



# THE STORY OF OUR IMPACT



SUPPORTING THE MOVEMENT FOR  
A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC **BURMA**  
2002-2012



**“We have been knocking on this door for a long time and it’s never opened. Now we are knocking and it’s opened a little. We are ready to struggle and push it until it opens further.”**

—Karen Human Rights Group, an AJWS grantee working on human rights in Burma

**“If you stand together, your voice will be heard.”**

—Women’s human rights activist and AJWS grantee, Burma

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**COVER** Monks, nuns and other citizens march in a peaceful demonstration during the Saffron Revolution. **PHOTO** BETH JONES

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of Burma is one of the most profound examples of progress in global justice that AJWS has ever seen. A country that has been shrouded in violence and oppression for more than half a century is beginning to see signs of hope. After decades of attacks on ethnic minorities, suppression of dissent and free speech, and denial of basic human rights, Burma's military junta is starting to release its iron grip on its people. Since 2010 it has signed preliminary cease-fires with several ethnic armed resistance groups, established a parliament, and released hundreds of political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the iconic democratic opposition leader who had come to embody the people's aspiration for freedom. In January 2012, in recognition of this progress and taking a tentative step of faith, the U.S. restored full diplomatic ties with the country for the first time since 1990.

The changes happening in Burma are inspiring. But what's extraordinary is *how* these changes have come about. They weren't the result of a dramatic armed intervention by the U.S. government or international powers. Instead, Burma's progress has been the result of the dedicated efforts over many years of a band of small civil society organizations and grassroots activists who refused to give up on freedom.

Their story is one of resilience, perseverance and ingenuity. To escape the regime's campaign of terror, democracy activists and ethnic minorities fled to the Thai/Burmese border. There, they founded civil society organizations and forged a people's movement. In the temporary dwellings of the refugee camps and on the footpaths of the dense jungle in Burma, activists dodged bullets and land mines to bring essential services to displaced communities and make sure their plight was broadcast far and wide.

AJWS recognized the potential of these groups to bring about change and has consistently supported their efforts over the last decade, helping the movement grow stronger and more numerous. We began funding several organizations along the Thai/Burmese border in 2002 and, today, we fund 30 organizations both along Burma's borders and inside the country.



Shan Youth Power conducts a training with local youth.

PHOTO JAMES ROBERT FULLER

Our grantees have documented human rights abuses by the junta and placed this information in the hands of world leaders. They have organized to provide the humanitarian aid that their government has denied. They have trained their youth to become activists and community organizers, strengthening and building the movement. They have found ways to subvert the information blockade in order to collaborate with each other and participate in major nationwide protests and peace-building initiatives. They have built strong networks that have gradually led to increased coordination between groups working inside the country and along its borders, and aligned their agendas in order to exert greater pressure on the government.

While the struggle for peace, freedom and democracy is a protracted process, decades of work by these extraordinary organizations and individuals has, at last, spurred change inside the country. The following is an analysis—based on a detailed tracking of achievements and indicators of progress—of the evolution of this movement and how AJWS has supported it.

## **Background: Mounting Terror and Early Attempts at Opposition**

Burma's modern history is fraught with war and turmoil. In 1948 when Burma gained independence from the British, the country descended into civil war. In 1962, the military, led by General Ne Win, staged a coup d'état and declared a socialist state, launching a decades-long campaign of ethnic cleansing and political repression.

The status quo of violence and military dictatorship continued until 1988, when voices for democracy became widespread across the country. At the helm of the pro-democracy movement was Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Aung San (who founded the modern Burmese army and negotiated Burma's independence from the British Empire in 1947). When citizens broke out in mass demonstrations for democracy on August 8, 1988, the military brutally cracked down, killing more than 1,000 demonstrators. On August 26, Suu Kyi addressed half a million people at a rally in the capital, calling for peaceful democratic reform and assuming the role of opposition leader.

In September 1988, the military formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), also referred to as the "junta." To break up the uprisings, the junta killed thousands of people in the streets. Suu Kyi helped found the National League for Democracy, and soon after, in July 1989, she was placed under house arrest. She was offered freedom if she left Burma, but she refused. In 1990, the junta held a general election and the National League for Democracy won 80 percent of the seats, which would have likely made Suu Kyi prime minister. The junta nullified the election results and took power despite the people's overwhelming choice for a regime change. In 1991, still under house arrest, Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Having fixed the election and maintained its control, the SLORC ruled with martial law, arresting thousands of people, including democracy and human rights advocates. The regime also ramped up the war against Burma's ethnic nationalities by seizing land and destroying and displacing communities in eastern Burma. Between 1984 and 1994, thousands of ethnic Karen people fled to Thailand and established refugee camps. In 1989, Burma's military government changed the country's name to "Myanmar," a word taken from the language of the majority ethnic group, Bamar—or Burman.

In the early 1990s, several grassroots organizations were formed by democracy activists in exile as well as by ethnic minorities who continued to flee violence in Burma's border areas. The level of repression was such that community organizing was increasingly difficult and

groups had to operate covertly. They faced tremendous communications challenges, as the military regime blockaded, or carefully censored, all forms of media.

Burma's nascent civil society organizations emerged along two parallel, but distinct, tracks: democracy activists—primarily university students and political leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi—campaigning and protesting for democratic reforms, but did not pay specific attention to ethnic concerns; ethnic organizations, on the other hand, focused on pursuing autonomy and self-determination for ethnic nationalities within Burma.

## **Documenting and Voicing Shared Problems Leads to Results**

The first step toward progress came when civil society organizations started to define and voice shared problems—and gain the capacity to share them with others. By the mid-'90s local women's organizations, including several future AJWS grantees, began to document human rights violations and share their findings via new alternative media streams that had emerged inside Burma, albeit in a very "under-the-radar" way. Radio, cassette recordings and educational pamphlets all functioned as sources of information and commentary about what was happening in the country.

Throughout the late '90s, local organizations continued to improve their capacity to document human rights violations, a powerful tool, which, in Human Rights Watch's words, is a means to "put a name to abusive behaviors that in some local contexts are not identified as such," and to "hold oppressors accountable to their population, to the international community and to their obligations under international law."<sup>1</sup> Several organizations that AJWS later funded, including EarthRights International, Burma Issues and Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), extensively documented forced labor, a major human rights issue, particularly among ethnic nationalities. Forced labor in Burma typically involves labor-intensive agricultural production or road projects for the junta, as well as sexual and military services.<sup>2</sup>

This documentation was significant because local organizations began to voice a shared concern, and had the evidence to get this concern onto the agendas of more powerful players. By 1997 the International Labour

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, website. Accessed 9 May 2012. Available at: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Campaign for Burma, "Forced Labor." Web. Accessed 12 March, 2012. Available at: <http://uscampaignforburma.org/learn-about-burma/attacks-eastern-burma/forced-labor/>.



AJWS partner Karen Student Network Group participates in an event for 2007 World Refugee Day, Thailand. PHOTO KAREN STUDENT NETWORK GROUP

Organization (ILO) began to monitor forced labor in Burma and, in 2007, after intense negotiations, the Burmese government signed an agreement establishing a complaint mechanism, where a Burmese citizen can lodge a complaint through the ILO with no risk of redress or retaliation.<sup>3</sup>

In 1998, EarthRights International released “School for Rape: The Burmese Military and Sexual Violence,” a report that shone a spotlight on the role of sexual and gender-based violence in the ethnic cleansing witnessed by villagers and defectors from the Burmese army. Similar research was carried out by other organizations. In 2002, the Shan Human Rights Foundation and Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN)—an AJWS grantee beginning in 2006—published “License to Rape,” a documentary history of sexual violence between 1996 and 2001. The report stated that rape was being used as a “weapon of war” against civilians in Shan State and called upon the international community “to pressure UN agencies and international NGOs working in the ethnic states of Burma to publicly bear witness to the atrocities being committed by the junta against civilians in these areas, since their silence makes them complicit in these abuses.”<sup>4</sup> News

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Vuylseke, “The International Labor Organization’s Forced Labor Complaint Mechanism,” Burma Issues. Web. Accessed 22 March, 2012. Available at: [http://www.burmaissues.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=99:the-international-labour-organisations-forced-labour-complaint-mechanism-&catid=10:archive&Itemid=28](http://www.burmaissues.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=99:the-international-labour-organisations-forced-labour-complaint-mechanism-&catid=10:archive&Itemid=28).

<sup>4</sup> The Shan Human Rights Foundation and The Shan Women’s Action Network. “License to Rape: The Burmese military regime’s use of sexual violence in the ongoing war in Shan State,” May 2002. Web. Accessed 6 February, 2012. Available at: [http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/reports/License\\_to\\_rape.pdf](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/reports/License_to_rape.pdf).

about the report was transmitted into Burma by the BBC, and the SPDC printed a report in response, calling “License to Rape” a series of lies. This was significant because the report not only reached the attention of the regime, but it also forced the regime to attempt to defend itself.

These and similar reports written by AJWS grantees gained international attention. In 2003, the U.S. passed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act (having passed its first economic sanctions against Burma in 1997), stating that “the SPDC [formerly known as the SLORC] continues egregious human rights violations against Burmese citizens, uses rape as a weapon of intimidation and torture against women...and is engaged in ethnic cleansing against minorities within Burma.”<sup>5</sup>

### ***Women are Empowered to Take the Lead***

As grassroots organizations brought the world’s attention to what was happening in Burma, AJWS began to increase its funding of women’s leadership, identifying women as key drivers of change in the country. In 2004, AJWS began funding Karen Women Organization (KWO) on the Thai/Burmese border, supporting its resource centers, which were used to coordinate women’s training workshops, projects and activities in camps on the border. These centers were also used to facilitate communication between KWO and

<sup>5</sup> Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003, Public Law 108-61 108th Congress, July 28, 2003. Available at: [http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/bfda\\_2003.pdf](http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/bfda_2003.pdf).

internally displaced people in Karen state and other ethnic women's and international women's organizations.

By 2006, AJWS was supporting six organizations working to empower displaced ethnic women. That year, three women leaders of AJWS grantees were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Several have since gone on to win other human rights and humanitarian awards. In 2008, Zipporah Sein, director of KWO and founding member of Women's League of Burma (an umbrella of 13 women's organizations established by several AJWS grantees), was elected the first female General Secretary for the Karen National Union (KNU), a political organization that represents a significant segment of Burma's Karen community. The KNU includes an armed wing called the Karen National Liberation Army, and operates with state-like authority in the areas under its control.

## ***Underground Communications Efforts Support the Saffron Revolution***

In August 2007, a pro-democracy protest led by Burma's monks and nuns rocked the country and the world. After a sudden 500 percent fuel price hike by the government, activists and lay people took to the streets. The government arrested and beat the peaceful demonstrators, spawning an outpouring of support from thousands of Burmese monks and nuns that became known as the "Saffron Revolution."

On September 24, 2007, tens of thousands of people marched together in more than 25 cities—the biggest anti-government demonstration since 1988. Two days later, government troops began to raid monasteries, arresting and killing people. On October 11, the United Nations

Security Council issued its first ever formal statement on Burma, urging the regime to release political prisoners and to end the use of violence against civilians.

Taking place a few years before the advent of online social networking as a tool for popular revolution, the Saffron Revolution emerged through the communications efforts of Burma's grassroots underground, including civil society organizations and monks. Communications networks had been built as a result of trainings in human rights, community organizing and non-violent tactics that a number of civil society organizations had conducted over many years. Burma Partnership, an AJWS grantee since 2010, in close collaboration with underground networks, was able to channel information and amplify messages of the Saffron Revolution to the outside world, in a timely and effective way. Over time, says one AJWS grantee, activists built a "secret link" between organizations working inside and outside of Burma, which enabled them to circumvent the government's blockade of information and get the word out about the protests. These investments in training and network-building helped to create an enabling environment for activists to communicate and collaborate as they challenged government repression.

While the loss of life and violence committed against the protestors was a human tragedy, the Saffron Revolution was a turning point for activists, who began to feel that there was a possibility for change. "Yes, there was a brutal crackdown and many monks were killed and imprisoned every day," says Khin Ohmar, coordinator of Burma Partnership, "but people—particularly the young people—started to feel really eager about letting the information out."

The underground network that spread the Saffron Revolution also spurred the development of a new generation of activists. With AJWS funding, many of the organizations on the Thai/Burmese border have brought emerging leaders in their early 20s from within Burma to trainings on the border, covering topics such as community organizing, women's rights, and documenting and reporting human rights abuses. To get to these trainings, people often travel for up to a month, on foot, through dangerous areas. Those who return to Burma work within local organizations and their communities and teach others what they have learned. "It's like these organizations have planted people all over the country who can challenge the status quo," says AJWS's grants program officer for Burma. "A voice in their community who can say, 'No, this is not okay.'"

For example, Hkawng Seng Pan, who studied human rights at Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) in 2007 when she was 22, is now deputy coordinator at KWAT and is participating in international decision-making spaces such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, in New York.



A Saffron Revolution demonstration on September 9, 2007, minutes before police opened fire and a Japanese photojournalist was killed.

PHOTO BETH JONES

## ***A Disaster Spawns Further Growth of the Grassroots Movement***

On May 2, 2008, just a few months after the Saffron Revolution, Cyclone Nargis hit Burma's low-lying Irrawaddy Delta, bringing the country into further isolation. The military junta initially obstructed all foreign aid, preventing the delivery of food, clean water and medicine, and refused to grant entry to foreign aid workers. Having left over 138,000 dead and at least 2.4 million people affected, the cyclone was the worst natural disaster in the country's history. It was also the most public: by turning away aid, the regime drew the world's eyes to its atrocities, and grassroots organizations took advantage of this opportunity for increased exposure.

While international aid organizations couldn't reach victims, AJWS's grantees and other civil society organizations rose to the challenge of providing the cyclone relief that the government withheld. AJWS grantees Human Rights Education Institute of Burma and Mae Tao Clinic and their partners used local networks to provide critical humanitarian aid. NGOs on the border organized themselves into Emergency Assistance Teams-Burma (EAT), a community-based network of organizations and individuals, to provide aid and assistance to cyclone survivors. Between August 2008 and June 2009, EAT documented how the government had blocked humanitarian aid, collecting 103 testimonies from relief workers and storm survivors, and releasing a report on its findings.<sup>6</sup>

This documentation informed "I Want to Help My Own People," a report released in 2010 by Human Rights Watch. It noted that a positive outcome of Nargis was the expansion of community-based initiatives, such as EAT. The report quotes a UN official saying that it is important to remember that the initial response to Nargis was a local response: "It was the Burmese people themselves who responded, and their solidarity with the victims of the cyclone was exemplary."<sup>7</sup>

While it was a humanitarian catastrophe, Cyclone Nargis created a new space for activists to emerge above ground, provide humanitarian aid and empower their own communities in the recovery process. After the [Saffron]

revolution and the cyclone, "inter-ethnic political and democracy activism grew further," says Khin Ohmar, of AJWS grantee Burma Partnership.

## ***Women Insist that Burma's Crimes be Investigated***

In 2009, the Women's League of Burma, an AJWS grantee, enlisted 64 leading women's organizations to call upon the UN to investigate the military regime's crimes against humanity. On March 2, 2010, in collaboration with the Nobel Women's Initiative and coinciding with a session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's League of Burma led an "International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Burma" in New York City, which heard the testimonies of 12 women, including several members of AJWS grantees.

The judges found the Burmese regime guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and recommended that the UN Security Council refer Burma to the International Criminal Court. News of the Tribunal and its recommendations were picked up by *The New York Times* and other media outlets and formed the basis for subsequent discussions during meetings between representatives from the Women's League of Burma and high-level officials, including United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

Later that month, Tomás Ojea Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Burma, called on the UN to consider the possibility of establishing an official Commission of Inquiry. He wrote, "According to consistent reports, the possibility exists that some of these human rights violations may entail crimes against humanity or war crimes under the terms of the Status of the International Criminal Court."<sup>8</sup>

## ***Citizens Demand Fair Elections and a Constitution that Ensures Equality for All***

For the first time since 1990, general elections were scheduled and the date was set for November 2010. But the people of Burma knew that these elections would be neither free nor fair. Underground networks and organizations in Burma and on its borders, including AJWS grantees Palaung Women's Organization (PWO), SWAN and Social Development Center, collaborated to launch a "No Vote" campaign against the election in 2010. Burma

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<sup>6</sup> Suwanvanichkij et al, "After the Storm: Voices from the Delta," Emergency Assistance Team and the Center for Public Health and Human Rights at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, March 2009. Web. Accessed 29 February 2012. Available at: [http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/AfterTheStorm\\_FullReport-2.pdf](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/AfterTheStorm_FullReport-2.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, "I Want to Help My Own People: State Control and Civil Society in Burma After Cyclone Nargis," 2010. Web. Accessed 12 March, 2012. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0410webwcover.pdf>.

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<sup>8</sup> Tomás Ojea Quintana, "Progress Report of the Special Rapporteur On the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar." Human Rights Council, Thirteenth Session, Agenda item 4, March 10, 2010. Web. Accessed 27 February, 2012. Available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/13session/A-HRC-13-48.pdf>.





Zipporah Sein, General Secretary of Karen National Union and former director of Karen Women Organization.

PHOTO KAREN WOMEN ORGANIZATION

Partnership mobilized regional and international solidarity groups to support this campaign. The shared campaign strengthened alliances between different ethnic groups as well as with the Burman majority.

While the elections did, in fact, turn out to be illegitimate, election fraud was publicized in Burma in a new way, as citizens used mobile phones to report what happened at polling stations. AJWS grantees, such as Burma Partnership, documented and disbursed information about intimidation and fraud at the polls. The Network for Human Rights Documentation in Burma, a network that includes four AJWS partners, produced a report entitled “Human Rights Violations in Burma’s 2010 Elections.” Despite the problems with the vote, there were a few areas where individuals from opposition parties managed to be elected at the local or state level.

## **The Door to Human Rights Begins to Open**

In the last couple of years, AJWS’s grantees have reached a new level of international recognition and influence. In 2010, *The Economist* ran an article on Burma that cited the work of PWO. Information networks are continuing to get the word out about human rights violations that are still occurring in the country, particularly against the Kachin ethnic minority.

In August 2011, President Thein Sein initiated dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, who, during her time under house arrest had come to represent the aspirations of Burma’s people for democracy and human rights. Coming full circle

from the 1990s, when the common narrative among civil society organizations was “democracy first, ethnic concerns second,” Suu Kyi (among others) has begun to emphasize ethnic rights as a key dimension for peace and national reconciliation.

In October 2011, KWAT received international attention when it published “Burma’s Cover Up War: Atrocities Against the Kachin People,” a report that documents how the Burmese government targeted civilians with torture, sexual violence and killings, and displaced over 25,000 people when it broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army.<sup>9</sup>

When Hkawng Seng Pan, of KWAT, initially told a UN representative how many people had been displaced, the woman did not believe her. But in December 2011, UN staff visited six IDP camps in Burma. After the visit, the UN released its own report condemning the displacement and abuse, confirming that there were 50,000 internally displaced people in Kachin State, up from an estimated 29,000 in October 2011.<sup>10</sup> The UN’s investigation and report was a positive outcome for KWAT, which has long been working to ensure that the reality of human rights violations in Burma reaches influential international institutions and policymakers.

Many organizations, such as PWO and KHRG, are testing potential opportunities to build democratic processes, such as engaging members of Parliament and gathering information for the National Human Rights Commission. Burma Partnership has mobilized a grassroots campaign calling for the National Human Rights Commission to become independent and to abide by the Paris Principles for human rights institutions. Many civil society groups feel that amending Burma’s Constitution is essential for building democracy in Burma.

The voices of AJWS’s grantees are now being heard in the halls of power in Washington, D.C., and are shaping the interactions between American and Burmese leadership. In anticipation of a visit in December 2011 by Hillary Clinton—the most senior U.S. official to visit Burma in 50 years—Women’s League of Burma sent a letter to Clinton, requesting that she demand an end to the use of rape as a weapon of war against ethnic women in Burma. The letter highlighted a report that KWAT had released in September 2011, describing the gang rape and murder of a 39-year

<sup>9</sup> Kachin Women’s Association Thailand, “Burma’s Cover Up War: Atrocities Against the Kachin People,” October 2011. Web. Accessed 12 March 2012. Available at: [http://www.kachinwomen.com/images/stories/publication/repor\\_%20book.pdf](http://www.kachinwomen.com/images/stories/publication/repor_%20book.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> UN-OCHA, “Myanmar: Displacement in Kachin State,” December 28, 2011. Web. Accessed 12 March, 2012. Available at: [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/2011-12-28-OCHA-Kachin\\_Update-red.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/2011-12-28-OCHA-Kachin_Update-red.pdf).

old woman and her 17-year old daughter, and the killing of her father.<sup>11</sup> This letter was part of an effort by many civil society representatives who sent messages to Clinton and met with her during her visit to Burma.

During her visit, Clinton spoke out about this issue: “While there has been some progress in political and social matters, particularly here in Rangoon, terrible violence continues elsewhere, especially in some of the ethnic nationality areas, which, in addition to the continuing conflicts, suffer from unacceptably high rates of poverty, disease, and illiteracy, and from the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, which I raised directly with the government yesterday.”<sup>12</sup>

## ***Civil Society Plays a Role in Peace Negotiations***

Today, ethnic armed resistance groups are negotiating a cease-fire process with the Burmese government. AJWS’s grantees are lobbying ethnic political and military leaders to make sure that the concerns of women and youth from war-affected areas are prioritized. This is essential given that these populations have been profoundly impacted by decades of conflict. In some cases, ethnic leaders are proactively consulting women’s and youth organizations. The expanded role of civil society in holding their leaders accountable is a major and promising shift.

In addition to marshaling the next generation of leaders living in Burma and along its borders, AJWS grantees are capitalizing on the strengths of the diaspora. Many political exiles are returning from abroad, where they have attended university and gained valuable skills. For example, several AJWS grantees have organized seminars with Karen people who have returned to their communities in Burma to talk about the current political situation and to seek their input on strategy.

In some cases civil society leaders have successfully entered politics. In late March 2012, KWO’s Zipporah Sein and Htoo Paw, a young woman who was trained by KWO and has since begun working with KNU’s foreign affairs department (and who participated in an AJWS speaking tour in 2008), were key members of a KNU delegation that held peace talks with President Thein Sen and dialogues with Aung San Suu Kyi and other newly-elected members of Parliament. It is an extraordinary accomplishment for

women to be at the forefront of these talks, given the entrenched patriarchal structures in Burma.

## ***Volunteers Help Build Sustainable Organizations***

Over the past nine years, AJWS has sent approximately 100 skilled volunteers to work with some of our grantees on the Thailand side of the Thai/Burmese border. Volunteers offer support and training in English, communications and other skills that grantees sometimes lack.

Over the last couple of years, AJWS has seen a shift in the types of projects for which our grantees request volunteers. While they still seek help with human rights documentation, report writing and advocacy, they have increasingly recognized the need to build internal capacity to sustain their efforts. In the past two years, many volunteers have helped organizations with strategic planning and financial management. The Karen Environmental and Social Action Network told us recently: “We [have] learned from our volunteers, who are outsiders coming and helping us develop skills and build capacity. We cannot make this change all by ourselves. Most ethnic groups from rural areas don’t have a chance to go to university.”

## ***Looking Ahead***

Much remains to be done, particularly with respect to building peace and implementing lasting democratic reforms. Looking forward to the next ten years, AJWS’s goals are to enable marginalized communities to become increasingly organized, vocal and active; to help them succeed in accessing justice, such as applying the rule of law and addressing impunity; to ensure that there will be a vibrant multi-ethnic civil society advocating for democracy, political reform and accountability; and to promote gender equality so that women will increasingly participate in decision making and the political sphere.

From the perspective of the groups AJWS supports, there has been progress, but there is still a long road ahead. As one former Burmese political prisoner said recently at a donor conference on Burma, echoing the sentiment of many of our grantees, “This is not change. It is merely the start of change. Our country is like a newborn baby.”

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<sup>11</sup> Women’s League of Burma, “Women’s League of Burma: Letter to US Secretary of State Clinton,” November 25, 2011. Web. Accessed 20 March, 2012. Available at: <http://uscampaignforburma.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/WLB-letter-to-Madam-Hillary-Clinton.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Press Availability, Rangoon, Burma, December 2, 2011. Web. Accessed 20 March, 2012. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/12/178103.htm>.

## NOTES

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