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human rights are worth the risk

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SUMMER 2007 UPDATE

Dear friends,

With your help, the Fund for Global Human Rights has passed another milestone—as of June 2007, we have awarded over \$8 million in grants to human rights champions across the globe. These grants support groups like those profiled in this e-update—two of which, now making international headlines and quadrupling their budgets, got their first grants from the Fund.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your ongoing involvement with the Fund. Your generous support makes all the difference in supporting frontline human rights groups that are critical to the future of human rights.

Warm regards,

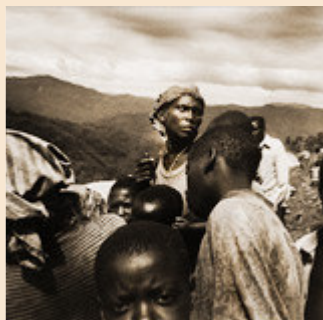
Regan E. Ralph
Executive Director

Fund for Global Human Rights announces latest grants

In April, the Fund awarded grants to fifty-six human rights groups working on human rights priorities such as the rights of women, environmental justice, access to justice, and the rights of children, among other key priorities.

- » [Download the April grants list here](#)
- » [Download the October grants list here](#)

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Rwanda, December 1994

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Grantee Profile: India's indigenous population wins landmark victory

India's indigenous population wins landmark victory recognizing rights protecting their historic land and livelihoods

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Grantee Profile: INSyDe

Ending the history of abuse and impunity by Mexico's police forces

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Grantee Profile: Green Advocates

Environmental justice activists force end to toxic dumping and shine light on human rights abuse

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Profile: Forest rights victory

India passes landmark human rights bill for the country's indigenous people

For most of India's indigenous populations, every day is a fight for basic survival and legal and social acceptance. Their social status—determined at birth by an illegal but deeply entrenched Hindu caste system—is used to deny their basic rights and keeps tens of millions of indigenous families without electricity, running water, schools, access to health care, and little chance to escape crushing poverty.

India's indigenous people live in a constant fear of having the land on which they and their ancestors have lived taken away. After India's independence in 1947, the state forest departments engaged in a land-grab, drawing new lines and circles on maps and claiming that all lands within their lines and circles were now state forest department lands. The indigenous people, and other long-term residents of the forested areas, suddenly became "encroachers." As a result, indigenous families have lived under constant harassment and extortion by local authorities and powerful non-indigenous persons who often want to mine the land, or clear it for timber. Attempts to defend traditional land from encroachment almost always end in violence, including brutal beatings. Police routinely burn crops and exploit the population.



Out of the more than 80 million indigenous people in India, an estimated 40-50 million of India's poorest indigenous people live in rural areas under such circumstances.

In the photo to the right: indigenous people gather to demand that the Indian state give them legal title to the land their ancestors have inhabited for hundreds of years. Without legal title, they are often treated as "encroachers" on their own land.

Over the past decade, Fund grantees, DISHA (in Gujarat), ASTHA (in Rajasthan) and Yakshi (in Andhra Pradesh), other activists, and politicians have galvanized tens of thousands of India's indigenous people in a campaign to defend their rights and dignity, and eventually moved the national legislature to pass the landmark "Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights)" Bill, which took effect on January 2, 2007.



The law was a culmination of a decade-long and persistent struggle. Indigenous rights activists began with local protests, meticulously documented the widespread abuses, tirelessly pressed local and national elected officials, and directly worked with affected communities. "At every stage, tribal leaders and members of tribal organizations were included, hundreds would gather from [tribal areas around the country] . . . to hear the latest developments, to give their views on what should be done next, and to

interact with Members of Parliament who came to meet the people gathered in support of the bill," said Dr. Ginny Shrivastava, director of ASTHA-ASWA and one of India's most gifted human rights activists. "Indigenous people have fought for their own survival with dignity, and won," said Shrivastava.

The law protects the rights of India's forest dwellers to their homeland and livelihoods, and dramatically strengthens the rights of the country's indigenous peoples ("scheduled tribes" as they are known in India) and other forest dwellers to protect their land against ongoing de-forestation

efforts by logging, mining, and other industries. Moreover, it represents an important move towards protecting the environment and righting the wrongs of the past century committed against poor, indigenous peoples across India. The new law now gives them the right to get legal land ownership papers for their traditional lands. And the law also stipulates that land ownership papers will be registered in the joint names of the husband and wife – thus giving land rights to tribal women – something they had not had until this landmark law.

In the photo to the right: indigenous people in the Northeastern “tribal belt” of Gujarat celebrate the landmark victory that enshrined their rights to land and livelihood with a week-long celebration.



The next step for our grantees will be enforcement of the law. Currently, thousands of indigenous families and forest dwellers are being evicted or live under threat of eviction across a rapidly industrializing India. Mass evictions are being fueled by corporations and government officials eager to control their valuable land. While the tribal population now has a clear means for defending their rights, activists predict that vested interests will attempt to derail the law’s implementation and weaken its provisions. The next battle for the human rights movement is to make sure that the law makes a difference in the lives of the millions of poor people across India. This involves an investment in educating indigenous communities about the new law and its provisions, conditions, and rules, challenging violations of the forest rights bill, and fostering public campaigns for its enforcement.

Paulomee Mistry, a leader of Fund grantee DISHA, states: “This victory is a major milestone in the people’s movement. It is special because it was led by the section of society (the indigenous community) who were never given their due share in history. Now the challenge for civil society and the Indian government is in implementing this law into reality.”

July 2007

Profile: Institute for Security and Democracy (INSyDE)

Ending the history of abuse and impunity by Mexico's police forces

Mexico's police have long been known for torture, corruption, and collusion with powerful interests. These abuses have been compounded by a national wave of violent crime, much of it related to the drug trade that sustains powerful organized crime rings. According to a 2006 survey, half of Mexico's citizens report feeling unsafe, and the police's track record is so bad that seven out of ten Mexican citizens say they do not trust law enforcement.

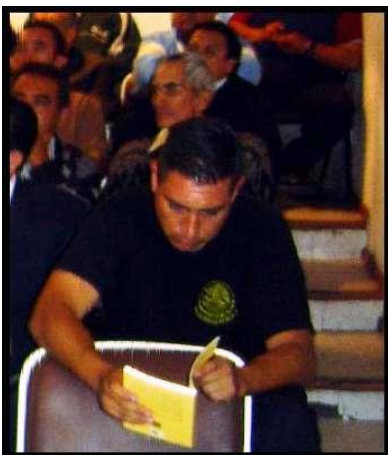


In 2003, public security experts in Mexico came together to respond to the public's growing sense of insecurity and the inability of Mexico's police forces to stem violent crime. With a grant from the Fund for Global Human Rights, these activists founded the Institute for Security and Democracy (Insyde), the first independent Mexican organization dedicated to promoting an effective and accountable police force. Four years later, Insyde is now considered the leading voice on police reform in Mexico.

Insyde promotes rights-respecting and effective police forces by advancing models of accountability and democratic policing. To marshal public support, Insyde trains journalists to cover public security issues more accurately and thoroughly. Insyde also helps frontline human rights activists understand public security issues and press for systemic reform.

Historically, experts on public security reform have had little interaction with frontline activists challenging abuses. Insyde bridges that gap by forging alliances that capitalize on human rights organizations' ability to document and monitor human rights violations committed by public security forces and by providing trainings on the fundamentals of justice reform.

For example, Insyde has worked with national human rights group Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (PRODH) to develop recommendations for police reform and use strategic media outreach to greatly expand press coverage of its reform proposals. Insyde currently is working with the PRODH to develop a manual on public security and human rights to help local human rights organizations participate in the debate.



In the violence ridden state of Guerrero, Insyde collaborates with the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center, also a Fund grantee, to monitor police practices and document abuses. On the southern border with Guatemala, Insyde is working with the local Fray Matias de Córdova Human Rights Center to monitor and document human rights abuses committed by police against Central American migrants.

Insyde has engaged the police themselves to increase their capacity to respond to violent crime. Insyde's policy recommendations and trainings are helping the police establish new procedures that discourage corruption and hold officers accountable for abuses while promoting democratic practices that respond to citizens' needs. Thanks to the efforts of Insyde, Mexican police forces are increasingly recognizing that better practices are in their interests and in the interest of human rights. Better training and respect for human rights by police will promote more respect, trust, and cooperation among citizens. Insyde's work with police in Mexico has been so successful that police forces in Venezuela and Ecuador

have requested its assistance.

Early support from the Fund helped Insyde attract significant funding from larger foundations. In April 2007, Insyde's innovative and effective work was recognized with a special \$500,000 award from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Insyde will use these funds to open Mexico's first center for police accreditation. The center will create national standards of best practices to which city managers, police chiefs, and patrol officers will aspire and be held accountable. The impact is potentially far-reaching, as police departments seeking to reform their image and improve their performance would learn new tools which would encourage respect for human rights and create high public service standards. At the same time, Insyde will continue its programs of outreach and technical support that assist police to improve performance and oversight systems, so that participating police forces can qualify for accreditation and earn the respect and trust of citizens.

The Fund provides general support to Insyde so that it can respond to key opportunities and seed new programs. Support of Insyde is part of the Fund's strategy to promote public security reform by building the capacity of local and national rights organizations to monitor the police, document abuses, and press for systemic change.

July 2007

Profile: Green Advocates

Environmental justice activists force end to toxic dumping and shine light on human rights abuse

Liberia is rich in natural resources, yet the primary beneficiaries of this wealth have been warlords and powerful multinational corporations. Throughout West Africa, natural resource extraction, environmental degradation, and land ownership are closely intertwined with human rights. For years, heads of states have enriched themselves through the sale of "conflict timber" and "blood diamonds" and used the profits to consolidate their power and fund brutal armed conflicts. Though Liberia is currently at peace, the extraction of natural resources remains a source of rights abuses.

Communities in resource-rich areas are violently displaced from their lands to make way for rubber tapping, while timber and mining operations destroy natural resources on which rural people depend for their livelihoods. Resource extraction operations pollute the rivers and watersheds on which communities depend for their survival. In 1997, a group of Liberian law students started Green Advocates to work with impoverished, rural communities to ensure them a voice in decisions affecting their communities' natural resources. The group also works to promote environmental protection legislation and to ensure that existing human rights and environmental laws are enforced.



Since receiving its first grant from the Fund for Global Human Rights four years ago, Green Advocates has launched a growing, national grassroots movement to challenge violations of environmental and economic rights. Led by lawyer Alfred Brownell, Green Advocates provides financial support to emerging community-based organizations representing people directly affected by the abuses and helps these groups develop their human rights strategies and organizational strength. One such community group is the Concerned Citizens Movement of Owensgrove County (CCM).

In the photo to above: A young Owensgrove resident takes part in a protest against the Firestone rubber plantation's use of toxic chemicals, which permeate the air and contaminate the water source for her town.

The people of Owensgrove have suffered a long history of being displaced by rubber harvesting operations; the community was originally founded in 1926 by people who were forcibly displaced from their land to make way for the Firestone rubber plantation. A rubber processing plant operated by the Firestone corporation has been dumping hazardous chemicals into the nearby Farmington River for over seventy-five years, and today virtually no fish or vegetation survive in the area. The conditions under which people labor are dismal; children work to help their parents meet unrealistic quotas and in return receive little pay and substandard housing and education. Thanks to the activism of Green Advocates and CCM, Firestone has been forced to commit publicly to improving its operations, and the corporation currently is installing a waste water treatment facility along the banks of the Farmington River.

Green Advocates also trains other community organizations living on or near the Firestone rubber plantation to document labor rights abuses, including the use of child labor. Last year, Green Advocates convinced the United Nations to release a major report on human rights conditions on the Firestone plantation; the report confirmed local communities' reports of child labor, pollution of the Farmington River, and miserable working conditions. Green Advocates currently is providing critical documentation to the Liberian government, which is negotiating a resource concession agreement with Firestone that will require new protections for labor and environmental rights.

Brownell and Green Advocates also provide legal representation to community leaders who are targeted for harassment and imprisonment for standing up against the practices of rubber

plantations. In 2005, Brownell secured the release of 107 community leaders who were illegally detained when they resisted violent displacement from their traditional lands to make way for expansion of the foreign-owned Liberia Agriculture Company rubber plantation. More recently, Brownell helped free thirteen Firestone plantation workers who were arrested while striking to demand better working conditions and free and fair elections for a union to represent the interests of workers and their families. For decades, the existing union has been run by the Firestone company itself. Police detained and beat the striking workers and fired tear gas indiscriminately into densely populated settlements to break up the strike.



In the photo to the left: Ma Konwree, 75 years old, stands in front of her home in Nahn village in Grand Bassa County, near in a Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC) rubber plantation. LAC decided to expand its plantation to envelop her community. When the community refused to accept a ridiculously low payment in return for their land, Konwree says LAC security guards burned down their crops and destroyed villagers' property. Without crops to support themselves, she says most people had no choice but to leave for Monrovia, Liberia's capital. But she refuses to leave, saying she has known no other life and doesn't want to beg in the capital. Says Konwree: "These people will kill me before they can take away my land that me and my husband lived for the past sixty years. Even though the company has destroyed all the other houses except my own and surrounded me with rubber trees, I will not leave because this

land belongs to me and my children." She still lives in her house, is supported by family, and is surrounded by empty fields where LAC is planting rubber trees.

Green Advocates promotes national policies that would stem corruption and abuses related to natural resource extraction. For example, Green Advocates pressed successfully for the passage of the Reform Forestry Law. The new law promotes access to information, transparency and accountability; establishes safeguards for the environment; explicitly prohibits illicit activities in the forest sector, providing specific penalties for corruption; and provides for benefit sharing and greater participation of local forest-based communities.



In the photo to the left: Alfred Brownell, co-founder and director of Green Advocates, is bringing journalists to a community with which he works. Brownell regularly works with the national and international press to provide coverage of the abuses against rural communities, and to increase pressure on multinational companies to reform, respect the law, and make long-term change in the way they interact with the local communities.

To generate increased public pressure for reform, Green Advocates founded two national networks, Publish What You Pay and the Civil Society Budget Network, to convene rights groups to press for transparency and accountability in the management of Liberia's natural resources. Under Brownell's leadership, the Publish What You Pay Coalition successfully campaigned for Liberia's entry into the United Nations' Extractive Industry Transparency Initiatives (EITI), which will provide greater oversight of the management of Liberia's natural resources. Working with the Civil Society Budget Network, Green Advocates has started to bring an end to 159 years of secrecy associated with the national budget and helped local communities challenge corruption and demand that the government promote economic, social and cultural rights by allocating sufficient funding to education, health care and development.

In a country where warlords' plunder of natural resources funded its civil war, Green Advocates is helping develop the long-term ability of five rural communities to defend their rights to physical

security, political participation, equality under law, dignity, a healthy environment, and health. Ultimately, victories gained will build a national legal framework and movement to defend the rights of communities and place a check on abusive powerful interests.

July 2007