

HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER

PEACE
JUSTICE
EQUALITY
DIGNITY
FREEDOM

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Director's Desk

As I write my final "Director's Desk" I am filled with gratitude for the privilege of leading this extraordinary organization for more than 22 years. The Advocates' staff, board, volunteers, and supporters have created a lasting community where anything is possible. Working alongside such passionate, dedicated, and capable individuals has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

The most important lesson I have learned is that anything is possible when we work together. Our founding directors had a unique vision that we all have a part to play in making human rights a reality. Involving volunteers in human rights work has been our core organizing principle through the decades. As Margaret Mead famously said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

We have an incredible number of volunteers. Last year, more than 1,800 of you volunteered with us. Together, we handled more than 3,900 legal matters for people who have experienced unimaginable violations of their fundamental human rights. One of the most important measures of our success is the number of individual lives saved.

Together, we have achieved remarkable milestones in our mission to advocate for human rights. We have launched groundbreaking initiatives, from establishing our Women's Human Rights Program a full decade before many others in the movement, to our historic project with Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission involving Liberians who fled the conflict in the truth-seeking process. We have consistently approached our work with boldness, creativity, and flexibility.

We have fostered important partnerships that have amplified our reach. These include collaborations with organizations here in Minnesota and around the world. We use the levers of power at the United Nations to hold governments accountable for their human rights practices. We monitor the compliance of individual countries with the human rights treaties they have adopted and propose recommendations to improve their implementation. We measure our success in changed laws and policies that improve people's lives.

While I may be leaving this position, I remain deeply committed to our mission and will continue as a senior advisor to the organization. It goes without saying that we will face tremendous challenges to human rights in the coming four years. I have every confidence in the future of the organization and the remarkable transition team that will continue to drive it forward. Our senior management has more than 75 years of combined experience advocating for human rights. They are smart, talented, creative, and dedicated. You can read more about them on page 29.

I am also confident in our future success because of you, our community of advocates. Thank you for your support, your dedication, and your commitment to making the world better.



Robin Phillips
Executive Director

TODAY.

The Advocates for Human Rights respects the inherent dignity of all human beings no matter a person's race, ethnicity, immigration status, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex, or age. We will continue to stand up against racism, bigotry, hatred, discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and all forms of gender-based violence. Today. Tomorrow. Always.

The 2024 election results promise serious challenges to human rights. These challenges are precisely why The Advocates for Human Rights exists, and why our mission to implement international human rights standards to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law has never been more vital.

We are ready to meet this moment.

The Advocates knows how to document and bring human rights violations to light. From working alongside our partners to counter the radical right's global pushback against the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people, to expanding our capacity to defend the rights of immigrants and refugees in Minnesota, we have been building the power we need.

The Advocates will continue to protect and promote human rights, both locally and internationally. We will continue to work towards a world where everybody lives with dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace; and where every person plays a part in ensuring human rights for all.

It will take all of us, working together, to protect the human rights of those most at risk among us.

Together we will fight to

- stop the worst threats to the immigration system: ending protections and lawful pathways, stripping constitutional and humanitarian protections, expanding detention, and deportation operations,
- protect women's rights to healthcare, bodily autonomy, and freedom from violence, and
- protect the rights of members of the LGBTIQ+ community, especially transgender people.

Together we will advocate for laws that respect fundamental human rights.

Join us as we prepare for the challenges ahead.

TOMORROW.

ALWAYS.



Donate to
The Advocates



Volunteer with
The Advocates

The Importance of Human Rights

At our annual Human Rights Awards Dinner, The Advocates celebrates the volunteers and partners who have made an **extraordinary impact in advancing our mission.**

“This room is full of the best of humanity, and I thank you for showing up for human rights tonight.” – Robin Phillips

On Wednesday, June 26th, 2024, The Advocates for Human Rights gathered together with our volunteers, donors, and partners to recognize the work accomplished in the previous year and look forward to future opportunities and challenges. Our Human Rights Awards Dinner celebrates the extraordinary efforts by The Advocates' community in protecting and promoting dignity, freedom, justice, equality, and peace.

The night began with Board Chair Karen Evans acknowledging staff, volunteers, board members, and donors - both current and past. She recognized fellow board member, Bridget Chivimbiso Chigunwe, for her unique contributions to the organization. Beginning with The Advocates as a client in 2016, Bridget was granted asylum in 2022. Recently, her two children, Paula and Edwin, arrived in Minnesota after eight years apart from their mother. Together, we celebrate this family reunited!



Karen continued her heartfelt remarks, announcing the retirement of Executive Director Robin Phillips after twenty-nine years with the

organization. She highlighted Robin's ability to be forward thinking, positive, and calm. Though she will no longer serve as executive director beginning in January 2025, Robin will remain a part of the organization as a senior advisor.



Robin spoke to all in the room as she listed the incredible contributions of the eighteen hundred volunteers involved in our work over the last year. She also spoke of the skill and passion of the staff and praised the ability of the interim co-executive directors Michele Garnett McKenzie, Jennifer Prestholdt, and Rosalyn Park to lead The Advocates into the future.

The Human Rights Awards Dinner celebrates that everyone has a part to play in supporting human rights. The Advocates recognized a select group of individuals for their outstanding contributions to the organization and the human rights movement. The 2024 awards winners are:

Sarah Stoesz, former President and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States, was honored with the Don and Arvonne Fraser

Human Rights Award for her lifetime commitment to reproductive health and human rights. Sarah is an extraordinary example of living your values. Her courage, dedication, and years of service to women's human rights have inspired us all.

The Advocates welcomed back our 2020 Don and Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award winner, **Lee Gelernt**, who was unable to join us in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lee has been on the front lines of the fight for immigrants' human rights, arguing in the courts to overturn discriminatory and illegal policies. He litigated the cases to overturn the Trump administration's first travel ban, stop mass deportations of refugees, and reunite families separated at the border.

Reyna Blandon Lagos (Volunteer Award) brings her whole heart and passion to her volunteer work with The Advocates. In addition to her contributions to United Nations reports and advocacy to counter restrictions on asylum, Reyna is always willing to share client-centered feedback for our project evaluations and provides logistical support for clients in the St. Cloud area.

Maureen Brown (Volunteer Award) started volunteering behind the scenes in 2021, helping with mailings. Now, Maureen volunteers at our front desk, and she is one of the first people clients may see when they arrive at our office. Maureen brings empathy, patience, and diligence to her volunteer work, and she is a friendly face that ensures that our clients know they are welcome.

Pictured: Bridget Chivimbiso Chigunwe (left), and Karen Evans (center).

Bill Hittler's (Volunteer Award) volunteer work has directly benefited more than 10 clients and indirectly benefited so many more. Bill first volunteered several years ago, representing an unaccompanied child. Since then, he has expanded his volunteer work to represent more kids and adults, including those in detention, and he also mentors other volunteer attorneys. Thanks to his hard work, one of Bill's clients is celebrating a recent grant of asylum.

Zehra Fatima Khan (Volunteer Award) began her volunteer journey with The Advocates four years ago through monitoring remote court hearings with the WATCH court observation project. Since then, she has continued as an intern with WATCH and supported other projects on violence against women, including work on UN reports, consultations with youth, and interviews with anti-trafficking experts.

Whitney A. Tuthill-Preus (Volunteer Award) has been analyzing, cataloging, and summarizing the thousands of documents, CDs, and VHS and cassette tapes in our organizational files since 2019. Whitney's volunteer contributions and experience in archival science are helping to preserve four decades of The Advocates' history.

Finally, the Law Firm Pro Bono Award was granted to **Goodwin Procter, LLP**. We are overwhelmed by the contributions that they and hundreds of their colleagues have made in preparing more than 120 pro se country conditions packets. These resources will benefit our clients from around the world.

As the Human Rights Awards Dinner closed, board member Bridget Chivimbiso Chigunwe reminded us of the importance of contributing both our time and financial resources. We are grateful to all who supported the event and made it such a great success.

Photo Credit page 3-4: Bill Cameron

Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award Winners



“You are the hands-on workers for human rights. You show all of us, the world, that human rights don't exist as a force of nature, but only exist because of the actions that we take, even at the risk to our lives sometimes, and to our family's [lives].”

– Sarah Stoesz

2024 Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award



“I think my only advice, having been doing this [work] for three decades is, we just need to keep fighting, you know, and that means doing everything possible...We will get through this, and it means everyone, not just lawyers. There are so many ways to help.”

– Lee Gelernt

2020 Don & Arvonne Fraser Human Rights Award

2024 Volunteer Award Winners

Reyna Blandon Lagos



Maureen Brown



Bill Hittler



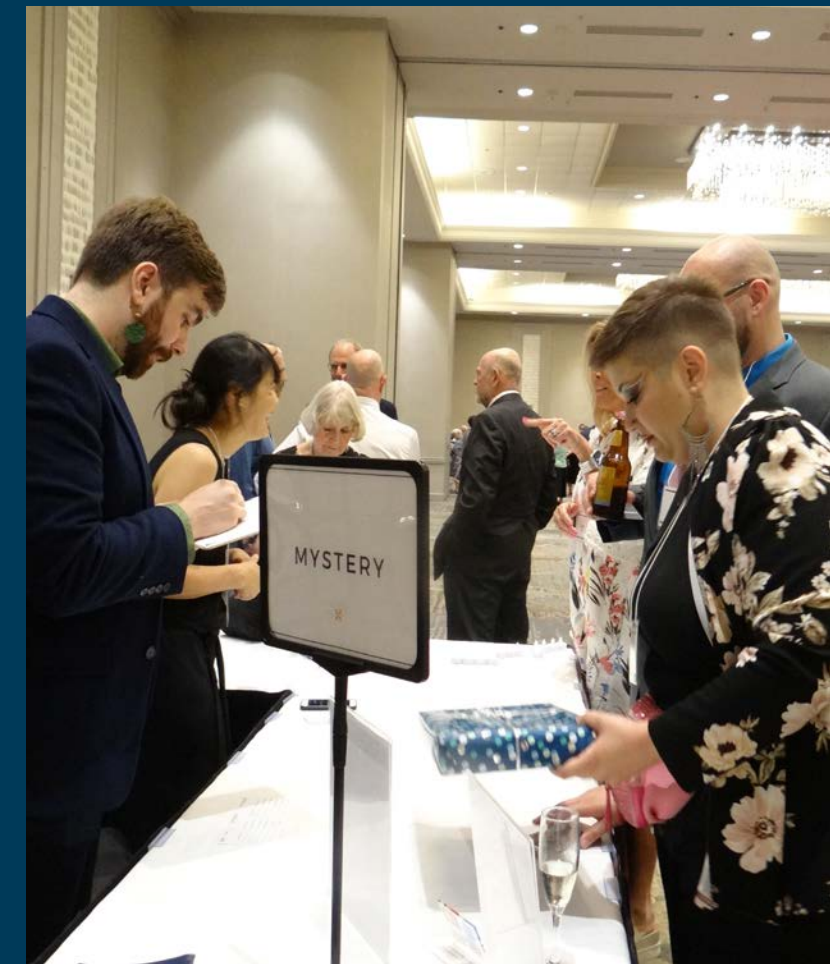
Zehra Fatima Khan



Whitney A. Tuthill-Preus



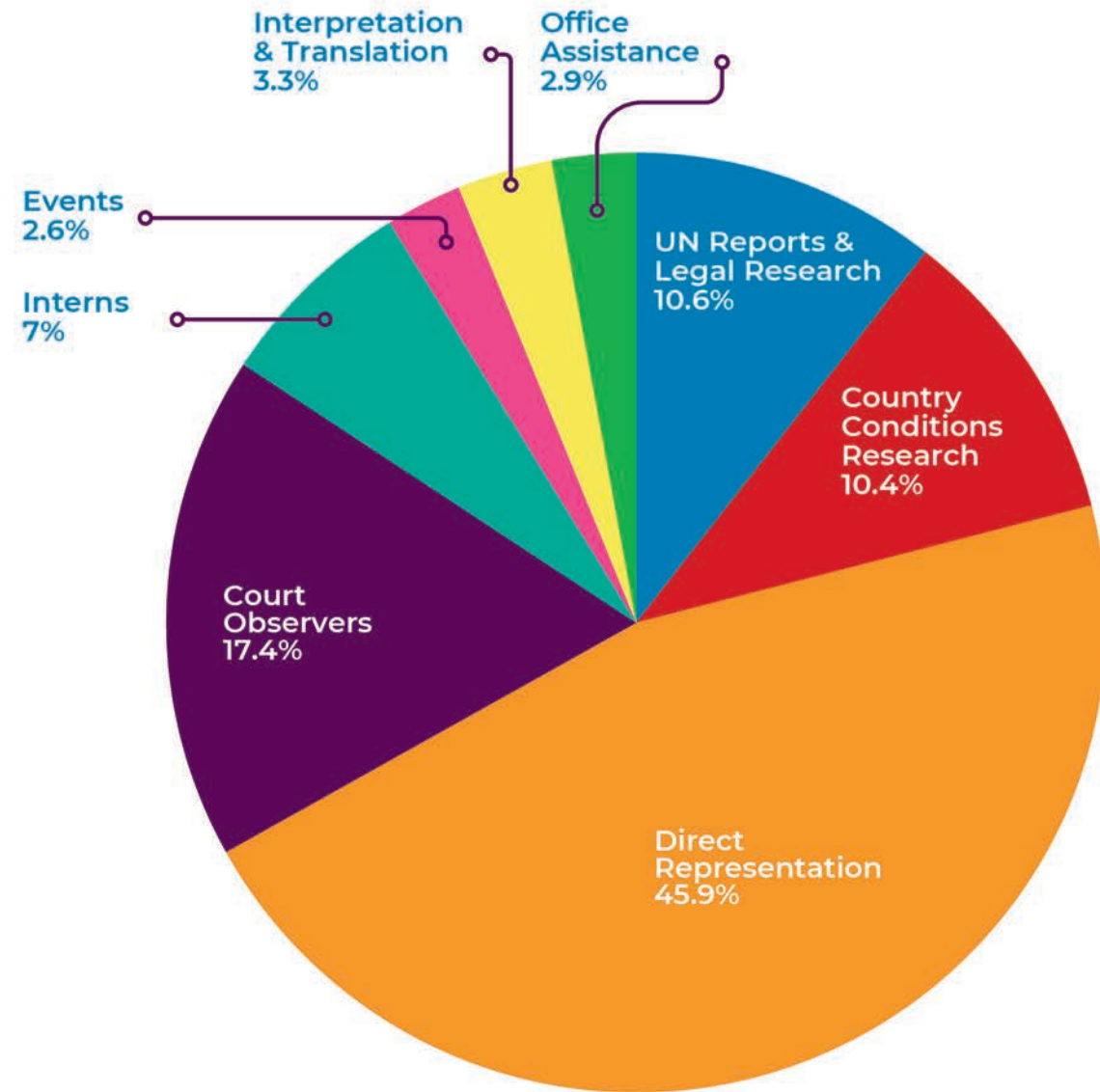
Award Winner Photo Credits: Bill Cameron



Silent Auction Photo Credit: Rebecca Mariscal

Your Volunteer Impact

In 2024, more than 1,800 volunteers contributed more than \$20M in in-kind contributions including:



“Through pro bono representation, you work alongside resilient individuals, who seek only the opportunity to be themselves and to live in safety. Collaboration with our clients continually presents the gift of perspective and the honor to witness courageous souls emerge with hope into their new lives after enduring immeasurable hardship.”

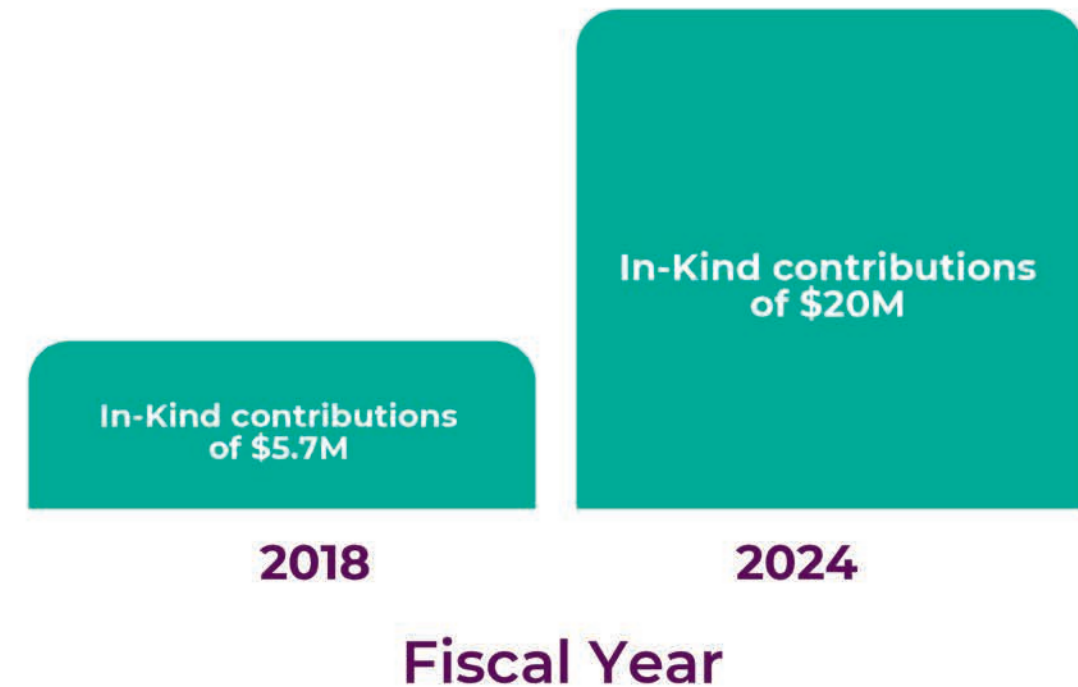
Jared Shepherd



“For human rights concerns such as LGBTQ+ issues, we are able to defend the rights of many, that without The Advocates for Human Rights would be a non-starter in our home countries. In a time when there is widespread pushback against the hard-fought gains for human rights, silence is not an option.”

Nathnael Berhanu

Leveraging Resources for Greater Impact



“Working with The Advocates has allowed me to contribute to meaningful, impactful work, first as an intern and now as a volunteer. The team is deeply dedicated and supportive, and I’m honored to have the opportunity to contribute to their mission to protect fundamental human rights.”

Amrit Sandhu

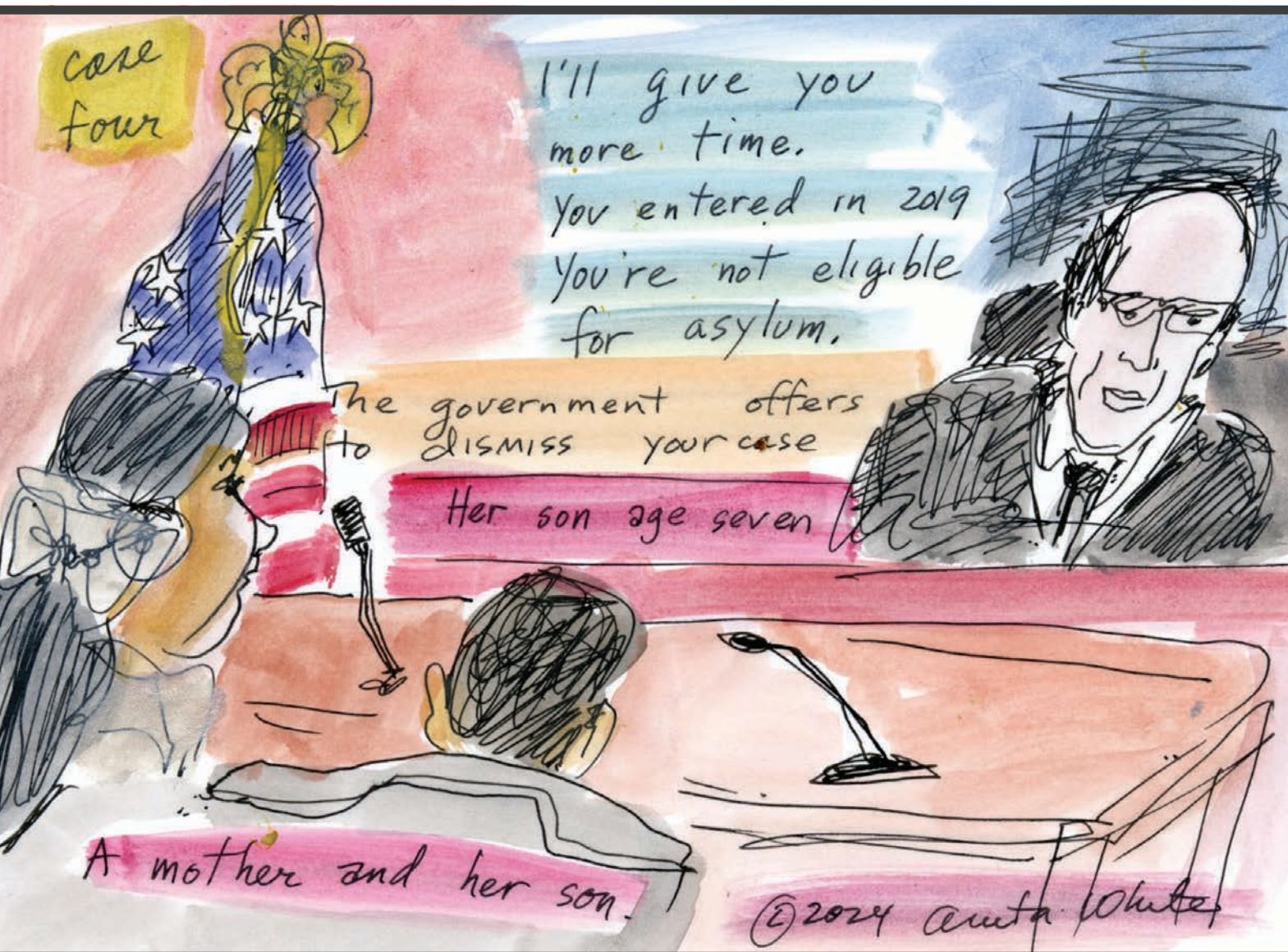
Reflecting on the Immigration Court Observation Project

“When the judge asked the attorney how long she needed to prepare for the next hearing, the attorney requested until the end of the next month, but the judge denied that much time. Ironic given the judge’s [comments] to respondents about how busy immigration attorneys are.” — Anonymous Observer

The Immigration Court Observation Project draws on the international human rights practice of trial monitoring to identify, bring visibility to, and end systemic human rights violations arising in the context of civil immigration enforcement.

The project brings observers from the public into the Fort Snelling Immigration Court in Minnesota to observe and document immigration hearings. In response to heightened attacks on immigrants, the project launched in 2017 to monitor hearings of people facing deportation while held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. Today, volunteers observe hearings on the detained, non-detained, and dedicated children's dockets.

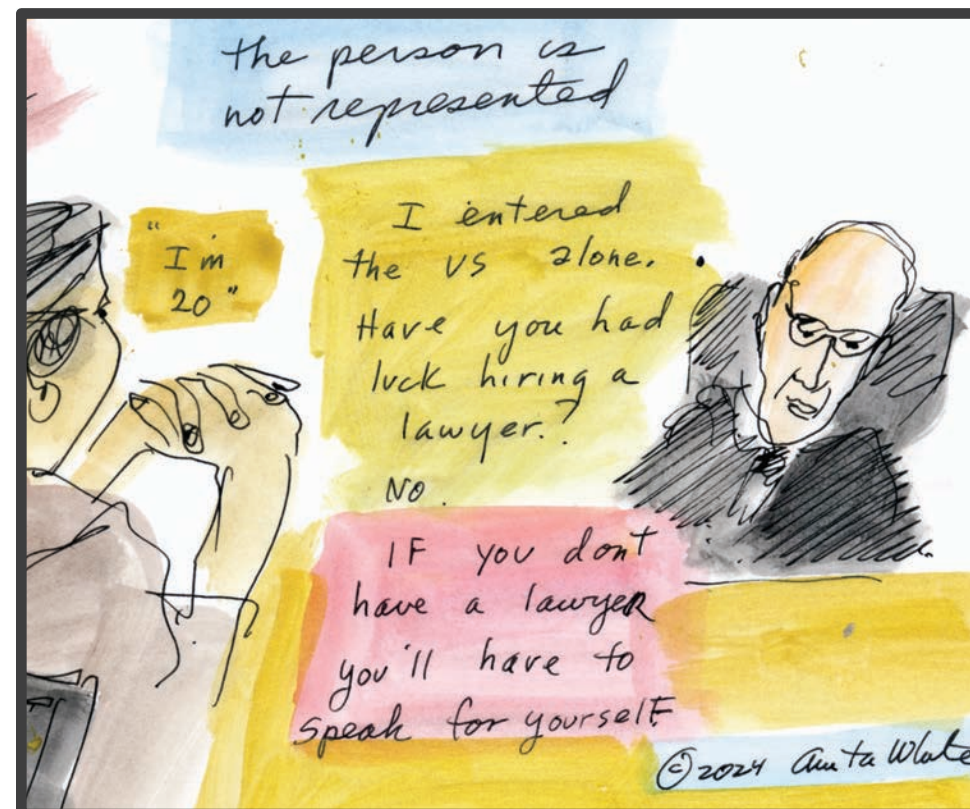
The Advocates expects the next four years will bring increased enforcement and less adherence to the rule of law, making the court observation project more important than ever.



“The judge gave him two weeks to fill out an asylum form and explained the standards. He then started to cry and asked to be deported because he could not stand to be in jail anymore.... The respondent was confused about the proceedings and thought it would work like the criminal court. The confusion of the respondent was unacknowledged. He said he had no money and asked for help at one point. The judge explained each procedural step, but I don't think the respondent was able to entirely absorb her instructions. Witnessing this proceeding makes me wonder if rules and steps are explained to detainees ahead of time. I also am concerned about how much the detainees can process during the hearing - when someone is emotional, it is very difficult to learn and employ logic.” — Suni Z., first time observer



“I saw two cases involving bond decisions. What disturbed me about these cases is the judge's willingness to accept evidence that a criminal court has not adjudicated the respondents on. In one case the prosecutor dismissed charges for lack of evidence. In the other case the incident was only a citation with no accompanying report and the detainee didn't receive the citation and denies the allegations (littering and open bottle) ... These unproven incidents formed the basis for her (the judge) to decline bond for the detainees... So, it made me wonder; do we not have a standard of 'innocent until proven guilty' to guide these decisions? I realize immigration court is not criminal court but is it common for the judge to place weight on evidence in dispute?” — Jeanne R., long term observer



Do you want to join the Immigration Court Observation Project? Scan the QR code and volunteer.



Art Credit: Anita White

It's Time to Fight for Our Values on Immigration

Immigration and anti-immigrant vitriol have taken center stage in the 2024 election and dominated U.S. politics in recent years. But this rhetoric runs counter to what the data show—Americans overwhelmingly want positive immigration reform, welcoming communities, and the protection of asylum. It also runs counter to human rights standards, which demand respect for human dignity regardless of national origin or immigration status.

The first Trump administration sought to weaponize the immigration system and target immigrants regardless of their legal status. Over 400 executive actions sought to dismantle an outmoded and underfunded immigration adjudications system,

terminate legal status for Dreamers and others, spur chaos at the border, and ban travelers from Muslim-majority countries.

This time around, the incoming Trump administration's stated agenda revolves around threats of mass deportations. It also signals a return to "deportation-by-attribution" strategies which undermine the human rights of non-citizens and their families with a goal of effectively pushing them out or deterring them from seeking safety in the US. Based on his campaign—and the Project 2025 platform—we anticipate this term to see similar threats. Despite clear Supreme Court precedent affirming these rights, the incoming administration has indicated it may attempt to target birthright

citizenship, limit access to services for U.S. citizen children in immigrant families and erode the current guarantee to public education for all children, regardless of immigration status.

Some threats could quickly be realized by orders rescinding Biden enforcement priority guidance or terminating programs like "Uniting for Ukraine," which provides a pathway for Ukrainian citizens to enter and stay temporarily in the United States. Halting refugee admissions or failing to renew temporary protected status for any of the sixteen countries currently designated could be achieved without congressional or regulatory action. But many proposed actions would require new regulations or legislation.

For example, expanding detention space and intensifying militarized immigration enforcement depends on congressional will to appropriate additional billions of dollars. Such changes would also hinge on the administration's ability to convince state and local governments to allow law enforcement resources to be diverted to Trump's deportation agenda through the 287(g) deputization program and other pressure. And, as we saw in the first Trump administration, the courts may play a role in stopping or pausing any efforts determined unlawful.

EXPECTED ATTACKS ON ASYLUM

Donald Trump again ran on an anti-immigrant agenda. The incoming administration likely will start where the last Trump Administration ended, reviving the "death to asylum" regulation. The sweeping regulatory change was enjoined by the court and never took effect under the Biden administration. The rule attempted to

fundamentally redefine the standards for asylum, erect procedural barriers, and heighten evidentiary burdens to eliminate access to internationally guaranteed protection from persecution.

Despite the expected challenges, presidential discretion remains limited by the Constitution, by the laws passed by Congress, and by international law. The Advocates and other coalition partners will use the tools we have to enforce Refugee Convention and the other protections for refugees and asylum seekers.

RECLAIM THE NARRATIVE

The Trump administration likely will send Congress a "border security" bill rife with provisions effectively seeking to end access to asylum early in the term. Restrictions or bans on asylum harm people and communities and are unlawful, cruel and ineffective. They do not reduce the number of people seeking safety. They only create more

harm and chaos.

It's time to reclaim the immigration narrative and reject demands to harm migrants and waste billions in unwarranted enforcement spending. We need smart, practical solutions that uphold the United States' obligations to protect people seeking safety.

For decades, immigration policy has been hijacked by tough-on-immigration/seal-the-border narratives. Today U.S. immigration law is designed to minimize the ways people can obtain lawful status and maximize the ways they can lose their status. Even plainly worded statutory guarantees of the right to seek asylum long have been treated as an end-run around immigration laws, rather than as the federal and international law it is. Meanwhile "success" is measured only by the numbers of "aliens" excluded or expelled, rather than by the inclusion of newcomers in and stability of our communities.

We must judge the efficacy of immigration policy by a different measure. By how well our immigration system provides safe, orderly, accessible, and fair pathways for people to become part of our community. By whether the system respects human dignity and due process. And by whether the most fundamental human rights – to seek asylum from persecution, to be free from arbitrary detention, and to be free from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment – are upheld.



Photo Credit: Pixabay



Become a Volunteer Attorney

Join the Court Observation Project



Volunteer as an interpreter or translator

Celebrating Our Work at Fall House Parties



House Party Photo Credit:
Rebecca Mariscal



Staff, volunteers and partners at UN
Photo Credit: Staff

Collaborating with the WAVE Network

Author: Louise Rosenbaum

In the sprawling corridors of the United Nations (UN), where global policies intersect with the lives of individuals, three women stand united in their commitment to combatting gender-based violence and advocating for women's rights. Elena, Stephanie, and Susana, through their respective organizations, have found a common ground and a shared mission within the Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) network. Their collective efforts underscore the power of collaboration in navigating the complexities of international diplomacy and advocacy.

Elena, in her first visit to the UN, was drawn to the potential for advocacy within the UN system, specifically related to women's rights and gender-based violence. Her work, particularly focused on the challenges within North Macedonia, emphasizes the need for practical implementation of laws and the establishment of an independent expert body to oversee national action plans. Elena's partnership with The Advocates for Human Rights opened new avenues for advocacy, introducing her to innovative tactics that enrich her efforts on the ground.

Stephanie, as the Executive Director of WAVE, brought to the fore the network's extensive experience in advocacy at the European level and its nascent engagement with the UN. For Stephanie, the deteriorating situation of violence against women in Europe presents both a challenge and an opportunity to advocate for change at the UN level. Her and the WAVE Team's work, particularly the collaboration with The Advocates for Human Rights, has been a source of inspiration and support, providing new perspectives on feminist work against gender-based violence. Stephanie's and her Team's initiatives, such as the development of toolkits and training manuals for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, highlight the importance of multi-agency collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and resources.

Susana, through her involvement with the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) and her leadership within WAVE, underscores the importance of engaging with UN human rights bodies and navigating international diplomacy. Her advocacy work, especially concerning women's rights and violence against women in Cyprus, calls for a comprehensive approach to implementing legislation and removing barriers to women's access to services. Susana's partnership with The Advocates for Human Rights has provided critical insights into effective advocacy strategies, emphasizing the need for institutional and structural transformation to achieve gender equality.

The partnership of WAVE, as highlighted by the experiences of Elena, Stephanie, and Susana, stands as a testament to the strength of collaborative efforts in addressing gender-based violence and advocating for women's rights. This collaboration extends beyond sharing knowledge and resources; it represents a unified front against the pervasive challenges that women face globally. The network fosters a sense of solidarity among its members, empowering them to advocate for change and support each other in the face of adversity.

The challenges encountered by these women in their advocacy work—ranging from societal norms and systemic biases to the complexities of international diplomacy—are daunting. Yet, their commitment to the cause, fueled by the support and collaboration within the WAVE network, drives them forward. The partnership between their organizations and The Advocates for Human Rights further enriches their efforts, providing a platform for sharing strategies and amplifying their voices at the UN level.

In the fight against gender-based violence and the pursuit of women's rights, the unity and collaboration among Elena, Stephanie, Susana, and their respective organizations underscore the potential for collective action to effect meaningful change. Their work within the WAVE network illustrates the power of solidarity, advocacy, and partnership in navigating the intricate landscape of international human rights work. As they continue to advocate for women's rights on the global stage, their united front serves as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the strength found in collaboration.



Sankhu-Palubari Community School (SPCS)

Silver Jubilee

Photo Credit: Ali McElroy



The Sankhu-Palubari Community School (SPCS), was founded in 1999 to provide the most vulnerable children in this rural agricultural Kathmandu Valley community with education as an alternative to child labor. A partnership between The Advocates, Nepali administrative partner Educate the Children, and the local community, SPCS currently serves 375 students in pre-K through 10th grade. By providing a completely free, high-quality education for 25 years, the school has made the right to education a reality for more than 1,000 low-income children in Nepal.

Since 1999, Nepal has made improvements in some areas of education, particularly basic primary education. Public education at government schools in Nepal is technically free, but school fees and the cost of textbooks, uniforms, and supplies are a barrier that keeps children from the poorest families out of school. SPCS addresses that barrier by providing access to education, and a daily meal, at no cost. The school also welcomes all children regardless of caste or ethnicity; approximately 7% of students are Dalit and 55% are Indigenous, from families who do not speak Nepali at home. From the beginning, gender parity has been an important priority for SPCS as even today more than 80 percent of girls reach graduation in grade 11 in Nepal.

In 1999, SPCS started with 20 kindergarten students in one room.

Today, SPCS serves 375 students in pre-K through 10th grade. Students now attend classes in a beautiful and functional 25-room school building donated by Kathy and Al Lenzmeier and dedicated in 2017. Thanks to The Advocates' supporters and special 25th anniversary fundraising initiatives, SPCS will debut a new science lab, expanded computer lab, and newly equipped and furnished early childhood learning classrooms in the coming months. SPCS students continue to excel on national standardized tests – the most important metric in Nepali education – scoring in the highest percentiles in a country where on average only 45% of 10th grade students pass.

Jennifer Prestholdt and Robin Phillips traveled to Nepal in October with board members Ali McElroy and David Vander Haar and volunteers Aviva Breen, David Feroe, Linda Svitak, and Lynn Vander Haar to further our regular evaluation and monitoring of the Nepal School Project. The team interviewed all 9th and 10th grade students and met with the teachers, the School Management Committee, local community leaders and the district education chief. In addition, the team visited other schools in the local area and in Kathmandu, as well as the community health post to learn about vaccination and other public health initiatives for SPCS students.

The highlight of the visit was the celebration of the 25th anniversary

(Silver Jubilee) of the Sankhu-Palubari Community School on October 25. During the program, students performed cultural dances from different regions of Nepal and presented a drama they wrote themselves. Local community leaders and representatives from The Advocates gave speeches and presented academic and sports awards to the students. Teachers who have worked at SPCS more than 10 years (including several who have taught at SPCS since the very beginning) received recognition for their dedication and service.

Many SPCS graduates have gone on to pursue higher education and careers as engineers, nurses, doctors, teachers, and accountants in Nepal, as well as in countries like Japan and Australia. The first female graduate of SPCS is getting her PhD in agronomy in India. One of last year's graduates beat out 1500 applicants to win a full scholarship to study at a prestigious school in Kathmandu. But it's important to note that every SPCS graduate has successfully completed the education level that allows them to pursue careers as civil servants or in the police and military. Over 25 years, we have witnessed the dramatic difference that accessing the right to education has made in creating opportunities and changing the lives of SPCS students, their families, their community, and their country.



My Journey: From Afghanistan to Empowerment

Written by:
Nilofar Painda
Women's Program Intern

In 2017, I made the heartbreaking decision to leave Afghanistan, the only home I had ever known. It wasn't just about seeking an education—it was about survival and hope. I knew that if I stayed, my dreams of a future where Afghan women and girls could thrive would wither. So, with a mix of fear and determination, I set out for Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to start my bachelor's degree at the American University of Central Asia on a fully funded scholarship.

Those years in Bishkek were transformative. I found my voice, my strength, and my purpose. Graduating in 2022, I held my degree with

immense pride, knowing it symbolized not only my personal achievement but also a triumph over the constraints imposed on women like me. Yet, my heart remained heavy with the plight of those left behind.

In Afghanistan, 75% of girls are out of school. Since the Taliban took over in 2021, they have banned girls' secondary education, denying nearly 1.4 million girls the chance to continue their schooling beyond grade 6. This oppressive system of gender apartheid strips millions of girls and women of their fundamental rights, trapping them in a cycle of exclusion and despair.

Motivated by a deep connection to these issues, I pursued an LLM degree at the American University of Central Asia. During this time, I was honored to

receive a scholarship to the University of Minnesota for a Master of Human Rights. These opportunities are more than just an academic achievement; it's a crucial step towards equipping myself with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate for those who cannot fight for themselves.

Life then blessed me with the profound joy of motherhood. My daughter, now 5 months old, is my guiding light and unwavering strength. Each time I gaze upon her, I am reminded of the immense responsibility I carry—not just for her, but for every girl in Afghanistan yearning for a brighter future. Her presence fuels my relentless resolve to challenge the systemic barriers and fight for a world where every girl can embrace her full potential. Alongside her, my husband's unwavering support empowers me even more, allowing me to continue this journey with determination and hope.

By the end of 2025, I will have earned two master's degrees. This journey, though challenging, has been marked by love, resilience, and an unyielding desire to make a difference. I am not just pursuing these dreams for myself; I am doing it for my daughter and every Afghan girl who dares to dream of a better life despite overwhelming odds.

Even though I am far from my beloved country, I remain steadfast in my commitment to be the voice of my Afghan sisters. I will continue to fight for their rights and work towards a future where they, too, can rise above the constraints imposed upon them. My journey is far from over, but with each step, I am inching closer to transforming those dreams into reality. This path is my mission, my legacy, and my promise to every girl who believes that a brighter future is worth fighting for.



Photo Credit: Nilofar Painda

Nepal Photo Credit: Ali McElroy

On the Ground at the UN



Kent Richey, Karen Evans, Katia Galambos, Matthew Webster
Photo Credit: Staff

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL TO IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

rights defenders, protections for Black and minoritized migrant women from violence against women and girls, and LGBTIQ+ rights in Guyana, Somalia, and the United Kingdom. The team also briefed the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the Committee's upcoming review of Mexico, incorporating information clients have shared about their experiences with human rights violations in that country.

Activities in Geneva also included training on international advocacy, outreach to and meetings with Human Rights Council delegates about death penalty issues and violence against women, delivering four oral statements at the Human Rights Council, and meetings with colleague non-governmental organizations and UN Special Procedures mandates such as the Special Rapporteur on migrants and the Working Group on discrimination against women.

The Advocates also hosted two well-attended parallel events. Staff, partners, and volunteers presented a gender analysis of human rights issues in **Afghanistan, Cyprus, Eritrea, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom, Viet Nam, and Yemen.**

International advocacy can be a powerful tool to improve human rights conditions at the local level. UN advocacy has played a key role in building global momentum for death penalty abolition by shining a light on

the human rights violations attendant with executions. We've also seen some great results from our advocacy at the UN in the past, with laws changed to better protect women from violence and concrete steps towards death penalty abolition. We look forward to seeing the impact of our March advocacy work in the coming months.

ON THE GROUND IN NYC

The Advocates' Elizabeth Montgomery and Verónica Cadavid González traveled to New York for the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. While in New York, Veronica and Elizabeth closely followed the negotiations by States and participated in official side events on the UN grounds and in civil society parallel events, hosted by CSW NGO, which allowed them to evaluate the current trends in gender equality advocacy. Veronica presented on a panel at one of the parallel events, sharing The Advocates' insights on forced criminality in sex trafficking and its collateral consequences.



Verónica Cadavid González and Elizabeth Montgomery
Photo Credit: Staff

ILGA World Conference



International Justice Program Managing Attorney Nathan Madson and incoming board chair Dan Supalla travelled to Cape Town, South Africa in early November to represent The Advocates at the ILGA World Conference, the largest global gathering of LGBTIQ+ changemakers. Nathan also participated in a pre-conference session on UN advocacy. The Advocates is a member of ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association) World, and we have been increasing our international advocacy on LGBTIQ+ issues and outreach to potential LGBTIQ+ partners globally.

Learn more about our work with the LGBTIQ+ community.



Nathan Madson and Dan Supalla
Photo Credit: Volunteer

ON THE GROUND IN GENEVA

The Advocates for Human Rights returned to the United Nations in Geneva in March for two very full weeks of international human rights advocacy. Staff were joined by ten volunteers and worked side-by-side with human rights defenders from the **Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies** (Cyprus), **National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence** (North Macedonia), **Women Against Violence Europe** (WAVE), and **Hibiscus Initiatives** (United Kingdom). Partners from the **Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders** were unfortunately unable to join the team in Geneva because the Swiss embassy denied them visas. While at the UN, the team participated in briefings with independent experts on the UN Human Rights Committee concerning the death penalty, human

Celebrate International Human Rights Day with a special Advocates Giving Day on December 10!

The Advocates for Human Rights respects the inherent dignity of all human beings no matter a person's race, ethnicity, immigration status, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex, or age. We will continue to stand up against racism, bigotry, hatred, discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and all forms of gender-based violence. Today. Tomorrow. Always.



Join us by making a special donation to protect human rights for all. Scan the QR code or contact our Development Director, Thekla Rura-Polley, (trurapolley@advrights.org or 612-746-4678) for other ways to give.

HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

The Invisible Reality of Women Sentenced to Death

Over the past year The Advocates has expanded its work to abolish the death penalty worldwide. A longstanding member of the Steering Committee of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, The Advocates collaborates with Coalition members to bring their expertise to the United Nations, leveraging human rights bodies to press their governments to make progress toward abolition.

For the last three years, The Advocates has added a gender dimension to that advocacy, shedding light on the invisible reality of women sentenced to death. The results are dramatic. Experts on the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women praised a closed-door briefing with The Advocates and Coalition

partners as “an eye-opener,” “very enlightening,” and “fantastic!”

The Advocates’ recent collaboration with the Singapore-based Transformative Justice Collective prompted the Committee in May 2024 to recommend that Singapore not only “halt the execution of all women,” but also “[e]nsure a gender-responsive application of the law so that” courts adequately account for “evidence of trauma, economic pressures, child marriage, and domestic and gender-based violence” in criminal proceedings against women.

International Justice Associate Program Director Amy Bergquist observes that “over the past year alone the CEDAW Committee has issued hard-hitting recommendations on death penalty issues in Jamaica,

Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, and Singapore. Our impact is clear. Before we initiated this project, the Committee had never even mentioned the death penalty. Now these experts are voices for women on death row around the world.”

Building on these experiences, in September The Advocates led a workshop in Philadelphia to empower Coalition members to engage in advocacy with UN gender mechanisms and to “transversalize” gender into all UN advocacy.

This work has garnered attention at the highest levels of the UN. In an August report to the General Assembly, the Secretary General called on UN member states “to pay more attention to the gender dimension of the death penalty, including by addressing multiple forms of gender bias facing women sentenced to death and taking full account of gender-related mitigating factors during sentencing, such as a history of surviving gender-based violence. States should offer gender-sensitive health care to women on death row and provide for the needs of women on death row who are incarcerated together with their children.”



Help Sustain the Mission:

The Death Penalty Protects No One

Marking World Day Against the Death Penalty on October 10, The Advocates launched another groundbreaking initiative. Just hours after the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) filed a request for an advisory opinion with the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights declaring that the death penalty is incompatible with the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, The Advocates announced its own amicus brief in support of the request.

The brief, prepared by a pro bono team at Foley Hoag LLP, connects the World Day theme—The Death Penalty Protects No One—with the litigation. It demonstrates that because the death penalty has no unique deterrent effect on crime, it does not further any penological interests, and therefore is disproportionate to the benefit it seeks to achieve and constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of life under Article 4 of the African Charter.

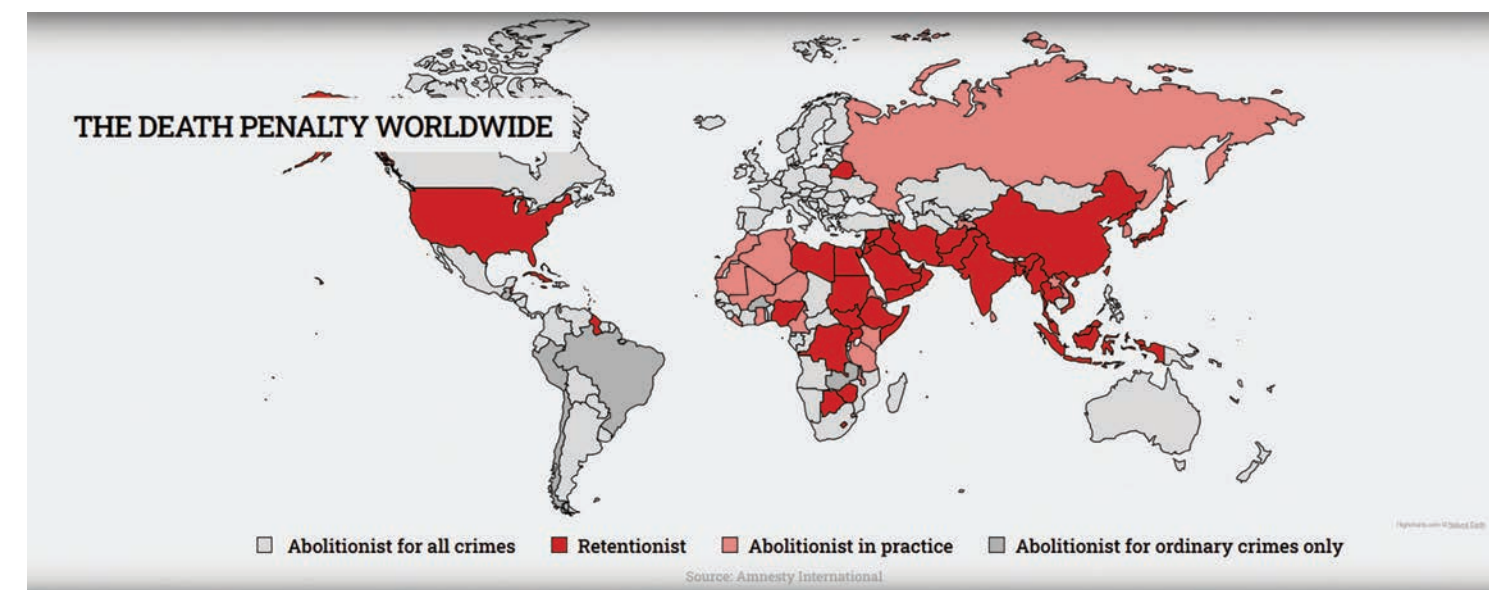
In a kickoff webinar, PALU member and African Court expert Tito Magoti explained the advisory opinion process and the influence of amicus briefs. Foley Hoag partner Chris Hart outlined the brief’s arguments, and Amy



Bergquist announced plans to recruit Coalition members in Africa to join as amici.

“The African continent will soon follow Europe’s lead in rejecting the death penalty,” Bergquist explains. “Over the past three years Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Zambia

have joined the abolitionist ranks, and Kenya, Liberia, and Malawi are on deck. PALU’s litigation is the catalyst we need to accelerate the momentum, and we know our amicus brief will bolster their case.”



PRIDE in Our Work and Those We Serve

Written by:
Anthony Colaizzi
Communications Manager

Over the two-day event, we met with 1500 couples, groups, families, and friends.

This was my first time at Twin Cities Pride, and it was The Advocates' first time as well. I had been to Pride celebrations back in Pittsburgh. There, they were a little more focused on the party, and less on the community building. Here, the community embraced the information booths. People showed an honest appreciation for connecting with resources for

themselves, and for those they know.

The Advocates helps LGBTQ+ migrants fleeing persecution find safety in the U.S. We also partner with LGBTQ+ human rights defenders to promote equality in their countries. The opportunity came to partner with Aight and ORAM to provide information about our shared services available to LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers who attended Pride.

Through those interactions, our team and the volunteers from Aight and ORAM were able to answer questions, hold deep conversations, and provide support. Our focus on LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers was unique among Pride vendors. Those who came into our booth played the trivia wheel, added to the community question board, and connected with necessary resources. Our primary resource for guests was

the LGBTQ+ Friendly Organization/Resource Referral List. The referral list was a collaborative effort to share legal, housing, mental health, and cultural resources available within Minnesota. This comprehensive packet was assembled by the knowledgeable staff and volunteers from all three organizations.

That collaboration was key to the entire weekend's success! By pooling our expertise, ability, and connections, our refugee and asylum seeker booth was a celebrated addition to the festival. From the sincere 'thank you' of a person in need, to the smile of the children playing the trivia wheel, Twin Cities Pride was an invaluable experience. We look forward to attending TC Pride in the years to come.

Pride Photo Credits: Volunteers



Anthony Colaizzi (far left), his husband MJ, Jo Haugen (center), ORAM and Aight volunteers, and Kyle Kvamme (far right)



Staff and volunteers from The Advocates, Aight, and ORAM



Staff and volunteers from The Advocates, Aight, and ORAM



Eric Stults, The Advocates volunteer and booth sponsor



Game wheel participant



We work across programs to uphold the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and others who are experiencing violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics. The Advocates helps LGBTIQ+ migrants fleeing persecution find safety in the U.S. We empower our LGBTIQ+ clients to share their lived experiences by participating in advocacy at the United Nations. The following is a discussion with some of our clients and our incoming board chair and volunteer attorney, Dan Supalla.

A.S. (Client)

What are challenges that LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers face that cisgender, heterosexual asylum seekers don't face?

Answer (A.S.): "This is a great opportunity to dive into the lives of people who go through a lot. We are born into and raised having families of male and female, and this is rooted in culture and religion; that's how family is supposed to be designed. It's so hard when you're raised in that environment, and you definitely know you're different, but you can't express that difference because of fear.

Fear is one that really attacks our mind and bodies. It does a lot. It prevents us from achieving a lot because it seems like an imprisonment.

Heterosexual asylum seekers have a lot of opportunities where it's so easy for them to get connected to the community, versus non-heterosexual asylum seekers who have experienced a lot of different things that they themselves can speak for themselves.

Some of them are general, some of them are specific, depending on what they've gone through. Because they

want to conceal their identity, they do not have a community. Being born and raised from a different country, from a different culture, combining all those elements, putting them up together is so hard.

There is no community, you know, in a foreign [country for] LGBTIQ+ person. It takes a while to get involved in a community that understands you or that you understand them. That takes support, support that no one has had growing up. It's so easy for someone with support, but so difficult for someone without support. This comes from people who are very much filled with doubt. You don't know who you can trust and who you cannot trust. This comes back to the fear factor that affects a lot of people, including myself. It could be easier said than done, but that's how it is."

Question: How can lawyers representing LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers respect those needs? What are some of the best practices?

Answer (Dan Supalla, volunteer attorney): "The last part of what A.S. had to say, coming from a place where you don't have a community is really difficult. We take it for granted here, certainly in Minneapolis, but, also in other parts of the United States where we have a big gay community. I have a lot of gay friends who I can

hang out with and get support from. Recognizing that people are coming from a place where they don't have that kind of support. Oftentimes, it is a place where being LGBTIQ+ may be illegal. Certainly, there are cultural factors at play, but legal issues too. There are specific laws on the books that make consensual same-sex practices illegal.

People are coming from a place where there is a lot of fear, a lot of shame. I think one of the most import things a lawyer can do that is taking on one of these sorts of cases is to learn as much as you can about that person's country of origin yourself. Before you even meet with the person, you want to pull the U.S. State Department country reports, they talk about human rights issues going on. At least all of the ones I've looked at recently, in the section where they talk about human rights there is always a section on LGBTIQ+ rights and conditions in the country. You can read about things that have happened in the country, and about things that have happened to specific people. Then you can just run a Google search of whatever country the person is coming from and "LGBTIQ+ rights" and you'll get a tone of news stories about what is happening in the country. Sometimes you'll find great stories from U.S. news sources, other times, you'll find things from other international sources.

There's a ton of reporting that you can go and read and review to learn about what's going on in someone's country. When you meet them for the first time, you have a better sense of where they're coming from and what's going on. Then you can talk about what you've learned, and that helps to build the trust between you and your client. They can understand that you are interested, have taken the time to learn about where they are coming from and what kinds of things are going on in their country, and that makes it easier for them to open up and talk to you about what's going on in their own lives.

I think the other thing is that you have to be really patient. Cases for LGBTIQ+ people and political asylum are a little bit different in that you have to be really patient in working with your client.

Willie (Client)

How did you first learn about the U.S. immigration process? What was it like being in immigration court?

I first heard about the immigration process when I was detained. [Before that], people warn you against getting caught and that's about it. When I was in court, I was given a list of lawyers and organizations. I couldn't contact anyone before my court date, so I went by myself, and I won my case! But then the government attorney appealed my case...I then spoke to someone who put me in contact with [The Advocates for Human Rights]. Before going to court, I couldn't talk about a lot of the stuff I had been through without crying. In court, it was the first time I could talk about things that happened to me without crying. It was really difficult, but it was really impactful on me.

How has the decision on your immigration case affected your life?

It's been really positive. I have a better job; I have had opportunities to feel

I think there's a more particular kind of trauma that people suffer when they're persecuted because of their identity.

Whether they're out, whether they have a small community of friends and no one else really knows about their identity. It's such a personal thing that you must be patient with people who haven't had the opportunity, like people in the United States have, to come out and be accepted by your family. When I came out, my family was great - the fear was really unfounded for me. People don't have those kinds of experiences. Understanding that there is going to be a difference between those experiences [accepting versus not] and being patient with people and letting them open up on their own timeline, I think is really important. It may take

more included. I have become a better person, I am happily sober, I happily have a job. It's a lot to deal with, because before when I had the charge I thought "what if they don't approve the appeal?" I overthink a lot of stuff.

Is there anything you want more people to pay attention to or shine light on this Pride?

I would say pay attention to what we are asking, rather than look at us like a show. I hear so many people talk about Pride and the drag queens, but they aren't really talking about our goals. We want to be respected, we want to have rights, not just be a show. It is nice to have our talent recognized, but it's more than that. Also, it would be nice to have a space to talk about HIV. In my country, it is really hard to get help. In here, I have the fortune to not be rejected because of being LGBTIQ+ or my HIV status.

Scan the QR code to read more stories online!



more meetings, more time to get to know one another. Once you build that trust I think it helps alleviate a lot of the fear, and a lot of the fear people come with.

The last thing I'd say is that part of representing LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers is not just doing the legal work, but also helping people find a community, or find people they can talk to who are, not lawyers, but other folks that can help build their own community so they can have a support system. I'll tell you that going through the asylum process is very difficult and if you don't have a community of people to support you, it can be even more difficult."

OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, Dec. 10th
4:00 — 6:00 PM CST

330 2nd Ave. South, Suite 800
Minneapolis, MN 55401

No RSVP Required

Light refreshments will be available.

Join the Minnesota human rights community in celebrating 22 years of Robin Phillips' leadership as executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights! Stop by the Open House to wish Robin well as she steps into a new role, connect with staff about our work to protect and promote human rights, and celebrate International Human Rights Day. Our community is at the heart of our mission - we are stronger together. Celebrate with us!

In Memoriam

Carol Hayden

The Advocates mourns the loss of former board member, volunteer, and friend, Carol Hayden. Carol was a stalwart supporter of women's human rights and always worked with dignity, grace, and kindness. Board member Nancy Speer remembers Carol as "a lovely, quietly dignified woman who, at the same time, was a fierce defender of the belief that every person has basic human rights that must be respected."

Carol was fully committed to the organizations in which she believed, and she invested her time, talent, and financial resources to making them stronger. Carol and her husband, Bud, participated in our first organized volunteer delegation to the United Nations. They were completely engaged with the process and supported the success of all facets of

our work. At our events, they always asked compelling questions to help ensure the audience learned about the important aspects of our work.

"Carol was a true advocate for human rights and always lived her values in both big and small ways," said Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates, "Carol worked with us in the trenches. She was willing to help with the often less glamorous work necessary to keep the organization going."

We are grateful to Carol for her unwavering commitment to making the world better. Carol understood what it takes to protect women's rights – ensuring impact, championing women's rights activists in front of and behind-the-scenes, and always remaining curious to learn more, listen, and ask the right questions. Her legacy will live on in the movement to protect women's human rights. We will miss her greatly.



Carol and Bud Hayden at the UN
Photo Credit: Volunteer

George Latimer

As told by The Advocates' Jim Dorsey

On the occasion of George Latimer's passing, I was reminded of the fact that in February 1998 George led our organization's second fact-finding tour of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The trip had been organized in collaboration with Augsburg's Center for Global Education. We visited with cabinet officials as well as leaders of small villages in each of the three countries. This was during George's time as the mayor of St. Paul, Minnesota.

During a visit to a village in Nicaragua, we met with its mayor. Even though George spoke no Spanish and the local mayor spoke no English, the two mayors got along famously. Indeed, at the end of our visit, the Nicaraguan mayor appointed George as the Minister of Volcanoes. George accepted the appointment with his usual combination of enthusiasm, humor and grace.



Jim Dorsey, Louis Smith, and Mayor George Latimer in the 1980s
Photo Credit: The Advocates Archive

Karen Evans Reflects

Photo Credit: Karen Evans



I will finish my term as board chair of The Advocates for Human Rights in January after three years. I am grateful for this experience. It has been a privilege and a joy to serve as board chair for such an amazing organization.

I took on this role during the COVID-19 pandemic and in spite of unexpected challenges, the organization reached many exciting milestones. The first was the completion of our capacity building campaign. We finished ahead of schedule and raised more than our original fundraising goal. This success created momentum for a fantastic celebration of the organization's 40th anniversary in 2023. Then, as we moved into 2024, we launched our strategic planning process and have outlined a plan for launching the next phase of the organization.

I also started my term as board chair with our board meeting by Zoom, which limited our ability to get to know each other better. I knew that our board members were dedicated human rights advocates, but I wanted to get to them as people. So, in that first year Robin Phillips and I met every board member for lunch, which was such a delight. It was wonderful to learn about their work and family and, of course, their connection with and interest in The Advocates. Our board members are passionate and responsive, and they care deeply about human rights.

I will be handing off the job to the talented and capable Dan Supalla. While I will not be the chair next year, I am happy that I have another two years before I must roll off the board. As I hand over the chair position to Dan, Robin hands over her leadership role to Jennifer Prestholdt, Michele Garnett McKenzie, and Rose Park - three talented, smart and long-time Advocates' employees. Together they will help lead the organization until a new leader is selected.

During these past three years I've traveled to Geneva twice to do human rights work at the United Nations, and last December visited the school sponsored by The Advocates outside Kathmandu in Nepal. The Geneva trips added deeply to my understanding of human rights in countries around the world (sadly for some countries, lack of human rights), but also the impact that The Advocates has through its advocacy with its partners located in various countries. My experience in Nepal was a brilliant example of how The Advocates' work significantly changes lives - in this case for children who otherwise would not get an education. The Advocates impacts lives in measurable ways.

I am grateful for the opportunity to see the impact of our work first-hand and I look forward to continuing my work as an advocate for human rights.



Photo Credit: Staff



Photo Credit: Bill Cameron



Photo Credit: Volunteer



Leadership Transition Marks a New Chapter for The Advocates for Human Rights

As The Advocates for Human Rights enters a new chapter, our interim leadership team is poised to guide the organization's work. "Our mission could not be more critical than at this moment," says board member Dan Supalla, who will take on the role of board chair in January. "Deputy Directors Jennifer Prestholdt and Michele Garnett McKenzie and Women's Human Rights Director Rosalyn Park are experienced leaders able to guide the organization while we prepare for a broader executive search and continue the critical work of defending human rights locally and globally."

The interim leadership team is tasked with implementing a new strategic plan, which positions The Advocates for even greater impact. Their collaborative leadership will be key in advancing initiatives that break new ground, including a statewide partnership aimed at expanding access to immigration legal services and a cross-movement approach to addressing gender-based violence that highlights the intersectional experiences of both women and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Innovative Approaches to Human Rights Advocacy



"The right to seek asylum is under attack," says Michele Garnett McKenzie. "We need to sustain our capacity to represent people seeking asylum so we can enforce U.S. obligations under the Refugee Convention. And we need to innovate so people can get the legal help they need." A new statewide partnership to improve access to immigration legal services is a key part of this strategy. This initiative aims to address gaps in legal support by creating a streamlined network of service providers across Minnesota, ensuring that people can receive the help they need when and where they need it. By strengthening ties with community organizations, law firms, and volunteers, The Advocates is positioning itself as a leader in making immigration justice a reality.

The team is also taking steps to deepen cross-movement collaboration in the fight against gender-based violence. "We cannot afford to be distracted by divide-and-conquer tactics of those seeking to rollback human rights for women and LGBTIQ+ people," says Rose Park. "We recognize that violence is often intersectional, and we are building partnerships across movements." From engaging people with lived experience in improving Minnesota's anti-trafficking strategies and the legal response to system-involved survivors of violence, to working in Morocco to ensure the safety of all individuals and communities from gender-based violence, The Advocates is focused on practical policies that protect human rights.

Photo Credit: Bill Cameron

Building on a Strong Foundation

The new initiatives of the interim leadership team are grounded in The Advocates' long history of mobilizing a vast network of supporters and volunteers. Last year alone, volunteers contributed more than \$20 million worth of pro bono human rights work. This robust support base will continue to be a cornerstone of our work.

"We know that by engaging people in hands-on human rights work, they become advocates for human rights," says Jennifer Prestholdt. "We're also continuing to invest in training our volunteers and partner organizations on using human rights."

Fundraising remains another critical pillar of The Advocates' strength, and our leadership team is committed to building on the organization's history of financial health. With a solid fundraising strategy in place, the team is well-positioned to sustain and strategically expand operations, ensuring that we have the resources necessary to implement our ambitious strategic plan.

Looking Ahead

As The Advocates for Human Rights continues to drive forward its mission, our interim leadership team is ready to lead with innovation, collaboration, and a bold vision for the future. Jennifer Prestholdt, Rosalyn Park, and Michele Garnett McKenzie bring decades of combined experience in human rights work, and their leadership is already shaping a new era for the organization. Their focus on maximizing the impact of The Advocates' advocacy will set the stage for the successful implementation of our strategic plan.

We are confident that under their leadership, The Advocates will continue to make an extraordinary impact in Minnesota and around the world. As we move through this transition, we remain committed to our mission of protecting human rights for all, and we invite our supporters to join us as we embark on this exciting new journey. Together, we will continue to change the world for good.



Photo Credit: Volunteer



Photo Credit: The Advocates Archive

Meet Our New Team Members



Louica Alexandre
Staff Attorney, Refugee and Immigrant Program

Louica Alexandre (she/her/hers) is a Staff Attorney for The Advocates for Human Rights' Refugee & Immigrant Program and the Immigration Legal Hub collaborative. In that capacity, she supports pro bono attorneys, creates pro se materials, oversees community outreach, assists other staff working to expand access to immigration legal help, and represents clients in humanitarian immigration matters.

Louica recently graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School, where she concentrated in immigration law and served as a certified student attorney in the Detainee Rights Clinic. She also served as the President of the Black Law Student Association, Moot Court Director for the Midwest Black Law Student Association, and a teaching assistant for various professors. During her last two years of law school, Louica clerked with the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office and Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, where she assisted clients with affirmative and defensive asylum & withholding of removal applications, and waivers of inadmissibility, restitution defense and research and writing briefs for criminal court.

Before attending law school, Louica graduated cum laude from the University of Florida. After graduation, she volunteered with the National Commission of Human Rights in Mali. As an immigrant from Haiti, Louica is excited to serve other immigrants and make sure they are given the help they need.



Valeria Jacome
Program Associate, Women's Human Rights Program

Valeria Jacome (she/her/hers) is a Program Associate with The Advocates' Women's Human Rights Program where she is involved with domestic and international advocacy focused on women's rights and gender-based violence. In her role, Valeria engages in research and writing for UN advocacy efforts, plays a supporting role for the WATCH court observation project, oversees the StopVAW website, supervises intern hiring and projects, and assists with any other actions needed to support the Women's Program.

Before working with The Advocates, Valeria spent one year working for an immigration law firm, where she served as a case manager for individuals seeking asylum, residency, and naturalization in the United States. Valeria obtained a Master of Arts in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action from Sciences Po's Paris School of International Affairs. She also has a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs with a minor in Sociology from the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University.



Olivia Leyba
Women's Human Rights Program Fellow

Olivia Leyba (she/her/hers) is a Fellow with the Women's Right Program. She has previously been a volunteer and an intern for the Advocates' for Human Rights, and is excited to return in a new role. In between her time at the Advocates, she has gained experience in state and local government as well as immigration law.

She recently graduated from Pomona College with a B.A. in International Relations with special interests in economics and the racial impacts of globalization.



Louisa Ntaji
Lutheran Volunteer, International Justice Program

Louisa Ntaji (she/her/hers) is a Nigerian human rights lawyer with LL.M. degrees from the University of Minnesota and the University of Pretoria. She is a Lutheran Volunteer Corps Fellow working with the International Justice Program of The Advocates for Human Rights. Louisa's focus areas include access to justice, reproductive rights and justice, women's rights, global health and human rights, and democratization in Africa. She has worked extensively with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights promoting social justice and health equity.

Louisa is driven by a profound belief in equality and the importance of giving a voice to the marginalized.



Marleni Pacheco-Omana
Case Coordinator, Refugee and Immigrant Program

Marleni Pacheco-Omana (she/her/hers) serves as the Case Coordinator at The Advocates for Human Rights. Her duties include internal case management, conducting intakes and interviews with clients, and collaborating with staff members to ensure the organization is providing the best and most efficient legal services.

Marleni graduated with a degree in Political Science from Inver Hills Community College.



Diego Varas Rubin
*Lutheran Volunteer, Intake Assistant
Refugee and Immigrant Program*

Diego Varas Rubin (he/him/his) was born and raised in Apatzingán, Michoacán. His hometown is one of the most violent places in México due to the war against the drug cartels. Diego has known for a long time that the peace his community so desperately need isn't going to come if individuals don't act and try to make a small but significant contribution. Because of this conviction, he has prepared himself academically (through scholarships) and professionally in three countries (China, Mexico and the US), to acquire the experience, knowledge, and skills to be an agent of positive change. As a Lutheran Volunteer Corps Fellow at The Advocates for Human Rights, Diego's goal is to keep learning and to hopefully contribute his work to make a positive impact in the world.

As a person that's lived away from home for many years now, he relates to and want to fight for the immigrant cause here in the United States, working to assist them by listening to their stories.

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Your gift will build a better, stronger future for us all and prepare the next generation of human rights advocates. For more information on becoming a legacy giver, please contact Thekla Rura-Polley at 612-746-4678 or email trurapolley@advrights.org.

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1. Bequest: leave a gift in your will or trust.
2. Beneficiary Designation: name The Advocates as a beneficiary of your retirement account, life insurance, annuity, or donor advised fund.

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