevin Lampone, with assistance from Meili and Good.

An activist and member of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Cameroon, Ms. F was arrested and tortured by the government. Represented by The Advocates’ Deepinder Mayell, she was granted asylum in September 2012.

Mr. N, a Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) citizen, was tortured by the government because he was a human rights activist and member of the UDEMO, a political party in the DRC. Granted asylum in September 2012, he was represented by John Mandler and Michelle Weinberg, Faegre Baker Daniels, in an affirmative interview with assistance from paralegals Declan Mumford and Cristine Trooien and The Advocates’ intern Maggie Brunk.

A citizen of Rwanda, Mr. T fled persecution that resulted from his refusal to join the Rwandan Patriotic Front political party. He was represented by Good in an affirmative interview and granted asylum in September 2012.

The Liberian government attacked Mr. F, a Liberian journalist, due to his imputed political opinion. He was represented by Kim Hunter of Kim Hunter & Associates in affirmative proceedings and granted asylum in October 2012.

Members of the Somalian government threatened Mr. B, a journalist, because he reported human rights abuses. Represented by Nicole Frank and Barry Landy, Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, Mr. B was granted asylum in October 2012.

Attorney Shauna Kieffer succeeded with getting removal proceedings terminated for a Mexican client, Mr. X, when it was concluded that the client’s conviction was not a removal offense.

Some day we may meet and you will see my face. Until then, I must protect myself and my family who remain in my home country.

“The Advocates saved my life; they represent my hope.”

The Advocates’ staff attorney Sarah Brenes secured a request for prosecutorial discretion for Mr. S, an asylum client from Turkey who fled persecution waged against him because of his ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. The Office of Chief Counsel agreed to file a joint motion to request the immigration judge to cease removal proceedings against the client.

Mr. J, a man from Jamaica (profiled on page 5 of this newsletter), was granted asylum in February 2013 based on a theory of aggregate harm. He was subjected to years of insults and violence because of his sexual orientation. He was represented by Mayell in the initial application and by Brenes in supplemental filings and the asylum interview.

A victim of torture due to his religion, Mr. T, an Eritrean man was granted asylum in February 2013. David Asp, Lockridge Grindal Nauen, represented him.
Mr. J was a tender 10 years old when children refused to play soccer with him and threw a stone at his head because they thought he was gay.

Childhood bullying escalated into serious threats on his life. Mr. J, at age 17, had an argument with a gang member. A large group of men retaliated, gathering outside of his school with knives, batons, and broken bottles and shouting they would get rid of him “once and for all.” Mr. J escaped the frightening situation when family members arrived and escorted him home.

Mr. J lived in an area of Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, largely controlled by young men associated with drug trafficking and organized crime, historically linked to committing heinous acts against homosexuals. Gang members regularly harassed him, taunting him by calling him a “battyman,” a slur for a gay man.

He lived in fear. At work, a co-worker threatened him with scissors. When he walked down the street, men brandishing knives accosted him. When he went to a nightclub, a crowd of men, incited by music calling for violence against homosexuals, beat him. Even though Mr. J reported these incidents to police, they failed to act.

Gang members so savagely beat an openly gay man in Mr. J’s community in 2010 that the victim’s legs had to be amputated. The day following the attack, some of the assailants pointed at Mr. J and shouted, “Here’s another one! You’re next!”

Frightened for his life, Mr. J left Jamaica and arrived in Minnesota in the summer of 2011 to work. He searched online, found The Advocates, and began his asylum journey.

With assistance from Deepinder Mayell, The Advocates’ director of the Refugee and Immigrant Program, and Sarah Brenes, a staff attorney with The Advocates, Mr. J was granted asylum in February 2013. His claim for asylum was based on a lifetime of anti-gay violence, not on a single incident or series of incidents.

Mr. J is working and plans to return to school in the fall. He hopes to study design or merchandising and, eventually, work as a fashion consultant for a major retailer.

“I couldn’t have had a better team,” he says, referring to The Advocates’ representation during his asylum quest. “On my own, I would have given up.”

Escaping a Life of Fear

For Mr. J, life in Jamaica was hell on earth

Mr. J’s Home Country: Jamaica

Despite its image as a tranquil island nation, crime spirals out of control in Jamaica because of poverty, corruption, and weak government.

This violence, coupled with a suspicion of homosexuals pervading Jamaican popular culture, creates an environment that often gives license to the harassment and physical abuse of gays and lesbians.

Frequently encouraged by homophobic messages espoused by popular musicians, young men often affiliated with street gangs carry out attacks with impunity, leading one magazine to dub Jamaica as the “most homophobic place on earth.”

Nepal School House Party

Thank you to hosts David and Mary Parker

Kathy Lenzmeier, Dianne Judd, and Irene Kotula

Katie Sieben, Dave Sieben, and Michael Sieben
Promoting Human Rights from Afar

An attorney working from a desk in Minnesota or London can be a vital link in advancing human rights in regions around the globe, especially in Africa.

That's the goal of the Africa Advocacy Project, launched by Faegre Baker Daniels and The Advocates in 2012. When finalized, the project will develop, promote, and implement a system to match African non-government organizations with pro bono assistance from attorneys in the United States and Europe to leverage the incredibly scarce resources available to those working on human rights issues in African countries.

More than 130 volunteers worked on the project, conducting research on 18 African countries and undertaking email and telephone interviews with organizations and individuals about the work they do and their pro bono needs.

Four countries—Cameroon, Liberia, Morocco and Tanzania—representing different regions and stages of development were selected for additional assessment. The Advocates and volunteers traveled to the countries last winter, conducting 150 interviews with legal service providers, international organizations, and government representatives. Team members documented work being done on a wide range of issues, including access to justice, constitutional and legal reform, torture and detention, freedom of opinion and expression, disability rights, LGBT rights, and women's rights.

“Organizations in Africa don’t know the extent of the potential help available and what can be realized through pro bono contributions from attorneys in the U.S.,” said Jennifer Prestholdt, deputy director of The Advocates and the project’s leader. “Human rights defenders in the four countries are excited about the opportunities envisioned for pro bono attorneys to support their work on human rights and rule of law issues.”

Faegre Baker Daniels travel team members included Alison Bure, David Buddingh, Mark Carpenter, Dianne Heins, Kara Lyons, Eric Marshall (Tanzania Team Leader), Jim O’Neal (Liberia Team Leader), Jacqueline Pimentel-Gannon, Brenda Robinson (Morocco Team Leader), Sierra Russell, Julie Shelton, and Tom Slaughter (Cameroon Team Leader).

In addition to Prestholdt, The Advocates travel team members were Amy Bergquist and Robin Phillips.

Kim Charbonneau, Kelly Dolihar, Milena Gebremeskel, Lou Mulcahy, Jennifer Schwope, Kim Marie Smith, and Candace Whitaker provided support for travel team members.

Building a Welcoming Minnesota

Fighting anti-immigrant bias, addressing immigration-related issues, and building healthy, welcoming communities through resources, capacity-building, and information-sharing are the big goals of One Voice Minnesota (OVM) a program started by The Advocates involving a statewide network of more than 150 organizations.

OVM continues its fact-finding project this year, investigating, documenting, and assessing the degree to which Minnesota welcomes all residents, especially immigrants and refugees.

The team has trained volunteer monitors, held community conversations, and conducted one-on-one interviews to capture what “welcoming” means to Minnesotans and to identify key issues facing our communities.

The Advocates will evaluate the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and long-term residents in Minnesota against international human rights standards to create policy recommendations that ensure Minnesotans’ human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. A report to be released in 2014 will provide a basis for public discussion, policy advocacy, and ongoing anti-bias work.

This Advocates initiative is funded by the Blandin Foundation and The Minneapolis Foundation. EnergyOfANation.org/ovm.html, or contact the team at OneVoiceMN@advrights.org
Volunteer Focus:
Kate Bruce Follows Her Passion

Kate Bruce didn’t just dip her toe in the water, she jumped right in. Soon after joining Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi in 2008, she volunteered with The Advocates and secured asylum for an elderly Kenyan woman, in poor health, who was an inherited widow bride passed on to a relative following her husband’s death.

Since then, Bruce has taken on other clients and trafficking cases. She has conducted research for the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project, contributed to “The Practitioner’s Guide to Human Rights Monitoring,” volunteered for The Advocates’ Stop Violence Against Women website, and commented on draft domestic violence laws.

“All of the issues I’m really passionate about are in one place at The Advocates,” Bruce said.

Her heritage roots her interest. “My grandfather was a judge in Ukraine and my grandmother was Ukrainian Orthodox during the Stalin era, when large numbers of Ukrainians were persecuted for being ‘intellectuals’ and on religious grounds,” she said.

In college, Bruce was involved in a mock asylum hearing. She lived in South Africa for seven months and studied human rights. While at the University of Wisconsin Law School, her programming focused on human rights and her law review article centered on women’s rights.

Kate tackles every project with incredible enthusiasm.

While with The Advocates on a fact-finding mission Mongolia in March, Bruce found one family’s story particularly heartbreaking. “A man told us about his sister, a victim of domestic violence, and what was required to protect her,” Bruce recalled. “After seven futile court proceedings, the family was compelled to send her to Belgium to keep her safe. She left behind her loved ones, including her three children.”

Bruce is a valued volunteer at The Advocates. “Kate, one of our longest-time volunteers in the Women’s Program, goes above and beyond her volunteer commitment,” said Rosalyn Park, The Advocates’ director of research. “Kate tackles every project with incredible enthusiasm. It is truly a pleasure to work with her.”

The Women’s Human Rights House Party
Thank you to hosts Jan Conlin and Gene Goetz

Lee Mitau and The Advocates’ board chair, Chris Bercaw
Paula Prahl and Catherine Shreves
The Advocates’ Women’s Program Director, Cheryl Thomas, and Judge Liz Cutter
The Advocates for Human Rights

invites you to the

2013
Human Rights
Awards Dinner

Thursday, June 6, 2013
Hilton Minneapolis
1001 Marquette Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403

2013 Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award Recipients
Minnesotans United for All Families and Our Vote Our Future

Also featuring remarks by
Ambassador Samuel L. Kaplan and Sylvia Kaplan

Silent Auction - 5:00 p.m.
Dinner and Program - 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

To register online, please visit TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org

Keynote speakers Ambassador Sam Kaplan and Sylvia Kaplan have spent the past four years representing the United States in the Kingdom of Morocco. Please join us to welcome them back and hear their views about human rights in Morocco and Northern Africa.

Special Recognition Award
Faegre Baker Daniels LLP
For outstanding innovation in providing pro bono services in the Africa Advocacy Project

Volunteer Awards
Katherine Bruce
Georgia O’Brien
David Woodward

Host Committee
Carol & Bill Beadie
Chris Bercaw & Mary McKelvey
Aviva Breen
Sonia & John Cairns
Carolyn Chalmers & Eric Janus
Jim Dorsey & Dee Gaeddert
Karen & Richard Evans
Barbara Frey & Howard Orenstein
Rachel & Tom Hamlin
Loan Huynh & Aydin Ozturk
Marlene & Tom Kayser
Kathy & Allen Lenzmeier
Sam & Char Myers
Jan & Rick Neville
Kathleen & Robert Seestadt
Nancy Speer
Jean Thomson & John Sandbo
Jane & Dobson West
Paving the Way to Protect Our Youth

Two important bills pending in the Minnesota legislature will help sex-trafficked children

At the time of this newsletter’s printing, anti-trafficking advocates await two important bills pending in the Minnesota legislature to remedy gaps in state law currently falling short of protecting children who are sexually exploited. The bills also ensure Minnesota’s compliance with human rights standards for protecting sex trafficking victims.

Senate File 1294 and House File 1187 expands Safe Harbor protection to all sexually exploited children under age 18. Two other bills, Senate File 384 and House File 485, take other critical steps. While expanding Safe Harbor to 16 and 17 year olds, they also establish and fund “No Wrong Door,” a measure that provides a victim-centered response to sex trafficked children.

While No Wrong Door has strong support, legislative spending targets in play could jeopardize the model’s full funding, potentially stranding trafficked children by leaving them without essential support services and housing options.

In 2011, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act (Safe Harbor 2011), laying the groundwork for a victim-centered response for sexually exploited children and those at risk of exploitation. Safe Harbor 2011 defined “prostituted children” as victims of sexual exploitation and ended reliance on delinquency proceedings as the sole response to meeting these crime victims’ needs. It called upon stakeholders to develop a framework to implement the changes to Minnesota’s delinquency definition.

While Safe Harbor 2011 reflects a sea change in how sexually exploited youth are treated in Minnesota, its provisions apply only to children under 16, leaving 16 and 17 year-old prostituted children subject to delinquency proceedings. Moreover, it did not provide the mechanisms or the funding to implement the changes to Minnesota’s delinquency code when the law becomes effective in 2014. Both the age and service gaps are the focus of the this year’s legislation.

The Advocates’ recently released report, “Safe Harbor: Fulfilling Minnesota’s Promise to Protect Sexually Exploited Youth,” analyzes the comprehensive victim-centered response. The report, produced with Women’s Foundation of Minnesota support, reflects more than three years of work by The Advocates on the Safe Harbor initiative.

The report makes the case that Minnesota fails to meet human rights standards in two key areas: Minnesota does not recognize all trafficked persons under age 18 as child victims, and Minnesota does not provide trafficked people with access to protection and services.

At the time of this newsletter’s printing, the bills are pending in the Minnesota legislature. If passed, they would ensure Minnesota’s compliance with human rights standards for protecting victims of sex trafficking.

Earn CLE Credits

Join us for the 2013 CLE lecture series, highlighting different areas of The Advocates’ work. Free and open to the public, sessions include:

**June 20, noon - 1:00 p.m.**
Detention and Asylum in the United States

**August 1, noon - 1:00 p.m.**
Policy Advocacy and Immigration Reform

**October 3, noon - 1:00 p.m.**
World Day Against the Death Penalty: The Caribbean

**November 1, noon- 1:00 p.m.**
Human Rights Advocacy at the United Nations

All lectures are held at:
Dorsey & Whitney, LLP
50 South Sixth Street, Suite 1500
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Application has been submitted for one CLE credit for each lecture. Topics are tentative.
To RSVP, contact Chanida at cpotter@advrights.org or 612-746-4692.
Human Rights Book Club


Clybourne Park, by Bruce Norris
Sat., July 6, 1 p.m. and Wed., July 10, 7:30 p.m.
Guthrie Theater, in the McGuire Proscenium Stage
818 S. Second St., Minneapolis, MN

In partnership with the Guthrie Theater, The Advocates will engage audience members in a post-play discussion after a performance of Clybourne Park, a 2010 play written in response to Lorraine Hansberry’s play, A Raisin in the Sun.

Clybourne Park is comprised of two acts set 50 years apart. Act One takes place in 1959, as nervous community leaders anxiously try to stop the sale of a home to a black family. Act Two is set in the same house in the present day, as the now predominately African-American neighborhood battles to hold its ground in the face of gentrification.

Les Miserables, by Victor Hugo
(Translated by Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee)
Thurs., October 10, noon - 1 p.m.
The Advocates’ Office
330 Second Ave. S., Suite 800, Minneapolis, MN

First published in 1862, Les Miserables is considered one of the greatest novels of the 19th century. Beginning in 1815 and culminating in the 1832 June Rebellion in Paris, the novel follows the lives and interactions of several characters, focusing on the struggles of ex-convict Jean Valjean and his experience of redemption. Themes of revolution, the clash between freedom and security, and changing social codes transcend time, finding meaning in contemporary conflicts around the world.

The Advocates for Human Rights House Party
Thank you to hosts Jean Thomson and John Sandbo

To RSVP or to find book lists and discussion guides, visit our website:

TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/book_club.html
Creating Change, Country to Country

Adjusting to different time zones and living out of suitcases have become common, yet welcomed, nuisances facing The Advocates’ Women’s Program staff and volunteers.

Since January, they traveled to 13 countries, working to improve, implement, and create policies and laws to address violence against women.

Cheryl Thomas, the program’s director, traveled to Ecuador in March to present at the 128th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly attended by 1,500 world leaders. Her presentation focused on the elements of a strong sexual assault law, offering strategies helpful when crafting laws.

“We are inspired that the increasing number of people paying attention to violence against women will result in giving this human rights abuse the priority it requires,” she said.

A second fact-finding mission in Mongolia found staff attorneys Rose Park and Helen Rubenstein traveling throughout nomadic countryside. Working with Mongolia’s National Center Against Violence, information was gathered and more than 100 interviews conducted to assess Mongolia’s implementation of its domestic violence legislation. The Advocates will write a report to inform legislation scheduled to be introduced in Mongolia’s parliament this fall.

“Mongolia faces unique challenges implementing domestic violence legislation, such as the isolation of rural women,” Rubenstein said.

Since January, The Advocates and its volunteers have been in 13 countries working to end violence against women.

In other work, The Advocates conducted trainings in Lithuania and Latvia, planned trainings in Serbia, worked with partners in Moldova and Croatia, and commented on draft laws in Latvia, the Maldives, Timor Leste, Uganda, and Kiribati. In March, Thomas and Rubenstein, along with The Advocates’ Robin Phillips and board members Carolyn Chalmers and Ellen Sampson, were at The United Nations participating in the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

“We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished during 20 years advancing women’s human rights, and we’re only just beginning,” said Thomas.

Volunteer Focus:
Karen Bridges Is a Force for Change

It’s a bit symbolic that Karen Bridges’ passion to abolish the death penalty took firmer hold when she moved in 2011 to Geneva, Switzerland, home of the Geneva Conventions, treaties addressing the treatment of war-time non-combatants and prisoners of war.

Before her move, Bridges, a Minnesota attorney, held strong views about the death penalty in the United States, but she did not fully realize its relationship to other human rights abuses, such as illegal detention, torture, inhumane prison conditions, and forced confessions. Nor did she appreciate the complexity of international death penalty advocacy.

A volunteer for The Advocates’ International Justice Program since becoming a Geneva transplant, Bridges helps draft stakeholder reports The Advocates submits to the United Nations Human Rights Council calling for the abolition of the death penalty in countries such as Japan, Cameroon, and Central African Republic. Prior to a country’s review before the Human Rights Council, she meets with Geneva-based human rights officers to highlight The Advocates’ death penalty recommendations.

“Given the large number of countries and human rights issues under review, the officers value the opportunity to discuss The Advocates’ death penalty reports in person,” she said.

A particularly rewarding part of her experience is collaborating with people from around the globe who are members of The Advocates’ partner, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. “They are wonderful professionals who provide critical insights on the use of the death penalty in their countries,” stated Bridges. “They highlight key issues and real-world stories of human rights abuses, particularly in Cameroon where information is not always easy to find.”

Her volunteer experience has taught her the depth of The Advocates’ international work and the remarkable professionals and volunteers dedicated to exposing human rights abuses around the world and, ultimately, ending them, according to Bridges.
Concert Kicks Off The Advocates’ Anniversary, Celebrating 30 Years of Changing the World

It’s fitting that on an evening in spring, a season of renewal and hope, people gathered to celebrate The Advocates’ 30th anniversary. It was a perfect evening to honor Minnesota’s remarkable culture of social justice and philanthropy that gave birth to The Advocates, as well as to thank the organization’s generous supporters.

Music and readings, woven together, spoke to the soul of hundreds of people attending the April 25 concert featuring the Cantus Vocal Ensemble and readings centered on human rights themes. The event, free and open to the public, was held at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis.

Cantus, a premier vocal ensemble, is comprised of nine singers who make their home in the Twin Cities and travel the world to share their unique sound. Creating a direct, human connection between the singers and audience, Cantus stands in an arc and looks to the audience to complete the circle of the performance experience.


The Advocates is grateful for the hospitality of Plymouth Congregational Church, its Global Concerns Committee, and Senior Minister Jim Gertmenian.

The Advocates will continue to celebrate its 30th anniversary at a variety of events, including its Human Rights Award Dinner, a summer BBQ uniting current and former board members and staff, a Human Rights Day Happy Hour, and an open house on Human Rights Day.

Snapshots from the Cantus Concert

Mark Your Calendars for These Anniversary Events

Sat., June 6, Dinner & Program: 6:30 p.m. (details on page 8)
The Advocates’ Human Rights Award Dinner

Sun., July 28, 3-7 p.m.
BBQ for current and former board members and staff
Home of Chris Bercaw and Mary McKelvey
2601 W. 52nd St., Minneapolis

Thurs., Dec. 10, Human Rights Day Open House, 5-7 p.m.
The Advocates Office
Snapshots from the Cantus Concert

Judge M. Jacqueline Regis and The Advocates’ executive director Robin Phillips

Member of Cantus Vocal Ensemble

Attorney Loan Huynh, a volunteer with The Advocates

Members of Cantus Vocal Ensemble

The Advocates’ board member and former client Eddie Bahadir-Williamson

Post-concert reception

Join The Advocates as a Sustainer

Sustainers, donors who support The Advocates’ work through secure, automatic monthly payments, strengthen our ability to promote and protect human rights.

While giving The Advocates a predictable revenue source, Sustainers appreciate the ease and flexibility of monthly giving. Donation amounts can be adjusted or cancelled at any time.

Check out becoming a Sustainer, planned giving, and other ways to give:

TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/Monthly_Giving,
or contact Ellen Van Iwaarden at evaniwaarden@advrights.org or 612-746-4677.
Welcome New Staff

Americorp VISTA attorney Robert Painter joined The Advocates’ Refugee & Immigrant Program in December. Painter worked on issues of economic, social, and cultural rights with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. He received his J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School and graduated from Macalester College with a degree in political science and international studies.

Milena Gebremeskel joined The Advocates in January as a program associate with the International Justice and the Research, Education, and Advocacy Programs. Gebremeskel holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Minnesota. Her professional experience includes working on issues relating to human trafficking, early childhood education, support and education for recent immigrant and refugee families, and advocacy for the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Susan Banovetz joined The Advocates in February as communications director. Banovetz led media and public relations for the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, the Saint Paul Area American Red Cross, and the University of Minnesota Duluth. She held public office for 27 years, including serving 15 years as mayor of the City of Vadnais Heights until she resigned in 2011. Minnesota Women in City Government honored her with its Outstanding Leadership Award in 2011 for her leadership in responding to domestic violence.

Thank You to Our Interns

Hamline University
Heidi Fahning

Iowa State University
Katie Diederichs

Macalester College
Oana Alexan
Anna-Kay Brown
Omar El Zoheiry
Cameron Kesinger
Isabella Kulkarni
Allan Martinez Venegas
Nolberto Zubia Ill

St. Olaf College
Luke Rile

University of Minnesota
Grimachew Aneme (Humphrey School Law Fellow)
Eleanor Frisch (Law School)
Fatima Jawaid (Humphrey School)
Kailey Mrosak
Julia Norsetter (Law School)
Sarah Super (graduate student)
Ariel Tazkargy (Law School)
Jonathon Walker
Lara Westerhof

University of Vilnius-Lithuania
Aurelija Olendraite

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National Network Launched, Works to Connect People

Established a few short months ago, Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA), a national network of human rights educators, has already garnered more than 300 members.

The network’s primary purpose is to connect people. Members can interact with other human rights educators around the country and engage with working groups on a variety of topics, such as policy, advocacy, higher education, K-12 curriculum, and early childhood education.

HRE USA builds a culture of respect for human rights though education. The network’s website offers information and resources for educators, activists, and scholars.

To learn more, visit: hreusa.net, or contact The Advocates’ Sarah Herder at sherder@advrights.org or 612-746-4691.
Featured Donor:
Shepherd Data Services

Shepherd Data Services and its staff have a history of giving to The Advocates. Staff members made individual contributions and the company became a donor when it contributed to the 2012 Human Rights Awards Dinner.

Now, they have taken on the job of scanning The Advocates’ hard copy files, creating a searchable database of information, especially critical in asylum cases.

“The contribution has been invaluable, making country files and our archives easy to access, more secure,” said Jennifer Prestholdt, The Advocates’ deputy director.

The work impacts Shepherd Data Services, too. “My colleagues say this widens their world,” noted Shepherd’s Bridget Sullivan. “They’re happy to learn that there are many committed people trying to stop abuse even in the most remote places.”

Minneapolis-based Shepherd Data Services offers technology solutions that reduce cost and time spent on document review.

Attorneys from 11 Faegre Baker Daniels LLP offices contributed 6,800 pro bono hours to the project.

“Thank You, Volunteers”

Volunteers are architects of change

We greatly appreciate the work of volunteers who took on new cases, consulted with new volunteer attorneys, and provided translation and interpretation services.

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Ruling Clears Way for New Social Studies Standards

Minnesota schools are a giant step closer to integrating new social studies academic standards into curriculum now that Administrative Law Judge Barbara Neilson dismissed challenges to the new standards. She ruled in March that the 2011 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, as had been proposed, can be adopted for the 2013-14 school year.

Governor Mark Dayton and Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius approved the standards following the ruling.

The standards reflect a shift in learning outcomes toward higher-order thinking and competencies that can be applied throughout students’ lifetimes, helping to ensure that individuals can make informed choices, advocate on behalf of themselves and others, and effectively participate in local and global communities.

During the drafting and editing process, The Advocates called for the addition to the standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the UDHR was subsequently included.
Reserve Your Seats Now

The Advocates for Human Rights

2013 Human Rights Awards Dinner

Thursday, June 6

See page 8 for details.
To register online, visit TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org