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From the Director’s Desk

Our first mission to document domestic violence as a human rights abuse was to Bucharest, Romania. I remember sitting in the beautiful new offices of an NGO that had just started a hotline for women victims of violence. While the women were excited by the potential of the hotline to provide support, they told me that they were afraid to give out the number because they had never been trained on how to respond to a woman in crisis.

It was 1994, one year after the historic Vienna Human Rights Conference, where the United Nations first declared that “women’s rights are human rights” and that violence against women violated the fundamental human rights of women. It is still hard for me to believe that this official recognition happened only two decades ago.

I had just been trained as a volunteer to answer phone calls at a local shelter in Minnesota. It was a great introduction to how ordinary women can provide the necessary information to help victims of violence protect themselves and their children. Our team in Bucharest knew that the shelters in Minnesota had helped develop some of the best practices recognized around the world. We knew we had some of the best resources right here at home.

The conventional wisdom at that time was that, to maintain neutrality, human rights organizations that document human rights violations should not work with local NGOs on training or other capacity-building support. It was clear from that first mission that this approach would never work with most violations of women’s human rights—individual human rights violations that are largely systemic, requiring changes to laws and policies to have any real impact.

Much work had been done, and best practices developed in the United States. We knew then that a little bit of information in the right hands would result in dramatic changes for women in Romania and around the world. Fortunately, The Advocates for Human Rights (at that time named Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights) is a flexible and forward thinking organization. We had the board’s full support to provide the resources necessary to advocates in the field working tirelessly to meet victims’ needs.

We started to send training resources which had been vetted by experts in Minnesota. One of our NGO partners said, “You don’t understand, these materials are like gold to us.” As the program evolved, we planned our first training in Tirana, Albania with the Women’s Rights Center and Reflexione, two of the strongest organizations in the region at the time. Women from seven countries in the Balkans participated in the training which focused on working with volunteers to provide services to battered women and educating the public to facilitate social change. We provided extensive manuals on both subjects to allow the attendees to pick and choose what was most relevant to their work.

Today, new technologies make sharing these resources easier. The Advocates developed a website of resources for advocates in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, StopVAW.org. We also developed sections of the United Nation’s Virtual Knowledge Center to End Violence Against Women to expand the reach of these important resources, EndVAWnow.org.

But one thing has not changed. The Advocates’ resources continue to be like gold to human rights activists around the world.

Robin Phillips
Executive Director
Sonia Nazario, author of *Enrique’s Journey*, will be the keynote speaker at the The Advocates’ Human Rights Awards Dinner being held June 16 at the Minneapolis Depot. Also that evening, Nazario will be presented the Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award for her work on behalf of Central American refugees.

Nazario will describe for the audience the plight of Central American refugees based, in part, on her journey with migrants from Honduras through Mexico to the United States. Her story, *Enrique’s Journey*, which was a *Los Angeles Times* series expanded into a book, describes a Honduran boy’s struggle to flee violence in his home country and to find his mother in the United States. It has earned more than a dozen awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing and the Grand Prize of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award.

Also that evening, VocalPoint and Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha will each be presented The Advocates’ Special Recognition Award. VocalPoint, an auditioned choir, staged a concert in February to benefit The Advocates and to make a safer, better world for women and girls. Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha organizes immigrant workers, using a human rights approach to its advocacy.

Volunteer Awards will be presented to: Eleni Beyene, Amharic translator and interpreter; Elizabeth Cutter, presenter and commentator on domestic violence laws; Mary Diaz, Spanish interpreter for Central American clients; Jörg Pierach, on behalf of Fast Horse, an integrated marketing firm that designed The Advocates’ brand and website; Carreen Heegaard, docent conducting human rights tours at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Sophia Leenay, French translator; Teresa Mesa, Spanish interpreter and translator for Central American clients; Ali Tews, Spanish translator; and Barbara Weissberger, Spanish interpreter in court for unaccompanied minors and families from Central America.

Attorneys, please note: If you have taken an asylum case for The Advocates, we want to recognize you at the Human Rights Awards Dinner. Please send an electronic photo of yourself to: Development@advrights.org by Friday, May 22.
The release of *Pretty Woman*, the Hollywood fantasy about a high-paid, safe “escort,” marked its 25th anniversary this year. The blockbuster perpetuates the myth of an empowered escort making all of the decisions, earning a lot of money, and meeting Prince Charming. Unfortunately, this fairy tale bears no resemblance to reality.

The majority of women and juveniles involved in prostitution have, at some point, a pimp-like figure or a third party making money by sexually exploiting them. Pimps use love, fear, violence, and intimidation to breakdown a victim’s resistance, obtain power over a victim, and maintain total control. Victims do not get to make the decisions about who, where, and how they have sex. They do not get to make decisions regarding how many men they have to have sex with before they can go home. They do not get to keep all, if any, of the money they earn. They are beaten and raped. They contract STDs and get pregnant. They rarely get to decide when they just want to stop.

People often make a false distinction between sex trafficking and prostitution. In reality, they are part of the same continuum of the criminal activity of sexually exploiting vulnerable people, primarily women and girls.

Trafficking is profitable for the trafficker. In one Ramsey County, Minnesota case, a trafficker had two girls who were required to bring in a daily quota of $500, resulting in a potential monthly “income” for the trafficker of $30,000. Traffickers may use business models that include selling multiple girls in order to increase their overall profit margins.

Third parties profit, too. Websites like Backpage.com reap huge profits from the business of sexually exploiting children and adults. The AIM Group reported that five websites raked in a total of $45 million in revenue for escort ads and other “promotions,” with Backpage.com taking 80 percent of the earnings.

Minnesota state law defines individuals who are prostituted by a third party as trafficking victims, regardless of age. Also, it is not necessary to show that any victim was forced, defrauded, or coerced in order to be “trafficked.” In this way, Minnesota law zeroes in on the trafficker’s actions, as opposed to a victim’s age, the way in which a victim got into the situation, and what she did or did not do to escape.

Then, there is Minnesota’s Safe Harbor Law, spearheaded by The Advocates, that defines individuals who are prostituted and are under the age of 18 as victims, not criminals. The law set in motion a state-wide effort to provide them with shelter and services.

The Safe Harbor Law and the accompanying model for service delivery, known as the No Wrong Door model, are based on these important values:

- Those who come in contact with youth should be trained to identify sexual exploitation;
- Youth who are sexually exploited are victims of a crime;
- Victims should not feel afraid, isolated, or trapped;
- Sexual exploitation is traumatic, and services for victims should be based on trauma-informed care which, in part, helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment;
- Services should be responsive to needs of youth, offered statewide, and based on positive youth development;
- Right to privacy and self-determination are inherent principles; and
- Sexual exploitation can be prevented.

“Now that the Safe Harbor Law has passed, The Advocates is working to ensure effective implementation by, among other things, developing educational resources for people—from teachers, to health care workers, to building code inspectors, to social service providers,” said Beatriz Menanteau, staff attorney with The Advocates for Human Rights’ Women’s Program. “We are working to put an end to this abuse.”
We all play a part to end trafficking

It Takes a Community to Save Lives

Police may be the first to spring to mind when thinking about who are on the front lines to help end sex trafficking. But most people no matter where you live or work can help end this devastating human rights violation.

**TEACHERS**

Teachers can help identify potential victims among their students. They should look for students who:

- Have frequent unexcused absences or an inability to attend class;
- Have histories attending many different schools or recent multiple transfers;
- Indicate meals, food, and money are limited or regulated, or they need to help family with money;
- Have unreasonable work/chore expectations at home;
- Travel frequently;
- Use language such as “a train” or a “train party”;
- Have overly controlling or abusive boyfriends;
- Possess expensive items seeming out of character;
- Have numerous inconsistencies when recounting life outside of school;
- Show signs of physical abuse or neglect, drug or alcohol addiction, and/or high-risk or self-injurious behavior;
- Resist or are emotionally triggered by touch;
- Fall asleep in class and are usually fatigued;
- Have tattoos or other “branding”;
- Are overly shy about changing clothes or refuse to participate in physical education;
- Demonstrate unusually fearful, anxious, depressed, or angry behavior;
- Have familiarity with places selling commercial sex, such as Backpage.com;
- Show signs of physical abuse, including bruises, cuts, broken teeth and bones, scars, and unattended infections; or
- Seem to lack basic medical care for illness or injury.

**HOTEL WORKERS**

Hotel staff can help identify potential victims and deter trafficking by keeping an eye out for guests who:

- Have no luggage or ID;
- Pay for rooms in cash; rent rooms for others; and/or use third-party reservations;
- Repeatedly request access cards for different people;
- Appear fearful, disoriented, or disheveled;
- Show signs of physical abuse;
- Are young and made to look significantly older;
- Are young but have significantly older “boyfriends”;
- Wait for periods of time in the lobby, talking on the phone;
- Do not fit together;
- Stay for short durations (20–60 minutes);
- Continue to refuse housekeeping services;
- Have multiple credit cards or excessive cash, and multiple computers, smartphones, tablets, and laptops;
- Have excessive number of visitors, especially men;
- Are men leaving alone and returning with young women; or
- Have escort and massage ads in their rooms, and/or have excessive pornography or any child pornography.

**BUILDING OFFICIALS**

License and code compliance officials have unique access to businesses and properties. While conducting inspections, they should keep an eye out for:

- Darkened/obscured windows; locked doors requiring a person to be buzzed into doors to rooms locked from the outside;
- Different men coming and going; all-male clientele;
- Multiple credit cards and/or excessive cash;
- Odd or late business hours;
- Individuals with fearful responses, or an inability to make little or no eye contact;
- A person with a tattoo or other “branding”; a person who is watched, accompanied, or followed;
- Potential victims all of same nationality or ethnic group;
- People with bruises, injuries, or presence of blood;
- Individual(s) not in possession of ID documents;
- Individual(s) restricted from moving or communicating;
- Individual(s) unsure of their location (i.e., state, city); or
- Young people made to look significantly older.

**SUSPECT SOMETHING?**

Take these steps if you are suspicious:

- Call 9–1–1. No concern is too small;
- Do not confront or intervene with traffickers;
- Establish partnerships with police in your area;
- If you come in contact with a victim, indicate that you are not the police;
- Contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888–373–7888 for referrals to services or to report a tip;
- Contact a Regional Navigator, the main points of contact in Minnesota for sexually exploited youth and concerned agencies. Find your area’s Regional Navigator by visiting Minnesota Department of Health’s website, www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor;
- Establish protocols at your school, hotel, or office to be ready to respond if needed.

Information for educators and others can be found at: TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/education_newsletter.
Life as a Woman in El Salvador

Testimonies chronicling life as a woman in El Salvador explained a range of human rights violations in a recent submission of The Advocates for Human Rights to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC). The accounts come from clients of The Advocates who are fleeing gender-based violence in El Salvador and seeking asylum.

Submitted in advance of the HRC’s review of El Salvador’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), The Advocates’ Information for Adoption of List of Issues Prior to Reporting provides first-hand information and hard-hitting questions to ask the government.

“Our clients confirm that El Salvador’s government is dramatically failing its ICCPR obligations,” said Jennifer Prestholdt, The Advocates’ International Justice Program director. “El Salvador’s legal system and policies do not protect women adequately, nor do they provide victims with necessary support and services. Perpetrators are not held accountable.”

An estimated 5,007 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2014, according to El Salvador’s Civil Chamber of the Supreme Court. In the first nine months of 2013, there were 4,826 reports of sexual assaults. El Salvador has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, according to the National Civil Police, and the rate of impunity for femicide crimes is estimated to be as high as 77 percent. “The numbers are likely very low compared to what actually takes place,” Prestholdt said.

Women said they did not report violence to police out of fear of retribution from abusers, as well as lack of protection from the police. “One woman told us that if she went to the police, her partner would ‘have the gangs do something horrible to her,’” Prestholdt said. “Many also said the police are connected with the gangs, and information reported to the police is not kept confidential.”

Gang violence has contributed to El Salvador’s record of having the highest murder rate of women in the world, according to UN Women. Women who come into contact with gangs are subject to kidnapping, extortion, sexual assault, and murder. The number of gang members in El Salvador numbered 20,000 in 2012, roughly 323 gang members per 100,000 citizens, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

“Clients said that gang members use sexual assault and physical violence against women and girls as a means to extort money and to silence political opposition,” reported Prestholdt. “Gang members coerce or force girls who are as young as 14 to become their ‘girlfriends.’” One client, a girl who left El Salvador when she was only 17, described years of abuse inflicted by her gang member “boyfriend.” With scars marring her body, the client described how he forced her to move in with him when she was 15. When she tried to leave, he stalked her and told her he would “cut her up in pieces and throw her remains in the ditch.”

In its submission, The Advocates recommends the HRC pressure El Salvador to:

- Establish a comprehensive program to protect women from violence, including public education; effective prosecutions; and training for law enforcement, investigators, prosecutors, and judges;
- End impunity for femicide, domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault by ensuring accountability and punishing perpetrators of those crimes against women;
- Strengthen the criminal justice response to gender-related killings of women and girls, in particular measures to support its capacity to investigate, prosecute, and punish all forms of such crimes, and provide reparation and/or compensation to victims and their families or dependents, as appropriate;
- Prevent the spread of gang violence against women and protect women who flee gang violence and sexual assault; and
- Prosecute traffickers and combat public official corruption related to trafficking.

“In El Salvador’s last review in 2010, the HRC expressed concern about the situation of women, including persistent stereotypes and prejudices, increasing violence against women and impunity, lack of statistical data, and high rates of domestic violence,” according to Prestholdt. “In spite of its Violence Against Women law passed in 2012, there is a systemic failure to protect victim safety and promote offender accountability in El Salvador.”

Photo credit this page: Amy Sivveland; opposite page: Bill Cameron.
Laws requiring a period of reconciliation are dangerous, too. In Mongolia, for example, the law authorizes judges to impose a three-month reconciliation period for couples before granting a divorce. Although reconciliation is not required if there is a threat to life, judges do not effectively screen for domestic violence. Even if domestic violence is reported, some judges still impose a reconciliation period, during which time women have been threatened, abused, and even killed by their abusers.

There are other problem laws, such as those providing a person the right not to testify against a spouse in criminal settings. In Croatia, this works to the victim’s detriment because if a woman invokes her right not to testify against her husband in a domestic violence case, the prosecutor closes the case, slamming the door on holding the offender accountable.

There are practices only monitoring reveals, including the harmful process of “facing,” exposed by The Advocates’ work in Croatia. If a judge is unable to assess the credibility of the parties and evaluate who is telling the truth, the judge forces victims and abusers to face each other while telling their versions of the incident. This is especially traumatizing to victims, and unlikely to result in candid testimony.

Monitoring and documentation are the first steps in creating change. They lead to training authorities to transform attitudes and practices. We also use our findings as leverage at the United Nations, shining an international spotlight on government practices and making specific recommendations on reforms. Our work bears fruit in other ways, too, such as supporting applications for asylum. Our documentation of domestic violence in Mongolia is being used to gain asylum in the United States for a Mongolian woman who would face great danger if forced to return to her home country.

By Rosalyn Park (pictured above), director of The Advocates’ Women’s Human Rights Program.

Photo provided by The Advocates.

Monitoring and documenting violence against women in countries around the world is painstaking, but is a critical first step in creating the systems’ change necessary to improve the human rights of women. The Advocates for Human Rights has traveled to nearly 30 countries—at invitations of NGO partners—to investigate how laws and authorities are working to protect women from violence.

Our work in Bulgaria began in 1995 in partnership with the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation. “It’s like a stone dropped in a pond; it sends ripples outward,” said a Bulgarian journalist in 1995, foretelling the dramatic transformation that has been realized. We succeeded in getting a domestic violence law passed, modeled after Minnesota’s law. We monitored its implementation, and we pushed for amendments to improve its protection of victims and to increase accountability of offenders. Since then, judges have issued thousands of orders for protection so that victims can get the protections they need. And throughout Bulgaria, our NGO partners have developed a network of shelters and a team of advocates to meet the needs of women escaping violence.

Currently, our focus is on Serbia’s implementation of domestic violence legislation, with results to be published in a 2016 report. We are also studying El Salvador, where our work began in April with a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee. Woven into the submission were the personal accounts of the violence suffered by our female clients from El Salvador who came to the United States desperate for asylum—and safety. (See “Life as a Woman in El Salvador,” page 6.)

A monitoring project begins by carefully analyzing a country’s laws and investigating the degree to which the laws protect victims and hold offenders accountable. To be effective, the laws must incorporate key elements, such as a civil order for protection, criminalization of domestic violence, criminalization of a violation of an order for protection, and services for victims. The Advocates describes these and other components of effective legislation as part of the website, UN Women Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls (EndVAWnow.org).

We scrutinize laws for harmful provisions, such as requirements for mediation or reconciliation in criminal or divorce cases. Mediation in domestic violence situations is extremely harmful because it assumes both parties are on equal footing. In reality, one party—usually the male partner—holds the power and control. This imbalance cannot be remedied, even with the skills of a third-party mediator.

“The bottom line is that women are safer.”
Rosalyn Park

By Rosalyn Park (pictured above), director of The Advocates’ Women’s Human Rights Program.

Photo provided by The Advocates.
It was a young woman and her six-month-old baby who changed the trajectory of Dr. N’s life.

A general practitioner who completed a fellowship on performing reconstructive surgery for rape survivors, Dr. N first met the young woman when Dr. N, disguised as a man to protect herself, led a mobile medical team to the woman’s village and to other remote areas in the eastern Democratic of the Republic of the Congo (DRC). There, she treated the woman and other rape survivors.

Then, months later, the woman and her baby, conceived during the rape for which she had been treated, arrived at the hospital where Dr. N worked. The mother and baby desperately needed the hospital’s expertise—both she and her six-month-old daughter had been raped.

“Everyone at the hospital was traumatized by this mother and child, a baby born of rape and then raped herself,” Dr. N said. “I couldn’t keep silent any longer. I wrote a report about the mother and child for my medical supervisor who, in turn, spoke to the media about it.”

She and other doctors organized a three-day peaceful protest to draw attention to the use of rape as a weapon of war in the DRC. “On the first day, we sat in the streets with our white coats on,” she recounted. “Some doctors held up signs that read, ‘You are raping our babies.’ The second day, we marched in front of the governor’s house, and on the third day, we walked the street for three hours and held a conference to educate the community.”

Threats on her life began. “I was on the street waiting for a bus when a man in a police uniform approached me, demanding to know my name,” she said. “When I didn’t respond, he pulled my picture out of his pocket, and told me to stop talking, or die.” Two days later, three men, including a police officer and a soldier, kidnapped a nurse from the hospital. And in June, August, and September, Dr. N received threatening phone calls, with a male voice ordering her to stop talking.

“In my country, rape is used as a weapon of war,” she said. “Soldiers go door to door, raping women and their daughters, from babies to women who are 90. They rape in front of the men to disempower and dominate them. The thinking is that if men can’t protect wives and daughters, how can they rise up and protect their country.”

The word “rape” does not begin to describe the brutality inflicted on women and girls. “The damage is so traumatic, many die,” she said. “Those who do survive

Photos, top to bottom: Congolese woman staring out a bus window as she travels to a refugee camp, March 2003 (photo by Natalie Behring-Chisholm via iStock); child treated by Dr. N, 2012 (photo provided by Dr. N); elderly woman fleeing fighting in the eastern part of the DRC, November 23, 2013 (photo by Jonny Hogg via Flickr).
need reconstructive surgery and extensive psychological support.”

Soon after the threatening phone calls began, Dr. N received a visa to come to the United States, and arrived in the country in 2013.

Dr. N, who has lived with war for 20 years, chose the United States as her safe haven because, “I want to live in a country that will protect me and protect my freedom of speech so I can go over the world to speak out,” she said. “More than 400,000 women and girls have been raped, and five million people have been killed. People in my country need people in other countries to help them.”

She came to Minnesota by herself, with no friends, family, or even acquaintances to help her. A kind, generous woman she met at a church provided her a place to live without charge.

Dr. N’s advisor at Saint Paul’s Hubbs Center, where she learned English, pointed her in The Advocates’ direction for help. “I came to this country to be protected, and I don’t know where to start,” she said when she approached the advisor.

“The Advocates is my first family I found here,” she said. “The Advocates’ Sarah Brenes is ‘WOW’; I love her! Most nights I can’t sleep, but on days I talk with Sarah, I can go home and sleep.”

Danger continues. “I am afraid for my family who remain, because in my country they will kill a family member if they don’t find you,” she said. “When I get a call and it’s from my country, my heart beats with fear.”

Dr. N finally received her work permit, and she started a job in March as wait staff at a senior citizen residence. She earned her driver’s license in April. She studies six hours a day to take the medical boards so she can one day resume practicing medicine. She also speaks to groups about what is happening in the DRC.

“The Advocates is my first family I found here.”

“When I get a call from my country, my heart beats with fear.”

Dr. N

“The Mineral Resources of Blood”

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a “long history of spectacular riches creating spectacular misery going back more than 100 years when the Belgians brutalized the country for rubber, ivory, copper and other minerals,” according to The New York Times (Nov. 16, 2014). “More recently, Ugandan and Rwandan militias killed thousands to plunder coltan and gold.”

In the DRC, coltan is called the “mineral resources of blood,” according to Dr. N. It is reported that 80 percent of the world’s coltan is found in eastern DRC. Coltan is used in the manufacturing of cell phones, computers, video games, medical devices, such as pacemakers, and other electronics.

“Violent rebel groups in the DRC channel minerals through neighboring countries Uganda and Rwanda and then sell them to multinational companies,” according to “Follow the Minerals,” published May 1, 2015 on telesur. “The minerals trade fuels the conflict in the war-ravaged Congo.”

In the May 11, 2015 article “Illegal trade in minerals fueling sexual violence,” The Scotsman reported that in the eastern DRC, the trade in minerals, such as coltan, has fomented violent conflict. Rebels and members of the national army have gained substantial wealth through illegal taxation and control of the trade while inflicting appalling suffering on local people. “Many people are taken hostage,” the article reads. “Men are forced to dig for the coltan and gold, and women are used as sexual slaves and cooks. Forced from their homes, children cannot go to school because they are made to work in the mines.”

When I get a call from my country, my heart beats with fear.”

Dr. N

“When people know what is happening, they can do something to change it,” she said. “I need to give back. It makes sense to my life to help.”
Nepal > Life Changed in an Instant

“All our SPCS family r safe,” read the text message I received from Anoop Poudel, headmaster at the Sankhu-Palubari Community School (SPCS), on the Monday following the 7.8 earthquake that devastated Nepal on Saturday, April 25. We had been desperately trying to reach Anoop and others connected with SPCS. Our concern grew as the death toll mounted and the strong aftershocks continued in the Kathmandu Valley. What a relief to learn that the teachers and 340 students at the school, as well as their families, were safe!

Anoop sent several more texts, describing heavy damage in the area of the eastern Kathmandu Valley where the school is located. Media sources and other Nepali contacts also confirm extensive destruction in the Sankhu area.

In his messages, Anoop told us that at least 95 percent of the students and teachers lost their homes in the earthquake. At the time of this newsletter’s printing, the families were living outside in fields and through severe thunderstorms, and tarps, tents, and other supplies were just beginning to reach them. (Monsoon season starts in June.) One small glimmer of hope is that, unlike Kathmandu, people in the Sankhu-Palubari area have access to a water source.

The Advocates for Human Rights has been partnering with the Sankhu-Palubari community since 1999 to provide a quality education, in grades pre-K through 10, as an alternative to child labor for low-income children in the area who would otherwise be working in brick yards or in the fields. In my role as The Advocates’ deputy director, I coordinate the organization’s SPCS Project.

The students’ standardized test scores are among the highest in Nepal, a highly competitive honor. And the school was awarded Nepal’s prestigious National Education Service Felicitation Award in 2014. Graduates are now studying at universities, preparing to become doctors, social workers, teachers, and agronomists; many plan to return to their village to improve the community’s quality of life. Their contributions are even more important now.

When SPCS began, girls often left school at an early age to marry or work. Now, they comprise 52 percent of the student body. They are staying and graduating.

The new school year had just started at SPCS, but school was not in session when the earthquake hit. Students in Nepal attend school six days a week; Saturday is the only day when there is no school. Many people believe that, had it been a school day, the numbers of dead and injured in Kathmandu and throughout the Kathmandu Valley could have been much higher.

At The Advocates, we believe that support for basic human needs, such as water, food, and medical assistance is the most urgent need at this point in time. We encourage people to give to reputable international humanitarian assistance organizations involved in the earthquake relief effort. In the long term, Nepal will need sustainable rebuilding and development programs.

Because education is essential to reducing poverty and inequality, the best way that The Advocates can support the rebuilding of Nepal is to ensure that the education of students at our school continues with the least amount of interruption possible. We remain focused on that goal.

By Jennifer Prestholdt, Deputy Director, The Advocates for Human Rights.

Photo credit: Jennifer Prestholdt.
Snapshots from SPCS

Just weeks before the earthquake struck, The Advocates for Human Rights’ Jennifer Prestholdt and volunteers were in Nepal conducting an annual monitoring visit. In addition to Prestholdt, the team included David Kistle and Jerry Zeirtman, Kathy Lenzmeier, Mary and David Parker, and Dan Pennie. Check out these photos from their trip, during a much happier time in Nepal.

SPCS provides free education to some of the world’s most disadvantaged children. Pictured: Jennifer Prestholdt with students.

Gender parity has been achieved through all grades. Of the 340 students enrolled this year, 52 percent are girls.

School is in session 7 a.m.–5 p.m., Mon.–Sat. Some students walk up to two hours each way to get to class; many walk an hour.

Graduates are becoming doctors, social workers, teachers, and agronomists, with plans to return to improve the community.

The children are healthier due to nutritious lunches provided without charge. This is particularly evident with the older students, who now stand much taller than their parents and older siblings.

Students’ standardized test scores are among the highest in the region, a highly competitive and revered honor.

Photo credits: David Kistle, Jennifer Prestholdt, photo in upper right.
While the Obama administration’s actions to help undocumented immigrants are tied up in court and on hold, The Advocates for Human Rights, Pillsbury United Communities, and leaders of Minnesota’s Latino community are moving full steam ahead to help people who are part of Minnesota’s undocumented immigrant population.

The groups teamed up to create a program and launch a support center to help immigrants wanting to take advantage of the administration’s Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Free legal services for families are part of the center’s program, known as the Administrative Relief Engagement Project.

The center, which opened its doors April 1, is housed in Mercado Central, 1515 Lake Street, Minneapolis. Staffed with volunteers and The Advocates’ attorneys, center personnel are working with immigrants to determine if they are eligible for DACA and are helping people complete required paperwork. In addition, center personnel are assisting people in securing jobs by connecting DACA applicants with employers, encouraging home ownership, and preparing people to be advocates for immigration reform and other issues.

“Thousands of undocumented Minnesotans and their families live excluded from the greater community and in fear of deportation, leaving them vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses,” said Robin Phillips, The Advocates’ executive director. “One of our goals is to put a stop to predatory immigration “services”—or notarios—whose promises of immigration options steal both money and hope from those desperate to bring stability to their lives.

The administration’s plan provides deferred action to certain undocumented immigrants in the United States; it affects an estimated 30,000 people throughout Minnesota. “In Minneapolis, there is a significant number of undocumented immigrant families who live in the shadows of fear and uncertainty,” said Michele Garnett McKenzie, The Advocates for Human Rights’ director of advocacy. “They live every day with the threat of being torn apart by deportation.”

The Time Is Now to Protect Families

Photo credit for photos on opposite page: Bill Cameron.

Interns Create the Future for Social Action

Thank you to The Advocates for Human Rights’ interns who served during the 2014-15 academic year.

Augsburg College
Catherine Essenburg

Carleton College
Travis Fried
Anna Jarman

Hamline University
Mohammed El Basshir

Macalester College
Farrah Al Haddad
Zoe Bowman
Lia Hanson

Mary Hellmich
Cameron Kesinger
Aramis Mendez
Sofie Pederson
Kalia Xiong

Minnesota State Univ., Mankato
Renee Gasner
(Graduate School)

Southwest MN
State University
Francisco Martinez

Southwest MN
State University
Francisco Martinez

University of Antiquia
Veronica Cadavid

University of Edinburgh
Juliet Ogembo

University of Minnesota
Nicole Ballou
Alex Benson
Doug Bryson (Law School)
Noah Cozad
Paula Cuellar (Graduate School)
Kayleen Jacobson
Sue Hoe Kim (Law School)
Paul Magyar (Law School)
Mary Mikhaeel
Julia Potach
Daniela Prigozhina
Lexi Steinke
Richard Suel
Catherine Ulrich

University of Notre Dame
Haja Saramba Kande

University of St. Thomas
Teri Guhl (Law School)
Johnnay Leenay

William Mitchell College of Law
Sandro Krkijes

Photo credit for photos on opposite page: Bill Cameron.
Audiences attending “Claiming the Sky: Voices of Phenomenal Women” took a roller coaster ride of emotions when experiencing the performers’ depiction of women’s struggles with domestic violence. VocalPoint, a 70-member auditioned choir, staged two concerts in February to help support The Advocates for Human Rights’ work to build a better, safer world for women.

“The performance captured The Advocates’ women’s human rights work and translated it into an artistic presentation about domestic violence,” said Kent Linder, a member of the choir and a staff member at The Advocates. “It told a compelling story that the audience saw in movement, heard in song, and listened to in spoken word.”

Joining VocalPoint were Zenon Dance Company, with a choreography especially arranged for the concert; mezzo-soprano Nicole Warner; Chimgee Haltarhuu, Circus Juventas teacher and performer, immigrant from Mongolia, and domestic violence survivor; and Nothando Zulu, president of the Black Storytellers Alliance, who read powerful poetry by Dr. Maya Angelou.

*Jennifer Anderson, VocalPoint’s artistic director and conductor.*

*Chimgee Haltarhuu.*

*Member of the Zenon Dance Company.*

*Members of the 70-member, auditioned VocalPoint choir.*
At one time, The Advocates for Human Rights led “study tours” to give people the opportunity to learn about human rights conditions in countries like Guatemala and the Philippines. The Advocates recently created a new hybrid, the “Study-Advocacy Tour,” and led a team to the United Nations in Geneva. There, participants teamed with The Advocates’ staff to conduct international advocacy on violence against women, the death penalty, prolonged pre-trial detention, and immigration. They participated in a UN Human Rights Committee closed-door briefing, and witnessed Committee members drill the Croatian government about why more is not being done to protect women from domestic violence. They met with Human Rights Council delegates, providing them with information and recommendations for the upcoming Universal Periodic Reviews of Bulgaria, Croatia, Honduras, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, and the United States. They made oral statements on the Human Rights Council floor. Others presented at The Advocates’ four parallel events.

“Our delegation was extraordinarily effective, and their efforts multiplied the amount of what we accomplished,” said Robin Phillips, The Advocates’ executive director.

Participants included Lisa Borden, Steven Clay, Colleen Cooper, Katherine Flom, Carol and Bud Hayden, Mark Kalla, Joan Kuriansky, Janet Leslie, and Julie Shelton. Staff members Amy Bergquist, Rosalyn Park, Robin Phillips, Jennifer Prestholdt, and Ann Ulring rounded out the delegation. Check out what volunteers Katherine Flom, Steven Clay, Julie Shelton, and Joan Kuriansky have to say about their experiences on this page, as well as pages 15, 16, and 17.

Answering the Question, “What am I accomplishing?”

The trip in March to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva transformed the way I think about my volunteer work with The Advocates for Human Rights. My work for The Advocates includes reviewing UN reports, conventions, and other UN documents, as well as researching country conditions, including domestic violence. The issues resonate with my values, and I feel good about working on them. But sometimes I would catch myself thinking, “Boy, there are a lot of words and facts and figures, but what am I really accomplishing?”

So, when I learned of the Geneva trip, I jumped at the chance to go. As an NGO with “special consultative status,” The Advocates’ team, including volunteers, would present parallel events at the Palais des Nations and meet with delegates to advocate on human rights issues in The Advocates’ partner countries up for Universal Periodic Review this year. Rosalyn Park asked me to work with her to report on the implementation of Bulgaria’s domestic violence laws.

A group of us presented a parallel event about domestic violence in Bulgaria and Croatia. Afterward, I was approached by the delegate from Bulgaria who had questions about The Advocates’ work and our report and who wanted more information. It was amazing to connect with her, and to see how interested she was in what we had to say.

The team and I fanned out throughout the UN Human Rights Council during session, quietly approaching delegates to talk about the issues, delivering written information, and scheduling one-on-one meetings with them in order to better inform the delegates about human rights abuses in countries.

It felt incredibly powerful to communicate directly with people who have the ability to take action at the highest levels and who are dedicated to human rights. I feel privileged to be part of The Advocates’ work.

By Katherine Flom (pictured left). Ms. Flom is an attorney in private practice in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her human rights work encompasses research, writing, and advocacy on women’s issues, asylum work, immigration, and criminal defense.

Photo credit: Colleen Cooper.
"The Advocates for Human Rights, you have the floor…"

The location is Geneva, Switzerland, on the floor of the United Nations Human Rights Council in the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room at the Palais des Nations. I pushed the large button on the microphone unit in front of me. The red disc around my microphone began to glow, signifying a live mic. If I dared to look up, I would no doubt see myself on one of the two big screens at the front of the room—staring down, wide-eyed, at the printed page before me. In front of me were delegates from all of the nearly 200 UN member states, seated in alphabetical order with the current Human Rights Council members seated in the inner half-circle at the front. The black-on-white-lettered placard at my seat reads “Orateur ONG” (French for “Non-Governmental Organization Speaker”). I had practiced delivering The Advocates for Human Rights’ oral statement; the familiar text on the printed page clutched in my hands steadied me.

I delivered The Advocates’ oral statement on the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), adopted in 1993. The VDPA, one of the alphabet soup of conventions and declarations relevant in the field of international human rights, contains strong language regarding women’s rights and domestic violence, and The Advocates used this debate at the Human Rights Council regarding ongoing implementation of the VDPA to point out that there is still much work to be done.

I greeted the Council leadership, and began:

“Domestic violence violates a woman’s right to life, liberty and security, equal protection, and freedom from torture and discrimination. Strong laws are essential for women’s full and equal participation in all aspects of life, and for governments to meet their human rights obligations, they must have effective legislation and practices that promote victim safety and offender accountability.”

This about sums it up for me, and seems a pretty succinct statement of what drew me to The Advocates in the first place: The idea that legal reform needs to lead societal change. In other words, real social change can only happen when the law is on the side of the victim, not the abuser.

We were in Geneva, 10 volunteers led by The Advocates’ staff, to continue this important work, and hopefully move the needle, at least a little bit, on issues ranging from domestic violence in places as far flung as Honduras and Mongolia, to the death penalty and the rights of migrants in the United States. We were joined by partners from other international NGOs in this important task. Overall, The Advocates submitted 10 stakeholder reports on human rights issues in eight different countries as part of this cycle of the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, and participated in other proceedings, such the Human Rights Committee (a UN treaty-monitoring body) review of Croatia’s implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

I had two minutes for my statement. Members of the Human Rights Council (47 countries sit on the Council at any given time) were allotted three minutes per topic; non-members and NGOs got two. In practice, I had been wrapping up with about three seconds to spare at what I considered an appropriate speaking pace. The consequences of going over time seemed to vary from being gavelled out of order, to having your mic cut, to receiving a tap on the shoulder from the gentleman in the earpiece standing behind you. I had no desire to find out which of these would be applied to me.

My internal mantra was “cool, calm, and collected” as I spoke about the issue of victims of domestic abuse being forced to prosecute their abusers on their own in private legal proceedings, and then the problem of “dual arrests,” where abuser and victim are arrested together. As I finished running through a list of actions member countries could take to combat these problems and thank the Council, I finally looked up: The clock on the screen showed seven seconds remaining before resetting to zero. Although my voice remained calm, I notice that I was still maintaining a death grip on the microphone button. I released it and my red microphone light faded to black.

I am honored to have been among the group of dedicated lawyers and human rights activists traveling with The Advocates to Geneva, and even more so to have had the opportunity to address a full session of the Human Rights Council. This experience was life-changing for me.

By Steven Clay (pictured above). Mr. Clay is an attorney, entrepreneur, and social activist. He is CEO of DCC Solutions, LLC, a cloud-based contact center, and a trustee of the Charles H. Clay Family Charitable Trust, which contributes annual gifts to the areas of nature, culture, education, and social justice.

Photo provided by Steven Clay.
When Human Rights Committee expert Margo Waterval questioned the Croatian delegation, I recognized her words; they came directly from The Advocates for Human Rights’ “one-pager.” Astonished, I turned to Rosalyn Park, director of the organization’s Women’s Human Rights Program; she knew the words, too. The look on her face mirrored mine: thrilled.

Rosalyn and I, along with The Advocates’ Croatian partner, Valentina Andrasek, and other volunteers, were in Geneva, Switzerland attending the United Nations Human Rights Committee’s review of Croatia. The Committee, comprised of independent experts, monitors the compliance of State parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee examines reports and listens to statements by States, as well as non-governmental organizations. Ultimately, the Committee addresses its concerns and makes recommendations in the form of “Concluding Observations.”


In Geneva, our findings were presented to the Committee by Valentina, AZKZ’s director. We also participated in an NGO forum for Committee members where we met Professor Waterval and gave her a copy of our “one-pager.”

Professor Waterval’s question to the Croatian delegation borrowed our exact words. “Research shows that men are the perpetrators of violence 95 percent of the time. Yet in Croatia, police arrest and charge women in 43.2 percent of the cases,” she said. She asked the Croatian delegation to respond and explain these “dual arrests.”

Over its two-day review of Croatia, the Committee considered many issues. The Croatian delegation responded, but said little about domestic violence. The Committee’s chairman took notice. He said, in summary, “Domestic violence is about power and control. I would like to hear Croatia’s answers to the questions that were asked about why police arrest the victims along with their abusers.” Rosalyn and I exchanged looks. Again, before our eyes was evidence that The Advocates and AZKZ helped focus the Committee on protecting victims of domestic violence in Croatia.

The Committee recently issued its Concluding Observations on Croatia. Reflecting The Advocates’ advocacy and recommendations, The Committee expressed concern about dual arrests and convictions, protective measures and protection orders for victims, insufficient shelters and legal aid for victims, inadequate investigation and prosecution of abuse, and lenient sentences imposed on perpetrators. The Committee urged the State to:

“(a) Adopt a comprehensive approach to prevent and address violence against women;

“(b) Intensify measures to raise awareness among police, judiciary, prosecutors, community representatives, women, and men on the magnitude of domestic violence and its detrimental impact on victims’ lives;

“(c) Ensure that cases of domestic violence are thoroughly investigated, perpetrators are prosecuted, and if convicted, punished with appropriate sanctions, and victims are adequately compensated;

“(d) Eliminate dual arrests and convictions of both the perpetrator and the victim of domestic violence;

“(e) Ensure the issuance of effective protective orders and follow-up to ensure the safety of victims;

“(f) Ensure the availability of a sufficient number of shelters with adequate resources; and

“(g) Collect data on domestic violence against women and, based on such data, continue to develop sustainable strategies to combat this human rights violation.”

By Julie Shelton (pictured above). After 30 years as a trial lawyer, Ms. Shelton now devotes her time to volunteer projects for human rights. She also serves on the board of directors of the Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center. Ms. Shelton was awarded The Advocates for Human Rights’ Volunteer Award in 2014.

Photo credit: Bill Cameron.
At the United Nations, “Where work really gets done…”

I became acquainted with The Advocates in the late 90’s when I joined the organization to conduct domestic violence training for NGOs from Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Armenia. Soon after, I teamed with The Advocates’ staff and an Armenian NGO to undertake careful fact-finding, with the goal of assessing the status of the rights of Armenian women to be free from intimate violence. The report’s recommendations were used to increase services for survivors and to hold more offenders accountable in Yerevan and other communities in Armenia.

In March of this year, more than 15 years later, I sat with a number of The Advocates’ staff and volunteers in the Serpentine Lounge in Building E, otherwise known as the home of the Human Rights Council in the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland. The Serpentine Lounge is two floors below the formal major chamber where delegates from around the world sit in an orderly fashion, each taking their turn to deliver two-minute statements or sound bites to comment and vote on proposed resolutions on issues like food and sustainability. They also listen to reports from special experts, or rapporteurs, on the status of a State’s record on various aspects of human rights as defined by myriad declarations and conventions.

In contrast to the chamber and the mellow Geneva landscape, the Serpentine Lounge was a hub of activity when The Advocates’ staff and volunteers were there. Delegates were in earnest conversations with each other and NGO representatives to learn from each other and no doubt to try to persuade one other. Of the many opportunities I had “working” at the United Nations, the Serpentine Lounge was one of the most energizing experiences.

Every four and one-half years, 16 countries are scheduled to appear for their Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council. Given The Advocates’ special consultative status with the United Nations, we had the ability to meet with delegates who will be submitting comments on the status of the countries scheduled for review this May.

Building on the tremendous work already completed by The Advocates, my colleagues and I met with delegates from literally every part of the world. I met with delegates from countries as diverse as Finland and Paraguay who are interested in how effective countries to be reviewed, such as Mongolia and Croatia, are at eradicating gender-based violence. We shared our findings with the delegates, and in the instance of Croatia, Valentina Andrasek, the director of our Croatian colleague, the Autonomous Women’s House Zagreb, was there to offer her NGO’s first-hand experience helping battered women.

Delegates were both surprised and discouraged to learn the way in which the Croatian criminal law is being implemented. In Croatia, more than 40 percent of domestic violence cases in which arrests are made result in dual arrests, with both the offender and the victim arrested.

In addition to sharing recommendations, we handed delegates fact-filled “one-pagers.” We got the chance to learn about the values and politics of countries we may never visit.

My mind went the proverbial mile-a-minute; I learned so much about the complexities of the UN world—an alphabet soup of shorthand—where work really gets done. I found my co-travelers as fascinating as the delegates with whom we met. And as one of the few non-Minnesotans in The Advocates’ delegation, I thoroughly enjoyed the Midwestern grace and calm that infused our time together.

By Joan Kuriansky (pictured above) testifying at the United Nations in Geneva. An attorney in Washington, D.C., Ms. Kuriansky has been involved in women’s rights throughout her career. She has experience running local and national organizations addressing a range of issues, including women’s economic empowerment and violence against women.

Photo credit: Colleen Cooper.
Snapshots

Much has been happening at The Advocates for Human Rights, from trips to the United Nations, to a symposium on immigration, to the Spring House Party season, that just wrapped up. A special thank you is extended to our generous house party hosts who welcomed The Advocates’ friends into their homes. Hosts include Dr. Colleen Cooper and Richard Ihrig (The Advocates’ House Party); Carolyn Chalmers and Eric Janus (Nepal School House Party); Dr. Penny Wheeler (Women’s Human Rights’ House Party); and Ellen and Jim van Iwaarden (International Justice House Party).

From L to R The Advocates’ Beatriz Menanteau; World Future Council’s Karin Heisecke; The Advocates’ Theresa Dykoschak & Robin Phillips; & Michael Paymar, representing the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, at the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in New York City. Photo provided by The Advocates.

Award-winning journalist & filmmaker Jose Antonio Vargas speaking at April’s “Out of the Shadows” immigration symposium, sponsored by The Advocates, the University of Minnesota Law School’s Center for New Americans, & the University of Minnesota’s Immigration History Research Center. Photo credit: MinnPost, by Ibrahim Hirsi.

Left to right, The Advocates’ board members Mary Parker, David Kistle, & Kathy Lenzmeier, volunteers who traveled in March for a monitoring visit to the Sankhu-Palubar Community School in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Photo credit: Jennifer Prestholdt.

Amaanee Ba, president of the Oromo Youth Association traveled with The Advocates’ Amy Bergquist to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss with UN experts human rights violations against Oromo youth in Ethiopia. Photo credit: Amy Bergquist.
Hyder Kahn addressing house party guests about the importance of The Advocates’ international work. Photo credit: Zafar Siddiqui.

The Advocates’ friends, from L to R, Linda Forman, Sarah Pennie Thompson, and Daniel Pennie at a house party. Photo credit: Susan Banovetz.

House party guests Suzanne Thorpe & Kathie Fargione. Photo credit: Susan Banovetz.

House party guest Apekchya Karki. Photo credit: Susan Banovetz.

From L to R: The Advocates’ Emily Good, Robin Phillips, Michele Garrett McKenzie; Minneapolis City Council Member Alondra Cano; Pillsbury United Communities’ Felipe Illescas; City of Minneapolis Neighborhood & Community Relations’ Mariano Espinoza; & Congressman Keith Ellison at the opening of the Administrative Relief Engagement Project’s center. See, “The Time Is Now to Protect Families,” page 12.

The Advocates’ Emily Farell (L) talking with participants of the organization’s Discover Human Rights Training. Photo credit: Kent Linder.
Because every person matters.

The Advocates for Human Rights

Human Rights Awards Dinner
2015

Tuesday, June 16
5:00 p.m.
The Minneapolis Depot

See page 3 for details.

An evening of honor and inspiration