

HRAP 2025-26

Human Rights Advocates Program




INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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 HRAP is on YouTube!



Since 1989, the Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR) has been contributing to the development of human rights practitioners around the globe through the Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP). We at ISHR are always heartened to hear about the program's impact on both participants and alumni alike. This year's final evaluations were no exception as advocates shared what the program had meant to them. Following are excerpts from two of the evaluations:

"Perhaps most significantly, HRAP expanded my vision of what is possible, including the paths available to me as an activist and human rights defender. It strengthened not only the organization I work with, but also my own individual trajectory. I left each stage of the program with a clearer sense of who I am as a defender, what I stand for, and where I want to go. In short, HRAP did not just meet my expectations. It completely redefined them. It challenged me to think bigger, connect more deeply, and act with greater purpose."

2025-26 ADVOCATE JÚLIA MOTA SILVA

"Stepping back, HRAP has shifted something in me. It's not just that I've gained knowledge or sharpened skills, it's that I'm leaving with a clearer, more grounded sense of who I am in this work and what I want my practice to look like going forward."

2025-26 ADVOCATE NYAWIRA WAHITO



The Advocates left the aftermath of a blizzard in NYC to travel to DC where their first meeting was with the Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center.



The Advocates endured a cold start to their time at Columbia.

We invite you to read the 2025-26 HRAP report to learn about each advocate's individual HRAP experience including which classes they selected and the speaking engagements that they had. In addition to the long-running workshops on research, writing and documentation at Human Rights Watch and the fundraising workshop, the 2025-26 program included new workshops including The Courage to Be Happy, Media Literacy and Human

Rights, and Building Networks and Coalitions. ISHR also organized two HRAP Study Groups, which brought together the 2025-26 advocates and HRAP alumni. You'll hear from ISHR master's students who volunteered with the organizations of HRAP alumni through ISHR's Student Volunteer Program as well as from HRAP alumni who shared their reflections of the program. Finally you'll learn from each advocate what drove them to human rights.

THE ADVOCATES
IN THEIR OWN WORDS



CHRISTOPHER RUTLEDGE

Executive Director
MACUA WAMUA Advice Office
SOUTH AFRICA

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“The intention of the regime was clear: they believed that fear and isolation would break the spirit of young activists. But what they misunderstood, something many oppressive systems eventually learn, is that brutality often has the opposite effect. Instead of silencing us, it deepened our resolve. Those experiences strengthened my commitment to justice and reinforced my belief that the struggle for human dignity is both necessary and unstoppable.”

I have always felt a deep sense of outrage in the face of injustice. From a young age, I could never accept the idea that some people should suffer indignity or exclusion simply because systems of power allowed it. That instinct, what I believe is the human capacity for compassion and moral clarity, has always animated my life. For me, the pursuit of justice is not a career choice; it is a calling rooted in a fundamental belief that human dignity must be defended.

My journey in human rights advocacy began during the struggle against apartheid. As a student activist, I was outraged by the brutality and arrogance of the colonial apartheid regime and the violence it inflicted on millions of people in South Africa. Like many young people of that generation, I refused to accept that oppression as normal. My activism came at a personal cost. The apartheid regime persecuted many of us, targeting our families, friends, and communities. When I was sixteen years old, I was imprisoned and placed in solitary confinement.

The intention of the regime was clear: they believed that fear and isolation would break the spirit of young activists. But what they misunderstood, something many oppressive systems eventually learn, is that brutality often has the opposite effect. Instead of silencing us, it deepened our resolve. Those experiences strengthened my commitment to justice and reinforced my belief that the struggle for human dignity is both necessary and unstoppable.

That early experience shaped the path I would follow for the rest of my life. Human rights advocacy became not just a response to apartheid, but a broader commitment to challenge injustice wherever it manifests. While political systems may change, the struggle for justice continues in different forms.

Today, much of my work focuses on communities affected by mining and extractive industries. These communities often live at the intersection of poverty, environmental harm, and political marginalization. In theory, laws and policies promise development, consultation, and shared benefits from natural resources. In practice, however, many mining-affected communities experience displacement, environmental degradation, and exclusion from decisions that directly shape their lives.

This gap between promise and reality remains one of the most pressing human rights challenges in our society. Communities living on resource-rich land frequently see the wealth extracted from beneath their feet while they themselves remain excluded from meaningful participation and benefit. My work has therefore focused on supporting these communities as they organize, claim their rights, and demand accountability from both the state and corporations.

What continues to inspire me is the resilience of the people themselves. Despite immense challenges, communities continue to organize, speak out, and demand justice. Their courage reminds me that human rights advocacy is not about speaking on behalf of people, but about standing alongside them as they assert their own dignity and rights.

Ultimately, I remain a human rights advocate because I believe justice is never guaranteed. It must be defended, strengthened, and renewed by each generation. The struggle for dignity and equality continues, and I am committed to playing my part in that ongoing journey.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Jackie Dugard
Senior Lecturer
Institute for the Study of Human Rights
Department of Political Science

CLASSES

Campaigning for Change Through Media,
Mobilization & the Power of Persuasion
Climate Justice
Energy, Corporate Accountability and
Human Rights
The History of Human Rights

NETWORKING

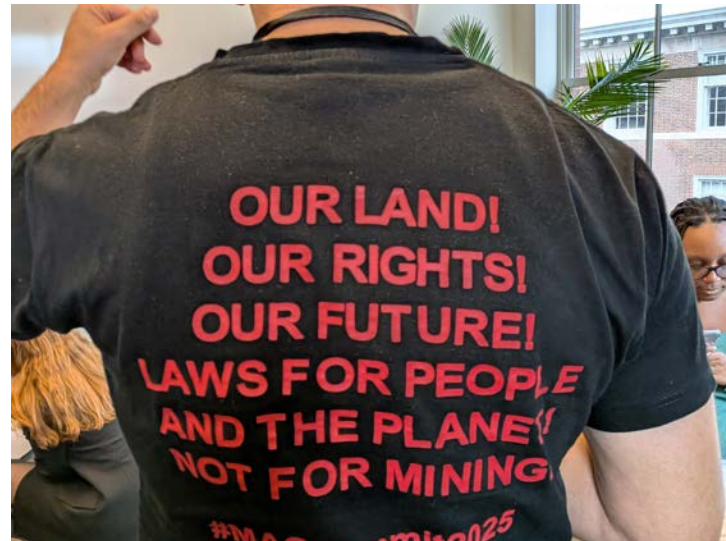
New York City
Center for Human Rights and
Global Justice at New York University
School of Law
ESCR-Net
Ford Foundation
Human Rights Watch
Interfaith Center on
Corporate Responsibility
International Center for
Transitional Justice

Washington, DC

American University
Amnesty International
Free the Slaves
Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute
Global Defenders Collective
Humanity United
National Endowment for Democracy
Robert and Ethel Kennedy
Human Rights Center

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Advancing Corporate Accountability and
Human Rights in an Age of Inequality,
Institute for the Study of Human Rights
Learning from Africa: Organizing
Movements and Advancing Human Rights
in Dangerous Times,
Barnard College
Lunch and Learn with Human Rights
Advocates, Center for African Education,
Teachers College
Meet Columbia's Human Rights
Advocates, Library,
The Interchurch Center



Christopher works with mining-impacted communities in South Africa.



The Advocates spoke at the NYU Center for Human Rights and Global Justice.



Teachers College hosted a Lunch and Learn with the Advocates.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION

I came to the programme with big hopes that I would be able to realise immediate benefits for my organisation and that we would be able to emerge with concrete collaborations, but I have come to understand that relationship building was the key strategic value that the program offers. The patience of building rapport and eventual support is not a “fast food” exercise and needs patience and consistent communication in order for it to flourish. But beyond the grand scheme I had cooked up in my mind, the learning experiences, having participated in 4 different classes was immensely gratifying and exciting. It allowed me an opportunity to access new information, share ideas, debate issues and generally emerge enriched through the process. The workshops along the way were a critical part of this as the experience and topics, while the Human Rights focus was broad, and engaging. The trip to Washington was really productive in many ways...A camaraderie and special bond was forged over the 4 months of the semester. All in all it was a blessing to be part of the cohort and I wish the programme every success going forward as it is a sorely needed platform and opportunity for advocates (young and older) to deepen their work and to strengthen the global architecture of human rights. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you. I had an incredibly productive and enriching experience. Viva, HRAP, Viva!

—Christopher Rutledge

ONESMO OLENGURUMWA

**Founding National Coordinator
and Board Secretary**

Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition

TANZANIA



THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“I came to know that many injustices are rooted in historical and structural inequalities that continue to shape societies today. This perspective broadened my focus from defending communities in isolation to confronting the wider governance and democratic challenges that sustain injustice.”

My journey into human rights work did not begin through employment, mentorship, or chance exposure as it is for many. It is rooted in the lived realities of my upbringing in Ngorongoro, within an Indigenous Maasai pastoralist community that has long faced land dispossession and ecological injustices. From an early age, I witnessed the struggles of my people for natural resources, land rights, livelihoods, and historical marginalization. These experiences instilled in me a deep commitment to justice and a determination to understand the law as a tool to confront inequality and historical injustice. I eventually realized that defending rights was not a choice; it was by default and an inborn call.

By high school, this inborn conviction had already translated into action. I led a student protest when essential services failed, demonstrating an early commitment to accountability and human rights. At the University of Dar es Salaam, where I studied law, my purpose became clearer. I served as President of the Human Rights Association and Secretary of the Law Society, advocating for marginalized groups and communities facing systemic discrimination.

Through these lived experiences, and further refined by human rights education, I came to understand that local struggles are inseparable from national dynamics. The challenges I witnessed in Ngorongoro reflected broader governance, constitutional, and rule-of-law challenges in Tanzania. I came to know that many injustices are rooted in historical and structural inequalities that continue to shape societies today. This perspective broadened my focus from defending communities in isolation to confronting the wider governance and democratic challenges that sustain injustice.

After graduating in 2009, I joined the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), traveling across Tanzania to document human rights violations, which made me witness the risks faced by human rights defenders (HRDs). Recognizing the absence of a national protection mechanism, I co-founded the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), which has become a central

pillar in protecting defenders and strengthening civic space. Leading THRDC for over a decade exposed me to both repression and resilience and reinforced my belief in the transformative power of collective action.

I have contributed to landmark cases, trained thousands of defenders, coordinated rapid-response interventions, and supported vulnerable communities facing threats ranging from criminalization to forced displacement. My professional development, including studies at the world’s leading universities, has strengthened my ability to address human rights challenges with local insight, historical context, and global perspectives. For instance, my current participation in the Columbia Human Rights Advocates Program will significantly enhance my capacity to address human rights challenges through a broader, interconnected, and intersectional lens, informed by global historical and contemporary contexts.

My path to becoming an HRD is not merely a profession I chose; it is a calling rooted in my community and country’s history. My journey continues to affirm one truth: defending human rights is not simply what I do; it is who I am. Most importantly, “Once a Human Rights Defender, Always a Human Rights Defender.”



Onesmo prepares before making a presentation.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Jenik Radon
Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs
School of International and Public Affairs

CLASSES

Climate Justice
Energy, Corporate Responsibility & Human Rights
The History of Human Rights
Human Rights Education
Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

NETWORKING

New York City
Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University School of Law
ESCR-Net
Ford Foundation
Human Rights Watch
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
International Center for Transitional Justice

Washington, DC

Alliance for Peacebuilding
American University
Amnesty International
Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute
Global Defenders Collective
Humanity United
Indian Law Resource Center
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
National Endowment for Democracy
Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center
UN Commission on the Status of Women
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
The World Bank Inspection Panel

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Advancing Corporate Accountability and Human Rights in an Age of Inequality, Institute for the Study of Human Rights
Learning from Africa: Organizing Movements and Advancing Human Rights in Dangerous Times, Barnard College
Lunch and Learn with Human Rights Advocates, Center for African Education, Teachers College
Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates, Library, The Interchurch Center
Pan-Africanism & Education Conference, Teachers College



David Schilling of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility moderated a talk with Ronald, Christopher and Onesmo.



Barnard hosted a speaking engagement with the Advocates from Africa.



At the Robert and Ethel Kennedy Center for Human Rights in DC, photos of HRAP alumni Hina Jilani and Samuel Kofi Woods adorn the walls.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION

As I near the completion of the HRAP program, I can confidently say that my actual experience has fully met and in many ways exceeded the expectations I had at the beginning of the program. I joined HRAP with very high expectations, particularly because of the opportunity to join Columbia University as a Visiting Scholar.

My primary goal was to strengthen my human rights professionalism by complementing my many years of practical experience with strong academic engagement. I also hoped to expand my professional network, especially with human rights institutions and donors in the United States. I am pleased to say that all of these expectations were fully realized.

Academically, the program greatly refreshed and strengthened my knowledge through four key courses: Human Rights History, Human Rights Education, Climate Justice, and Corporate and Energy Accountability. These classes not only deepened my theoretical understanding but also strengthened my ability to apply human rights principles in practice.

The program significantly enhanced my resource mobilization capacity. I had the opportunity to meet and engage with several donors, which has strengthened my confidence and skills in fundraising and partnership development.

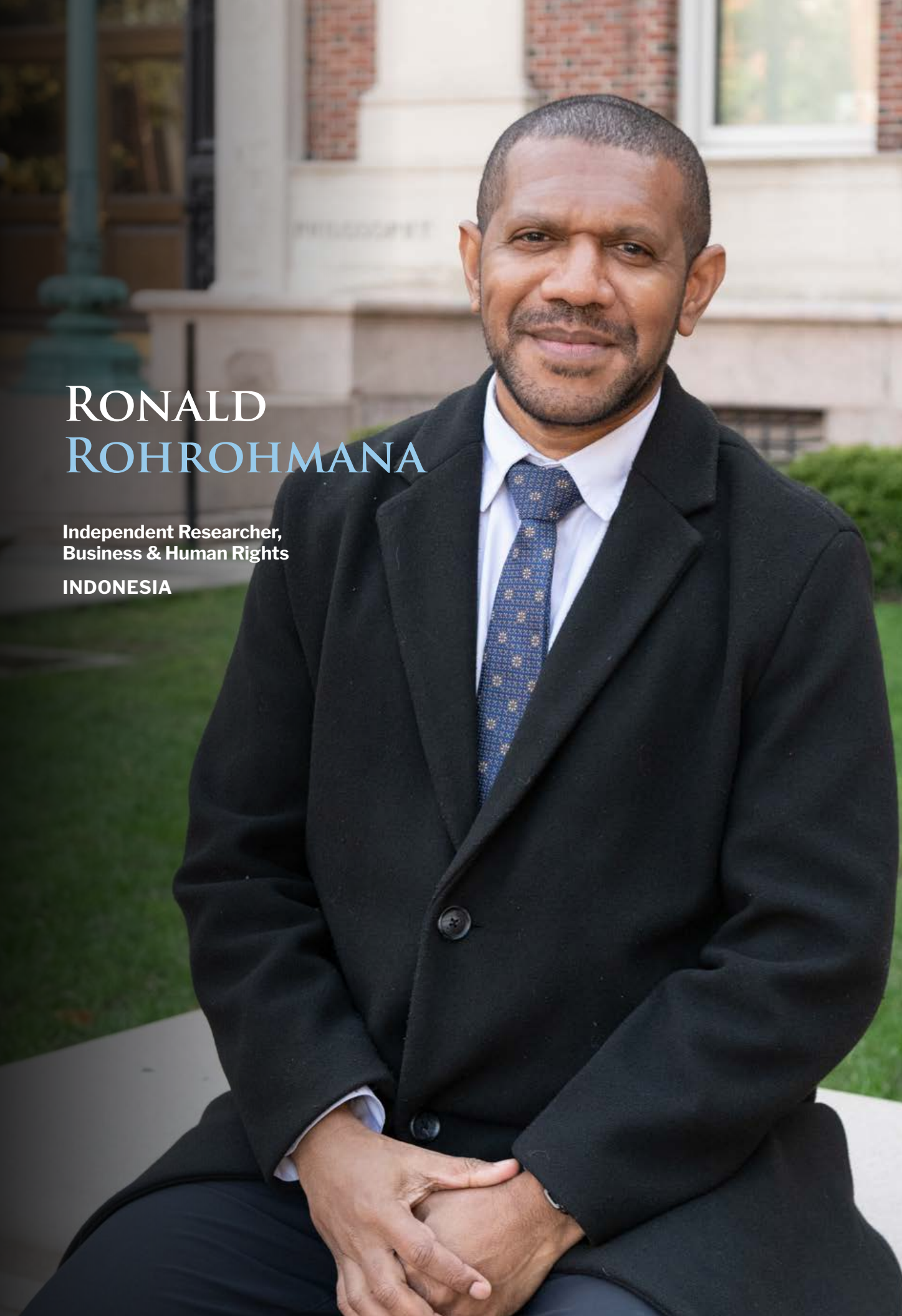
I was very impressed by the quality of teaching and the pedagogical approaches used across all the HRAP workshops. The modes of instruction were engaging, participatory, and well adapted to adult learners with diverse professional backgrounds. Instructors encouraged critical thinking, open dialogue, and reflection, creating a learning environment in which I consistently felt seen, heard, and supported. My professional experience was acknowledged and effectively integrated into classroom discussions, which enriched both my learning and that of my peers.

Overall, HRAP has been a highly enriching and transformative experience that has contributed meaningfully to my professional growth and future work in the human rights field.
—Onesmo Olungurumwa

RONALD ROHROHMANA

Independent Researcher,
Business & Human Rights

INDONESIA



THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“To be Indigenous in a nation that privileges its dominant culture is to occupy a contradiction: citizen on paper, invisible in practice.”

Why am I a human rights advocate? This is a tough question, because in truth I was brought into the world of human rights advocacy from a professional angle. I did not set out to become an advocate. But I grew up as part of an Indigenous minority in a country that often pretends we don't exist, and that leaves a mark. To be Indigenous in a nation that privileges its dominant culture is to occupy a contradiction: citizen on paper, invisible in practice. That early awareness of erasure shaped everything that followed, and it taught me that rights are not abstract principles debated in conference rooms. They are lived, embodied, and too often denied in silence.

My path into this work was not a straight line. But there is a moment in every advocate's life when the work stops being professional and becomes personal. For me, it came not as a single revelation but as a slow accumulation, story after story from people whose suffering was not accidental but engineered. The Indigenous elder fighting for land rights. The migrant fisher locked in a floating prison. The woman demanding accountability for gender-based violence. Their circumstances differ, but the structures that harm them are kin: colonialism, extractive capitalism, racial hierarchy. Human rights advocacy, at its best, names those structures and builds coalitions across them.

People sometimes ask me whether advocacy really changes anything, and I understand the skepticism. Progress is slow, uneven, and reversible. But I have watched investor pressure force companies to audit their supply chains. I have seen a single well-documented report shift a government's position. And I have sat with survivors whose willingness to share their stories, at great personal risk, moved institutions that years of lobbying could not. Change is not only possible. It is happening, in ways that rarely make headlines.

This journey has deepened my conviction that the work must be both local and global. Fellow advocates I have met along the way come from every continent, each carrying knowledge forged in struggle. From them I am reminded that solidarity is not a slogan but a discipline, one that requires listening as much as speaking, and humility as much as courage.

I am a human rights advocate because silence was never an option for someone from where I come from. And because the world I want, one where no community is invisible, no worker is disposable, and no identity is a liability, will not build itself.



The Advocates attended events around the city.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Judith Gearhart
Adjunct Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs
 School of International and Public Affairs

CLASSES

Campaigning for Change—Media, Mobilization & the Power of Persuasion
 Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

NETWORKING

New York City
 Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University School of Law

ESCR-Net
 Ford Foundation
 Human Rights Watch
 Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
 International Center for Transitional Justice

Washington, DC
 Alliance for Peacebuilding
 American University
 Free the Slaves
 Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute
 Global Defenders Collective
 Humanity United
 National Endowment for Democracy
 Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Advancing Corporate Accountability and Human Rights in an Age of Inequality, Institute for the Study of Human Rights
 Fisheries Governance, Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality, School of International and Public Affairs
 Learning from Africa: Organizing Movements and Advancing Human Rights in Dangerous Times, Barnard College

Lunch and Learn with Human Rights Advocates, Center for African Education, Teachers College
 Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates, Library, The Interchurch Center



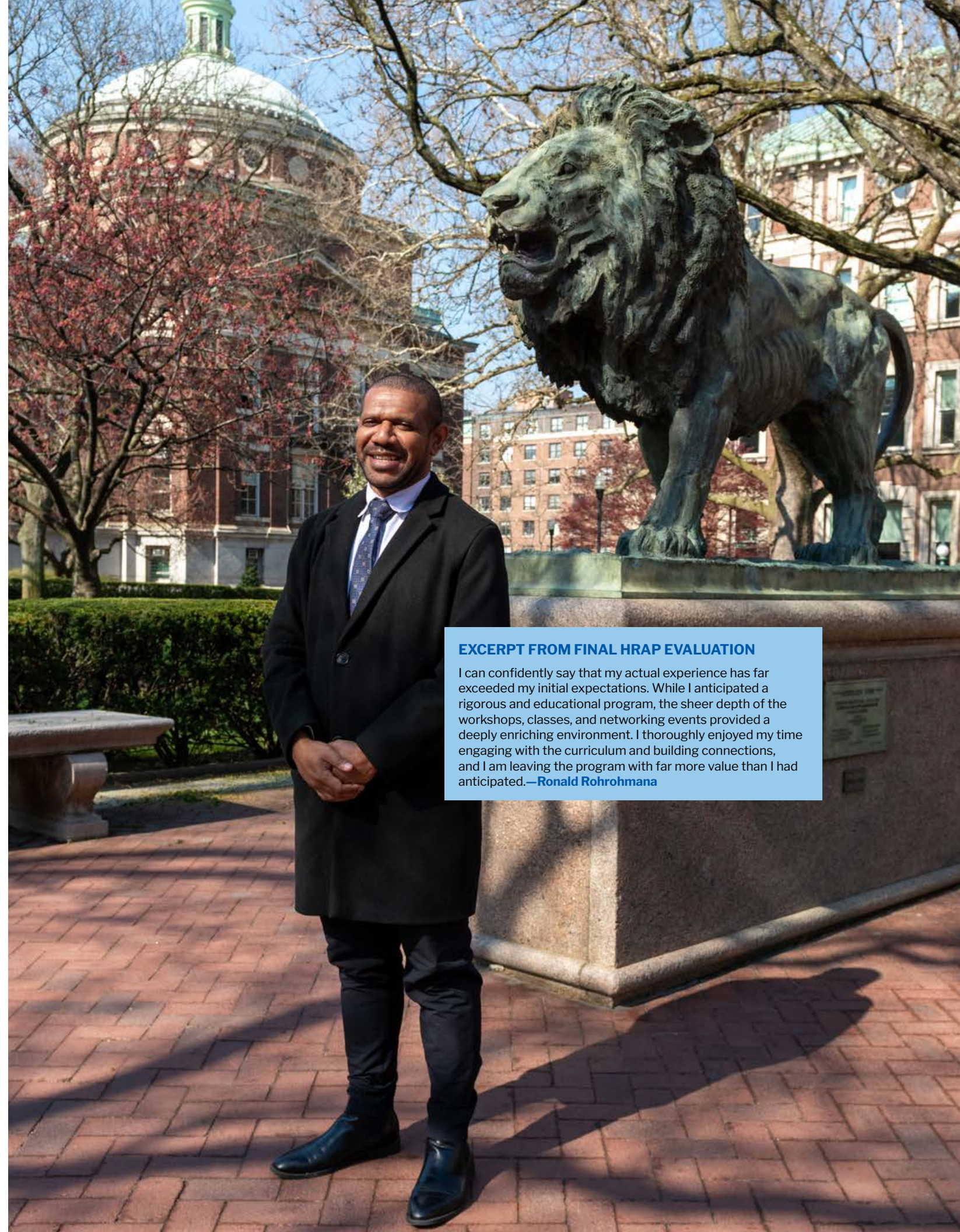
The Advocates were part of I-House's 700-member community.



David Schilling of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility supported the cohort.



Ronald introduced his work to the staff of the Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION
 I can confidently say that my actual experience has far exceeded my initial expectations. While I anticipated a rigorous and educational program, the sheer depth of the workshops, classes, and networking events provided a deeply enriching environment. I thoroughly enjoyed my time engaging with the curriculum and building connections, and I am leaving the program with far more value than I had anticipated.—**Ronald Rohrhmana**

MAIYA SHANG

Asia-Pacific Grants Coordinator

International Indigenous Women's Forum

INDIA



“Women from our communities faced even more acute challenges. They experienced overlapping forms of marginalisation shaped by ethnicity, gender, and entrenched structural inequalities.”

I was born and raised in the Naga Hills in the northeastern part of India. Growing up in an armed conflict area marked by heavy militarisation, I experienced and witnessed the deep and lasting impact of violence on both my own life and that of my community. Those who were meant to ensure our safety became sources of fear and trauma. It was only later, when I had some distance from the region, that I fully grasped the extent of that trauma—memories of unprovoked firing, arbitrary violence, and the torture of innocent civilians, that had quietly shaped our lives.

Because of the conflict and the resulting paralysis of normal life, our region has long suffered from poor infrastructure, frequent disruptions in education, and lack of meaningful opportunities. As a result, many young people leave home to pursue education and livelihoods elsewhere. After completing high school, I too moved to Delhi. There, I encountered another harsh reality, the pervasive racism and discrimination faced by people from our region. For over a decade of my stay there, it was rare to pass a day without experiencing some form of harassment (subtle or overt) rooted in our race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. Through my participation in student activities and collective spaces, I became increasingly aware that these were not isolated incidents, but manifestations of deeper structural discrimination embedded within the society and racism was central to the discrimination we faced. Women from our communities faced even more acute challenges. They experienced overlapping forms of marginalisation shaped by ethnicity, gender, and entrenched structural inequalities.

In response to these external pressures, I turned towards my community for emotional support and a sense of belonging. Within the solidarity and spirit of the community, I found a measure of solace (even though our institutions were severely weakened by conflict). However, this inward reflection also led me to confront uncomfortable truths. Beyond external marginalisation, inequalities also existed within our own systems. Women did not enjoy equal rights or opportunities; for instance, they were often denied the right to inherit

immovable ancestral property or right to represent and meaningfully participate in decision-making bodies. These realisations led me to understand that no society can truly move forward if half its population remains excluded from important aspects of life. This called not for the rejection of our traditions and institutions, but for their transformation so that they may respond to changing realities while upholding justice and dignity for all.

These lived experiences have profoundly shaped both my commitment to human rights advocacy and the perspectives I bring to it. My engagement in this field is not abstract or theoretical; it is grounded in the realities I have witnessed and endured. Alongside other Indigenous women from my region and across the world, I have been part of a collective effort to raise our voices and demand our rights. This journey has not been easy. Yet it is a struggle we undertake not only for ourselves, but also for our future generations. It is also a call for deeper social and political transformation—one that addresses both external oppression and internal inequalities—so that our peoples may strive with dignity, equality, and self-determination.



Maiya participated on a panel during UNPFII.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Eugenia (Jenny) McGill

Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of
International and Public Affairs
Co-Director of the Economic and Political
Development Concentration
School of International and Public Affairs

CLASSES

Gender, Politics and Development
The History of Human Rights
Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

NETWORKING

New York City

Center for Human Rights and Global
Justice at New York University
School of Law

ESCR-Net

Ford Foundation

Human Rights Watch

International Center for
Transitional Justice

UN Commission on the Status of Women

UN Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues

Washington, DC

Amnesty International

Global Defenders Collective

Humanity United

Indian Law Resource Center

National Endowment for Democracy

Robert and Ethel Kennedy
Human Rights Center

Vital Voices

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Opportunities Presented by the Inter-
American Court's Ruling in Ascencio
Rosario v. Mexico for Safeguarding the
Right to Health of Indigenous Women;
National Coordinating Committee of
Indigenous Women, International Institute
on Race, Equality and Human Rights, and
Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights
Center (representatives in the Ascencio
v. Mexico case), and Continental Network
of Indigenous Women of the Americas;
United Nations Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues

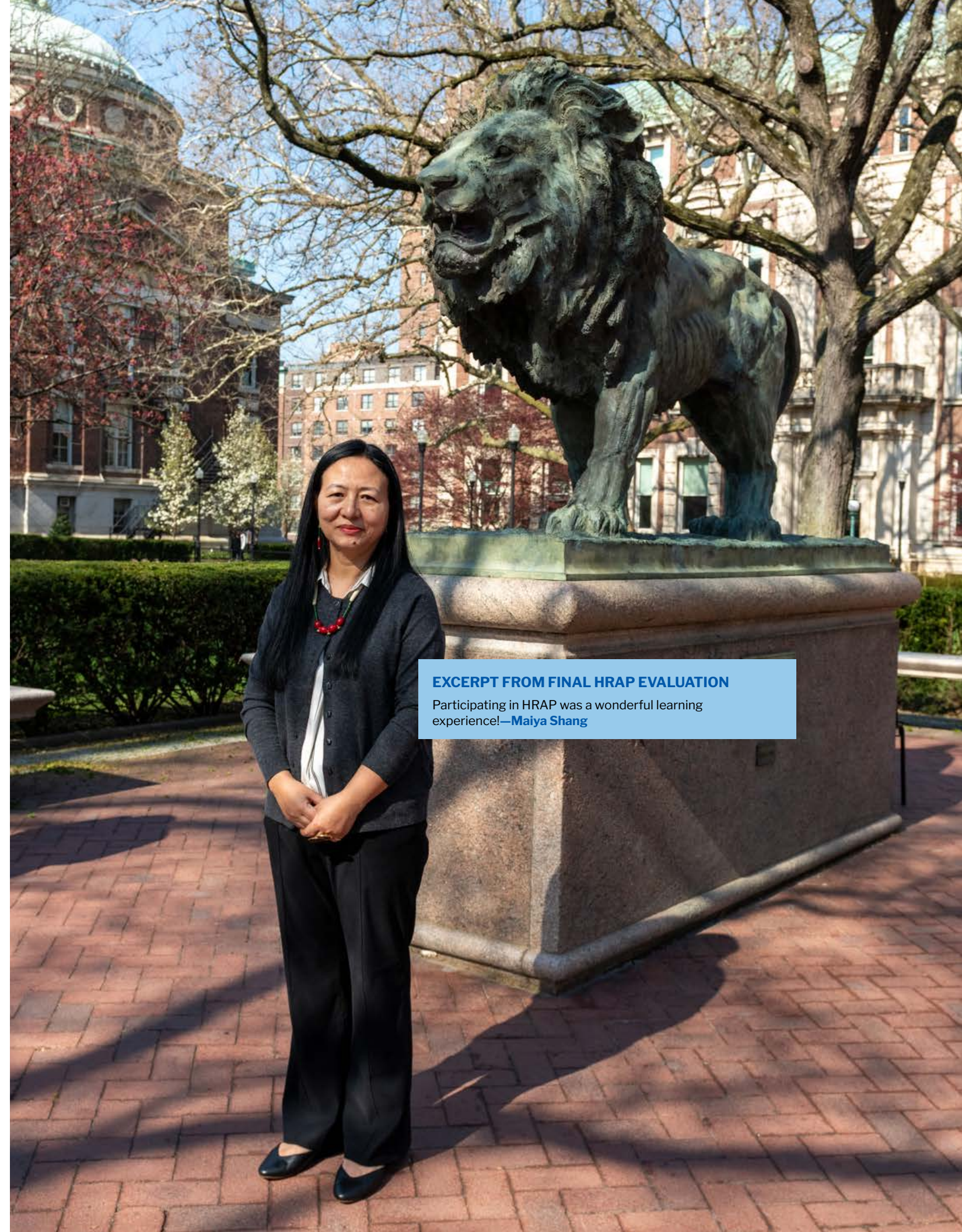
Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates,
Library, The Interchurch Center



In late February, the Advocates visited Washington, DC.



Ronald, Maiya and Tatsiana at a talk on campus.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION
Participating in HRAP was a wonderful learning
experience!—**Maiya Shang**

JÚLIA MOTA SILVA

Advocacy Specialist

Fundo Agbara

BRAZIL



THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Being a Black woman in a racist and patriarchal world is a challenge that is not individual.”

My work as a human rights defender emerges from the process of understanding myself as a Black woman in Brazil, a country deeply structured by racial, class, and gender inequalities.

My political involvement began in my adolescence. In 2016, when I was 16 years old, during the political crisis that led to the coup against President Dilma Rousseff, I used to participate in protests that marked my first direct experience with social mobilization. Because of that initial engagement, I became more and more involved with social movements, particularly the feminist and student ones, where I began to connect practice and learning.

From these experiences, my contact with Black feminism became central to me. Through it, I came to understand intersectionality as a fundamental analytical tool, allowing me to see how different forms of oppression overlap. That helped me interpret individual experiences not as isolated events, but as expressions of broader structural inequalities. It also made clear that Black women are among those most impacted by inequalities, and that confronting these injustices requires structural transformation, especially in the economic sphere, as a way to break historical cycles of exclusion.

As my political awareness deepened, I also realized the need to structure my work more strategically, particularly in light of the worsening political context in the following years, marked by the dismantling of public policies, increased attacks against human rights defenders, and the intensification of hate speech.

In line with this shift, I worked at an impact consultancy, where I engaged with a range of grassroots organizations. This experience expanded my understanding of both the challenges and the strengths present across different territories in Brazil.

It was also by getting to know so many grassroots organizations that I understood that what I wanted was to work at the frontline of impact, and more than that, with the mission of promoting change for women who, like me, face daily violence, as well as being affected by generational trauma. Being a Black woman in a racist and patriarchal world is a challenge that is not individual.

And now I want the world to see what I see every day through my work: the transformative potential of Black women in their territories, as protagonists in the creation of solutions that are historically underfunded and insufficiently supported. Strengthening these initiatives is central to guaranteeing democracy and protecting rights in marginalized territories.

I like to see that my trajectory is shaped not only by a political dimension, but also by a deeply personal one, connected to the realities of women such as my mother, my aunts, my cousins, my friends, and even myself. It is from this intersection of the personal and political that I build my commitments.

This is why, even within rigid economic and political structures in Brazil and globally, I will always seek to work to expand possible futures and contribute to breaking cycles of scarcity that continue to affect Black women, while sustaining the possibility of imagining and building alternative futures.



Júlia and Nyawira presented at a forum at Teachers College.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Frances Negron-Muntaner
Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities

CLASSES

Gender, Politics and Development
 Human Rights and the Politics of Inequalities



Júlia spoke at the Black Women Shaping Afrofutures Forum organized by Agbara.

NETWORKING

New York City
 CARE
 ESCR-Net
 Ford Foundation
 Human Rights Watch
 Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
 Open Society Foundations

Washington, DC
 Amnesty International
 Global Defenders Collective
 Humanity United
 National Endowment for Democracy
 Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center
 Washington Office on Latin America
 Vital Voices

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Black Women Shaping Afrofutures Forum, Teachers College
 Learning from Africa: Organizing Movements and Advancing Human Rights in Dangerous Times, Barnard College
 Lunch and Learn with Human Rights Advocates, Center for African Education, Teachers College
 Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates, Library, The Interchurch Center
 Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, Grassroots Feminism and Leadership, NYU School of Law
 What Does the Future Hold for Afrodescendants in the Second UN Decade? Protecting the Rights of Women, Youth, Cultural and Religious Practices, Land And Environment, Washington Office on Latin America and Organization of American States, American University
 Washington College of Law
 What Philanthropy Must Learn from Black Women-Led Organizations, Harambee Conference—San Francisco, A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities



More than 40 students attended the advocates' event at Teachers College.



The current cohort was also featured in the HRAP photo exhibit at Interchurch.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION

When I first joined HRAP, my expectations were mostly focused on learning. I anticipated gaining new knowledge about human rights frameworks and international advocacy strategies. Looking back now, I realize how modest those expectations were compared to what I actually experienced.

The program delivered something far beyond what I had imagined. It became a profound journey of both professional and personal growth that fundamentally shifted how I see the world. My understanding of global politics deepened in ways I did not anticipate, and I developed a much more nuanced perspective on Brazil's context within the broader international human rights landscape.

Perhaps most significantly, HRAP expanded my vision of what is possible, including the paths available to me as an activist and human rights defender. It strengthened not only the organization I work with, but also my own individual trajectory. I left each stage of the program with a clearer sense of who I am as a defender, what I stand for, and where I want to go.

In short, HRAP did not just meet my expectations. It completely redefined them. It challenged me to think bigger, connect more deeply, and act with greater purpose.

—Júlia Mota Silva

TATSIANA ZINIAKOVA

Legal Analyst
Human Constanta
BELARUS



THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“This work is often a marathon—demanding, painful, and humbling. But today, seeing Nasta free, and being part of the Human Rights Advocates Program alongside an inspiring cohort of defenders from across the world, I am reminded that solidarity across borders and continents is its own form of power. It gives me hope.”

I am writing this on March 19, 2026—the day my colleague and friend Nasta Lojka, co-founder of Human Constanta, was finally released after over three years as a political prisoner in Belarus. It feels like the only right moment to reflect on why I do this work.

I did not choose human rights work so much as I grew into it—by the country I grew up in and eventually by what I could no longer ignore. Growing up in an authoritarian state means absorbing a certain version of reality as normal. For a long time, you do not question the system you are born into—it is simply the (troubled) water you swim in. But reality has a way of surfacing, even when omnipresent state institutions work hard to suppress it. Learning about the forced disappearances of the 1990s, piecing together a history that had never been fully taught to me, I began to understand that people being imprisoned or silenced for their opinions was not normal.

That growing awareness shaped my choice of public international law as a field of study. International order seemed full of puzzles and dilemmas. I was curious to learn how states “talked” and made agreements with each other, and why they so often failed to honor them. As I immersed myself in questions of justice and fairness, I grew increasingly interested in the role advocates play in dismantling the suffocating structures of authoritarianism—both offline and online.

While still a student, I started volunteering for Human Constanta, working with documentation of the hardships of Chechen refugees stranded at the Belarus-Poland border. This work was less academic and more lived introduction to human rights realities. The years that followed layered my understanding. Working at the Ministry of Justice gave me a sobering picture of how institutions resist democratic change; the private sector showed me how law operates outside public life; teaching European Human Rights Law at university made me feel the responsibility of shaping a new generation of lawyers, guiding and inspiring future Belarusian legal professionals

to be resilient and unafraid. Pursuing an LL.M. as a Fulbright scholar deepened that foundation further.

Then came 2020. Following a fraudulent presidential election, public dissent and mass political repression reached a new level—my people were beaten and jailed, internet shutdowns silenced protesters on the streets and online, poisonous political rhetoric continued to frame civil and peaceful protest as “extremism.” For me, it was a moment of moral clarity. The only honest and responsible answer to what to do with my legal knowledge was to put it in service of human rights. I joined Human Constanta full time, fortunate to find myself among a team of people who shared the same values.

This work is often a marathon—demanding, painful, and humbling. But today, seeing Nasta free, and being part of the Human Rights Advocates Program alongside an inspiring cohort of defenders from across the world, I am reminded that solidarity across borders and continents is its own form of power. It gives me hope.



The Harriman Alumni Network invited Tatsiana to speak about her work.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Jack Lewis Snyder

Acting Director, Harriman Institute
Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of
International Relations
Department of Political Science and
the Saltzman Institute of War and
Peace Studies

CLASSES

Borders, Surveillance, and Rights
Campaigning for Change—Media,
Mobilization & the Power of Persuasion
Internet Governance

NETWORKING

New York City

Access Now
Center for Human Rights and Global
Justice at New York University
School of Law
ESCR-Net
Ford Foundation
Human Rights Watch
International Center for
Transitional Justice
UN Commission on the Status of Women

Washington, DC

Alliance for Peacebuilding
American University
Amnesty International
Free the Slaves
Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute
Global Defenders Collective
Humanity United
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
National Endowment for Democracy
Robert and Ethel Kennedy
Human Rights Center
The World Bank Inspection Panel

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Belarus in the Aftermath of 2020,
Harriman Institute Alumni Network,
Penn Club
Columbia Pre-Law Society Conference,
Columbia University
Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates,
Library, The Interchurch Center

MOOT COURT JUDGING ENGAGEMENTS

Americas Regional Round of the Monroe E.
Price Media Law Moot Court Competition,
Cardozo School of Law

King & Spalding U.S. National Rounds of
the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot
Court Competition, Atlanta, Georgia

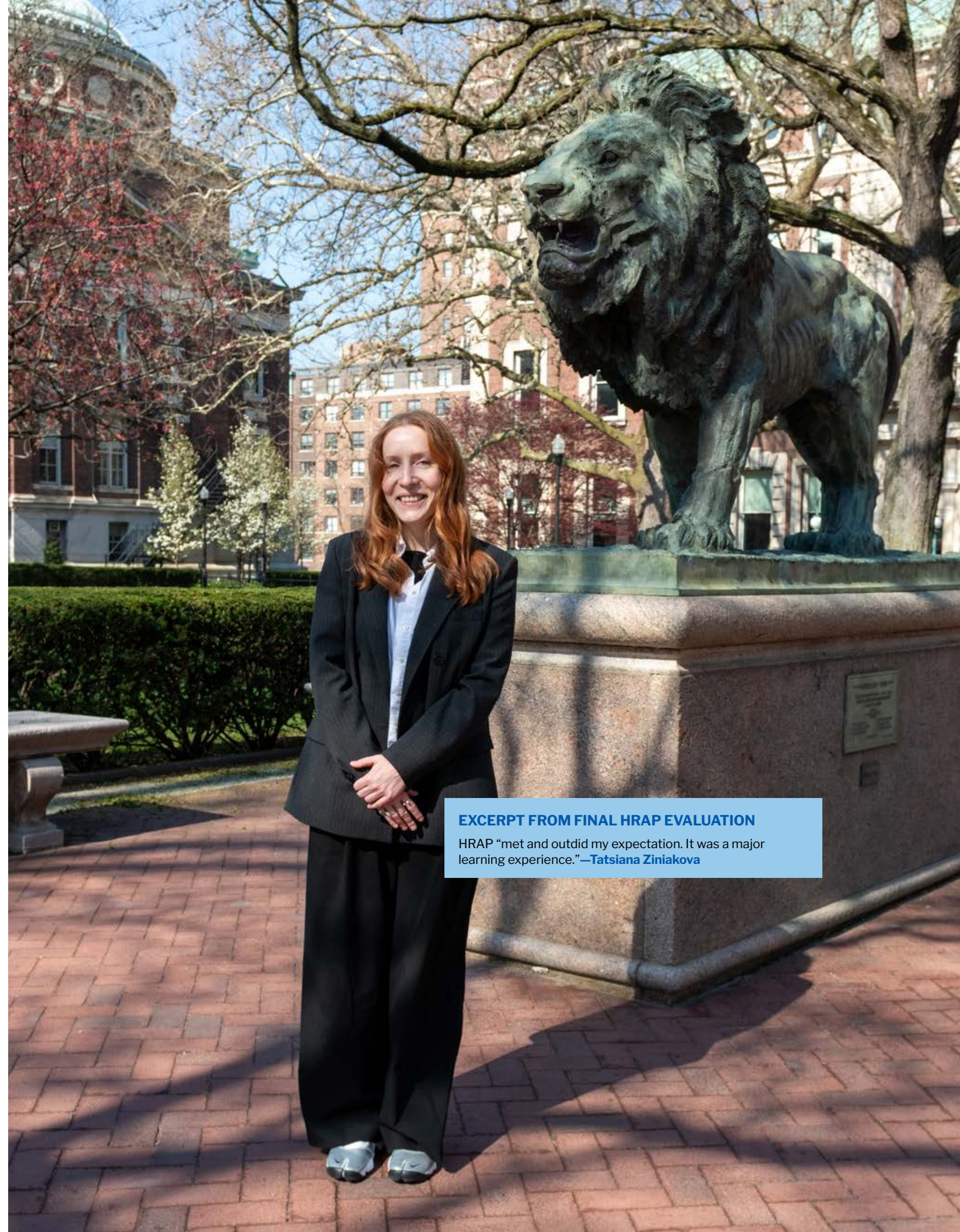
International Rounds of the Philip C. Jessup
International Law Moot Court Competition,
Washington, DC



The Advocates in front of The Thinker on Morningside Campus.



Tatsiana served as a judge at the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, Atlanta, Georgia.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION
HRAP “met and outdid my expectation. It was a major learning experience.” —Tatsiana Ziniakova

NYAWIRA WAHITO

Executive Director
Resource Center for
Women and Girls

KENYA



THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“How can I not be a human rights advocate when conversations about my body, my pleasure, and my rights are still being held in rooms I am not in?”

I am a human rights advocate because, for me, this work is not optional. It is necessary. It is something I carry with me every day, shaped by my lived experiences and deepened through 13 years of feminist organizing. I have come to understand that to be a girl is to resist, and to be a woman is to continue pushing back against systems that constantly try to shrink you, define you, and tell you that you are not enough.

Even now—in 2026—that reality persists! There is always a “but.” You can be accomplished, outspoken, and self-aware, and still find yourself navigating spaces where your voice is questioned, your choices are scrutinized, and your autonomy is negotiated. This is what continues to anchor me in this work. How can I not be a human rights advocate when conversations about my body, my pleasure, and my rights are still being held in rooms I am not in? When decisions that affect me and millions of other women are made without our input?

I continue to be an advocate because I see, clearly and consistently, the impact of this work. Over the years, I have witnessed the transformation of girls and young women who begin to see themselves differently—who move from silence to voice, from doubt to confidence, from limitation to possibility. There is something deeply powerful about watching someone claim their space in the world, often for the first time. Being part of that journey is quite affirming.

Being a human rights advocate has also given me a sense of purpose that is hard to describe but impossible to ignore. It is bigger than me. It connects me to a broader movement of women and girls pushing back against harmful norms, challenging oppressive systems, and reimagining what is possible for us and for future generations. It has also connected me with people across borders and countries who are seeking the same thing: freedom. freedom to, freedom from, and freedom with. That sense of collective struggle and shared vision keeps me grounded, even when the work is difficult.

I am a human rights advocate because I refuse to accept a world where girls and young women must constantly

negotiate their worth. I refuse to normalize inequality, even in its most subtle forms. And I refuse to be silent in the face of systems that continue to exclude, diminish, and control us.

I remain a human rights advocate because I know that change is possible. I have seen it, I have been part of it, and I am committed to advancing it. This work fulfills me, challenges me, and reminds me, every day, why it matters.



The Advocates visited the Robert and Ethel Kennedy Center for Human Rights in DC.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FACULTY MENTOR

Sara E. Casey
Associate Professor of Population and Family Health
Mailman School of Public Health

CLASSES

Human Rights and Politics of Inequality
Internet Governance
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Humanitarian Settings

NETWORKING

New York City
Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University
School of Law

ESCR-Net
Ford Foundation
Human Rights Watch
International Center for Transitional Justice
UN Commission on the Status of Women

Washington, DC
American University
Amnesty International
Free the Slaves
Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute
Global Defenders Collective
Humanity United
National Endowment for Democracy
Robert and Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center
Vital Voices

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Learning from Africa: Organizing Movements and Advancing Human Rights in Dangerous Times, Barnard College
Lunch and Learn with Human Rights Advocates, Center for African Education, Teachers College
Meet Columbia's Human Rights Advocates, Library, The Interchurch Center
She Who Rises: African Women Shaping Futures, African Development Group, Columbia University
The Race for Financing: What Is Working for Adolescent Girls, UN CSW



The Advocates learned about local activism at the Museum of the City of New York.



Nyawira along with her cohort was also featured in the HRAP photo exhibit at Interchurch.



As the ED of her organization, Nyawira presented at CSW.



Nyawira, the ED of Resource Center for Women and Girls, joined a panel discussion at CSW.



EXCERPT FROM FINAL HRAP EVALUATION

As I near the end of HRAP, I can honestly say the experience both met and exceeded what I came in expecting. I knew it would be busy and demanding; and it was, but what I didn't anticipate was how well-paced it actually felt. There was real breathing room built in, which meant I could fully engage with the program without losing touch with my responsibilities back home. That balance made a big difference.

One of the genuine surprises was the cultural side of things. The museum visits, the opera, the artistic spaces woven into the program. I didn't see those coming, and they ended up being some of the most memorable parts of the experience. They weren't just a break from the work; they opened up different ways of thinking about human rights, history, and storytelling, and gave me a much richer sense of New York City and its culture. They made the whole experience feel more complete.

The speaking engagements also stood out for me. They pushed me in ways I appreciated. My confidence grew, and more than that, I found myself getting better at talking about human rights issues in ways that actually land with different audiences. That's something I'll carry with me.

But honestly, what I underestimated most was how much the relationships would matter. I came hoping to connect and network and that happened, but it went so much deeper than I expected. The people I've met here, the conversations, the sense of real community that has been just as valuable as anything I learned in a formal setting. These are friendships and connections I genuinely intend to keep.

Stepping back, HRAP has shifted something in me. It's not just that I've gained knowledge or sharpened skills, it's that I'm leaving with a clearer, more grounded sense of who I am in this work and what I want my practice to look like going forward—**Nyawira Wahito**

ISHR organized new workshops for the 2025–26 cohort including Building Coalitions and Networks, The Courage to be Happy, and Media Literacy and Human Rights. The 2025–26 cohort was part of the inaugural HRAP study group in the fall of 2025. The success of the fall group led ISHR to offer a second study group in the spring of 2026.

Research, Documentation, and Writing

MICHAEL GARCIA BOCHENEK

Senior Counsel, Children's Rights Division

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Michael Garcia Bochenek led a six-part workshop that covered the conceptualization of a research project, interviewing victims and witnesses, interviewing perpetrators and accomplices, and writing.

"The Human Rights Watch workshop series was really valuable. The sessions I attended were engaging and substantive, and each one brought something different to the table."

NYAWIRA WAHITO



Michael Bochenek of Human Rights Watch took the Advocates to the top of the Empire State Building after their final workshop.

Media Literacy and Human Rights

ABU ABDELBAĞI, EDD

Teachers Instructor | Technology, Media & Learning

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

This workshop explored the intersections of media literacy and human rights. It introduced media literacy as a concept and practice, and its potential to facilitate better understanding and engagement with media and information. It examined this potential in promoting and protecting human rights, before it critically engaged with media literacy shortcomings. It invited participants to think about these intersections in relation to their work and asked them how media literacy can be better conceptualized or operationalized to address their contexts, being mindful of the western-centric origins and underlying assumptions of media literacy research/education.

The Courage to be Happy

JEREMIAH KYLE DRAKE

Theatre of the Oppressed Director

THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH

Jeremiah led an interactive workshop informed by the Theatre of the Oppressed to encourage the advocates to reflect on joy and happiness even when their work demands much of them.

"There is something valuable in that experience itself being willing to sit with uncertainty and allow understanding to come in its own time. In a program as intense as HRAP, a session that invites you to slow down and reflect on joy, happiness and what it means to show up fully in this work is perhaps more necessary than it might initially appear. Jeremiah created a space that was different from everything else, and in hindsight, that difference was exactly the point."

NYAWIRA WAHITO

HRAP Study Groups

SUZANNE B. GOLDBERG

Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical Professor of Law

Director of the Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic

COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

Prof. Suzanne Goldberg, the Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical Professor of Law and the Director of the Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic at Columbia Law School, proposed and led the inaugural HRAP study group in the fall of 2025. More than 30 HRAP alumni around the globe and members of the 2025–26 cohort attended the sessions which were co-led by 1993 Advocate Luis Felipe Polo and coordinated by Brooke Blackburn, a master's student in Anthropology at Columbia who has been the HRAP work-study student for the past two years. Multidimensional advocacy, strategic thinking and misinformation were among the topics discussed over the course of the study group.

CHRIS GROVE

Human Rights Researcher and Consultant

In the spring of 2026, Chris Grove, the former longtime director ESCR-net and a SIPA alum, led a five-part study group during which the 2025–26 advocates and HRAP alumni discussed the evolution, roles, and limitations of human rights amid the polycrisis of climate, rising inequalities, debt, and care, as well as attacks on the rule of law, the UN, and wider human rights institutions within an increasingly multi-polar world.

Building Coalitions and Networks

CHRIS GROVE

Human Rights Researcher and Consultant

Chris Grove, who until the end of 2025 had served as the longtime executive director of ESCR-net, facilitated a robust session during which the advocates and he exchanged lessons learned, the importance of core principles/commitments, the value of clarity about roles, and the significance of taking time to build shared analysis.



Erik Detiger (left) led a four-part workshop series on fundraising.

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 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.

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. Candid is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization—headquartered in New York, NY—that provides the most comprehensive data and insights on the social sector, specifically regarding U.S. nonprofits, foundations, and grants. Formed by the 2019 merger of **GuideStar** and **Foundation Center**, it connects organizations with funding and helps researchers, donors, and the public analyze philanthropy.

“The resource mobilization sessions, led by Erik, were a brilliant and timely initiative, especially at a time when human rights funding is facing a global crisis. The sessions were highly practical and directly responsive to the real challenges faced by civil society organizations. Erik’s extensive experience and practical approach added significant value, making the sessions both realistic and impactful. I strongly believe that sessions of this nature should be sustained and further strengthened, particularly to support organizations in developing concrete tools such as structured donor databases.

Personally, I benefited significantly from these sessions. The practical guidance, hands on methodology, and materials shared by Erik enhanced my ability to conduct targeted donor research and plan resource mobilization more strategically. As a direct result of this experience, we have successfully developed a donor database for THRDC, which has already expanded our donor reach and strengthened our fundraising strategy. Overall, these sessions had a tangible and lasting impact on our organization’s sustainability and resource mobilization capacity.”

ONESMO OLENGURUMWA



At the end of the program, the Advocates discussed the program. In addition to reviewing what they appreciated about HRAP, they also came up with a collective wish list which included an extra day in DC and more interactions with HRAP alumni.



Thomas Lansner (left) led an interactive workshop on public speaking.

Public Presentation and Interviewing Skills for Effective Advocacy

THOMAS LANSNER
 Visiting Professor, Sciences Po
 PARIS SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Thomas Lansner offered a two-day workshop geared at enhancing the advocates’ skills in policy advocacy media and public presentations through instruction, discussion, and skills practice. Each advocate prepared a 250-word policy advocacy brief (PAB) that discussed the issue on which they focused during the workshops. Their PABs served as the basis of their message development practice, practice interview, and other exercises.

“Very useful especially on how to make use of sufficient time in meetings and events. I have learnt so much from him.”

ONESMO OLENGURUMWA

Introduction to Columbia University Libraries

YUUSUF CARUSO, PHD
 African Studies Librarian
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Yuusuf 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.



Maiya, Nyawira, Júlia and Tatsiana enjoyed a rare great-weather day in NYC.

Video Advocacy

ADEBAYO OKEOWO

Associate Director of Programs,
Regional & Partner Engagement

WITNESS

Adebayo Okeowo 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.

“This workshop was genuinely useful. Adebayo brought a depth of knowledge and really practical examples that made the content come alive. What I appreciated most was the nuance of understanding what counts as legitimate documentation in crisis settings, and what doesn’t, is something that isn’t always clearly spelled out in this field. His examples helped me grasp how documentation, when done well, can be instrumental in establishing that human rights violations actually occurred. That kind of evidentiary grounding is something I will carry into how I think about and approach documentation in my own work going forward.”

NYAWIRA WAHITO

Introduction to the Foundation Directory

STEPHANIE V. GREPO

Institute for the Study of Human Rights

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Stephanie introduced the advocates to the online Foundation Directory, the most comprehensive prospect research tool for fundraisers, with over 239,000+ grant maker profiles. She taught them how to search for grant makers who have funded organizations working on causes and with communities similar to those they serve.

Introduction to Vergil

BROOKE AUDRA BLACKBURN

Master’s Student, Anthropology

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Work-study student

HRAP

Brooke introduced the advocates to Vergil, the platform used by Columbia for course planning.

Human Rights Documentation

PAMELA GRAHAM, PHD

Director, Humanities & Global Studies

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.

Session with HRAP Alumni

HRAP alumni shared their experiences with the 2025–26 advocates in a lively and laugh-filled session before the new advocates traveled to NYC. The new advocates said the session allayed their concerns and fears about living in NYC and made them look forward to meeting even more HRAP alumni.

Resilience in the Face of Systemic Challenges

DR. HAWTHORNE SMITH

Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry
NYU GROSSMAN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Director

BELLEVUE/NYU PROGRAM FOR
SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

Dr. Hawthorne Smith provided guidance and facilitated a thoughtful discussion about building and sustaining resilience in the face of systemic challenges.

“It’s important to take time to heal and this was appreciated.”

CHRISTOPHER RUTLEDGE



The Advocates visited cultural destinations in NYC and DC.



The Advocates quickly learned to navigate the city.

The Institute for the Study of Human Rights is grateful to the following for their financial support of the advocates in the 2025–26 program:

2011 Advocate Elvis Mbembe Binda

Harriman Institute, Columbia University

International Indigenous Women's Forum (IIWF/FIMI)

Packard Foundation

Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

The Institute for the Study of Human Rights is grateful to the following HRAP alumni for the time they devoted to interviewing applicants for the 2025–26 cohort:

1995 Advocate
Michaelle Gueraldi
Brazil

1996 Advocate
Aurora Parong
Philippines

2010 Advocate
Siarhei Antusevich
Belarus

2010 Advocate
Glenda Muzenda
South Africa

2013 Advocate
Absolom Shalakha
Kenya

2015 Advocate
Sandra Creamer
Australia

2016 Advocate
Aehshatou Manu
Cameroon



The Advocates visited the Tenement Museum during orientation week.

“It was my honor to meet the 2025–26 HRAP advocates and get to know such passionate and determined leaders. In our media literacy workshop, I was truly fascinated to learn about how the human rights defenders thoughtfully and creatively utilized media in the face of many challenges within their media ecosystems. The conversation was very insightful. It was also hopeful and inspiring.

I am very grateful to HRAP for this opportunity, and for bringing together such a talented group of changemakers. I look forward to meeting next year’s cohort.”

ABU ABDELBAGI, EDD
*Teachers Instructor | Technology,
 Media & Learning*
 TEACHERS COLLEGE

“Over the years, members of the Human Rights Advocates Program have consistently enriched our course with their participation. This year’s advocates were especially active and engaged in class discussions, bringing their uniquely informed perspectives to each topic. Several produced papers of publishable quality, and I hope they will have opportunities to share their work more broadly.

The participation of front-line human rights activists (all from developing countries) make two crucial contributions to the seminar. First, they ground theoretical concepts in lived experience, offering illustrations as well as challenges to the ideas explored in class. Second, they draw attention to risks and human rights violations that are often ignored or overlooked by the dominant discourse in our country.”

RAINER BRAUN
*Adjunct Associate Professor of International
 and Public Affairs*
 School of International and Public Affairs
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“This year we had five HRAP advocates join our class. They were each amazing in their own right and made valuable contributions to the class.

I also had the privilege of mentoring Ronald and Christopher. We met a few times during the semester to talk about Ronald’s work on migrant fishers’ rights in Indonesia and Christopher’s work organizing artisanal mining communities in South Africa. Both engaged in class discussions, bringing real life examples from their work as well as a sharp geopolitical analysis of current affairs. Together they talked about the challenges of natural resource management and the organizing strategies used by impacted communities and workers.

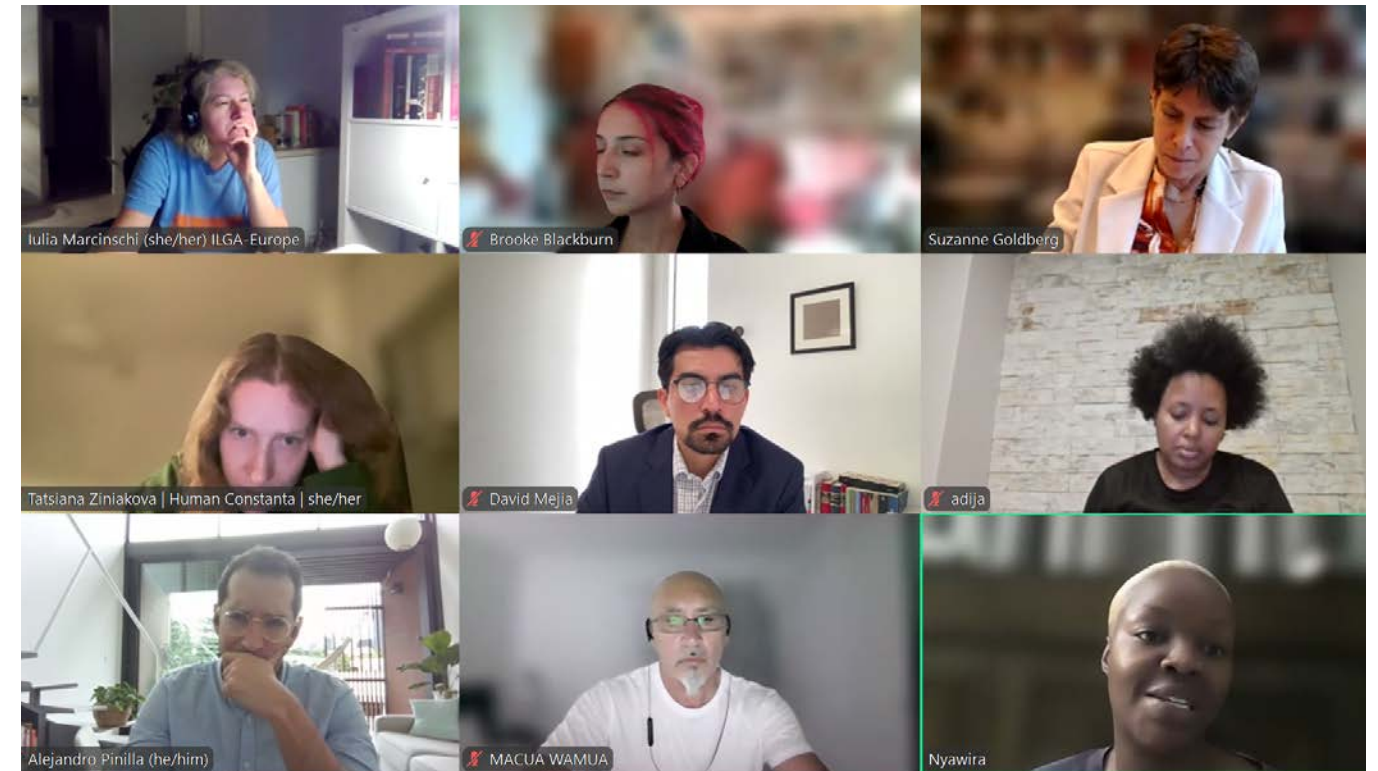
I believe the HRAP program is a truly special approach. Participants learn to engage in Global North debates, often discovering how much they can contribute to that. It is also a great way to promote both South-South, peer-based education and, because the students in their classes learn so much from them, it is also a form of South to North education.”

JUDY GEARHART
*Adjunct Associate Professor of International
 and Public Affairs*
 School of International and Public Affairs
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“For almost two decades it has been a privilege to welcome each group of advocates to Columbia University. They bring remarkable expertise, courage and frontline experience addressing the most pressing human rights challenges around the world.

Programs like HRAP demonstrate the power of international exchange to foster learning and collaboration across borders. Just as importantly, the HRAP advocates share their perspectives and knowledge which deepen our understanding of the realities faced by those working to advance justice, dignity and inclusion globally.”

JANE ACTON
Director of Faculty and Scholar Services
 ISSO Morningside and Manhattanville
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



CU Law Prof. Suzanne Goldberg proposed and led the inaugural HRAP Study Group.

“In the busy and demanding world of human rights advocacy, the study group offered a beautiful opportunity to reflect together, with colleagues worldwide, on strategies and practices across a wide assortment of issues. What does research tell us about effective persuasion strategies? What advocacy insights can we gain from social psychology? What more can we do to respond to disinformation? These questions sparked important conversations about theory and practice and generated ideas to bring back to work. I am grateful to the advocates for their time and thoughtful engagement—and hope everyone who participated found something that they can carry forward into their day-to-day work. I know I did.”

SUZANNE B. GOLDBERG
*Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical
 Professor of Law*
 Director of the Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic
 COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

“Having met with numerous HRAP groups over many years, including as director of the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights, I was delighted to join colleagues from the Human Rights Institute at Georgetown Law to visit with this year’s cohort, who were every bit as impressive in their commitment to, and advocacy of, international human rights and rule of law principles.”

MICHAEL PATES
Distinguished Fellow
 Human Rights Institute
 GEORGETOWN LAW

“It was a privilege to engage with such a thoughtful and committed group of HRAP advocates throughout the study group. The sessions created a rare space for honest reflection, shared learning, and dynamic exchange—bridging theory and practice through the participants’ lived experience, critical thinking, and generosity. **The experience reaffirmed why this community continues to matter so deeply and left me inspired by the depth, courage, and integrity of the advocates’ work.**”

LUIS FELIPE POLO
 1993 HRAP

TESTIMONIALS

“ My co-instructor Maxine Weisgrau and I were honored to have Júlia Mota Silva and Maiya Shang from the Human Rights Advocates Program participating in our “Gender, Politics and Development” course at SIPA this spring. From the first weeks of the course, they participated actively in class discussions and dialogue with guest speakers. Their perspectives from their human rights work in Brazil and India really enriched our discussions. They also signed up to lead the class discussions on gender and environment and gender and financial inclusion, which gave them opportunities to share more about their organizations and work. Maiya shared with the class her work with the Indigenous Women’s Forum, and highlighted the achievements of some of its members working on biodiversity and climate change. Júlia highlighted the work of her organization, Agbara, in providing funding and technical support to small businesses led by Black women in Brazil. Both Maiya and Júlia also linked their work to the assigned readings for the week, and facilitated thoughtful discussions with the class on key themes in the readings. Although they were technically auditing the class, Júlia and Maiya were fully engaged, and their presence really enhanced the classroom experience for all of us.”

EUGENIA (JENNY) MCGILL
Senior Lecturer and Co-Director, Development and Governance Concentration
School of International and Public Affairs
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“ It was a great pleasure to meet with the entire HRAP cohort this year and hear about their tremendous work. **The importance of programs like HRAP has only intensified in the aftermath of global aid cuts that have reduced opportunities for building the international interchange that has long been a crucial component of the human rights movement.**

The advocates shared invaluable experience around how they are navigating the challenges of this moment and contributed to how we think about navigating this difficult time together.”

AARON MYERS
Global Defenders Collective

“ Getting to know HRAP advocates and learning about their important and inspiring work is a real pleasure for Harriman Institute’s faculty and students. Their engaging presentations offer thoughtful insights into both their professional work and the region, leaving a lasting impression on everyone in attendance. We are deeply grateful for their meaningful contribution to our community.”

ALLA RACHOV
Executive Director
Harriman Institute
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“ It was a great privilege for me and my other students to have been joined this past semester by two Human Rights Advocates Maiya Shang and Onesmo Olungurumwa. Both Maiya and Onesmo participated in my History of Human Rights lecture course, and Onesmo also joined my seminar on Human Rights and Education. Both courses are designed to be participatory, and Maiya and Onesmo contributed significantly to the discussions in the history course, drawing on their experiences working to advance human rights in the contemporary world to illuminate the historical dimension, in particular with respect to our discussion of colonialism, indigeneity, and the UN human rights regime. In the education course, Onesmo’s perspective was especially valuable to students as we grappled with the tensions or advancing human rights education (HRE) in different contexts. I spoke several times with Onesmo outside of class as he began conceptualizing a new project on HRE in Tanzanian schools, for which I look forward to continued discussion as he moves on to the next phase of his work. Having Maiya and Onesmo in my courses solidified for me how important the HRAP program is not only for supporting the Advocates’ work but for enriching the classroom experience of all Columbia students.”

GLENN MITOMA | He, him, his
Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights
Director of Undergraduate Studies
Institute for the Study of Human Rights
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Judy Gearhard (lower left) and David Schiling (upper left) supported the 2025–26 HRAP cohort.

“ I have had the privilege of speaking to the Human Rights Advocates Program a number of times since joining the staff of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) in November of 1994. My work has focused on engaging companies on their human rights responsibilities in their operations and global supply chains. Each time I had the opportunity to talk about this work with the Human Rights Advocates Program, I have been impressed with the advocates’ commitment to listen, learn and grow in their understanding of the many ways human rights is central to their communities, societies and the world.

Here are a few reflections on the importance of this program.

1. The advocates come from communities and countries where there are substantial and often severe human rights crises. This means that advocates are on the front lines in promoting and protecting individuals and communities. Stress is a part of being human rights defenders. The Advocates Program provides four months away from their settings which, according to a number of advocates, helps them get a new perspective on their ongoing work, which is invaluable.
2. The advocates learn a great deal from experience, the professors, the opportunities to talk with human rights experts and more. It enriches the advocates’ understanding and helps them envision new perspectives on their work as they return home.

3. Four months goes fast, yet the advocates become a community. They learn from each other and build relationships that go well beyond the months at Columbia University. I’ve learned over the years that being a human rights advocate is never an individual endeavor. It is a collective engagement that stems from a strong belief that human rights is a movement of the many, building organizations that meet the small and big issues of the day. In my experience, this program helps the advocates share, grow and prepare for future challenges.

I have seen individuals in this program not only gain knowledge but also rekindle their passion for human rights, justice and peace. **If the Human Rights Advocates Program did not exist, it would need to be invented.** Fortunately, since 1989, the program has touched hundreds of advocates and wider populations in their home countries tens of thousands more.”

REV. DAVID SCHILLING
Senior Advisor
INTERFAITH CENTER ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY



Christopher and David Schilling of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility.



Pleasant weather arrived at the end of the program.

IRENE ATAMIAN, Business Manager

JACKIE DUGARD, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights, ISHR, and in Political Science

STEPHANIE V. GREPO, Director, Capacity Building

GERGANA HALPERN, Deputy Director, ISHR

JULIA MANNES, Undergraduate Studies Manager

MAGDALENA MEDLEY, Communications and Outreach Coordinator

ANNA MILLER, Senior Program Manager, Graduate Studies

GLENN MITOMA, Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights, and Director, Undergraduate Studies

SHOURIDEH C. MOLAVI, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights, and Director, Graduate Studies

JOSEPH SLAUGHTER, Director, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature

TIM WYMAN-MCCARTHY, Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights, and Associate Director, Graduate Studies

YVETTE ZAPATA, Finance Coordinator

HRAP PEOPLE

Stephanie V. Grepo (she/her) joined ISHR in 2008. Since then, she has secured funding to dedicate openings in HRAP to LGBTQI+, Indigenous Peoples, and disability rights advocates; encouraged HRAP alumni—who can be found in 100+ countries around the globe—to cooperate across class years and geographic boundaries; and advised advocates on raising funds for their organizations. She has guided 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 University students volunteer at organizations led by alumni of ISHR's fellowships programs around the globe. 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. She designed and secured funds for ISHR's first massive open online course which more than 6,000 students have attended since it was first released.

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 grant making program to support confidence-building projects 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.

For nearly a decade, she was a lecturer at The New School where she led graduate students through practicums with clients including the International Rescue Committee and Transparency International. At The School of The New York Times, she developed and taught the school's first human rights course for high school students. She has also taught human rights in the Pre-College Program at Columbia University. She is a graduate of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a student in the EdM program in Adult Learning & Leadership at Teachers College. Her volunteer work in resettlement with Catholic Charities of Greater Boston in the late 1990s led her to focus on human rights.

Brooke Blackburn is a current graduate student in the MA program for Sociocultural Anthropology at Columbia University. Before arriving at Columbia University, Brooke received a dual bachelor's degree in international relations and communications from Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire. During her undergraduate career, Brooke was a very civically engaged student, serving as co-chair of the communications committee for the New Hampshire Institute of Politics Student Ambassador Program. After completing her degree, Brooke transitioned to direct service and spent three years as the senior case manager at the Marjorie Kovler Center for Survivors of Torture in Chicago. Brooke has continued to draw on her experiences supporting asylum seekers and other immigrants to inform her academic work. Her current research centers on the ethnography of public stickers in New York City, examining stickers as dynamic cultural texts and agentive objects within urban space, in order to explore what practices of stickering reveal about the sociocultural life and political imaginaries of contemporary communities. As a Graduate Research Fellow at the Columbia University Narrative Intelligence Lab, she engages with questions at the intersection of sociolinguistics, literary theory, and the sociology of knowledge. Outside of her academic work, Brooke also volunteers as a bookseller and event coordinator at Word Up Books, a multilingual, community-run nonprofit bookshop in Washington Heights. Brooke has been a program assistant with the Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) since 2024. ISHR is grateful to Brooke for her contributions to two HRAP cohorts. Her good will, commitment, professionalism, and sense of humor was appreciated by the advocates and ISHR staff. She will be missed.



Breaking bread is part of the HRAP experience.

2022–23 Advocate

MARINE KAPANADZE

REFLECTS ON HRAP

When I reflect on the time I spent at Columbia University as part of the 2022–23 Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP), I can confidently say it was one of the most transformative and empowering periods of my professional life. My time in New York City was not only intellectually enriching, but it also provided me with practical skills and personal growth that continue to shape my work as a human rights lawyer and civic space defender in Georgia.

The HRAP experience gave me far more than academic insight—it helped me develop a deeper understanding of the human rights ecosystem, global advocacy networks, and the critical role of communication in this field. In today's world, people skills and strategic networking are just as essential as professional knowledge, and the Program provided the perfect environment to strengthen both. I had the opportunity to meet inspiring advocates from around the world, engage with leading scholars, and participate in events that broadened my perspective. These encounters helped me grow in confidence and conviction, pushing me to take on greater responsibilities back home.

One of the most valuable outcomes of HRAP was the connection I built with Columbia's Global Freedom of Expression initiative. Through this collaboration, I began working as a legal researcher, providing analysis and commentary on key freedom of expression cases from Georgia. This ongoing relationship not only keeps me connected to the Columbia community but also allows me to contribute to a global platform that defends fundamental rights in increasingly hostile environments.

Through Columbia's network, I was also introduced to the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights at Oxford University and invited to serve as a judge for the



2022–23 Advocate Marine remains connected to Columbia University.

international finals of the Monroe E. Price Media Law Moot Court Competition. This opportunity was both humbling and motivating, reinforcing the importance of regional perspectives in international legal debates and giving me a renewed sense of purpose in my work.

Since returning to Georgia, I have taken on a new leadership role as the Executive Director of Georgia's Future Academy—a youth-focused civic organization that plays a key role in empowering the next generation of democratic actors. Despite increasing repression from the country's authoritarian regime, I have been able to apply the knowledge, skills, and networks I gained through HRAP to strengthen my organization's impact. Whether in the courtroom, the classroom, or civil society spaces, the foundation built at Columbia has been instrumental in helping me navigate today's complex challenges.

The HRAP experience taught me that leadership in human rights is not just about advocacy—it is about resilience, collaboration, and courage. In the face of shrinking civic space and increasing risks, the lessons and relationships I gained through Columbia continue to sustain and inspire me. I am deeply grateful to the Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the HRAP team for opening these doors and amplifying the voices of human rights defenders like myself.

2023 Advocate

KEMAL PERVANIC

REFLECTS ON HRAP EXPERIENCE

In an online presentation sponsored by ISHR in late 2025, 2012 Advocate **Kemal Pervanic**, the founder and director of **Most Mira** in Bosnia, opened with his feedback on HRAP: "I had no expectations when I came to HRAP but it was brilliant in so many ways. I hoped that I would not only learn from others but that I could share some of my experiences. I was not very much aware of all the benefits I was receiving while I was in the program. Looking back on that time, it was one of the best decisions I made...My organization benefited enormously from taking part in the program. I'm not talking any specific experience...It was wonderful to be with a group of people from different parts of the world—to hear



2012 Advocate Kemal Pervanic started his presentation with a remembrance of his time in HRAP.

about their work in addition to the workshops we attended. I'll say it again. It was one of the best decisions when it came to my work. **In fact, HRAP was one of the best decisions of my life.**"



The CU Public Safety team informed the Advocates about their many resources to stay safe.



Felipe received an honor from Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES HONORS 1993 ADVOCATE

1993 Advocate **Luis Felipe Polo** sent the following message to ISHR: "With great gratitude and emotion I received the recognition as 'Distinguished Peruvian of the Bicentennial' awarded by the City of Los Angeles, during the commemoration of 200 years of relations between Peru and the United States. I received this distinction with humility, not only as a personal recognition, but also as a tribute to the Peruvian community that, with effort, work, culture and values, continues to build bridges between our two nations. Two centuries have passed since the beginning of this historic relationship between Peru and the United States, a relationship that has transcended generations and is today strengthened as well through millions of human, family, academic and cultural histories. As a Peruvian based in California, this moment has a very special meaning to me."



Geoffrey was named a Marianne Laureate.

2013 ADVOCATE RECOGNIZED AS MARIANNE LAUREATE

Congratulations to 2013 Advocate **Geoffrey Mayamba**, the Executive Director of the Prisoners Future Foundation in Zambia. He was chosen to participate in the 2026 Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders. In 2021, President Emmanuel Macron launched the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders, with the aim of providing stronger support to those who fight for human rights, both abroad and in France. The Initiative benefits 15 laureates each year through personalized support, accommodation, training, and networking opportunities.



Tandia and his colleagues at The Abolition Institute led a trip with judges and elected officials from Chicago to West Africa.

2010 ADVOCATE HONORED IN SENEGAL

2010 Advocate **Bakary Tandia**, the co-founder of The Abolition Institute, and his colleagues traveled to Senegal and Mauritania in early May with a delegation of judges and elected officials from Chicago to learn more about West Africa. The Abolition Institute was honored with the Gorée Pilgrim Award in recognition of its work for assisting those coming out of slavery.

Since 2011, ISHR has been offering Columbia students the opportunity to volunteer at the organizations of Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) alumni around the world through its Student Volunteer Program (SVP). Following are reflections from two students who participated in SVP during the summer of 2025.

ISHR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS IN KENYA

Ariella Kissin, who graduated with the MA in Human Rights Studies, participated in ISHR's Student Volunteer Program (SVP) in the summer of 2025 when she was still a master's student at ISHR. Following is a reflection piece by Ariella, who volunteered with Change 4 Planet Foundation (C4P), where she worked with 2013 Advocate Absolom Shalakh, the Executive Director and co-founder of C4P.

"The child is the responsibility of the community," a university student said, her peers nodding in agreement. C4P was conducting a gender mainstreaming training at a university in Nakuru, a city in Kenya's Great Rift Valley. The training focused on institutions of socialization and gender in the workplace. We reflected on how religion, family, and schools shape our understanding of gender roles. The training was a critical thinking exercise, prompting self-reflection, rather than instructing students on what to think.

Because socialization often sets its roots in early childhood, we asked participants to reflect on their upbringings and how these experiences shaped their perceptions of gender. One student shared that in his community, during harvest season, men and women take on different roles to cultivate crops. Another noted that, until recently, his tribe's norms did not allow women to consume chicken or eggs. These norms have shifted, he shared, but his grandmother had never tasted an egg or chicken, despite being the best cook he ever knew. Students shared how their experiences in religious institutions have shaped their understandings of gender, from clothing to behavioral expectations.

As students spoke, I noticed how their reflections centered on community, togetherness, and shared values. Coming from the United States, where individualism prevails as a dominant cultural value, I was curious to learn more about the role of community in Kenya. Having spent a total of four months in the country over the past few years, I've observed the innate friendliness among strangers, a tangible kindness, and hospitality.

One time, while commuting on a boda-boda (motorcycle taxi), my driver pulled up next to another boda at a red light. The two drivers struck up a casual conversation in Swahili, chatting like old friends until the light turned green. "Did you know him?" I asked my driver. "No," he replied, "but he's still my friend." I've observed this sense of community and belonging in all corners of Kenya, from the northwestern region of Turkana to the coast of the Indian Ocean. Participants in the training explained that this is rooted in tribal culture; I learned that if a child loses their biological parents, they are quickly embraced by the community, raised by aunts, uncles, grandparents, or even parental figures not related by blood.

During the university training, what began as a conversation about gender organically evolved into a broader reflection on community and belonging. Every participant agreed that they are a product of their community.

At C4P, self-reflection has been an important part of our community work. During my volunteer placement with the NGO, we traveled to schools, universities, and community centers all over the country, not with the objective of instructing, but rather facilitating a safe space for participants



Ariella spent eight weeks with the Change for Planet Foundation in Kenya.

to empower themselves through self-reflection. No place has this been demonstrated better than in the #Seeds4Progress project, where the organization trains and distributes Sorghum seeds for food and fodder to farmers in Kakamega, Vihiga, and Kajiado counties, to combat food insecurity. Additionally, the organization is setting up a C4P Community Resource Centre and Digital Hub in partnership with a local partner in Chegulo Village, Kabras Sub-County, Kakamega County, to enhance digital literacy in the rural community.

In Kenya, where challenges like climate change, gender inequality, and limited access to education intersect, C4P

stands as a beacon of hope, driving transformative change through innovative programs. Founded on the principles of empowerment, sustainability, and inclusivity, C4P's work focuses on Women, Youth, and Empowerment, Climate Action and Agriculture, Governance, Peace and Security, and Research and Documentation. At the heart of the NGO's mission is a commitment to fostering resilient communities, with a particular emphasis on SRHR sensitization and mentorship programs in primary and secondary schools. Through these initiatives, C4P aims to equip Kenya's youth and women with the tools to shape a just and sustainable future.—**Ariella Kissin**

ISHR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS WITH DOCUMENTA IN MEXICO

Uni Valdivieso Wooldridge, a Master's Student in Human Rights Studies at ISHR, was one of three students participating in ISHR's Student Volunteer Program (SVP) in the summer of 2025. Following is her reflection on her experience working with 2023–24 Advocate David Mejía and his colleagues at Documenta in Mexico City.

In June, I arrived in Mexico City to work with the wonderful team at Documenta, an organization that focuses on promoting human rights through legal avenues and advocacy in Mexico. For several weeks, I contributed to writs of protection and amicus curiae briefs, systematized letters from people deprived of their liberties, and got to witness a win for my supervisors, David and Jacqui, who have been working on disability rights, in the Primera Sala of the Supreme Court.

The biggest highlight of my experience in Mexico was the people, specifically the team at Documenta. They were unbelievably welcoming and full of laughter. Every day I looked forward to getting to know everyone during our lunch break when we would eat together at the table outside. Community and food are both incredibly important in Mexico—during my first week, another volunteer, Gawon from Columbia Law School, and I were invited to an asado (barbecue) at the office. We arrived early to help set up, and I ended up having the honor of making the guacamole—which surprisingly got more compliments than I expected! Chatting over grilled meats and tortillas, I learned about the Mexican judicial system and where to go for the best enchiladas. I immediately felt comfortable and excited for the opportunity to learn from such deeply caring people.

During my fourth week, I was able to attend a panel for the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture hosted at the Centro

de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez. The panel, along with other human rights organizations across Mexico City, was organized by Zuri, who coordinates projects and events about torture prevention. At least 10 individuals spoke during the panel, sharing their experiences of being tortured or of those of their family members who had been tortured. The stories of these courageous people were disturbing—it was difficult to listen to their detailed accounts. I left deeply heartbroken. Afterwards, as I reflected on everything that had been said, I realized how little I understood about the lived experiences of far too many victims of torture around the world because of how unfathomable it is. It's difficult to face the reality that one human could possibly commit such an act against another human. Legally, it is challenging to bring justice to victims when much torture occurs during incarceration and at the hands of the state. However, it was seriously uplifting to be surrounded by a community of hope, courage, and love. After having endured so much, every panelist was still fighting. Whether because of what they'd personally experienced, or what their loved ones had, they were still fighting for justice and for the rights of those that maybe did not survive or those yet to come. I left inspired by the community that forms in the face of such horrors, and very grateful to be invited into such a painful and personal space.

In Mexico, community is everything, and Documenta is a beacon of hope and support for those who need it most. From torture prevention work to advocating for individuals with disabilities, the people at Documenta continue to passionately advocate for human rights. I am incredibly thankful to have had the opportunity to know the Documenta team and to be able to explore the beautiful country of Mexico and the amazing Mexico City.

—Uni Valdivieso Wooldridge



Coworkers at Documenta preparing for asado.

MOURNING THE LOSS OF 2016 ADVOCATE MULSHID ELEAS MUWONGE, JR.



ISHR is sorry to report that 2016 Advocate Mulshid Eleas Muwonge, Jr., of Uganda died in October 2025.

Since 2019, he had been the Managing Partner and Chief Impact and Enablement Executive of Performatics Consulting Group. He previously worked with Defenders Protection Initiative as Director of Special Projects and Strategic Initiatives. He advised and consulted with organizations around the globe including COC Nederland, Frontline AIDS, and The Global Fund. He earned a master's degree in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa from the University of Pretoria and a bachelor's in business computing from Makerere University.

He will always be remembered for his zest for life, commitment to human rights, and willingness to lend a helping hand. ISHR expresses its condolences to all who knew and loved him. May he rest in peace.

*Your donation will
make it possible
for more human
rights advocates
to attend HRAP.*





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