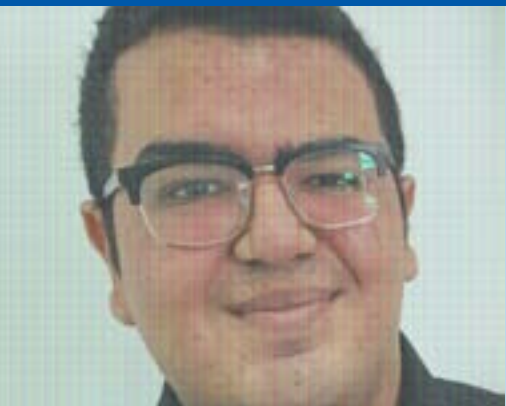
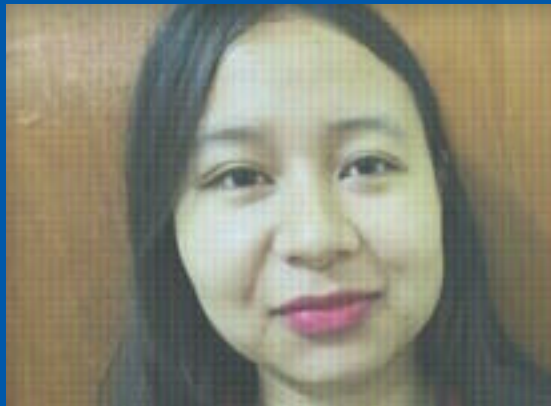


# 2020-21

## Human Rights Advocates Program

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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# 1 Introduction

## “Why did you apply for HRAP?”

2011 ADVOCATE ELVIS MBEMBE BINDA, RWANDA

In mid-2020 with the consent of advocates who had been shortlisted for HRAP, the decision was made to hold the program online over two semesters instead of postponing it until the pandemic receded. The work of human rights advocates was increasing exponentially as the pandemic made its way around the globe. How could we cancel HRAP when applicants were willing to commit their personal time to the program?

With six advocates from Georgia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Mexico, and Nigeria, we opened the 2020–21 HRAP with an address by 2011 Advocate Elvis Mbembe Binda of Rwanda. Elvis urged the advocates to focus on the reasons why they had applied for the program instead of ruing the fact that they couldn't travel to NYC for an in-person program. Up until the very last week of the program, the 2020–21 cohort said Elvis's advice lifted them up when time differences, unreliable internet access and other challenges might have taken them down.

When we made it to the end of the program, ISHR congratulated the advocates who committed themselves to classes, networking, skill-based workshops, speaking engagements, writing opportunities and mentoring opportunities while simultaneously confronting the impact of the pandemic on the communities that they serve and attending to their personal lives. ISHR is grateful to all who contributed to the 2020-21 HRAP.



Advocates from Africa and Latin America spoke about their organizations' work during the pandemic.

## 2 The Advocates in Their Own Words

# Francis Bichnord Komla Asong

*Executive Director*

**Voice of People with Disability Ghana  
(VOICE Ghana)**

**GHANA**



I had a lower limb paralysis at the age of 23 in mysterious circumstances. This occurred after I sat on a chair at my former workplace and felt a sharp pain in my waist. After years of seeking a cure through both medical and spiritual means to no avail, I resolved in 2002 to dedicate the rest of my life to championing the human rights of the socially excluded and the marginalised in our society, particularly people with disabilities including those with mental health challenges. I took this decision following the human rights abuses I not only observed against those with mental health disabilities at traditional healing centres and prayer camps but which I suffered personally for nearly seven years. Some of the abuses involved the administration of concoctions against one's will and compulsory dry fasting for 7, 14 or 21 days, depending on one's problem, as well as the chaining of people with mental health disabilities and whipping them with the intention of driving out demons from them, sometimes resulting in the death of some inmates.

***“After years of seeking a cure through both medical and spiritual means to no avail, I resolved in 2002 to dedicate the rest of my life to championing the human rights of the socially excluded and the marginalised in our society, particularly people with disabilities including those with mental health challenges.”***



As a result, I joined VOICE Ghana as one of the founding members and helped to develop the organisation from its formation in 2002 with no office and resources, to now one of the leading human rights NGOs in Ghana, which brands itself as the VOICE that SPEAKS for the marginalised people with disabilities, and CHAMPIONS their rights and social inclusion.

Together with my team, VOICE Ghana has been promoting the right to education for children with disabilities. As a result, over 500 children with different categories of disability who were of school going age but not in school were enrolled for primary education in some mainstream basic schools. Furthermore, through our work, several people with disabilities, especially in the Volta and Oti regions of Ghana, are now active participants in local-level development and decision-making processes on issues that affect their wellbeing as human beings. They are also being empowered to demand their rights from traditional and political duty bearers and fight for social inclusion. We are also advocating and challenging the status quo

of some cultural perceptions and myths, as well as societal beliefs such as stigma associated with social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

I think one of my most significant achievements has been the introduction of the disability Self-Help Group (SHG) as an innovative model into the disability fraternity in Ghana. It is a community development model, which empowers people with disabilities at the grassroots to take charge of their lives and to take collective actions voluntarily. I learned about this in 2005 on a Voluntary Service Overseas-sponsored Disability Educational Tour to India in the company of some Ghanaian disability experts. I was highly impressed about how a large number of people can be empowered with knowledge in human rights issues with limited resources through the concept of SHG. Today, VOICE Ghana has 72 active SHGs in the Volta and Oti regions with several others in development. Besides, some civil society organisations in the country are now adopting the SHG model in empowering their constituents, especially those at the grassroots.

On the international front, I represented the Ghana disability fraternity at a number of workshops and conferences in Nigeria, Cote d' Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Germany, Denmark and Ireland, and served as guest speaker at some of these conferences.

By dint of hard work and dedication by my team over the years, VOICE Ghana is gradually transitioning into a Disability Rights and Advocacy Think Tank, to play an active and leading role in policy advocacy and inclusive governance for persons with disabilities in Ghana and the West African Sub Region.

I hold an MBA in governance and leadership from the Australian Institute of Business and am currently a PhD Candidate in Management Studies with the LIGS University in the USA. I have also participated in some short human rights courses/training and was a DANIDA Fellow in 2013 with the Danish Institute for Human

Rights in Copenhagen, Denmark, where I studied Democratisation and the Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Programming.

I first applied for HRAP in 2017. In 2020, I was invited to join the program. In spite of the challenges associated with the virtual HRAP model for 2020–21 cohort due to the global pandemic, the programme has greatly impacted my working experience and offered me lots of networking opportunities. In brief, HRAP has prepared me to continue empowering people with disabilities in Ghana to claim their rights, to access justice, and to become advocates for their own human rights and social inclusion.

My immediate task after the programme is to develop our new disability Think Tank together with my team and to provide a broad spectrum of disability policy ideas and technical advice to governments, the private sector and communities in Ghana and the West African Sub Region.



## FACULTY MENTOR

### LAUDAN JAHROMI

Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College

Department Chair, Health and Behavior Studies,  
Teachers College

Director, Programs in Intellectual Disability/Autism

## CLASSES

Human Rights Education in Africa

NGOs and the Human Rights Movement

## NETWORKING

Center for Economic and Social Rights

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

International Disability Alliance

National Endowment for Democracy

NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

Restless Development

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

United Nations Department of Economic and  
Social Affairs-Disability Program

United Nations Development Programme

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Advocating for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in  
Ghana, Disability Awareness Caucus, Columbia School of  
Social Work

A Conversation with Judy Heumann, the first Special Advisor  
for International Disability Rights at the U.S. Department of  
State, 2017 Advocate Michael Miro, Technical Advisor on  
HIV/AIDS, Disability, and SGBV for the Masaka Association  
of Persons with Disabilities (Uganda), and Francis Bichnord  
Komla Asong

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Rights, and Social  
Work: Insights for Practice in the Midst of the COVID-19  
Pandemic, Columbia School of Social Work

Human Rights in Africa with Ekanem Ito Effiong and  
Francis Bichnord Komla Asong, Center for African Education,  
Teachers College

Francis Bichnord Komla Asong was interviewed by students  
in Introduction to Human Rights with Class of 1919  
Professor of Political Science Andrew J. Nathan



### A CONVERSATION WITH DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATES IN GHANA AND UGANDA

MODERATED BY JUDY HEUMANN

**Michael Miro** (center) is the technical advisor on HIV/AIDS, disability, and sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) for the Masaka Association of Persons with Disabilities (Living with HIV & AIDS (MAMHDA)). He has trained village health teams, health workers, and police in sign language, and held workshops about persons with disabilities (PWDs) who are living with HIV & AIDS as well as SGBV against PWDs.

**Francis Bichnord Komla Asong** (right) is one of the founding members of Voice of People with Disability Ghana (VOCE Ghana). Over the past 15 years, Francis has contributed to the organization's development into one of Ghana's leading organizations dedicated to persons with disabilities.

**Judy Heumann** (left) is a lifelong advocate for the rights of disabled people. President Obama appointed Judy as the first Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the U.S. Department of State, where she served from 2010 to 2017.

Francis is participating in the 2020-21 Human Rights Advocates Program at Columbia University; Michael attended HRAP in 2017.

November 12, 2020 - 10:00 to 11:00 am ET  
For Zoom login information, register here:  
[http://bit.ly/disability\\_rights](http://bit.ly/disability_rights)



# Joy Pathaw

Executive Member  
Grassroot  
INDIA



When I was in school I struggled with my studies. I did not really understand science. Math was a subject that made me lose my self-confidence. Given that I studied at a convent school, we had to take English very seriously. I studied to pass year after year.

I found myself naturally doing well in “Khasi”—a subject that not only fetched me good grades but one that introduced me not only to the folktales and the folklores of my community but to a world that I could innately relate to—a world of the Khasi philosophy, culture, people and way of life.

Growing up Christian and studying in an English-speaking Catholic school, I often found myself struggling with self-expression. On one hand, I was raised to think, write, and speak English but on the other hand, I was feeling, being, and identifying myself a Khasi. I almost felt as though I was incapable of anything because of the constant conflict between the two.

***“On one hand, I was raised to think, write, and speak English but on the other hand, I was feeling, being, and identifying myself a Khasi. I almost felt as though I was incapable of anything because of the constant conflict between the two.”***

The time finally came for me to graduate from school. I again found myself at a crossroad. I had to choose a major to pursue for college. My best friends chose economics, political science, and law. I chose to study social work, a subject that was only recently introduced in my state in 2008–2009. My friends and I eventually said our goodbyes as we embarked on our separate journeys.

In my first year of college, I was introduced to concepts and terms such as gender equality, women’s representation, community development, patriarchy, equal pay, gender-based violence, education for all, education for the girl child, land rights, food security, climate change, etc. I found myself exposed to whole new perspectives, something that my previous schooling did not afford me. We wrote weekly

reports about our field visits, communication with our communities, internships, and group works and were always encouraged to emphasize our “personal reflections” of the week. That was honestly the best part of my education process. I finally found something I understood and related to because I was living it. It was there that I found my love for social work and human rights.

During college break, I volunteered for community health programs, worked with my teachers on campaigns in bringing in awareness about gender-based violence, worked on the college’s first indigenous food gathering through the Slow Food Movement, and found myself assisting with anything that involved social workers. The three years of my undergraduate education came to a close and I left my hometown to pursue my master’s degree.



I was learning concepts and theories during the undergraduate years but it was only when I left my hometown did I truly experience inequality, unfair systems and power hierarchy. I witnessed discrimination, was teased, and faced struggles because I look differently, eat differently, and pray differently. I became a minority in my own country simply because I am an Indigenous person.

As I moved on and as I started meeting new people from different fields, I understood then that there are bigger and larger systems that perpetuate violence, discrimination and inequalities, and minorities such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQI people, people with disabilities, and women are most often at the receiving end of the broken systems.

I became an advocate not because I felt I could save the world. I became an advocate because I am one such person at the receiving end. It isn't a pleasant place to be, for me and many others.

And now as I reflect, I know human rights advocates have a long way to go and there is much to learn and unlearn. I also know that as we go, we are also being guided by the ones who have walked this road before us.

It is safe to say that human rights is not just a career choice. It is a calling, a calling to those with the courage to pursue and protect human dignity, identity and the very being of the next Seven Generations.

## FACULTY MENTOR

### ELSA STAMATOPOULOU

Director, Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University

Adjunct Professor, Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race & Department of Anthropology, Columbia University

## CLASSES

Gender Based Violence and Human Rights

Gender, Globalization, and Human Rights

Gender, Politics and Development: Theory, Policy and Practice

## NETWORKING

Ford Foundation

National Endowment for Democracy

Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations LGBTI + Core Group

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT

2020–21 Advocate Joy Pathaw addressed students in Gender, Politics and Development: Theory, Policy and Practice with Professors Jenny McGill and Maxine Weisgrau, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

2 The Advocates in  
Their Own Words

# Rena Green

Executive Director  
TransWave Jamaica  
JAMAICA



*“I became an advocate after realizing that there was no one who looked like me advocating for the rights of my community.”*

I became an advocate after realizing that there was no one who looked like me advocating for the rights of my community. I saw my community dying and struggling and that's why I decided to take up this mantle and fight for a community that is in need.

This program helped to broaden my understanding of the intersectionalities that exist within the framework of oppression and transphobia. It helped to provide new skills to aid me in doing my work as well as enhanced my understanding of issues that may not have a direct impact on my community but affect everyone in the long run.



## FACULTY MENTOR

### THEODORUS SANDFORT

Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (in Psychiatry), Division of Gender Health and Sexuality, Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University

Research Scientist, HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, New York State Psychiatric Institute

## CLASSES

Gender, Globalization, and Human Rights

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Human Rights

## NETWORKING

Human Rights Watch

National Endowment for Democracy

Out in Tech

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Independent Expert on Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

The Current State of LGBTQI + Rights in Jamaica and Mexico, Human Rights Campaign with Ruben Alan Avila Reyna and Renae Green

Renae Green addressed students in Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Human Rights with Professor Paisley Currah, ISHR

## THE CURRENT STATE OF LGBTQI+ RIGHTS IN JAMAICA & MEXICO

### A Conversation with participants in ISHR's Human Rights Advocates Program

Renae Green (She/Her) is the Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy at TransWave Jamaica

Ruben Avila Reyna (He/Him) is the Mexico Country Coordinator for the International Youth Alliance for Family Planning

Moderated by Jean Freedberg (She/Her), Director of Global Partnerships at Human Rights Campaign

Friday, October 16  
11am ET

For Zoom login, register at  
<http://bit.ly/EventHRAP>



# Ruben Alan Avila Reyna

Executive Director  
**Sin Parental Control**  
**MEXICO**



During my adolescence, the city where I have lived since I was born (Nuevo León, Mexico) was really affected by insecurity and organized crime. I have many stories about hearing shootings when I was in my grandma's home or watching the news with many horrifying stories about killings, missing people, and shootings. There was a time when everyone around me knew someone who had been killed or gone missing due to organized crime—including members of my own family.

I always felt badly about all of the things happening. As I got older, I started feeling uncomfortable about not doing anything. At the age of 18 and after many little interactions with social projects in the city, I formally started doing activism and work around the defense of human rights.

As a young person and as a member of the LGBTIQ community in one of the most conservative cities in Mexico, activism is sometimes a fight to survive. In my case, activism also has also given me the security and space to stand up and speak out against injustices and to defend human dignity.

***“As a young person and as a member of the LGBTIQ community in one of the most conservative cities in Mexico, activism is sometimes a fight to survive.”***

Thanks to the people I have met doing activism, I have also had the opportunity to learn about myself and recognize that the violence I experienced in the past was having negative effects on me. As an example, I learned that being an LGBTIQ person is not something to feel ashamed of or as a death sentence, as many of my friends and I were told when we were younger.

All of these experiences pushed me to make as a personal goal to put all my efforts to making it possible that every youth and adolescent has the possibility to decide freely about their life and never feel shame or be persecuted for those decisions.

I have to say activism and human rights defense are not easy. Big wins take a long time and the feeling of not doing enough comes constantly when you see that you're fighting against a giant and powerful monster, the system.

Nonetheless, there are also really energizing moments. Little wins becoming everything and definitely one of the best things for me has been the amazing people I have met along this path. Every single time you feel you're alone in this fight, just remind yourself that there are more people fighting and once you meet them, you



can create a powerful network of support and love, with people fighting next to you. They sometimes become your chosen family.

It has been an interesting and hard ride, but definitely being part of the work for social change and human rights is one of the best decisions of my life.

One of the most important people that I met on this path told me, "Sometimes we come here trying to change the life of others, when in reality the biggest change is what we do for ourselves."



## FACULTY MENTORS

### SARA CASEY

Assistant Professor, Population and Family Health,  
Columbia University Irving Medical Center

### NEETU JOHN

Assistant Professor, Population and Family Health, Columbia  
University Irving Medical Center

## CLASSES

Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Health and Human Rights Advocacy

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Human Rights

## NETWORKING

Global Philanthropy Project

National Endowment for Democracy

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Independent Expert on Protection against  
violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and  
gender identity

United Nations LGBTI Core Group

United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy  
on Youth

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Challenges to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for  
Youth and Adolescents, Leitner Center for International Law  
and Justice, Fordham Law School with Ekanem Itoro Effiong  
and Ruben Alan Avila Reyna

The Current State of LGBTQI + Rights in Jamaica and  
Mexico, Human Rights Campaign

HRAP Info Session with HRAP Alumni from Ghana,  
Honduras, Mexico, and Zambia

Ruben Alan Avila Reyes addressed students in Global Sexual  
and Reproductive Health and Rights with Prof. Lynn Collins,  
Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

Ruben Alan Avila Reyes was interviewed by students in  
Introduction to Human Rights with Class of 1919 Professor  
of Political Science Andrew J. Nathan

**Leitner Human Rights Speaker Series:**  
**Challenges to Sexual & Reproductive Health  
Rights (SRHR) for Youth & Adolescents**



**Ruben Avila Reyna**  
Member  
*International Youth Alliance for  
Family Planning, MEXICO*



**Ekanaem Itoro Effiong**  
Youth Leader, West & Central Africa  
*UNAIDS*  
Advocacy Working Group Lead  
*The Pact*

Wednesday | 11.11.20  
12:30PM - 1:30PM ET  
Register:  
[leitnercenter.org/events](http://leitnercenter.org/events)



# Tamar Ivaniadze

Executive Director  
Initiative for Social Changes  
GEORGIA



*“Throughout my practical work, I faced some cases in which children, women and families were victims of unfair social policies and scarce protection mechanisms.”*

At all stages of my life, I have been connected to social issues and fighting for social changes. My aspiration to study the social sciences and make a difference came from my childhood. I grew up in one of the most disadvantaged communities of Georgia, where I saw people struggle against extreme poverty, social injustice and discrimination every day. I would like to highlight that it was not only a place where everything went wrong; it was also a place of hopes, wishes, hidden resources and unused opportunities.

I truly wanted to make a difference, change the reality and transform my community. While still a child, I became involved in extra-curriculum activities, such as debate, school councils and peer education programs. I was very lucky to have had such opportunities in my school. In conjunction with the school projects, I designed and implemented some voluntary activities and contributed to my community’s development. This childhood experience inspired me and I decided to continue my path as a social worker. I am a first-generation student who received an academic degree in Social Work from Tbilisi State University in Georgia. Human rights advocacy is a significant part of every social worker’s job.

My interest in social advocacy stems from 12 years of experience in the provision of social services and direct practice as a social worker in the NGO sector of Georgia. As a frontline social worker, I had direct practical experiences to work with children under state care, women who experienced domestic violence, and conflict-affected children and their families. During the face-to-face work with people in need, I realized that helping individuals, groups and communities is more effective when social problems are deeply analyzed and advocacy strategy is based on evidence. Throughout my practical work, I faced some cases in which children, women and families were victims of unfair social policies and scarce protection mechanisms. Children should not be separated from their families because their families are poor. We need to consider that adequate assistance is not provided by relevant state bodies, that the government refuses citizens' needs for social housing based on their mental health diagnosis, and that women are forced to return their violent husbands because of limited supportive resources. Similar cases and moments from my practical work encouraged me to pursue social advocacy in order to make a difference through changing harmful social and gender norms and shifting unfair social systems and policies instead of just worrying about it or helping people to adapt "easily" in the existing context. I strongly believe that the power of social workers as social advocates is in making changes, not in maintaining the status quo. Today, strengthening people for change, fighting against systems and conditions that cause human rights abuse are both my personal aspiration and my job. Therefore, I am advocating for social justice and human rights!



## FACULTY MENTOR

### ELISE GIULIANO

Lecturer in Discipline, Department of Political Science, Columbia University

Director of Graduate Studies of the MA program at The Harriman Institute, Columbia University

## CLASSES

Advocating and Campaigning for Economic and Social Rights

Children's Rights Advocacy

Gender Based Violence and Human Rights

## NETWORKING

Center for Economic and Social Rights

Reproductive Health Access Project

National Endowment for Democracy

United Nations Development Programme

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

**COLUMBIA** | SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

**Gender, Human Rights, and Social Work: Insights for Practice in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Cosponsored by Columbia School of Social Work's Social Intervention Group (SIG) and Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR)

**Moderator: Anindita Dasgupta**, SIG associate research scientist

- **Tamar Ivantsova**, Co-founder and Chairperson of Initiative for Social Changes
- **Francis Richard Asong**, Executive Director of VOICE Ghana
- **Samuel Metlakura**, Programmes Manager of GALZ

**REGISTER TO ATTEND:**  
Wed 21 Apr 2021  
3pm – 4pm (CAT)

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Rights, and Social Work: Insights for Practice in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Columbia School of Social Work

# Ekanem Itoro Effiong

Director

Advocacy and Resource Mobilization  
African Network of Adolescent and  
Young People Development  
NIGERIA



*“To deny people their  
human rights is to challenge  
their very humanity.”*

NELSON MANDELA

Growing up in an ever-evolving world, I have lived by this principle for as long as I can remember. My belief that the fundamental human rights afforded to one by birth are a birthright is the bedrock of my orientation to life and is primarily responsible for shaping me as a person. I strongly believe that every human should have the unreserved right to chart their course and build their path. Decisions that shape one's life should be taken by no other than oneself. Any form of violation of this very basic belief irks me to my very core.

Born and raised in Nigeria, a nation infamous for its bleak record on issues concerning human rights, I have grown to realize and understand the intricacies and disparities that exist in and around human rights issues in different societal settings. My immediate environment for one has given me first-hand exposure to the dangers of social existence devoid of equity and equality. Witnessing developments across the globe that have seen advancements in human rights causes, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), has only spurred me to do everything within my ability to ensure that this level of progress, regardless of its pace, is extended to the most vulnerable members of Nigerian society.



My passion for closing the human rights gap has been the galvanizing force behind my work in SRHR and has led me to manage and implement advocacy and high-impact and evidence-based programs around SRHR and HIV/AIDS prevention interventions. This pure drive of mine for human rights advocacy has solely been responsible for providing opportunities for me to serve in the capacity of UNAIDS Youth Leader for West and Central Africa and the Advocacy working group lead for The PACT, a global coalition of youth-led and youth-serving organizations working within the sexual and reproductive health and HIV movements.

My achievements in the SRHR ecosystem are purely down to the raw desire I have for human rights advocacy. What motivates me is believing in the power of solidarity, of standing with other defenders and advocates of human rights causes. Making little gains in the form of policymaking and/or implementation geared towards making life a bit more bearable for the seemingly oppressed is the essence of my being.



Dedicating a large part of my life to this was never a difficult decision for me as my lifelong goal has always been to lend a voice to those who for some reason, through no fault of their own, have lost theirs. Humanity is all we have as humans, any form of infringement upon our rights is a threat to our quality of life and ultimately a threat to life in itself. I will continue to fight for the fundamental human rights of all, build collective resilience to suppression, and live to oppose oppression.

## FACULTY MENTORS

### SARA CASEY

Assistant Professor, Population and Family Health at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center

### NEETU JOHN

Assistant Professor, Population and Family Health at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center

### THEODORUS SANDFORT

Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (in Psychiatry), Division of Gender Health and Sexuality, Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University

Research Scientist, HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, New York State Psychiatric Institute

## CLASSES

Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Health and Human Rights Advocacy

Key Issues in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Human Rights

## NETWORKING

EMpower

Global Philanthropy Project

National Endowment for Democracy

OutRight International

Reproductive Health Access Project

Restless Development

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations LGBTI Core Group

United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

U.S. Department of State

World Bank Inspection Panel

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Challenges to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Youth and Adolescents with Ekanem Ito Effiong and Ruben Alan Avila Reyna, Leitner Center for International Law and Justice, Fordham Law School

Human Rights in Africa with Ekanem Ito Effiong and Francis Bichnord Komla Asong, Center for African Education, Teachers College

Ekanem Ito Effiong addressed Students in Health and Human Rights Advocacy with Prof. Joanne Csete at the Mailman School of Public Health

Human Rights Advocates on the Frontlines Respond to Covid-19 with Ekanem Ito Effiong, 2014 Advocate Caryl Dyantyi, 2019 Advocate Nkali Biggie and 2019 Advocate Wisdom Bebli

The poster is for a panel discussion titled "DISABILITY RIGHTS & HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES PANEL: HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA". It is organized by the Center for African Education (CAE) at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) at Columbia University. The event is scheduled for Thursday, December 10, from 10:00 AM to 11:40 AM EST. The Zoom link is <https://teacherscollege.zoom.us/j/91951814115>. The panel features five speakers: Ekanem Ito Effiong (UNAIDS Youth Leader for West and Central Africa, Nigeria, Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) 2020-21), Francis Bichnord Komla Asong (Executive Director, Voice of People with Disability (VOICE Ghana), Ghana, Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) 2020-21), Abu Bakari Bangura (Country Representative of African Youth with Disabilities Network, Founder & Director of National Disability Students Forum, Sierra Leone), Francis Issa Esq. (Human Rights Lawyer, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Advocate, Sierra Leone), and Tania Fraser (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Advocate, People's Alliance for Reproductive Health Advocacy (PARHA), Sierra Leone). The poster also includes contact information for disability-related accommodations: "TO REQUEST DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS CONTACT OASD AT OASD@TCU.EDU OR 212-678-3788, 212-678-3854 VIDEO PHONE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE."

# 3 Workshops

## Research, Documentation, and Writing

**JANE BUCHANAN**

*Deputy Director of the Disability Rights Division*  
**Human Rights Watch**

**PARAM-PREET SINGH**

*Associate Director of the International Justice Program*  
**Human Rights Watch**

Jane Buchanan and Param-Preet Singh led a six-part workshop that covered the conceptualization of a research project, interviewing victims and witnesses, interviewing perpetrators and accomplices, and writing.

## An Introduction to StoryCorps

**ZAZIL DAVIS-VAZQUEZ**

**LUIGI VILLANUEVA**

*National Facilitators*  
**StoryCorps**

Zazil Davis and Luigi Villanueva led a comprehensive workshop covering StoryCorps' mission, signature conversation style, operational procedures, tiers of service, style, community outreach efforts, and tools for communities while sharing some of the organization's work.

## Introduction to Columbia University Libraries

**YUUSUF CARUSO**

*African Studies Librarian*  
**Columbia University Libraries**

Yuusuf Caruso introduced the advocates to the Columbia University Libraries, which comprises 13 million volumes, over 160,000 journals and serials, as well as extensive electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, maps, and graphic and audio-visual materials.



StoryCorps staff shared their organization's philosophy with the advocates.

## Resilience and Trauma

**RAPHAEL D. COLEMAN**

*Executive Director, Ask Alice! Health Promotion  
Columbia Health*

Dr. Coleman led the advocates in an interactive workshop in which they talked about trauma, building capacity for resilience in individuals and communities, and strategies for self-care and stress management.

## Fundraising

**ERIK DETIGER**

*Founder and Managing Director  
Philantropia, Inc.*

With more than a decade of experience working in the field of international philanthropy and fundraising, Erik Detiger provided the advocates with an overview of concepts and strategies in international fundraising. The four-part workshop series focused on fundraising from institutional donors and individuals.

Dr. Raphael Coleman led a workshop on resilience and trauma.

### DAY 2: PRACTICING SELF-CARE AND STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

#### CONSIDER A TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH TO HELPING- RELATIONSHIPS

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
- Cultural and Historical, and Gender Issues





Zoom allowed HRAP alumni to join workshops such as the one on Human Rights Documentation.

## Human Rights Documentation

**PAMELA GRAHAM**

*Director, Humanities & Global Studies and Director  
Center for Human Rights Documentation*

**KAOUKAB CHEBARO**

*Head, Global Studies  
Columbia University Libraries*

The Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research at Columbia University holds an extensive collection of archives of human rights NGOs. Pamela and Kaoukab discussed the collecting program and the process of working with NGOs to preserve their records. They noted the value and importance of preserving the record of human rights advocacy. The CHRDR is also developing the Human Rights Web Archive, an online resource that captures and preserves the websites of human rights organizations and blogs. They demonstrated the HRWA and discussed the issues associated with preserving this information, and encouraged advocates to consider contributing their websites to this collecting effort.

## Effective Presentations

**STEPHANIE V. GREPO**

*Columbia University*

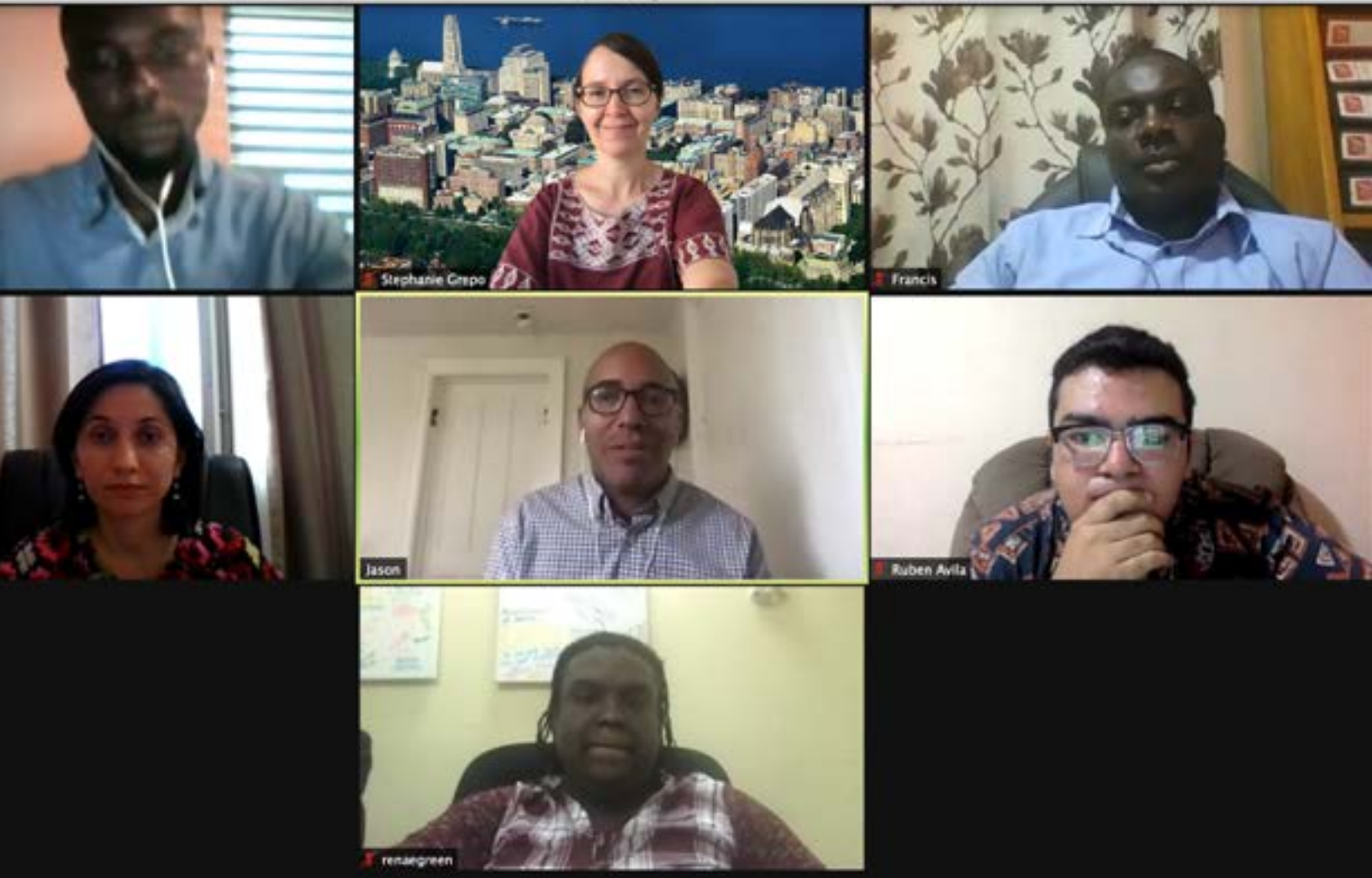
The advocates learned how to make concise and effective presentations on their work. Stephanie encouraged the advocates to provide constructive feedback to one another as they learned to make powerful presentations.

## Introduction to Candid

**TRACY KAUFMAN**

*Programs Manager  
Candid*

Tracy Kaufman offered the Advocates a comprehensive look at the resources available through Candid's online resources.



Even though HRAP had to take place online, Jason McGill encouraged the advocates to make the most of networking opportunities.

## Thoughtful, Creative, and Effective Engagement

**JASON MCGILL**  
*Founder and Principal*  
 Justice Associates

At the beginning of the 2020–21 HRAP, Jason McGill encouraged the advocates to make the most of HRAP even though it was taking place online due to the pandemic. He focused on the importance of building strong, trusting partnerships with everyone they were going to meet throughout the program and to take the long view of the relationships they were going to establish.

## Human Rights Skills and Advocacy

**DRAGICA MIKAVICA**  
*Senior Advocacy Adviser*  
 Save the Children

Dragica Mikavica spoke about the design and implementation of Save the Children’s advocacy strategies in New York to advance its priorities with the UN Security Council, permanent missions, agencies and other relevant bodies.

## Video Advocacy

ISABEL PINHEIRO  
VALENTINA FERREIRA AMAZONAS  
WITNESS

Isabel Pinheiro and Valentina Ferreira Amazonas led a workshop on the effective use of video advocacy as a complement to traditional approaches to human rights advocacy. The Advocates learned the ways in which stories, visual evidence and personal testimony can be used as part of a human rights advocacy strategy to inform policy.

## Beyond Data For Good

JACLYN SAWYER  
*Lecturer in Social Work*  
Columbia University

*Director of Data Services*  
Breaking Ground

This workshop was designed to build a critical foundation for doing human rights and social justice work in a datafied world. Participants in this workshop developed a basic "data literacy", by exploring building a dataset, working with data, and data storytelling. Throughout the workshop the advocates developed a basic framework for how to critique data-based projects and weigh the ethical considerations of using data about people and social welfare issues.

WITNESS led a workshop on video advocacy.



## Surviving and Thriving in a Human Rights Context

MELBA NICHOLAS SULLIVAN, PHD

This interactive workshop explored the impact of human rights work on staff well-being. Frameworks for understanding individual and collective survival strategies were introduced, as well as practices that promote individual, team, and organizational thriving. The workshop drew on psychology, mindfulness, and theater arts.

## Maximizing Your Time in HRAP

BAKARY TANDIA

*Case Manager and Policy Advocate*  
**African Services Committee**

*Co-founder*

**The Abolition Institute**

2010 Advocate Bakary Tandia helped the advocates to maximize their time in HRAP. He described the U.S. government system through the lens of advocacy and presented resources available to advocates in the USA. Tandia is a case worker and policy advocate at African Services Committee in New York City and a co-founder of The Abolition Institute which is working to end slavery in Mauritania.



# 4 HRAP Alumni Sessions

The following HRAP alumni shared their experiences as human rights advocates with the 2020–21 HRAP cohort.

## 2011 Advocate Elvis Mbembe Binda

On the first day of orientation, Elvis spoke with the advocates about his HRAP experience and the impact it continues to have on him to the present time. He urged the advocates to focus on why they applied for the program rather than focus on the fact that the pandemic prevented them from traveling to the USA to attend HRAP. The 2020–21 cohort acknowledged that Elvis’s advice reverberated throughout the program. Elvis returned to HRAP as the keynote speaker at their virtual graduation eight months later. He congratulated them on staying with the program while continuing to work full-time during the pandemic and urged them to take time to reflect on the program and how they could best apply what they have gained to their work.

Elvis is the president and a founding member of Initiatives for Peace and Human Rights, which helps communities and individuals in Africa's Great Lakes Region achieve sustainable peaceful coexistence using human rights and good governance education. Elvis is a member of the Rwanda Bar Association and the East African Law Society. He holds a PhD in law from Utrecht University (the Netherlands). He has been a lecturer at the School of Law at the University of Rwanda since 2007.



Top left: 1994 Advocate Samuel Kofi Woods of Liberia

## 1994 Advocate Samuel Kofi Woods II

Samuel spoke with the 2020–21 cohort about his trajectory as a human rights advocate as well as the challenges facing activists around the globe today. He urged the advocates to develop and maintain solidarity in speaking out against human rights abuses.

Samuel Kofi Woods II is a Liberian journalist, academic, activist, and politician. Woods began his activism as the student president of his university and a leader of the national student organization in 1986. After the outbreak of civil war in 1989, Woods fled to Ghana but returned to Liberia in 1991 to launch the country’s most prominent human rights organization, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. In the midst of the war, he wrote and distributed reports of human rights violations. He also established a radio program that focused on publicizing arrests and extrajudicial executions and educating citizens about their rights. In 1994, he founded the Forefront Organization to document the human rights abuses of the Second Liberian Civil War. In 1998, Woods was threatened with sedition for exposing forced child labor in the country. Woods, his family, and his staff faced threats from government authorities, many of his colleagues were murdered, and he was forced into hiding and exile on multiple occasions. After the civil war, Woods served as the Liberian minister of labor and the minister of public works.

## 1996 Advocate Twesigye Jackson Kaguri

Jackson spoke with current HRAP participants as well as HRAP alumni about his 25-year journey educating HIV/AIDS orphans in southwestern Uganda.

Twesigye Jackson Kaguri was born and raised in Uganda in the village of Nyakagezi. A graduate of Makerere University, Kaguri co-founded the human rights organization, Human Rights Concerns, to help victims of human rights violations in Uganda and to educate the public about their rights. In 2001, he founded the Nyaka AIDS Orphans Project in response to the devastating effects of AIDS in his hometown. The organization provides free education to children who have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. In addition to two primary schools and a secondary school, Nyaka also operates two libraries, a farm, a nutrition program, a medical clinic, two clean water systems, and a support program for the grandmothers who care for as many as 14 children at a time. Since founding the project, Kaguri has also become an author. He was named a CNN Hero in 2012 and the winner of the Waislitz Global Citizen Award in 2015.

## 1997 Advocate Babatunde Olugboji

Babatunde spoke with the 2020–21 cohort about his HRAP experience and his trajectory as a human rights advocate and shared best practices from his work.

Babatunde is deputy program director for Human Rights Watch. He brings more than 25 years of experience to his job, having worked as a researcher, journalist, writer, editor, human rights activist, campaigner, and public policy analyst. Before joining Human Rights Watch, he worked with Christian Aid in London and in Berlin with Transparency International. Previously, he was executive director and cofounder of the Centre for Free Speech, Nigeria's first specialist freedom of expression human rights group. Olugboji holds a PhD in mass communication from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom, where he wrote his thesis on how the British press report and frame corruption issues in the three aid-recipient African nations of Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

## 2005 Advocate Alejandra Ancheita

Alejandra drew from her own experience as she encouraged the advocates to nourish and care for themselves as they pursue their work.

Alejandra, the founder and executive director of the Mexico City-based Project of Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights (ProDESC), is a lawyer and activist who leads the fight for the rights of the migrants, workers, and indigenous communities of her country to raise their standard of living. Since founding ProDESC in 2005, Alejandra and her dedicated team have run strategic campaigns aimed at protecting the economic, social, and cultural rights of Mexico's most marginalized people. In 2014, she was honored with the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.



*Top photo:* 2005 Advocate Alejandra Ancheita of ProDESC  
*Bottom photo:* 1997 Advocate Babatunde Olugboji of Human Rights Watch

# 5 Testimonials

“The conversation [as part of the 2021 Social Impact Week at Columbia Business School] was terrific, and we were blown away by Mary Akrami's and Marijana Savic's remarks. I, along with many others, left inspired and a bit more knowledgeable about women's rights issues and opportunities to empower women throughout the world. CBS is very US-focused, so we loved learning about successful social enterprises in other countries.”

**ANNA HOUSEMAN**  
M.B.A. Candidate 2021  
Social Enterprise Club |  
Columbia Business School



2009 Advocate Mary Akrami and 2018 Advocate Marijana Savic spoke to students during Social Impact Week at Columbia Business School.

“ For my Introduction to Human Rights Master's class, my students and I were fortunate to have visiting talks from Advocates Ruben Avila Reyna and Renae Green. In the Introduction class, we look at numerous human rights issues through the lens of reporting, advocacy, campaigning, litigation, and other methods of accountability and implementation. So it was tremendously exciting for the students to have the Advocates join and talk about how they employed all or some of those methods in their own human rights context and work. Ruben talked about women's rights and youth rights in Mexico, with great examples. He told the story of each campaign very clearly, including challenges and his analysis of what didn't work, which is also important for the students to hear. Renae talked about her experience organizing for transgender rights in Jamaica, and, in a place with a history of brutal violence against LGBTQ people, the importance of providing safe spaces, and the power of representation and speaking out in the face of danger and opposition—and of finding appreciation and allies in surprising places (including a Starbucks!).

From both of these visits, the students began to understand in real terms the concepts and readings we engaged with all semester—they really needed to hear it told from the point of view of people who have undertaken human rights advocacy to describe the experience as well as what's at stake. After each visit, they were clearly inspired and buzzing with more comments and questions. I am grateful to the Advocates for taking the time and giving us the benefit of their thoughtful storytelling.”

**MILA ROSENTHAL**

*Chief of Communications and Advocacy, UNDP  
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Political Science,  
Columbia University*

“ It was a pleasure working with HRAP Advocates Tamar, Francis, and Samuel [on a presentation to Columbia School of Social Work students and alumni]. They presented about the inspiring work they are doing to advocate for and improve the health and human rights of some of the most marginalized populations, globally. It was incredible to learn not only about their work, and the work of the organizations they lead, but also how they have had to adapt in the midst of a global pandemic that impacts virtually all sectors of society. Their unwavering commitment to helping those most in need in times of such wide-spread suffering is truly outstanding.”

**ANINDITA DASGUPTA**

*Associate Research Scientist, Social Intervention Group,  
Columbia University School of Social Work*

“ I had the honor of working with the 2020–21 cohort of Human Rights Advocates by hosting a workshop on data-based advocacy. Every interaction I've had with the HRAP program has been rewarding, and this year, despite the inevitable challenges of remote connection: different time zones, technical irregularities, and the weight of the year on our hearts, minds, and in our work, was no different. The advocates were engaged and extremely thoughtful during our workshop as we moved through technical concepts and skill-building to developing data-based advocacy strategies. The opportunity to come together with this group, to share and collaborate over zoom, discover where our work overlaps and how to strengthen our respective strategies, was an incredible experience. I look forward to following the advocates' work and meeting futures cohorts of the HRAP program.”

**JACLYN SAWYER**

*Director of Data Services, Breaking Ground  
Lecturer, Columbia School of Social Work*



Sheila Platt worked with countless HRAP cohorts on stress management over the years. Pictured from left to right: Prof. Andrew J. Nathan, Stephanie V. Grepo, Anna Kirey and Mary Akrami of the 2009 HRAP, and Sheila Platt.

**The Institute for the Study of Human Rights is grateful to the following for their financial support of the advocates in the 2020–21 Program:**

**Ambassador Nicholas Platt in memory of his wife, Sheila Platt**

**Anonymous**

**Arcus Foundation**

**Harriman Institute, Columbia University**

**Indigenous Women’s Forum (IIWF/FIMI)**

# 7 ISHR Staff

**Irene Atamian**  
Business Manager

**Elazar Barkan**  
Director, ISHR

**Joanne Bauer**  
Senior Researcher, Business  
and Human Rights

**Kristina Eberbach**  
Deputy Director, ISHR

**Yasmine Ergas**  
Senior Advisor

**Stephanie V. Grepo**  
Director, Capacity Building

**Gergana Halpern**  
Director, Education

**Purvaja S. Kavattur**  
Staff Associate (through  
December 2020)

**J. Paul Martin**  
Senior Scholar

**Lara Nettlefield**  
Director of Graduate Studies

**Monica Olveira**  
Education Program Coordinator

**Sandra Paunksniene**  
Director, Alliance for Historical  
Dialogue and Accountability

**David L. Phillips**  
Director, Peace-building and  
Rights and Human Rights

**Breandra Pichon**  
Finance Coordinator

**Elsa Stamatopoulou**  
Director, Indigenous Peoples'  
Rights Program

**Inga Winkler**  
Director of Undergraduate  
Studies

## 8 HRAP Administration

**Stephanie V. Grepo** joined ISHR in 2008. During her tenure, she has increased the number of female participants in HRAP, secured funding to create openings in HRAP for LGBTQI and disability rights advocates, and encouraged HRAP alumni—who can be found in 90+ countries around the globe—to cooperate across class years and geographic boundaries. She has advised alumni on their work ranging from youth empowerment in South Sudan and Bosnia-Herzegovina to capacity building for Indigenous Peoples to advocacy around prisoners' rights in Nigeria and Zambia. In 2011, she created a summer program at ISHR through which Columbia students volunteer at organizations led by alumni of ISHR's fellowships programs around the globe. She designed and secured funds for ISHR's first MOOC which was launched on edX in October 2020. She has organized side events on advocacy tools and strategies at the Committee on the Status of Women and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

With the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe from 2000 to 2007, Stephanie developed multi-ethnic experiential education programs in Kosovo; created and led a \$2 million euros grants program to support confidence-building projects at the grassroots level in North Macedonia; worked on return and integration issues and led a field office of 10 staff in one of the most politically sensitive regions of Croatia; and served as the youth and education advisor to the OSCE Head of Mission in Serbia. She has observed elections in Bosnia and Georgia. A lecturer at The New School, Stephanie has led graduate-level practicums with clients including the International Rescue Committee, Transparency International, and the Libertas Center for Human

Rights at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, New York. In 2021, she joined The School of The New York Times as an instructor. She earned a master's degree from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Her volunteer experience with resettling refugees through Catholic Charities of Greater Boston led her to work in human rights.



**Julia Granski** is a graduate student at the Columbia University School of Social Work and currently completing her clinical work at New York Presbyterian—Weill Cornell Medical Center in the Bone Marrow

Transplant Department. Her passion lies within the intersection of health and human rights and her work has focused on tackling social determinants of health, addressing health inequities, eliminating social injustices, and reducing disparities in access to healthcare. Prior to entering Columbia, Julia double-majored in Psychology and International Studies with a concentration in Global Environment and Health at the University of Michigan. Upon graduating from Columbia, Julia aspires to continue to work as a social worker within the field of healthcare, specifically advocating for policies that reduce health disparities and improve access to healthcare. During Julia's time as an HRAP assistant, she scheduled the HRAP participants' networking opportunities and organized speaking engagements for them with Columbia student groups.

# 9 HRAP Alumni News

**2005 Advocate Alejandra Ancheita**, a Mexican lawyer and activist, has been named to the board of the Martin Ennals Foundation. She is the founder and executive director of Mexico City-based ProDESC, where she and her team conduct strategic campaigns aimed at protecting the economic, social and cultural rights of Mexico's most marginalized people. In 2014, she was awarded the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund named **2009 Advocate Mary Akrami** of Afghanistan a member of its newest campaign which calls on the world to invest in 1,000 women leaders working to build peace in 1,000 crisis-affected communities by the end of 2025. Mary is the Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network.

**2010 Advocate Siarhei Antusevich**, the Vice Chair of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, had an opinion piece titled "Impossible, Unthinkable Change Is Happening in Belarus" in The New York Times in August 2020. The Arthur Svensson International Prize for Trade Union Rights for 2021 was awarded to BKDP and its affiliates. They receive the award for their fearless struggle for democracy and fundamental trade union rights in Europe's last dictatorship.

**2010 Advocate Tambudzai Glenda Muzenda** was awarded one of the 2020 Desmond Tutu Reconciliation Fellowships for work in the field of gender reconciliation. Glenda is the Board Chair of Ceredev and Sustainability Lead at Symphonia, South Africa, and is particularly notable for her focus on Uncomfortable Conversations, which bring men into conversation with women and each other to address difficult issues.

StoryCorps recorded a conversation between **2010 Advocate Bakary Tandia** and Sean Tenner who talked about what led them to work together to end slavery in Mauritania through the organization they founded, The Abolition Institute. StoryCorps has been working with HRAP for more than 10 years.

**2010 Advocate Agnes Apea Atim** was elected MP of Amolatar District in Northern Uganda. She is the founder and CEO of Hope Development Initiative which works to unlock the leadership, citizenship and entrepreneurial potential of rural women through agribusiness.



2010 Advocate Agnes Apea Atim of Uganda



2019 Advocate Mariano Ruiz of Argentina

**2018 Advocate Marijana Savic** of Belgrade, Serbia has been named to the board of the Global Fund for Children. She is the founder and director of NGO Atina, which fights violence against women and human trafficking.

On behalf of the International House Davis Projects for Peace Adjudication Committee and the Davis United World Scholars Program, **2019 Advocate Mariano Ruiz** was awarded a Davis Projects for Peace grant for his project, Creating Diverse Communities for Receiving Syrian Refugees in Argentina.

ISHR's first MOOC, Indigenous Peoples' Rights, was launched on edX in October 2020.

**2014 Advocate Aviâja Egede Lyng** of Greenland, **2015 Advocate Sandra Creamer** of Australia, **2016 Advocate Aehshatou Manu** of Cameroon, **2019 Advocate Cecilia Ramirez** of Mexico and **2019 Advocate Platon Shamaev** of Russia share their expertise throughout the MOOC.



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