It has been 25 years since the United Nations officially recognized that women’s rights are human rights, a principle that is integral to our work at The Advocates for Human Rights. It is essential to analyze human rights violations through a gendered lens to fully understand the problems and propose appropriate solutions. We see in our daily work the connection between local and global human rights issues and the need to address them on both levels.

Our work has stretched from Minnesota—where we conducted a needs assessment on sex trafficking and were instrumental in getting stiffer penalties for people convicted of sex-trafficking crimes—to Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where we are helping countries improve their legal standards for protecting women from violence.

We are thrilled to welcome a strong advocate for women’s human rights as the keynote speaker at our annual Human Rights Awards Dinner on June 21—Jane Connors. Ms. Connors was appointed last year as the United Nations’ first Victims’ Rights Advocate. In creating this position, Secretary-General António Guterres pledged that the United Nations would give priority to the rights and dignity of victims as it works to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. Ms. Connors is uniquely qualified for this role, with a long history of protecting women’s human rights as an academic, Amnesty International advocate, and United Nations professional. At the dinner, we will present her with the 2018 Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award.

This issue of the Observer highlights the important research, education, and advocacy work of our Women’s Human Rights Program. We help draft laws that promote the safety of women, provide commentary on new and proposed domestic violence laws, and conduct trainings of police, prosecutors, lawyers, and judges to most effectively implement such laws. In December, we issued a report on the implementation of Serbia’s domestic violence laws, following a similar report in July on Montenegro. Both reports were prepared with in-country partners. The reports highlighted gaps in the system for protecting women, including the lack of emergency protection orders and court backlogs in Serbia and poor police practices and judicial misperceptions about domestic violence in Montenegro.

We also recently submitted reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council advocating for improvements in domestic violence laws in Azerbaijan, Colombia, and Russia and included these countries in our advocacy efforts at the United Nations in March. At the same time, we work to ensure that the United Nations complies with its own standards for gender equality. As it encourages countries to comply with the Sustainable Development Goal objective on empowering women, its own policies and practices must do the same. Represented by our Women’s Human Rights Program Director, Rosalyn Park, The Advocates is a core member of the United Nations Gender Network, which brings together academic, civil society, United Nations, and government representatives to examine whether United Nations bodies are doing enough to promote gender equality within and how to strengthen such efforts.

We continue to monitor human rights conditions for women throughout the world as we engage in our day-to-day work in Minneapolis representing asylum seekers, many of whom are women escaping conflict, sexual assault, or domestic violence. We also advocate at the United Nations for the improvement of laws and policies that force women to flee their homes.

Thank you for all that you do to help us ensure that women’s rights are recognized as human rights. We celebrate the successes you made possible, and we are inspired by your support to take on future challenges.

Robin Phillips
Executive Director
Advocating for the victims of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by those under the flag of the United Nations is Jane Connors' mission. As the UN Victims' Rights Advocate on sexual exploitation and abuse, Connors gives victims a voice. “Perpetrators can be UN peacekeepers; they can be non-UN troops under a Security Council mandate keeping or building the peace; and they can be UN staff members,” she said.

As the UN’s first Victims’ Rights Advocate, appointed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in August 2017, Connors supports an integrated, strategic response to victim assistance in coordination with UN system actors with responsibility for assisting victims. She works with government institutions, civil society, and national and legal and human rights organizations to build networks of support and to help ensure that the full effect of local laws, including remedies for victims, are brought to bear. "It is important to ensure that the process the victim goes through takes into account at the highest level the rights and entitlement for the victims," said Connors.

Connors will be awarded the Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award at the Human Rights Awards Dinner on Thursday, June 21. She will be the event’s keynote speaker.

Connors, of Australia, brings to her current position a long and multi-faceted career in human rights advocacy as well as human rights and humanitarian assistance in the academic, United Nations and civil society spheres. From 1996 to 2015, she held various positions at the UN, including at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Before joining the UN, she held academic posts in the United Kingdom and Australia, including 14 years at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Also at the June 21 event, The Advocates will present its 2018 Volunteer Awards to Lisa Borden, Karen Bridges, Karen Evans, and Gail Irish.

Held annually by The Advocates for Human Rights, the dinner is the organization’s major fundraising event enabling The Advocates’ worldwide life-changing work.
As part of that work, The Advocates brought in extensive pro bono resources from the law firms of Dechert, Fredrikson & Byron; Stinson Leonard; and Faegre Baker Daniels to map out gender equality policies within the United Nations. It has held a series of workshops to discuss policies and to develop recommendations for the United Nations. The Advocates is a core member of the Network.

The Network’s work places the women who work at the United Nations at its core. “The policy recommendations look at the history of women working at the United Nations, past attempts to strengthen their roles and looking to the future suggests changes at both the policy and practice levels to ensure that women working at the UN will be better served,” according to an abstract on the United Nations Policy Proposal on Gender Equality and Parity, written by Rosa Freedman and Aoife O’Donoghue. “This policy proposal aims to cause a significant shift in not just the numbers of women working at all levels at the UN but also their experiences within the workplace. The policy’s goal is to make the UN a better place for all staff to work, and in doing so, ensuring they can lead states in making their own workplaces into spaces where gender equality is without question a good.”

This is where the United Nations Gender Network comes into the picture. The network is reviewing gender equality policies within the United Nations. It has held a series of workshops to discuss policies and to develop recommendations for the United Nations. The Advocates is a core member of the Network.

As we reflect on The Advocates for Human Rights’ recent work to make the world a better, safer place for women, the word that immediately comes to mind is “strength.” In the last year, we strengthened the capacity of women’s rights defenders, made life-saving recommendations for reforms, and strategized how the United Nations can increase its effectiveness in achieving gender equality.

We continued to identify gaps in governments’ responses to violence against women so we can recommend to them ways in which they can make women’s lives safer. Last year, we released reports on domestic violence in Montenegro and Serbia, where they become tools for sweeping change. As a result of our reports, laws can truly help victims by criminalizing domestic violence, strengthening victims’ protections, and funding shelters.

We also began building a multi-country cadre of women’s human rights defenders to use international mechanisms. By teaching 16 Russian-speaking attorneys strategies and tactics to leverage these remedies, we build their capacity to safeguard women’s rights against sexual harassment, trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault. This work is powerful and life-saving for the women in many countries who otherwise would have few realistic options for safety. One attorney from Georgia told us, “With your help, I have started to believe that we can change our situation to the best.”

We have continued our advocacy before the United Nations. Not only are we holding countries to the highest standards of women’s rights, but we have expanded our lens to focus on the United Nations itself. If the United Nations is going to lead on women’s human rights, it must lead by example. In the face of ongoing investigations of sexual harassment by United Nations figures, such scrutiny is long overdue. Some bodies within the United Nations lack policies to address sexual exploitation and harassment. In addition, there is no single, consistent policy on gender equality throughout the United Nations.

We have continued our advocacy before the United Nations. Not only are we holding countries to the highest standards of women’s rights, but we have expanded our lens to focus on the United Nations itself. If the United Nations is going to lead on women’s human rights, it must lead by example. In the face of ongoing investigations of sexual harassment by United Nations figures, such scrutiny is long overdue. Some bodies within the United Nations lack policies to address sexual exploitation and harassment. In addition, there is no single, consistent policy on gender equality throughout the United Nations.

We have continued our advocacy before the United Nations. Not only are we holding countries to the highest standards of women’s rights, but we have expanded our lens to focus on the United Nations itself. If the United Nations is going to lead on women’s human rights, it must lead by example. In the face of ongoing investigations of sexual harassment by United Nations figures, such scrutiny is long overdue. Some bodies within the United Nations lack policies to address sexual exploitation and harassment. In addition, there is no single, consistent policy on gender equality throughout the United Nations.

The United Nations must lead by example.

As part of that work, The Advocates brought in extensive pro bono resources from the law firms of Dechert, Fredrikson & Byron; Stinson Leonard; and Faegre Baker Daniels to map out gender equality policies across all United Nations bodies. The Advocates organized and facilitated more than 20 interns and summer associates to take on the monumental task of examining the United Nations’ extensive human rights policies. Ultimately, this work allowed the Network to gain a better picture of United Nations’ policies.

Jane Connors, the keynote speaker for The Advocates June 21 Human Rights Awards Dinner, has been an active member of the Network. She is now the United Nation’s first Victims’ Rights Advocate.

By: Rosalyn Park, Director of The Advocates for Human Rights’ Women’s Human Rights Program.
True Gifts to Women

A young woman who came to The Advocates for Human Rights to seek asylum was surprised when she was given a bag filled with useful items to help meet her basic needs. It was a true gift. She said she was excited to use the black purse as a diaper bag for her twin babies.

Another client was speechless and very thankful. She said she has not received anything like this in her life.

Each year, The Advocates for Human Rights assists approximately 75 women fleeing persecution, harm and death, to seek asylum in the United States. Many arrive with just the clothes on their backs. Many do not speak English. Many are alone or have little support from family or friends. Relatively few are able to find temporary housing in shelters managed by faith-based or non-profit organizations.

The Advocates is the current beneficiary of the Zonta Club of Minneapolis. Zonta members have provided financial support and partnered on a number of volunteer initiatives, including the welcome bags.

The Zonta Club of Minneapolis has made these women its priority. Zonta seeks to empower women worldwide through service and advocacy. Members help to meet the immediate needs of The Advocates’ female clients. The Zonta Club of Minneapolis created welcome bags to help meet female client’s basic necessities, including:

- A large, reusable bag
- Hygiene and personal care products
- Phone cards
- Metro Transit passes
- Basic household items, such as a blanket, pillow and towel
- Winter clothing/accessories
- Resources, such as bus schedules, lists of potential resources/services (job placement, English tutoring, etc.), and a list of free activities around the Twin Cities.

“Every time we give one of our clients a bag, we are reminded how little they have and how much many of us take for granted,” said Sarah Brenes, director of The Advocates’ Refugee & Immigrant Program.

International Women’s Day

Again this year The Advocates for Human Rights co-hosted International Women’s Day in the Twin Cities. This year’s theme explored the importance of media, technology, and gender equality in women’s lives.

“We are seeing more and more that women are subjected to online violence, either from known perpetrators or anonymous harassers,” said Theresa Dykoschak, staff attorney at The Advocates. “But women have also harnessed the power of online collaboration to respond and support each other.”

As part of International Women’s Day each March, communities throughout the world celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. It calls on everyone to improve gender equality and women’s rights.

The Justice Office of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet & Consociates, Hamline University’s Women’s Resource Center, and the Hamline University Wesley Center for Spirituality, Service and Social Justice, joined The Advocates in hosting the event, which was free and open to the public.

Featured were keynote speaker Nekessa Julia Opoti and performance artist Andrea Jenkins, as well as workshops addressing a variety of topics, including “Muslim Sheroes of Minnesota,” the “Impact of Storytelling to Trafficking in Native Communities,” and “Empowering Women through Technology to Combat Hunger.” Theresa Dykoschak presented one of the workshops, “Online Violence Against Women.”

Photo of The Advocates’ Theresa Dykoschak and Zonta’s Sue Keirstead displaying the welcome bags. Photo provided by The Advocates for Human Rights.
I worked with a “Dream Team” at the United Nations in Geneva in March. There is no other way to describe The Advocates for Human Rights’ team of volunteers and staff. Some have been involved in pro bono United States and international high-profile human rights work for their entire careers. Many have invested long hours preparing reports to address specific countries’ human rights issues and violations. They are partners with attorney volunteers who have tremendous workloads in law firms. I feel very blessed to have been able to listen to and learn from them.

The Universal Periodic Review (or UPR, in United Nations’ speak) is a unique process involving a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 member states of the United Nations. It is akin to a human rights audit that takes place in the UN Human Rights Council and is carried out by all of the other member states. This peer review is a central pillar to the United Nations’ mission to promote and protect human rights.

Let’s do a quick overview of the United Nations to help put this mission in perspective. Perhaps the best known operations of the United Nations are the General Assembly (policy making) and the Security Council (international peace and security) in New York City. The Human Rights Council, created by the General Assembly in 2006, is the United Nations’ body responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe, addressing situations of human rights violations, and recommending measures to address the violations. The Human Rights Council convenes at the United Nations’ Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

As representatives of The Advocates, our mission was to participate in the UPRs of Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Colombia, Cuba, and Russia. Think of us as lobbyists for a better, safer world. To make the best use of our team’s resources, our leaders determined where we had the most depth and expertise to maximize our impact. The game plan ultimately focused on:

- Violence against women in Azerbaijan, Colombia, and Russia;
- LGBTI rights in Cameroon and Russia;
- Death penalty abolition in Cameroon and Cuba; and
- Restrictions on human rights defenders in Russia.

Human rights defender partners from Azerbaijan and Cameroon were there to advocate side-by-side with us.

The prep team had done meticulous research on all 193 United Nations’ member countries to examine their past statements on the human rights records of countries “under audit.” For example, Cambodia had gone on record in 2012 saying that Azerbaijan should “carry out a public awareness campaign ... on women’s rights” and that Cameroon should “effectively protect its most vulnerable (LGBTI) citizens.” One of my responsibilities was to find the delegate from Cambodia to encourage a meeting with us. I quickly realized that The Advocates’ “one pagers” on each country were highly coveted by diplomatic staff who needed to develop justifications of the positions they were going to take in the audit. Picture me walking through the aisles of delegates in the general session to Cambodia’s seat, tapping the delegate on the shoulder and whispering my argument for a meeting with our team to learn more.

I attended delegate meetings in the Serpentine Lounge (two flights below the Human Rights Council room) at which we described human rights issues and put forth our recommendations. I was inspired watching diplomats in action; they were gracious, polite, attentive, and prepared. They acknowledged all attendees, remembered names, took notes, and asked informed questions. It put a face on what diplomacy looks like.

The governments of Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Colombia, Cuba, and Russia went before their peers in the Human Rights Council for their UPRs in late May. United Nations seized Member States had the opportunity to make recommendations to each of them about how to improve their human rights records. Many Member States took up our issues, and now it is up to those governments to decide how to respond. I am looking forward to seeing the results of our UPR lobbying and the impact it will have in those countries.

By Judy Corradi, a volunteer with The Advocates for Human Rights.
A couple people have asked what I was doing in Switzerland in March and I thought I’d try to understand it myself, and then try to describe it. I am not finished yet, with the understanding part, but here it goes. I have been working with The Advocates for Human Rights. It’s the same group I worked with in Liberia, and in Minnesota when the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission held hearings in Saint Paul, Minnesota in 2008 to get input from the Liberian diaspora. This was a first—one of the other TRCs had included diasporas in this way.

For the first days for my trip this March with The Advocates UN Study Advocacy Tour at the United Nations, I worked primarily with the Human Rights Committee, an expert group that monitors the international XC Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Approximately every five years, a country (referred to as “State” at the United Nations) submits a report on its compliance with such treaties. This is followed by a “list of issues” developed by one of the treaty monitoring bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee. In response to this list of issues, non-governmental organizations such as The Advocates have opportunities to comment on the particular State’s compliance.

The Advocates produced lengthy reports on Liberia’s failure to comply with its obligations for due process of law, right to a speedy trial, and safeguarding its citizens from torture, among other things. Using these reports, I was allowed to make a three-minute statement to the Human Rights Committee this March summarizing a report on the appalling conditions in Liberian prisons and the lengthy detention of prisoners, who in some cases are detained, without seeing a judge, longer than they could have been imprisoned if convicted of the alleged crime. A volunteer colleague also made a statement about female genital mutilation and other gender-based violence against women in Liberia.

After our oral presentations in formal meetings of the Human Rights Committee, we met with Human Rights Committee members in a closed door “informal session” to answer questions about our reports. The next step in the process involved the Human Rights Committee’s interactive dialogue with the State and its request of Liberia to respond to questions and recommendations. However, Liberia failed to appear for this part of the process and asked for a continuance. (Liberia will appear before the Committee in July.)

The Advocates for Human Rights has had great success in shaping the debate among the various States and treaty monitoring bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee. In addition to the work with the Human Rights Committee in Palais Wilson, we worked in and around the Palais des Nations home to the United Nations Human Rights Council, which was preparing for the Universal Periodic Reviews of certain countries, including, at the time of our visit, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Colombia, Cuba, and Russia. The Advocates and its volunteers produce lengthy, thoroughly researched memos as well as succinct summaries which they deliver to all delegates and hand-deliver to the Council. During the Univeral Periodic Review, we listen carefully as these States make their comments and recommendations to see if they are “reading directly from our memos” or arguably quoting them. We look meaningfully at each other and sometimes do a subtle thumbs up when that happens.

The Advocates’ memos are finely crafted to compel States to take positions on issues or to point out whether they have followed—or not followed—their past promises or the recommendations of others. The Advocates has Special Consultative Status, which is given to select non-governmental organizations allowing them to give significant input on the debates. Occasionally, as part of the agenda in the Human Rights Council proceedings, we are allowed to make brief statements (your microphone is cut once you meet the two-minute mark) which are carried on live UN-TV. They are also posted on the United Nations’ website.

I’m looking forward to watching the videos of our team in action.

By Mark Kalla, an attorney in Minneapolis and long-time volunteer with The Advocates for Human Rights. Kalla has traveled and worked twice with The Advocates to the United Nations in Geneva. Photo credit: BD Portraits Studio - BDPortraits.com
Thanks to The Advocates for Human Rights, I had the amazing opportunity to take my interest in human rights—particularly my work on gender violence—to the United Nations in Geneva in March. Along with 11 others, including representatives from non-government organizations in Cameroon and Azerbaijan, I participated in The Advocates’ annual UN Study Advocacy Tour spending five days in Geneva at the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council lobbying Council members on gender violence, LGBTI, and death penalty issues. Even though I am just 17, The Advocates ensured that I was not just a passive observer to their work.

I participated on a panel on violence against women with experts to address these issues in Azerbaijan, Columbia, and Russia. I focused on gender violence at the high school level, an often overlooked issue. I spoke about the need to change the dynamic and educate children at a young age about the meaning of “consent.” My hope is that early education may dissipate the prevalence of gender violence in the community at large.

I took the floor of the United Nations and made an oral statement to the Human Rights Council about the implementation of the Vienna Declaration, which emphasizes the importance of eliminating “gender bias in the administration of justice.” I spoke about the importance of criminal laws to combat violence against women and the need for United Nations Member States to adopt laws in line with international standards to protect victim safety and promote offender accountability. The gentleman sitting next to me was a bit surprised to see someone so young sitting in the NGO speaker seat next to him. I was thankful that I can speak quickly because each NGO had a mere 90 seconds to speak. (They actually cut you off if you go over your time!)

Alongside The Advocates’ staff and volunteers, I met representatives of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. We learned about their priorities and the amazing work they are doing. The Special Rapporteurs’ representatives were truly interested in the work of The Advocates and solicited examples of best practices as well as assistance with their ongoing work.

I encouraged Council delegates to comment during the Universal Periodic Review process. During the UPR process, any government can raise questions and make recommendations about other governments’ human rights compliance. Before the trip, The Advocates did extensive research regarding the human rights record of countries up for their UPR and prepared recommendations on ways those countries could improve women’s rights and LGBTI rights, and end the death penalty. I encouraged delegates to meet with us to discuss The Advocates’ recommendations. At first I was afraid to approach some of the delegates (you literally go into the Human Rights Council chamber and tap people on the shoulder), but then I was excited to see how receptive they were to speak with me. This is important work because in the past delegates have adopted The Advocates’ recommendations and recommendations were accepted by countries under review.

While watching Human Rights Council debates, I heard a representative from Hungary declare that migration was not a fundamental human right and a delegate from Cuba call out United States’ hypocrisy on issues of civil and human rights. I watched international players holding countries accountable.

By The Advocates for Human Rights’ youth blogger, Jenna Schulman. Schulman is a high school student in Washington, D.C.
Mary Kariuki Ries, a board member of The Advocates for Human Rights, has lived in the Twin Cities for 22 years. She has worked in the financial industry for almost two decades and is currently working for a large financial institution as a vice president in their Wealth Management Group. Outside of work, she is involved with her church and enjoys spending time with her family, gardening, and traveling. She has been married to her husband Darin for 14 years, and they have an 11-year-old daughter.

How did you first connect with The Advocates for Human Rights?
I connected with The Advocates for Human Rights as a client. I was treated with dignity by everyone I met at this organization. Most clients contact The Advocates confused, traumatized and desperate. When they encounter kindness and respect at the time of need, it restores their faith in humanity. The Advocates gives hope to the hopeless.

What do you value about The Advocates?
I love that they open their doors to clients with no strings attached. Whether or not a case is represented by one of their pro bono attorneys, clients feel valued and regarded. When immigrants come to this country, they have to deal with the culture shock and the challenges of moving to a new country. Those who contact The Advocates has undergone traumatizing experiences which leave them broken and afraid. The pro bono attorneys that represent them are not only counselors/therapist but also confidants and friends. These attorneys are the backbone of this organization.

How has The Advocates changed your life or the life of someone you know?
I could shout from the rooftop and say that this organization transformed my life. I’m forever grateful for all that they did for me. In the 22 years that I have lived in this great country, I have accomplished things that I never thought possible, and the genesis of my success began when I set foot in this organization.

What contributions do you want to make to the Board and the organization?
I would like to bring insight from the perspective of the client. I’m privileged to serve with so many talented people on the Board.

Where would you like to see The Advocates in five years?
I would like to see more former clients on the board. I believe that there are likely more former clients that would like to give back to this organization but do not know where or how their talents and contributions could be used at The Advocates.

“Focus on Board Member Mary Kariuki Ries”
“The Advocates gives hope to the hopeless.”

Mary Kariuki Ries

“I could shout from the rooftop, “This organization transformed my life!””

Mary Kariuki Ries
The first week of March was eerily calm for me.

As the person at The Advocates for Human Rights in charge of our client intake, one of my primary responsibilities is monitoring our client line, a phone line open from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday through Friday where we get calls from people seeking help.

Normally we get somewhere between 20-30 calls on a given work day, which might be a five-minute referral or a 40+ minute intake interview – certainly enough to keep our crew of undergraduate interns busy. And yet, the first week of March, the calls seemed inexplicably less frequent and less pressing.

The twist? We received a letter from an immigrant being held in detention in the Sherburne County Jail informing us that the phone system at jail had not been working properly for several days. Dozens of people detained by immigration had been unable to reach us. Once we contacted the jail and got the problem resolved, our call volume immediately jumped back up again—and kept rising.

Over the past year, The Advocates’ client line has been getting an increasing number of calls of all types, but especially from detainees. In July 2017, we received 41 calls from detainees. In March 2018, that number skyrocketed to 274. The months in-between show a near-linear upward progression.

The increase in calls is no surprise when you consider current trends in ICE detention. The Trump Administration has made concerted efforts to expand its arrest and detention capacity. The bottom line? More people are getting detained and those who are detained are staying in detention longer. It is to the point where facilities are rapidly running out of beds. As NPR reported last fall, “ICE reports the average daily population in its detention facilities was a little more than 38,000 for the 2017 fiscal year. The president’s 2018 budget plan requests an increase of $1.2 billion in funding for detention beds, to support an average population of over 48,000 adults.”

The demographic of detainees is also changing. According to ICE data recently obtained by the National Immigrant Justice Center, more than half of the daily population in the first month of FY 2018 was marked as “non-criminal,” seen as posing “no threat,” while a mere 15 percent was classified as high threats, with violent criminal histories. Further, a recent report from the American Immigration Lawyers Association finds that from FY 2016-2017, arrests of immigrants with criminal convictions had increased a notable 12 percent while arrests of people with no criminal convictions increased a whopping 146 percent.

At The Advocates, these statistical trends are translated into conversations with individuals. People in ICE detention call for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they will ask for research on country conditions that is needed to apply for asylum, or pro se (legalese for “DIY”) information for a particular application. Still others need contact information for miscellaneous institutions as they try to collect documentation from detention to support their cases.

Then there are the times when you can tell they just want to talk to someone about what they are going through. One inmate asked for help to request a new copy of his documents: he had lent a copy of a motion he filed to a fellow inmate to use as a model. That friend had been woken and deported at 3:00 a.m., taking the man’s papers with him. Some report medical issues, threats from fellow inmates, and being sent to solitary after raising a complaint.

There’s a feeling of desolation that even people with viable claims for legal relief consider giving up. One detainee, who had been denied ibuprofen for recurring headaches, commented, “I won’t even resist deportation if I’m ordered – I just want to be able to live a decent life, you know?” In another conversation, a man commented, “I feel like I’m losing my mind. I think I will go mad here.”

Of course, the most frequent request from detainees on the client line is legal representation. Detention’s most devastating consequence is that it limits vulnerable immigrants’ already limited access to legal counsel. This makes the work of The Advocates, especially through The Minnesota Detention Project, more valuable everyday.

Not an attorney? Not a problem. Here are three concrete ways you too can make an impact:

1) Help us monitor immigration proceedings through The Court Observer Project.

2) Sign up as an interpreter to facilitate attorney meetings with detained immigrants.

3) Donate to The Advocates so that when calls pour in on our client line, we not only answer, but respond.

By Rosie La Puma (pictured), Jesuit Volunteer Corps Program Assistant in the Refugee & Immigrant Program at The Advocates for Human Rights. Photo provided by The Advocates.
When 92 men and women on board a December 7 deportation flight bound for Mogadishu endured a 48-hour ordeal that ended back in immigration detention in Miami, pro bono attorneys from around the country stepped up to help.

On December 7, 2017, federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) attempted to deport 92 people to Somalia. The plane left Louisiana for Somalia but was grounded in Dakar, Senegal, for 23 hours. The people on board the plane remained in 5-point metal shackles for nearly 48 hours, unable to move, denied access to medication, and forced to urinate and defecate on themselves when the toilets stopped working.

When the plane landed in Miami, ICE transported the men and women to detention centers and began making plans for another flight. Meanwhile, family members began hearing from their loved ones now back in the U.S. and reached out for help.

"These cases show the tragic impact of the detention and deportation machinery."

Michele Garnett McKenzie

A number of Minnesota attorneys, including Kimberly Hunter and John Bruning, Malee Ketelsen-Renner, Marc Prokosch, and Rachel Peterson, represented people on board the flight and were in the midst of seeking stays of deportation when the plane took off. When their clients started calling from the Miami detention centers, they set the wheels in motion for what has been an enormous collaborative effort.

Among those representing clients on board the flight were Linus Chan and Mirella Ceja-Orozco of the James H. Binger Center for New Americans of the University of Minnesota Law School. Binger Center director Ben Casper Sanchez, in turn, contacted colleagues at the University of Miami School of Law who, with the help of Miami-based immigration legal service providers Americans for Immigrant Justice and Legal Services of Broward County, met with the detainees. Within 10 days, the U.S. District Court in Miami granted an emergency motion to stop the deportation, which was scheduled for the following day. By late January, following oral argument, a stay of removal was in place along with an opportunity to reopen the underlying deportation cases.

The Need for Pro Bono

The judge’s order meant that the 92 men and women with deportation orders now had the opportunity to file a motion to reopen their individual cases. Together with Miami-based Americans for Immigrant Justice, The Advocates for Human Rights issued a call to action for pro bono attorneys to help on the ground in Miami and to prepare and file motions to reopen for the dozens of people on board the flight.

The need for representation could not be greater. “These cases show the tragic impact of the detention and deportation machinery,” says Michele Garnett McKenzie, deputy director of The Advocates for Human Rights. “Virtually everyone on board the December flight had been ordered deported while in ICE detention, without access to counsel or essential evidence. They faced indefinite detention if they tried to seek asylum or defend themselves against deportation, leading many to sign away their right to a hearing and agree to be deported.”

Attorneys from around the United States answered the call to help. Minnesota-based volunteers Paula Duthoy and Cathy Gnatek traveled to Florida, spending weeks interviewing men detained at the Glades County Detention Center. Fredrikson & Byron attorney Michael Ginzburg stepped away from his family vacation in Florida to meet with the four clients his firm agreed to represent. In all, more than 150 attorneys and law students from Akerman; Briggs and Morgan; Carlton Fields; DLA Piper; Duane Morris; Fragomen Worldwide; Fredrikson & Byron; Kilpatrick Townsend; Kirkland & Ellis; Reed Smith; Stinson Leonard Street; Strook; Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network; the University of Pennsylvania’s Transnational Legal Clinic; St. Thomas University; and Miami-based solo and nonprofit attorneys stepped up to help alongside attorneys at the University of Miami, Americans for Immigrant Justice, and The Advocates.

Other nonprofit partners also came forward. Innovation Law Lab provided access to the case management system developed to respond to the family detention crisis. The Immigration Justice Campaign, an initiative of the American Immigration Council and American Immigration Lawyers Association, provided access to their new case support portal.

By Michele Garnett McKenzie, Director of The Advocates for Human Rights’ Research & Advocacy Program.
December 1, 2017 was a red letter day for students, families, teachers, and The Advocates for Human Rights when the new Sankhu-Palubari school building in Nepal’s Kathmandu Valley opened its doors. In addition to well-designed classrooms, welcoming them were science and computer labs, playground, sports field, lunch room, and staff meeting room.


The Advocates has supported the school’s programming since the school’s inception in 1999. “Providing education as an alternative to child labor has always been our focus. The earthquakes were the impetus for the new building, and the generosity of Kathy and Allen Lenzmeier made the dream come true.”

“Al and I feel strongly about the importance of education for all children so when the opportunity arose to fund a very necessary school building for this community, we knew it was our mission,” said Kathy Lenzmeier. “I have been visiting Nepal since 2003, and with a close friend, I have been helping families in the Himalayan region with educating their children. When I became involved with The Advocates I was very interested in the Nepal school, and after visiting twice, I was overwhelmed by the school’s success.”

The Sankhu-Palubari Community School has demonstrated success throughout its history. “Students have consistently achieved outstanding results in national standardized testing, which is a big deal in Nepal,” said Prestholdt.

Last year, the school provided 353 students in grades pre-K through 10 with a brighter future and maintained gender parity in the school’s student population, with girls comprising 52 percent of students. It provided extracurricular activities to enhance learning and well-rounded development. Activities included student government, essay, poetry, debate, drawing, handwriting, speech and sports competitions.

The new building will create numerous opportunities for The Advocates to focus on the sustainability of programs and exciting new ways to explore possibilities for expanding programming to include STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and empowerment programs for girls. The school will continue to give children a brighter future and a genuine alternative to child labor.

“Former students continue to succeed in higher education and give back to the school,” said Prestholdt. “For example, two students enrolled in a civil engineering program at university placed first and second in their class of 56. Another former student now studying electrical engineering brought a robot to exhibit for Sankhu-Palubari students.”

The building project is a testament to the partnership between The Advocates and the Sankhu-Palubari Community. “An architect in Nepal volunteered to design the building and community members contributed labor to construct the school. Kanchi, the first girl from the school to graduate from 12th grade and now studying agronomy at a Nepal university, created the school’s landscape design and will return to her home community to do the planting,” said Prestholdt.

Photo this page: Allen & Kathy Lenzmeier talk with a student at the Sankhu-Palubari Community School in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Photo credit: Jennifer Prestholdt
It costs only $250 to educate a student like Parbati for an entire year.

Parbati began SPCS when she was eight years old. When not in school, she enjoyed doing homework, helping her parents, and watching her younger brother. She played badminton and skipped. Her favorite subject was math because she could solve problems easily. Her dream at that young age was to become a doctor.

Last year, Parbati graduated from 10th grade at SPCS and moved to upper-secondary education in preparation for a university education. She had a very successful academic career at the SPCS, consistently placing at the top of her class. She won several prizes for extracurricular activities, including debate, and she received the Emily Sandall Global Citizenship Award for her service to the school community. Established in memory of a volunteer of The Advocates, the award is given to the student who is a positive influence, caring, helpful, giving, humble, and is dedicated to community service.

In her capstone year at SPCS she earned distinction by achieving the highest score in the district on the national standardized test for tenth grade graduates. (The district includes all of Kathmandu.) Parbati is well on her way to fulfilling her dreams.

Parbati’s story is typical of students—especially girls—at SPCS. Students live in poverty. Their parents are often illiterate and work in subsistence farming or similar jobs. Some children have worked as child laborers, and all of them are pursuing an education as an alternative.

“Parbati and the other SPCS students prove that when kids are given the opportunity to pursue their right to education, when their teachers support and believe in them, when their community values the education of girls, that’s when they can break the cycle of poverty and discrimination to pursue their dreams,” said Kathy Lenzmeier, a member of The Advocates’ board of directors and a supporter of SPCS. She and her husband, Al Lenzmeier, provided the funding for the school’s new building.

Photo above: Parbati speaking at her commencement from SPCS. Photo credit: Robin Phillips

Meet Parbati

Testament to Success

When The Advocates for Human Rights’ volunteer, David Vander Haar, interviewed Parbati in 2013, she was in sixth grade at Sankhu Palubari Community School (SPCS). She lived with her parents, who are farmers, and her younger brother in a small three-room house with a tin roof and a dirt floor.

Ninth grade students studying in the classroom. Photo credit: David Kistle

The Advocates’ team at the new school building in Nepal in December 2017. Photo credit: Anoop Poudel.
House parties generate an important source of funding upon which The Advocates relies. Gifts support advocacy before the United Nations, legal representation for refugees and immigrants, initiatives to end human trafficking, and much, much more. A special thank you is extended to our generous house party hosts. Hosts include Kathleen and Robert Seestadt and Donna and Bryce Hamilton (International Justice); Jan Conlin and Gene Goetz (Women’s Human Rights); Mary and David Parker (the Nepal school); Kristine and John Mandler (Refugees & Immigrants); and Faegre Baker Daniels (Washington, D.C.).
Robin Phillips, The Advocates’ executive director, addresses guests at the Women’s Human Rights House Party. Photo credit: Louie Tran

Guests in Faegre Baker Daniel’s Washington, D.C. office in April listen to the presentation about The Advocates. Photo credit: Lexi Steinkraus

Paola Thomas, co-host Julie Carlson, & Rachel Birkedal (l-r) get up-to-date on the The Advocates’ recent work to help refugees & immigrants. Photo credit: Stefani Conyers

Co-host Samuel Berhanu speaks with a guest at the International Justice House Party. Photo credit: Jinath Tasnim

Student guests enjoy delicious food at the Women’s Human Rights House Party. Photo credit: Louie Tran

L-R: Ira Aukhmovich, Nikita Levin, Oksana Sokurec, co-host Chris Sur, co-host Alena Levina, Rosalyn Park, Kathleen Graham, co-host Sylva Zoraqi, & co-host Pauline Wahl gather at the Women’s Human Rights House Party. Photo credit: Louie Tran
Change the world for good.

HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER
2018

Thursday, June 21 • 5 p.m.
Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel, The Depot
225 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN

Featuring
Jane Connors
United Nations Victims’ Rights Advocate on sexual exploitation and abuse

Register at TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org