

AJWS REPORTS

Winter 07

Defending Democracy in Burma

AMERICAN
JEWISH
WORLD
SERVICE

Pursuing Global Justice
Through Grassroots Change



Dear Friends:

This has been a most challenging time for all of us involved in global change.

In Burma, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur, war, political turmoil and social injustice have descended with a vengeance, and the most vulnerable people are paying the greatest price. In response to these growing crises, AJWS is working more than ever in conflict and post-conflict regions and countries in the developing world.

In both Darfur and Burma, AJWS has been involved in humanitarian work for the past several years, and in both regions the human-made disaster necessitates our use of the strategy “from disaster to development.” We were there before the most immediate crisis began, and we will remain long after the stories fade from public view.

AJWS continues to offer volunteer opportunities for the young and the “not-so-young” to work in communities with AJWS-supported projects around the world. In this issue we focus on the World Partners Fellowship, which offers college graduates and young professionals extended placements with NGOs.

Featured in this issue of *AJWS Reports* is a description of Global Goods Partners (GGP). We encourage you to think of GGP in this season of giving. Shop your values.

We encourage you to recommit your support for AJWS as we continue to take action against the genocide in Darfur, work on behalf of the pro-democracy movement in Burma and continue our ongoing work with over 350 grassroots community-based organizations in 36 countries around the world. We hope you will travel with us, participate in one of our service programs or learn more about the work of our grantee partners abroad.

We wish you a season of miracles and peace in 2008.

Happy Holidays,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Ruth Messinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue background.

Ruth Messinger
President

Contents

Winter 2007



Defending Democracy Burma's Struggle for Human Rights, Freedom and Justice	4
World Partners Fellowship Jewish Values, Global Impact	8
In Pursuit of Peace Making Progress in Darfur	10
Global Goods Partners Shop your Values, Support our Grantees	11

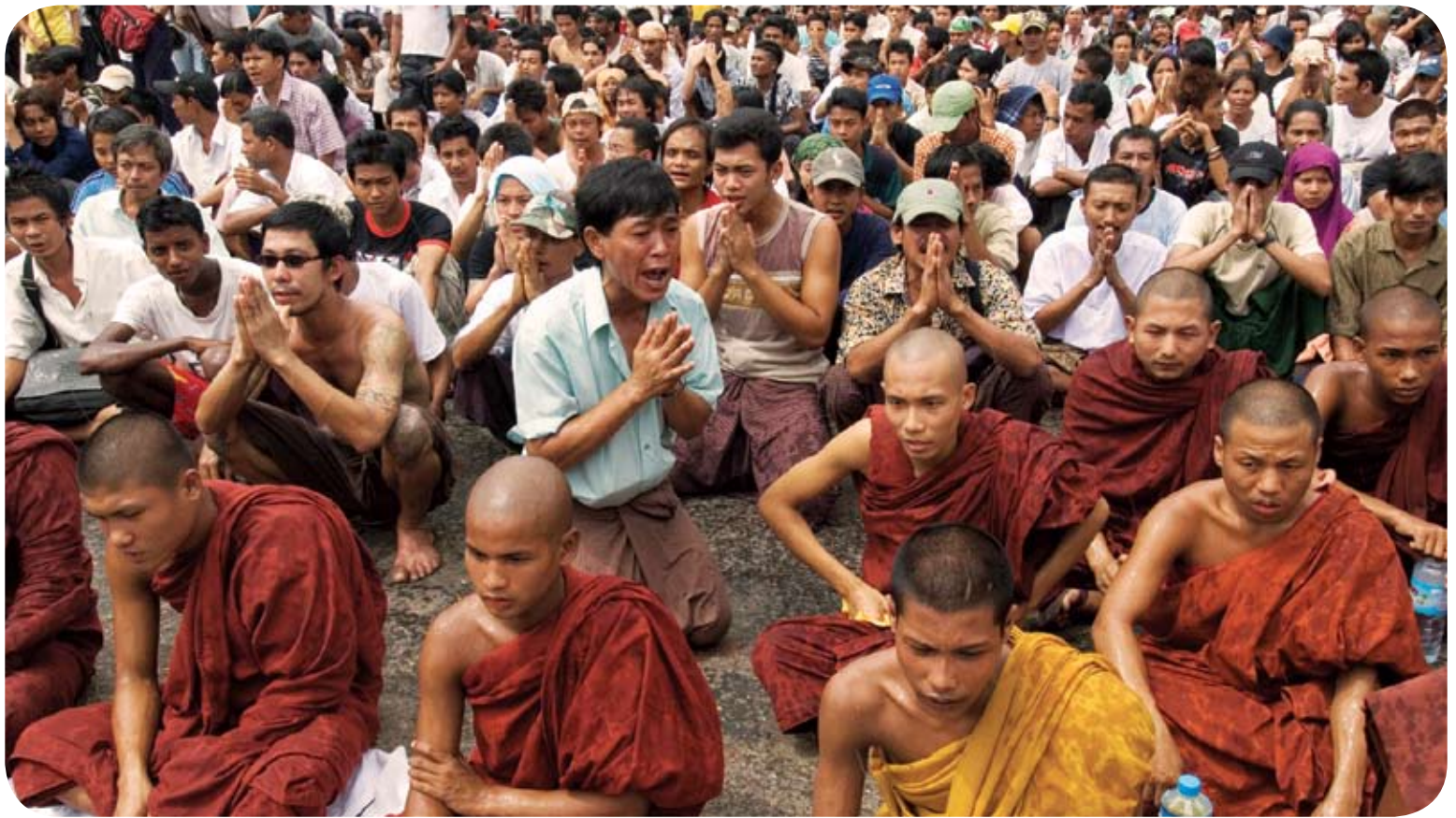
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Monks and lay people send their peaceful blessings to soldiers as they call for regime change during September's Saffron Revolution, Burma. A Smith

Defending Democracy

Burma's Struggle for Human Rights, Freedom and Justice

“Peace and stability have been restored in Myanmar, and life has returned to normal all over the country.” Thus spoke the UN envoy to Burma, Kyaw Tint Swe, to the United Nations Security Council on November 13. Unfortunately, Swe's comments do not reflect the reality of the situation on the ground in Burma, where AJWS is working closely with those fighting for democracy and human rights.

In August and September of 2007, mass demonstrations swept across Burma. The Burmese government had

removed fuel subsidies, and the price of diesel and petrol quickly rose by 100 percent. Hundreds gathered on the streets of Rangoon, Burma's largest city, to speak out against the price hike. In defiance of government threats, thousands of Burmese monks joined the demonstrations, protesting not only the fuel hikes but also continued state oppression. A total of 246 demonstrations occurred in 66 towns and cities across the country. The powerful image of these highly revered monks captured the world's attention and led to the coining of the term the “Saffron Revolution.”

The Burmese government cracked down violently on demonstrators, tear-gassing crowds, arresting hundreds and killing many. An estimated 4,000 monks were detained and deported to prison camps, and 52 monasteries were raided.

While the government stated that few people were killed, it is estimated that the death toll is significantly higher: AJWS' sources report that more than 200 activists were killed. Visits from a UN special envoy appointed especially to negotiate a solution to the protracted conflict in the country, as well as to highlight condemnation by the international community, offered hope for many. Unfortunately, following the initial wave of worldwide support, international efforts on behalf of the country's pro-democracy movement faded quickly. In addition, a media blackout banned or shut down almost all communications lines.

A brutal history, a troubled present

The nationwide demonstrations in Burma may have stemmed from economic issues, but they were rooted in decades of political repression and armed conflict.

Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948. Comprised of an ethnically diverse population, many of the country's minorities clamored for autonomy after Burma's independence. Despite this, a democratically elected government was able to function until 1962. That year, a brutal military junta took control, crushing personal freedoms through the torture, political imprisonment and censorship of citizens. In 1988, this oppressive regime took on the name of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Burma, also known as Myanmar, is a Southeast Asian country of 50 million people that has been under military rule since 1962. A popular uprising was defeated in 1988, when government soldiers killed an estimated 3,000 people during pro-democracy protests. Two years later, despite legislative elections that brought the main opposition party to victory, the ruling junta placed the democratic party leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest, where she remains to this day. Those who support her, as well as others who speak on behalf of human rights, are often attacked or imprisoned.

The SPDC renamed the country "Myanmar." (Pro-democracy activists, however, still use the former name in order to reject the policies and military rule of the SPDC.) Today, the SPDC wields absolute

control over the people of Burma, particularly its ethnic minorities. The SPDC uses forced labor to build large-scale development projects in areas rich in natural resources. Children are abused and sold as soldiers. A prolific drug trade has made Burma a global capital for the production of heroin, second only to Afghanistan.

Burma's indigenous and ethnic nationalities are in the most danger; many live in remote border areas where fighting is taking place

between the military and armed opposition groups. Millions of people have been forced to flee from their homes. To date, more than two million have fled Burma for Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh. Approximately 150,000 people are living as refugees in camps along the Thai-Burmese border, and there are more than 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern Burma alone. Many of these people have seen their homes burned, livestock killed and livelihoods destroyed.

Gender-based violence is also a primary concern of communities living in Burma's conflict zones. Human rights organizations have documented the widespread and systematic use of rape and sexual violence by the Burmese military. Due to the extreme levels of poverty and displacement — 25 percent of all Burmese households have incomes below minimal subsistence level, and many go without basic education or health services — ethnic minority women are also especially vulnerable to trafficking for prostitution.

Identifying priorities for support – AJWS responds

AJWS' support of Burma began with grantmaking to organizations in Thailand working with refugees and migrant workers living outside of Burma. AJWS now supports non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are working both with refugees in Thailand and IDPs within Burma and is currently funding 15 community-based organizations that are striving to build civil society for a future democratic Burma.

AJWS grants enable communities living under military rule and in areas of conflict to provide for their basic needs, education, health and economic development. To date, these grants have prioritized support for the education and health needs of internally displaced populations in ethnic areas cut off from humanitarian aid; they also foster civil society movements within these communities through human rights trainings and peacebuilding efforts.

As women are at the forefront of the struggle for rights in Burma, AJWS grantmaking is focusing on women-led organizations. The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), an AJWS partner since 2006, offers empowerment trainings and workshops for women living along the border, runs a support center for women in crisis and promotes income-generation projects. With AJWS' support, SWAN provides health education, basic community health care and reproductive health care for refugees and IDPs.

AJWS grantmaking in Burma is also prioritizing the needs of migrant workers and IDPs. Burma Issues, a non-partisan NGO partnering with AJWS since 2004, is working to secure the basic rights that citizens—especially those living in marginalized communities—are denied by the government. With AJWS support, Burma

Issues helps run a community school free of cost to IDP children in Karen state and conducts community organizing trainings to build local leadership on social and educational needs.

Next steps for recovery and relief

Despite the comments made by the UN envoy to Burma, peace and stability have not yet been restored to the country. However, in the months since the brutal crackdown began, the people of Burma are continuing their struggle for freedom and justice. Despite ongoing arrests and disappearances of activists, citizens are coming forward to speak out against the regime. Some detainees have been released from prison and have openly discussed their torture and maltreatment.

As the people of Burma persist in their struggle,

solidarity actions continue around the world, including protests in front of Chinese consulates across the U.S., interfaith days of prayer in Australia, sit-ins in India and demonstrations in Malaysia. AJWS joins in calling on Burma's government to halt the violence it is perpetrating on its people, release all political prisoners and begin a genuine dialogue with the National League for Democracy and ethnic opposition groups as a first step for meaningful political and economic reform.

AJWS supports the thousands of monks, nuns and civilians speaking out against Burma's repressive regime, and we continue to provide relief to our partners who are helping displaced communities access health care, education and livelihoods. In the midst of this difficult and violent conflict, it is critical to maintain the sense of urgency and momentum that the Saffron Revolution spurred. Please visit www.ajws.org to learn about actions you can take in support of the movement for peace and justice in Burma. ●



AJWS project partner Karen Student Network Group participates in an event for 2007 World Refugee Day, Thailand. KSNG



Join Ruth Messinger in

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Pre-trip: Jewish Abayudaya Community in Uganda
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Dr. David Elcott, *AJWS Trustee*

Or join us in:

India, November 10 to 20, 2008

Senegal, February 2 to 8, 2009

South Africa, July 13 to 23, 2009

For more information, visit www.ajws.org/studytours, or contact Rena Dascal at rdascal@ajws.org, 212.792.2829.

Planned Giving Opportunities

Your commitment to American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is important, and we invite you to strengthen that commitment by considering one of the AJWS planned giving opportunities. A planned gift is a lasting investment in AJWS, advancing our mission and ensuring our ability to respond to the challenges we will face in the future, as we have done for nearly 25 years.

Please call Riva Silverman, director of development, at 212.792.2809 for more information on naming AJWS as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance policy or retirement plan, or establishing a trust or annuity to provide income while supporting the work of AJWS.



AJWS World Partners Fellow David Rodwin participates in a day of sport organized by AJWS project partner DSK, India. D Rotbard

World Partners Fellowship

Jewish Values, Global Impact

When Rebecca Shaloff arrived in Mumbai, India in the middle of the night, she was confronted by a new and foreign world. She had never been to India, and the sights and smells were overwhelming. Amid the confusion, she heard someone say the words “ein baya” – Hebrew for “no problem” or “no worries.”

They were spoken by a member of the local Indian Jewish family with whom she was going to be staying. “Hearing these familiar words in a shared mother tongue,” says Rebecca, 26, from Silver Spring, Maryland, “spoke to the fact that Judaism has very few boundaries. The Jewish community goes farther and wider than I had ever thought.”

The AJWS World Partners Fellowship (WPF) explores the intersection of Judaism, social justice and international development. It offers an opportunity for Jewish college graduates and young professionals to volunteer internationally while exploring the texts and traditions of Judaism. WPF arranges nine-month-long volunteer placements with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), where Fellows provide needed skills and service to organizations that address issues such as women’s empowerment, public health and education. In addition to the overseas volunteer experience, Fellows gain professional and leadership skills by participating in an orientation, regional retreats, online education and a domestic conference at the close of their service.

The program now has 36 alumni, and currently there are 17 Fellows living in India. In February 2008, 13 additional Fellows will begin their service in Central America.

In the field

Sharon Miodovsky, 22, is a Fellow from Los Angeles volunteering with Dasra, an NGO working to strengthen Indian organizations investing in and spearheading social change. Sharon's work involves creating an operations manual for Dasra's financial management services, as well as assisting partnering NGOs in assessing their impact and success in the field.

"The placement I have really fits with my interests and the direction I'm going in," she says. "In the future, I see myself working in a field that has to do with social justice. Being in India and especially working with Dasra is giving me a better sense of what I want to do next. It's still early on, but I already see it influencing my professional development."

Exploring what it means to be Jewish is a vital component of the volunteer experience. The WPF curriculum integrates Jewish service learning, engaging Fellows in dialogue about the connections between Judaism and social justice.

Becca Sherman, 23, a current Fellow from Needham, Massachusetts who is volunteering with SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action for Women and Children) in Mumbai, feels that WPF is helping her to engage in Judaism in new and exciting ways. "I haven't done a lot of Jewish things for a long time," she says. "I was turned off by Jewish peer activities when I was younger. I'm really glad that I'm doing World Partners; I'm learning a lot about Judaism and meeting some out-of-the-box Jews in the Fellowship and participating more in Jewish life here than I normally would be."

Beyond World Partners

World Partners Fellows have gone on to a variety of careers focusing on social justice. Rebecca Shaloff, who participated in WPF in 2004-2005, now works for

RugMark, a global nonprofit organization that focuses on ending child servitude in South Asia's handmade rug industry.

"World Partners was the stepping stone to where I am today and the basis of my knowledge that I use daily," says Rebecca. "In some ways I feel like the experience hasn't left me. The work that I do now to improve labor conditions and promote fair trade is very much connected to and inspired by my volunteer work in India."

Becca Sherman sees ways to connect her experience to her Jewish community back home. "I'm interested in embracing my Judaism and multi-culturalism. Also, meeting other Fellows has helped me realize that I can define my own Judaism."

For more information about the World Partners Fellowship, including upcoming program locations and application deadlines, please e-mail volunteer@ajws.org, call 800.889.7146 or visit www.ajws.org/volunteer. •



AJWS World Partners Fellow Becca Sherman talks with a staff member of AJWS project partner SNEHA, India. D Rotbard

In Pursuit of Peace

Making Progress in Sudan



Refugee children, Eastern Chad. R Messinger

Nearly five years ago, the Sudanese government responded to a rebel uprising in Darfur by launching a ruthless counter-insurgency campaign. Government forces and the militias they unleashed, the *Janjaweed*, systematically targeted the rebel ethnic communities by destroying thousands of villages and terrorizing, raping and murdering their inhabitants.

Despite the international condemnation of the genocide, more than 2.2 million people are now homeless, and 4.2 million people—two-thirds of Darfur’s population—rely on international aid for their survival. Threats to civilians have multiplied dramatically. Fighting between rebel factions and increasingly violent inter-communal clashes have made Darfur more dangerous than ever. According to the United Nations, attacks on aid workers have increased by 150 percent, prompting many organizations to scale back their operations or withdraw from “no-go” areas entirely.

As the delivery of aid is becoming increasingly difficult, AJWS continues to provide sustainable assistance to those in need while supporting life-saving programs managed by international aid agencies. To date, AJWS has distributed more than three million dollars toward health services, rape reduction and response, water and sanitation efforts, psychosocial services and other programs.

AJWS also continues to press the U.S. government to live up to its commitments, including ensuring the deployment of a 26,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping mission and the investigation and prosecution of war crimes suspects through the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Because the Sudanese government thwarts progress at every turn, AJWS strongly believes the international community must increase pressure on Khartoum. U.S. sanctions on Sudan have already had an impact, and thanks in part to the efforts of AJWS activists, 20 states have passed divestment measures. In response to this groundswell of activism, the House of Representatives passed federal divestment legislation in July 2007 by a vote of 418 to one. AJWS is working to ensure that the Senate follows suit.

The people of Darfur want nothing more than to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. It remains our responsibility to do all we can to help them in their journey toward freedom.

To learn more about the AJWS Darfur Action Campaign, visit www.ajws.org/darfur. ●

Global Goods Partners

Shop your Values, Support our Grantees

AJWS grantees strive to become more effective and self-sustaining. By developing income-generating enterprises that create locally representative products, these community organizations build sustainability, strengthen the capacities of individual beneficiaries and generate supplementary funds to support families and ongoing development programs.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to find and maintain profitable markets for these products. Language barriers, lack of familiarity with international fashions and standards and the unique circumstances of community development goals make working with importers and retailers complicated, if not impossible.

Global Goods Partners (GGP), a nonprofit organization founded by development professionals, is creating ways to help AJWS grantees and other groups access the U.S. market. Partnering with community organizations in Asia, Africa and the Americas, GGP sells handmade, fair trade products through fundraisers, sales events and online retail channels, building sustainability at the grassroots level while giving socially responsible consumers an opportunity to support their favorite causes.

Among GGP's partners is the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), which focuses on health, education and women's rights in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hand-embroidered clutches are made by women learning market skills from AIL's micro-enterprise projects. Profits help support literacy and education for women and girls.

In Uganda, the Foundation for Development of Needy Communities (FDNC) promotes sustainable



Woman with a woven ceramic bowl, GGP partner Gone Gural, Swaziland. J Shifrin

development through art. FDNC's most recent project is an art and design center where local artisans train students in the production of commercial artworks. Hand-painted watercolor cards, as well as cloth batiks and wall hangings, depict scenes of daily life in rural Africa.

By purchasing these special products, supporters of AJWS' mission can make an even greater impact on community development worldwide. To make a purchase, learn more about GGP or receive information about organizing a school fundraiser or sales event in your community, visit www.globalgoodspartners.org.

SHOP TODAY and GGP will contribute 10% of every purchase to AJWS. ●



Pursuing Global Justice
Through Grassroots Change

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Have you sent in your year-end gift to AJWS?

Your contribution helps empower grassroots leaders and organizations around the world to advance human dignity, civil rights and self-determination. For your convenience, there are several ways of giving:

Online

Use our secure online form at www.ajws.org by following the “Donate” link.

Phone or mail

Call 212.792.2900 to speak with a member of the AJWS staff or mail your contribution to:

American Jewish World Service
45 West 36th Street, New York, NY 10018

Matching gifts

Your donation can be doubled – even tripled – with a matching gift from your company. Contact your human resources department to see if this option is available.

Appreciated stock

Support AJWS by making a gift of appreciated stock. (Consult your financial planner or tax advisor to determine your specific tax advantages.) Stock gift forms are available at www.ajws.org/stocks or by calling 212.792.2900.

AJWS received an “A” rating from the American Institute of Philanthropy and a four-star rating from Charity Navigator seven years in a row.

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is an international development organization motivated by Judaism’s imperative to pursue justice. AJWS is dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the developing world regardless of race, religion or nationality. Through grants to grassroots organizations, volunteer service, advocacy and education, AJWS fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people, while promoting the values and responsibilities of global citizenship within the Jewish community.