FEATURES

• Minnesota Protocol Explained
• Modern-day Slavery Happens Here & Now
• Asylum Client Delivers Powerful Testimony
• The U.S. Runs with a Devil
• Doors of Safety & Help Opened to Sex-Trafficked Children
• Where Punk & the Law Meet
A colleague of mine from Poland once remarked, “I wish I could vote in U.S. elections—they have a much bigger impact on my life than our elections do.” It was a vivid reminder of how important it is to engage in the political process as an educated voter.

International human rights standards provide a framework to evaluate candidates’ policies and party platforms. At their most basic, government policies should ensure that all human beings in the United States live with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace, and party platforms should be grounded in human rights. To ensure a commitment to human rights, consider whether candidates’ policies and party platforms will:

- promote and uphold international human rights law, recognizing that international legal standards help protect and promote human rights worldwide and strengthen international institutions designed to hold governments accountable;
- support the honest reporting about US enforcement and respect of human rights principles here and abroad;
- recognize the human right to basic necessities, such as health care, housing, food, and education;
- respect the US commitment not to torture under any circumstances as set forth in the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Geneva Conventions;
- use all means to prevent genocide and other mass crimes against humanity in the world and work with the international community to stop them when they occur;
- demonstrate in word and practice that human rights are universal, and commit to making human rights a reality for women, refugees, asylum seekers, as well as for marginalized racial, ethnic, religious, and LGBTI communities worldwide;
- support the International Criminal Court and other international justice mechanisms as a complement to national justice systems;
- join the majority of the international community of democratic nations by rejecting the death penalty as cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment;
- recognize and protect the human rights of all people within its borders, and uphold its obligations not to return refugees to places where their lives or freedoms are at risk;
- support national and international legal instruments that promote greater corporate responsibility for human rights; and

Freedom, democracy, and human rights require constant vigilance, including during election season. The world is watching.

Robin Phillips
Executive Director
As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns investigates and exposes some of the world’s most egregious human rights violations. He has made updating the groundbreaking Minnesota Protocol a priority.

Mr. Heyns will deliver the Human Rights Awards Dinner’s keynote speech and receive the Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award. The event is being held June 1 at the Marriott City Center in downtown Minneapolis.

Originally developed by The Advocates for Human Rights in the 1980s, the Minnesota Protocol was adopted by the United Nations in 1991 with the official title, UN Manual on the Effective Prevention of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. The manual, widely known by its original name, has been used in a myriad of investigative contexts in almost every region of the world.

Last year, Mr. Heyns invited The Advocates to help update the Minnesota Protocol with forensic, medical, and other advancements that have taken place since its original publication. “The need for clear international standards that encompass the realities of human rights abuses in the twenty-first century has resulted in the current revision,” he said.

The Advocates’ connection to Mr. Heyns’ work as a special rapporteur began in the 1980s when The Advocates developed the Minnesota Protocol, the first set of international guidelines for investigating suspicious unlawful deaths. Effective investigation is key to establishing responsibility and holding perpetrators accountable, but no international standards existed at the time that required governments to initiate or carry out investigations of suspected unlawful deaths.

In addition to his role with the United Nations, Mr. Heyns is professor of human rights law and director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Also at the June 1 event, The Advocates will present its Special Recognition Award to David Wippman, dean of the University of Minnesota Law School, for his passion for human rights and his work with the Center for New Americans, a collaboration between the law school and The Advocates.
The Minnesota Protocol

Creating Guidelines for Effective Investigations

In the 1980s, a small group of Minnesota lawyers was concerned about the lack of accountability for the 1983 political assassination of Benigno Aquino in the Philippines as well as other suspected unlawful deaths happening in the world. While key to establishing responsibility and holding perpetrators accountable, no international standards existed at the time requiring governments to initiate or carry out investigations of suspected unlawful deaths.

Clearly, there was a need for international standards regarding death investigations, as well as practical guidelines for conducting investigations. In 1983, as its very first project, The Advocates for Human Rights (then known as the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee) took action by engaging experts in law and forensic science. Almost all volunteers, the team included David Weissbrod, Sam Heins, Barbara Frey, Don Fraser, Tom Johnson, Lindsey Thomas, Garry Peterson, and Marie Bibus.

In 1987, at a conference center in Wayzata, final details of the Minnesota Protocol were hammered out. There were two parts: 1) international legal standards detailing the duty of governments to prevent, investigate, and initiate legal proceedings after a suspicious and unlawful death; and 2) guidelines for conducting effective investigations, and model protocols for conducting autopsies, disinterment, and analysis of skeletal remains.

The standards were incorporated into the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions in 1989, adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council and endorsed by the UN General Assembly. The UN formally adopted the guidelines in 1991 as the United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions. For the first time, the world had standards and guidelines for effective investigation.

Together, the Principles and the Manual are the key UN-mandated texts that have provided guidance for 25 years on the international duty to investigate violations of the right to life and best practices for conducting autopsies and forensic analysis of suspicious deaths in custody. When Tom Johnson led a team of Gray Plant Mooty attorney volunteers to research the Minnesota Protocol’s impact, they found that it has been cited as the yardstick for conducting investigations by international and regional human rights bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, as well as national courts in India, Australia, and other countries.

The Minnesota Protocol has guided investigations throughout the world, including in Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, and Guatemala. In Peru, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used the Minnesota Protocol when exhumining mass graves. I’ve been told by colleagues that the Minnesota Protocol is the most effective tool they have to remind their government of the duty to conduct an effective investigation when there is a suspected unlawful death. Forensic experts have told me that they bring copies of the model autopsy protocol with them when conducting investigations in the field, writing their notes in it.

Forensic science, DNA analysis, and other technologies have advanced greatly since the Minnesota Protocol’s drafting. International law has advanced, too, with clear, internationally-accepted principles as to what constitutes the legal duty to investigate. The rights of victims are now acknowledged in international law, including the rights of families to know what happened to their loved ones and to reparation and other remedies. Society as a whole has a right to know the truth about what really happened in order to prevent those human rights abuses from happening again.

For years there has been discussion at the UN about updating the Minnesota Protocol. Christof Heyns, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, began to make it a reality in 2015, inviting The Advocates to be a part of the revision process. Along with University of Minnesota professor Barbara Frey and other human rights law experts, I serve on the Legal Investigations Working Group. There is also a Forensics Working Group and an Advisory Panel, which includes several of the original authors. As it was in the 1980s, the work involves extensive contributions by international experts in law, forensics, and crime scene investigation.

The Minnesota Protocol

Integrating Science & Law for Investigations

**PROBLEM**
Governments were not being held accountable for thousands of suspicious and arbitrary killings, such as political assassinations, because there were no international standards requiring investigation.

**SOLUTION**
Bring together experts in law, human rights, and forensics to create a set of international standards for investigating suspicious and unlawful deaths.

**RESULT**

1983
The founders of The Advocates for Human Rights were concerned with the worldwide lack of government accountability for suspicious deaths, such as the assassination of Benigno Aquino in the Philippines.

1983-1987
The volunteer-based group worked with international experts in law and forensic science to research how to create internationally standardized procedures for death investigations.

1987
Details of the Minnesota Protocol were hammered out at a conference in Wayzata, Minnesota. It included international legal standards and guidance for conducting investigations, and model protocols for conducting autopsies and for disinterment and analysis of skeletal remains.

1991

1989
The international legal standards were incorporated into the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council and endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

1991-2015
The Minnesota Protocol has been used in investigations throughout the world, including in Rwanda, Bosnia, Guatemala, East Timor, and Peru.

2015-2016
The UN commissioned The Advocates to help update the Minnesota Protocol to meet the needs of the 21st century and better reflect changes in law and advancements in forensic science.
A woman from Vietnam traveled to the United States in 2008, smuggled across the U.S.-Mexico border by human trafficker Tieu Tran of Mankato, Minnesota. Tran enticed her prey with false promises of legal immigration status and a high-paying job. Instead, she forced her victim to work long hours without paying her as promised. Tran isolated and intimidated the woman to hold her in fear, knowing that she was without legal status or money, did not speak English, feared losing her family home in Vietnam to creditors, and had nowhere to turn for help.

The woman’s case is just one of the real-life examples of human trafficking in Minnesota that The Advocates for Human Rights’ Madeline Lohman and Sarah Warpinski Ladd presented at a training session for Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry investigators and other professionals. The presentation was a precursor to a labor trafficking report that The Advocates will soon release.

“Human trafficking occurs when a person obtains or holds another person in compelled service. It includes both sex and labor trafficking,” Ladd told the group. Ladd is an attorney who has represented survivors of human trafficking and who helped lead the anti-trafficking movement in Ohio. She is on temporary assignment with The Advocates with funding from the Skadden Fellowship Foundation Flom Incubator Grant.

Human trafficking is not a crime of movement. It is the dehumanizing practice of holding a person for involuntary work using whatever means necessary. There were an estimated 25,000 cases of human trafficking reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center over the past eight years in the United States.

Labor trafficking combines abusive or fraudulent employer control over a worker with a failure to pay fair wages or otherwise respect the worker’s rights. The nature of labor trafficking, which often depends on isolating the victim from those who can help, means accurate information on the prevalence of trafficking in Minnesota is hard to find.

In addition to the woman from Vietnam lured into compelled labor in a restaurant, cases have been reported in a variety of other industries:

- a woman worked without pay as a nanny while the employer held her immigration documents and threatened to report her to ICE;
- three adults performed in a cultural group after their employer brought them to the United States with false promises and then kept them isolated and refused to pay their wages;
• seven adult carnival workers on seasonal work visas labored in deplorable conditions under constant threats and received less than minimum wage; and

• two boys carried drugs after gangs beat and threatened them.

Traffickers seek out vulnerable individuals who are the least likely to complain about abuses because of poverty, the need to support family members, distrust of authority, and precarious immigration status. Traffickers operate in industries where oversight is difficult because workers are highly mobile, isolated, or invisible, such as construction, farms, door-to-door sales, domestic service, and restaurants.

“Learning how to identify labor trafficking is the first step to help people and to hold traffickers accountable,” reported Lohman, a senior researcher with The Advocates who is leading work on the forthcoming labor trafficking report. The report, expected to be released this spring, will articulate problems in the system for identifying, preventing, and responding to human trafficking in the workplace.

Identifying instances of labor trafficking is the first step to ending this grave abuse.

At this time, there is no statewide referral system, screening, educational materials, or training, reported Lohman. “We are collaborating with partners in the anti-trafficking movement to develop a screening mechanism, referral system, educational materials, and training to fill that gap.”

21 million
number of people in slavery in the world*

$150 billion
number of dollars generated for traffickers each year*

55%
percentage of world’s labor trafficking victims that are women*

60%
percentage of Minnesota’s labor trafficking victims that are women**

*International Labor Organization statistics
**National Human Trafficking Resource Center
Asylum client testifies before the Minnesota legislature >

There’s Power in Her Words

The Advocates for Human Rights’ client Dr. Edwige Mubonzi, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), gained asylum in the United States in 2015. She had fled the DRC in 2013 when threatened with death for speaking out about the use of rape as a weapon of war. Rape and other violence is fomented by the trade of minerals used to manufacture cell phones and other technology.

Dr. Mubonzi is a stalwart advocate. So far, she has made nearly 100 public presentations about the horrors taking place in the DRC. In April, she spoke to the Minnesota Legislature’s House Government Operations and Elections Policy Committee during its consideration of the Conflict Minerals Bill, HF 3213. After listening to her courageous testimony, the committee unanimously passed the bill. We are honored to share Dr. Mubonzi’s testimony with you.

“Thank you Madam/Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee. I am very thankful for this opportunity to share my story with you. My name is Edwige Mubonzi. I am a medical doctor from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“In my country, I worked in the Panzi Hospital mobile clinic that went to rural areas to find and treat women victims of rape and mutilation. Rape is used as a weapon of war in Congo. The war is about controlling our mineral resources—especially coltan, which is used for cell phones and computers all over the world. Eighty percent of the world’s supply of coltan comes from the eastern part of the Congo where I am from. Since 1998, more than 400,000 women and girls have been raped in this war. Today my country is called the ‘rape capital of the world.’

“Rape is an effective war strategy, and it is destroying my community. Usually women are raped in front of their husbands and children. This destroys the whole family and enables militias to control populations and therefore, the mineral resources. After raping a women, soldiers and militia members often insert an object such as wood, knives, guns, or fire into the vagina. This practice destroys a woman’s body—often causing leakage of bodily fluids from the vagina and the inability to have children—and it completely destroys her spirit.

“I would like to share a story of one of my patients, a six-month-old baby raped, who was born from rape. One day during my night shift at Panzi Hospital, I received a women that I knew because I had treated her before. She was a victim of rape and became pregnant from that rape. She came with her six-month-old baby, and I was afraid that she had been raped again. But she told me that she had not come for herself, she had come for her baby. Her baby, born of rape, was raped at six-months old. This has become an intergenerational problem. The baby had her vagina destroyed and the liquid was coming from her stomach through her vagina. All the physical findings were heart breaking. This was the reason why I decided that besides treating my patients, I had to advocate for them.

“We all know the close connection between the exploitation and illegal trade of natural resources and how this finances armed groups and massive human rights violations. We cannot continue to only repair the consequences of violence. We must treat the root causes of this violence to put an end to these horrific crimes. Minerals from Congo need to be mined in a lawful manner that respects the lives of all people. That is why I am here, engaged in a plea for peace, justice, and respect for human rights. It is urgent to act. The solutions exist and require real political will.

“Madam Chair and Members of the Committee, the vote in support of this bill would be a victory for human rights and stability in my country, DRC. With humility and hope, I now urge this committee to support this legislation to help transform blood minerals into minerals for development and peace. This is an opportunity to solve the real problem of Congo and we need your support.”

Photo provided by The Advocates for Human Rights
The U.S. Runs with a Devil


You may never have heard of the Oromo people, the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia. You might be surprised to learn that if you are a U.S. taxpayer, you are subsidizing their oppression.

On Tuesday, April 19, a Congressional commission named the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission conducted a hearing on human rights conditions in Ethiopia. The Commission provides information concerning human rights to Congress, so it is particularly fitting that it should inquire into conditions in Ethiopia. That country has been a major ally of the United States and recipient of U.S. humanitarian and military aid for all of the years Ethiopia’s current regime has been in power. Since 2013, the United States has given in the range of half a billion dollars per year in foreign aid to Ethiopia, plus a much smaller amount of military aid, which means the United States is Ethiopia’s largest and most important source of foreign assistance.

In July 2015, President Obama visited Ethiopia, drawing widespread criticism from human rights groups for his warm words toward the country and his relatively milquetoast references to its abysmal human rights record. Obama said that the Prime Minister of what he referred to as the “democratically elected” Ethiopian government “would be the first to acknowledge that there is more work to be done” in the field of human rights.

Well, yes. The ruling party in Ethiopia won all 547 seats in Parliament following the elections that occurred just two months before Obama’s visit, and the “democratically elected” Prime Minister was allocated 100 percent of the vote. U.S. officials were prohibited from acting as election observers. The election featured denials of registrations for opposition candidates, while journalists were arrested and threatened. After the election, at least three opposition politicians were murdered, with no investigations conducted.

The government’s security forces employ murder and torture. In 2014, they fired into crowds of peaceful students who were protesting the government’s “land grab” for the benefit of international development interests, which would potentially displace an estimated two million Oromo. Dozens were killed. Many more were arrested and remain in prison. The killings continue. According to Human Rights Watch, relying on reports of activists, at least 75 protesters were killed by government security forces in November and December 2015, while the government only acknowledged five deaths. The actual figures are likely much greater than is known, since the government tightly restricts access to such information. There is no freedom of the press, no independent judiciary, no adherence to international human rights standards beyond lip service.

The Ethiopian government is adept at achieving the maximum oppression while drawing minimal attention to its human rights abuses. It signsto onto numerous international human rights conventions, although it routinely violates them. It purports to allow local human rights organizations to exist, although its Charities and Societies Proclamation makes it largely impossible for them to operate by denying the organizations international funding.

Perhaps most impressive, the government masterfully plays the terrorism card. In 2009, it adopted the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, allowing draconian treatment of persons accused of being “terrorists,” largely an arbitrary term for those opposing actions of the Ethiopian government and wishing to bring about change. The government frequently brands protesting Oromo and others as “terrorists” to justify imprisoning or killing them.

The Tom Lantos Commission should disseminate to Congress all possible documentation of the crimes of the Ethiopian government. In turn, Congress should find ways to be sure the United States ratchets up the pressure on its strategic ally far beyond clubby acknowledgements of “more work to be done.” The spigot of international development money should not remain open without real and fundamental changes in the human rights environment in Ethiopia, beginning with an end to extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary killings; a release of political prisoners; restoration of a free press and independent judiciary; and the repeal or modification of the Charities and Societies Proclamation and the Anti-Terrorism Law.

Pictured: Amaanee Badhasso, International Oromo Youth Association’s president in 2014, accompanied The Advocates’ Amy Bergquist to Geneva that year to meet with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Photo credit: Amy Bergquist
Photo credits: Girl running, Jennifer Prestholdt; Kathy Lenzmeier & children; Laxmi, & teacher, David Kistle
A new school building to become reality for our Nepal students

Blueprint for Changing Lives

Excitement will shift into overdrive for students of Sankhu-Palubari Community School in Nepal when they set foot into their new, well-equipped school building. Gone will be the crowded classrooms, library that serves many purposes, potato field that functions as a playground for only part of the year; the adjacent main road's fumes and noise; and electricity that is “off” more often than “on.”

When students walk through the doors of their new school, they will be greeted by well-designed, furnished classrooms and science lab. The playground and sports field, staff meeting room, and classrooms designed and reserved for pre-K children will be icing on the cake.

“The Sankhu-Palubari community has for years yearned for a new school building,” said Jennifer Prestholdt, deputy director of The Advocates and co-ordinator of the Nepal School initiative. “In fact, the community has already funded and built the new school’s foundation; it has been sitting there, waiting for a new building.”

After the 2015 earthquakes ravaged Nepal, including the area the school serves, building plans moved into warp speed. “The earthquakes changed everything, making the new building a necessity,” Prestholdt remarked. Construction is anticipated to begin by May, with the building ready for occupation within six months.

“For 16 years, The Advocates has supported Sankhu-Palubari Community School’s programming,” said Prestholdt. “Providing education as an alternative to child labor has always been our focus. The earthquakes were the impetus for the new building, and a generous couple stepped forward to turn the dream into reality.”

That couple is Kathy and Allen 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,” Kathy Lenzmeier explained.

“When I became involved with The Advocates, I was very interested in the Nepal school and after visiting twice, I am overwhelmed by the school’s success. Alan 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.”

The building project is a testament to the partnership between The Advocates and the Sankhu-Palubari Community Development Committee. An architect in Nepal volunteered to design the building and community members are contributing some of the 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, is creating the school’s landscape design and will return to her home community to do the planting.

This 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, continuing to give children a genuine alternative to child labor and a brighter future.

Photo credit: The Advocates for Human Rights
It is commonly believed that a young person who begins to experience homelessness is approached within the first 72 hours by someone asking the youth to compromise her or his body in exchange for basic needs, food, shelter, or clothing. Nicole Mills, executive director of Oasis for Youth, told the more than 100 people gathered at a house party in April to support The Advocates’ Women’s Human Rights Program.

Oasis for Youth opens doors to housing, employment, education, and wellness for youth facing homelessness in southern Hennepin County suburbs. In her work, Mills sees first-hand dramatic evidence of the effectiveness of Minnesota’s Safe Harbor Law. The law defines individuals who are prostituted and are under the age of 18 as victims, not criminals. Spearheaded by a coalition of which The Advocates was a leading force, the law—implemented in August 2014—set in motion a statewide effort to provide these young people with shelter and services.

“I’ve been involved in this work for more than 16 years and from a policy perspective, the accomplishments—which The Advocates for Human Rights has been a key part of—have been game changing,” Mills said. What has been the biggest impact may sound simple, but it is profound, according to Mills. “Young people are now believed when they say that bad things are happening to them.”

Prior to the Safe Harbor legislation passing, Oasis for Youth and other providers had nowhere and no one to turn to. “Nobody believed the heinous nature of what young people experienced. When a girl was hurt in a transaction, we didn’t call the police, we didn’t call a doctor, we didn’t call child protection,” said Mills. “There was no one we trusted, no one we knew who didn’t think these kids were just ‘bad’ kids and deserved what happened to them. Some could not believe that this type of thing happened in Minnesota.”

The Advocates changed that. “The Advocates for Human Rights was one of the first groups to stand up and say to our kids, ‘I believe you and you deserve better.’”

The Advocates has been a core driver of the changes that Mills now sees. “I’m here to say ‘thank you’ for your support and for literally writing the legislation that creates an environment that allows young people to be believed, to ask for help, and to get help,” Mills told the house party guests. “You should be proud of your legacy.”

Pre-Safe Harbor, Mills and her colleagues found the systems to be abusive. “So, rather than pressing charges or seeking help, we taught the kids how to be safer,” she said. “Imagine it normal to be working with a 17-year-old girl and not being able to say, ‘I know where we can get you help, I know a cop who will believe you.’ Instead we’d teach her how to convince a john to use a condom.”

Beth Holger-Ambrose, executive director of The Link, agrees with Mills, praising the Safe Harbor law because sex-trafficked children are no longer criminalized. “Instead of juvenile detention, youth are referred to places like The Link,” she said.

For more than 20 years, The Link has provided support to at-risk youth in the Twin Cities, including specialized services for sexually exploited youth which began after the Safe Harbor law’s implementation. The organization provides sex-trafficked youth services to meet their particular needs, including emergency shelter; safe housing; help with their involvement in any court case, if applicable; and on-site school, a survivor mentor program, chemical dependency counseling, group activities, and other services.

In Holger-Ambrose’s estimation, the biggest change the Safe Harbor law has brought is that, with rare exception, abused kids are no longer placed in detention. “They’re finally being seen as victims of crime and in need of help. Now child protection and law enforcement refer kids to The Link, Tubman, and Brittany’s Place, in the Twin Cities; Heartland Girls Ranch, in Benson; Life House, in Duluth; and other members of the safety net.

The Link helped 57 children in the first year of its work with child victims. “We turned away up to 10 kids each week because we didn’t have the capacity. Sometimes we can find places at a different agency, or we put them into a hotel, a less than optimal choice,” said Holger-Ambrose.

It is now easy for law enforcement to get help for a trafficked child. “All they have to do is contact the Safe Harbor regional navigator—people throughout the state who provide access to services,” she said. “Youth, themselves, can reach out to a regional navigator. That’s why it’s critical.
to get out the word about the law and about the help that is available. Training is important, too. The Advocates has been there every step of the way.”

Another benefit is that more people who commit trafficking crimes are being prosecuted. “Not only has Safe Harbor brought this revolting crime out of the shadows and focused attention on it, young people are now developing trust and are more open to working with law enforcement—giving addresses and cell phone numbers, texts, dates, positive IDs on traffickers, and other important information,” she said.

● **Children trafficked for sex are now treated as victims, not criminals.**

It is not just people working directly with youth who can put a stop to trafficking. Michele Harvet, a lead license inspector with the City of Minneapolis, and her colleagues are a testament. “Because we work on the front lines and our eyes see things others don’t, staff from licensing, housing, health, animal control, fire, and traffic control depart-

ments received training from The Advocates on identifying sex trafficking,” Harvet told the house party crowd. Since then, she and other city staff have identified businesses suspected of being involved in sex trafficking.

“Since our training in 2014, the city has denied licenses and has gotten problem businesses closed, including 25 massage parlors suspected of using massage as a guise for trafficking sex.”

Minnesota does not have a good handle on the number of kids being trafficked. There is a huge undercount because sex trafficking, especially of children, is an underground, hidden illegal activity. “Our youth are still exposed to heinous crimes, and we live those stories out as we sit by their hospital beds because their pimp beat them, a john raped them, or they tried to take their own lives,” Mills said.

The next step is for the state of Minnesota to fully implement the law by authorizing the $5.3 million needed for emergency shelter, housing mental health and chemical dependency counseling, survivor mentor programs, etc. “That we turn kids away illustrates the profound need,” said Holger-Ambrose. ● ● ●
Where Punk & the Law Meet

According to John Barham, the areas of law he specializes in—criminal defense and immigration—are designed, it sometimes seems, to be especially confusing and pernicious, instruments that disempower as much as they protect. “It’s more like magic than anything else,” he said. “There’s all these tricks you need to know.” And so, as best he can, and often for no money, Barham helps protect his clients from (misapplications of) the law.

In January in his volunteer work with The Advocates for Human Rights, Barham (pictured here) won asylum for a 13-year-old girl who fled to the United States to escape violence in South America. That same week, he and his punk band, Murrieta, took part in a benefit at The Hexagon Bar in Minneapolis; proceeds went to The Advocates’ Refuge and Immigrant Program. Felix Valanzasca, Barham’s friend and the attorney who shares his law office, organized the concert. Valanzasca had also volunteered as an interpreter for Barham’s asylum client from Ecuador.

Barham is bald, bespectacled, friendly, and, at least at the end of the day, a touch tired. He speaks quickly and with the trace of a southern accent (politics becomes pawlitics.) The clutter of his office, at the intersection of Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue, is a homey clutter. The law in this office is not so intimidating as in other law offices, not quite so infallible-seeming, not quite so buttoned-up.

‘A music of resistance’

In the evenings, when he is performing with Murrieta, Barham wears no shirt at all. Videos on YouTube show him plodding on stages in dark rooms, bare-chested, a microphone in hand. The music is guitar-heavy, drum-heavy, and loud—but it is also inviting. The music is loud because, in part, the music is a cry, a cri de coeur—it is political. Punk, says Barham, “is a music of resistance, a subversive music, analogous to hip-hop ... the scene does well where there are lots of immigrants. It tends to flourish in places where immigrants are dealing with abuse or hostility. ... Even just in the punk scene here [in Minneapolis] there are a lot of Latino immigrants, as well as immigrants from other parts of the world. And to a large extent that’s who we’re playing for.”

His involvement in the punk scene stems from the same roots that led him to practice social justice law; in some respects when he is practicing law he is practicing punk, and vice versa: when playing punk, he is performing social outreach. The group takes its name from Joaquin Murrieta, a sort of Latino-American Robin Hood, who during the gold rush looted rich, unscrupulous prospectors and then distributed the purloined funds among the poor.

Barham grew up in South Carolina. Half his family was Vietnamese. “Racism as an issue was very clear to me before I was in kindergarten,” he says. “My childhood was fist-fighting most of my neighborhood over them wanting to kill my cousins and brothers and sisters because of where they were from. That remained a troubling thing for really the rest of my life.” After graduating from college he spent more than a decade living in South America. In Argentina he spent two years as a social worker for a human rights group, providing aid to children who lived in train stations. In Chile, in addition to working as an English teacher and translator, he and his crew provided de-facto security to the country’s gay rights movements.

While in South America, he met the woman who would become his wife (and, later, his ex-wife). She had a son, and they decided to raise him in the States. Barham enrolled in law school in eastern Tennessee. “Law school was the worst part of my life, by far,” he says. “The racism and xenophobia faced by my ex-wife and son there were just tremendous. And it was the first environment I’d been in where greed was explicitly OK. We left the first day we could, and drove right here.”

Minnesota: a kind of oasis

Minnesota, he says, “and the Twin Cities in particular, is kind of an oasis in the United States in terms of tolerance and acceptance and diversity.” He notes the imperfections — “I feel like every time I pick up the newspaper or see the news there’s something new about a Somalian person being insulted or injured,” he said; he began volunteering for Black Lives Matter after several of their supporters were shot. But he maintains that, in his experience, it ranks among the most inclusive of American cities that he has lived in.

It can with justification be said that Murrieta carries on the legacy of its namesake.


Photo credits: This page, Kathy Brown; facing page, Sue Banovetz
Meet four refugee clients >
Mending Heart & Soul

Tania (pictured) was just 11 when, accompanied by her uncle and a guide, she left Ecuador, fleeing for safety and a better life. Family members had abused her in Ecuador and refused to get medical care for her heart condition. After making the long trek from Ecuador to the U.S.–Mexico border, U.S. officials apprehended her and put her in detention. Tania lived in a detention center with children in similar circumstances—alone. Eventually, she reunited with her parents who live in Minnesota. She had the heart surgery she desperately needed, and she was granted asylum in January. Her life is good in Minnesota. Now 14, she enjoys school (gym is her favorite class), playing soccer, learning English, and making friends. “My best friend’s name is Jessica; she helps me with English translation,” Tania said.

Mother’s past suffering secures safety for her children
The ruthless M-18 gang targeted Maria and her two children in Guatemala, routinely exacting a “quota” from her. Maria lived in fear the M-18 would kidnap her children, or worse. Last year, she fled with her little ones. U.S. authorities apprehended them at the U.S.-Mexico border. While immigration authorities were set on removing the family from the country, Maria and her children were allowed to join their husband and father in Minnesota.

The Advocates’ volunteer attorneys Luke Olson, Chris Bercaw, and Annie Trimmerger of Dorsey & Whitney LLP argued Maria’s asylum application on violence she suffered as a member of Q’anjob’al Mayan, an ethnic group indigenous to Guatemala. When she was a baby, her father and brother were killed in a massacre of Q’anjob’al Mayan. The attorneys’ strategy, grounded in complex immigration law, proved winning—Maria gained asylum and lives, with hope for the future.

Woman has hope-filled future after fleeing forced marriage & abuse
The fear Ms. C held for returning to Guinea was palpable. Her father, his family, and the man to whom she had been “promised” were extremely violent to her because she had rejected forced marriage. She also opposed circumcision. “I was afraid if I returned to Guinea, they would kill me,” she said. “My father is a very violent person, and my actions disrespected him and made it appear that he had broken a promise. I feared the man I was promised to would kill me because he tried to kill me before.” Ms. C was also afraid she would be beaten, raped, and forced to be circumcised. “I could not go to the government of Guinea for help and ask for its protection because these issues are considered family matters and female circumcision is an accepted practice that the government of Guinea does not try to stop.” The Advocates’ volunteer attorney Brian Dillon of Plant Mooty represented Ms. C in her asylum case.

Now in Minnesota, Tania is happy because she is with her parents and healthy because she received the heart surgery she needed.

“The stakes were high—this was a sweet, timid little girl,” said John Barham, The Advocates’ volunteer attorney who gained asylum for Tania (see story on facing page). “I could see her tense up when the idea came up of her returning to Ecuador.”

Quest for better lives for all forces man to flee for safety
Mr. S had lived on the streets in Cameroon and helped to feed his family by working instead of going to school. He wanted life in his country to change, and he saw politics as the way to achieve that goal. He joined the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party. Because of his success with organizing peaceful opposition campaigns, registering people with his party, and reaching out to young people, his notoriety grew. Police recognized him during a protest and brutally beat him, blinding his right eye. They threw him in prison with other activists—many dying because of the conditions. While Mr. S escaped death, he was tortured in an electric chair, beaten, and raped. After his release, he hid in the mountains for more than three years until he could get to the United States. He was granted asylum in August 2015.

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Focus on Sam Myers >

Our Successes Translate into Incalculable Human Results

Sam Myers serves as chair of The Advocates for Human Rights’ board of directors. He works with Myers Thompson, P.A., a law firm he co-founded that focuses on representing employers in the field of immigration. He is a 30-year member and has served as national president of the 14,000-member American Immigration Lawyers Association. Along with other accolades, American Lawyer listed Myers as one of the “Best Lawyers in American Immigration Law.”

How did you first get connected to The Advocates? I think it was during the mid-1980s when I was asked to be a consulting attorney for The Advocates’ Refugee & Immigrant Program, and I worked with several volunteer attorneys on asylum cases which, I recall, were all successful. These lawyers weren’t schooled in immigration law, but the results they achieved testified to their tireless efforts. One particular case involved a thrilling Eighth Circuit appeal that Janice Clay won, following an oral argument. Janice continues to be a valuable supporter of The Advocates and a good friend of mine.

What is it about The Advocates’ work that resonates with you? The Advocates’ extraordinary staff and volunteers save lives. The human results are incalculable. It is easy to consider human rights as being vague and aspirational, but it’s not. Rather, human rights involve conscious decisions people and institutions make daily that affect peoples’ lives. The Advocates has taught me that it’s possible for an organization, even one located in the Midwest, to have real impact on people’s lives. As board chair, I thoroughly enjoy attending staff meetings and listening to everything these remarkable people achieve.

What do you enjoy most about being part of The Advocates’ community? For one thing, they’re really nice people. That may sound simplistic, but genuine feelings and expressions of kindness permeate The Advocates’ community. During times when neither genuineness nor kindness seems to be prevalent in society, The Advocates’ staff and volunteers restore my faith in the essential good nature of people. Sometimes we need to be reminded of that.

What distinguishes The Advocates among nonprofits? The leverage resulting from the extraordinary relationship with our volunteers distinguishes The Advocates. Our impact is unusually large for a relatively small agency. I’m impressed with the extensive collaborations we have with other organizations, such as the Center for Victims of Torture, University of Minnesota Law School and its Center for New Americans, American Immigration Lawyers Association, and partners throughout the world. I’m very enthusiastic about the collaborations we now have with arts organizations that introduce us to new supporters and collaborators and help educate people about human rights. The breadth of local, national, and international impacts being accomplished by our staff and volunteers is inspiring.

How has your involvement with The Advocates changed your degree of fulfillment? I’ve always valued collaborating with non-profit organizations that do good things for people. Often, they’re our hedge against ineffective, inadequate, or sometimes contrary government social systems. Twenty years ago, I never would have thought of an organization like ours supporting a school in Nepal, having 300 volunteer attorneys winning more than 90 percent of their asylum cases, creating the Minnesota Protocol that set international standards to investigate suspicious deaths in countries, or sharing the many strategic alliances we have in place locally and globally.

Photo credits: The Advocates for Human Rights
Focus on Beatriz Menanteau >
She Changes Systems and Lives

Beatriz Menanteau, a staff attorney with The Advocates for Human Rights, applies human rights standards to advocate for women. The lead author of a recent report on batterer intervention programs in Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union countries, she conducts legal analysis, research, and trainings on domestic violence, sex trafficking, and batterer intervention programs. She facilitates ground-breaking trainings of government officials, judges, and legal professionals in Moldova, Georgia, Turkey, and elsewhere, and supports advocacy at the United Nations and the European Court of Human Rights. Here at home, she was instrumental in developing Minnesota’s Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act (Safe Harbors) and aided its passage by the state legislature. She advocated for legal amendments to Minnesota’s sex trafficking law to increase penalties for perpetrators. She organized a first-of-its-kind training for prosecutors to ensure effective implementation of the Safe Harbors, and is integral in training hotel employees, city inspectors, and others about sex trafficking’s red flags and what people should do if they suspect something is running afoul.

What do you find rewarding about your work?
By advocating for women's human rights, I make the world better for everyone. When people are marginalized, exploited, or ignored, the global community suffers. Conversely, the world benefits when women are empowered and their rights acknowledged and respected. If I have a rough day or a project is difficult, I take a step back and say, “This work, this effort might save someone’s life.” My work might bring someone justice and a new start on life. It might keep a little girl in school. It might keep her from getting raped. It might keep her mother safe and give her choices. It might give them a voice they didn’t have. That “might” makes it rewarding.

What led you to working to make the world a safer, better place for women?
Having been born in Chile, I became aware at a young age of the effect human rights violations have on people and communities. I knew I wanted to use the opportunity of going to law school to work for social justice. At The Advocates, I’m able to use my law degree and my experience to change systems so women’s human rights are recognized and protected. Working on local and international levels makes it more effective and enriching. I’m able to connect what we see in Minnesota with what we see in other countries; as a result, our work and partnerships have broader impact.

What do you consider your most significant accomplishment in your work?
It has been amazing to be part of the anti-trafficking movement in Minnesota. We have made huge progress relatively fast, and that’s refreshing because struggles for human rights in that area can take decades. I’ve seen a huge shift in the way people understand and approach sex trafficking in Minnesota. This shift will sustain long-term effective change in the system’s practices and policies. Being a part of that movement and having had the opportunity to play a significant role in that shift is something that I value. And I’ve learned from other leaders involved in the anti-trafficking movement in Minnesota.

Tell us about your family.
My husband, John Paul, and my three-year-old daughter, Isabella Sol, are extremely influential in my life. When my daughter was born, working for women’s human rights took on a very personal and added dimension. It wasn’t just about the world I want for other women; it became about the world I want for my daughter—safety, choices, and freedom. Moreover, I couldn’t do my work without the support of John Paul and our extended family of parents and siblings who help when I’m traveling. When my work keeps me away from my daughter, I find strength in the hope that my efforts will make the world a better place for her and the ones who will become her family later in life.
House parties generate an important source of funding upon which The Advocates relies. Gifts support advocacy with 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 who welcomed The Advocates’ friends into their homes. Hosts include Linda Foreman and Thomas Dickstein (The Advocates’ and International Justice); Jan Conlin and Gene Goetz (Women’s Human Rights); and Mary and David Parker (the Nepal school).

House party co-hosts Linda Foreman and her son, Thomas Dickstein. Photo credit: Kate Ali

Jim Roth (l) visits with The Advocates’ board chair, Sam Myers. Photo credit: Kate Ali

Amy Bergquist (l), staff attorney with The Advocates, & human rights activist Arvonne Fraser support change throughout the world. Photo credit: Kathy Brown

The Advocates’ board member Jim O’Neal describes the importance & success of the organization’s work throughout the world. Photo credit: Kate Ali
Don Fraser (l) and Mel Dickstein enjoy the International Justice house party. Photo credit: Kate Ali

Human rights leader David Weissbrodt visits with Emily Hutchinson. Photo credit: Kathy Brown

Barb Frey, a drafter of the Minnesota Protocol, discusses details about the need for the guidelines & standards. Photo credit: Kate Ali

House party guests (l-r) Melissa Finnegan, Rosa Tock, & Patrick Finnegan. Photo credit: Kathy Brown

Mary & David Parker enjoying the Women’s Human Rights House Party. Photo credit: Kate Ali

Michele Harvet (l), a Minneapolis lead license inspector; Rosalyn Park (c), director of The Advocates’ Women Human Rights Program; & Nicole Mills (r), executive director of Oasis for Youth, at the Women’s Human Rights house party. Photo credit: Kate Ali
Changing the world for good.

HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER
2 • 0 • 1 • 6

Wed., June 1 • 5 p.m.
Marriott City Center
30 South 7th Street
Minneapolis, MN

Featuring
Christof Heyns, UN Special Rapporteur

Register at TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org