

AJWS REPORTS

Fall 2008

THE PANDEMIC STOPS HERE

INSIDE:

Grassroots Partners Combat AIDS

Inside Burma

Empowerment on the Air

The Global Food Crisis





AJWS Reports

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**Linda Heller Kamm and Nancy Schwartz Sternoff were inadvertently omitted from the board of trustees list in the 2007 Annual Report. AJWS would like to publicly recognize them here.*

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Dear Friends:



This issue was composed during a unique period for me at AJWS. I left my desk in New York and spent a month in the AJWS Volunteer Corps working at Ikamva Labantu, a South African NGO that runs a vast network of services in Cape Town's impoverished townships (see "Redefining Sabbatical," page 14). I witnessed the impacts of poverty, violence and disease up close in South Africa and saw how the support AJWS provides makes it possible for a local organization to effect change.

We must recognize that the brutality, lack of care and resources, and inequality that define the lives of so many of the world's poor are not the result of individual injustices; rather, they are part of a global "pandemic." This word, most often used to describe the scourge of HIV/AIDS, can also be seen to encompass the ethnic violence that erupted in South Africa this summer; human rights abuses in Burma after Cyclone Nargis; hunger around the world as families struggle against rising food prices. AJWS and its partners reject the finality of this injustice. This issue is dedicated to activists everywhere—at the International AIDS Conference, in refugee camps, farms, community centers and schools, and in offices run by AJWS grantees and other grassroots organizations around the world—whose voices are ringing out, saying "the pandemic stops here."

Ruth W. Messinger
President

AJWS Reports is published biannually by American Jewish World Service, 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.



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COVER AJWS grantee KCCC, in Kampala, Uganda, works to mitigate the psychosocial, economic and medical impact of HIV/AIDS in slum communities. Photograph by Addie Guttag.

OPPOSITE PAGE Children playing in Ghana. Photograph by Stephanie Pell, AJWS Volunteer Summer, 2008.

ABOVE Children at AJWS grantee KCCC, Kampala, Uganda. Photograph by David Rotbard.

RIGHT A woman from the Daborin Single Mothers' Association winnows rice at a small processing plant in the northern Ghanaian town of Bolgatanga. Photograph by Finbarr O'Reilly/REUTERS.

AJWS Reports was printed on paper that was produced locally and contains 30% post-consumer recycled content material. This issue saved 2 tons of wood, 11 million BTUs of energy, required 5,000 fewer gallons of water, eliminated 2,400 lbs. of CO2 from greenhouse gas production and prevented 700 lbs. of solid waste from entering landfills. These estimates were made using the Environmental Defense Paper Calculator. For more information, please visit www.papercalculator.org.



Behind the Global Food Crisis

Reported by Sara Hahn, Matthew Emry and Leah Kaplan Robins

PHOTO AMIT DAVE/REUTERS

The numbers are staggering: 850 million people are chronically hungry each day. Ten million die each year of hunger and hunger-related diseases. In a brutal blow for the world's poor, prices for rice, wheat and corn—the primary elements of a low-income diet—have soared world-wide. For billions of people, even basic staples are now too expensive. The “crisis” reported in the news is overwhelming populations around the world:

According to the World Food Programme, in Sri Lanka, 51 percent of five- to seven-year-olds in conflict areas experience malnutrition and stunted growth; in Ethiopia, more than 12 million people are affected by malnutrition and decreased crop production; in Haiti, 42 percent of children under age five are chronically malnourished.

Requests for emergency assistance have poured in from AJWS partners struggling to deal with encroaching hunger. Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environment, in Uganda, wrote: “Many children are stunted and adults wasted; the sick, people living with AIDS and the elderly starve to death. The price of food is so high here that people can no longer

afford to buy it. And food aid is just a drop in the ocean.”

The impact is clear, but the terminology is confusing. The term “food crisis” implies that there is a lack of food, when in reality, there is an enormous surplus. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, global cereal (wheat, rice, coarse grains) production in 2008 is forecast to increase 2.8 percent, to a record 2.1 billion tons. This is 1.6 billion tons more than forecast consumption for the same year. Clearly the crisis is not about the availability of food globally, but about access to it locally. The term “global food insecurity crisis” is more fitting of the real state of global food affairs.

The factors fuelling food insecurity are complicated, and even among experts there continues to be a debate about what's to blame. Here, we break down the jargon to explain some of the complex issues contributing to the crisis:

Food Sovereignty refers to the rights of people, particularly farming families and peasants, to control their own land and access to food. When poor communities can't produce their own food, they are reliant on the fluctuating forces of the international

market—a recipe for disaster when prices rise.

Global Agribusiness: Large-scale transnational corporate farming, or “agribusiness,” can be destructive to local agricultural independence. Small farmers can't compete on an unequal playing field with giant, predatory corporations, and are often forced to relocate from their lands. In resource-rich areas such as Mexico, Cambodia and India, land is being degraded, seized and privatized by outsiders for capital gain.

Trade Policy: Local farmers are hurt by free-trade agreements that benefit international commerce for politically and economically powerful countries at the expense of the poor. The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), for example, has opened local markets to highly subsidized American agricultural products. Staples such as cooking fuel, basic agricultural products and water are sold to communities in the developing world at artificially cheap prices that put struggling local farmers out of business, deepening the community's dependence on aid in a vicious cycle. While in the long run, many economies could benefit from reducing dependence on subsidies, eliminating them nearly always exacerbates developing nations' already unacceptable

ABOVE Farmers walk toward a paddy field to sow saplings in the village of Visalpur, India.

levels of unemployment, hunger, extreme poverty, AIDS and other health problems.

Biofuel Boom: Biofuels are organic energy sources derived from biological material (mostly plants). The most well known is the corn-based ethanol, hailed by some as the solution to Western dependence on oil. Demand for this fuel alternative has curtailed the amount of land available for growing edible corn and caused the price of corn to rise dramatically on international markets, making this important staple too expensive for the poor to afford.



The causes of the global food crisis are manifold. The few factors suggested here combine with additional concerns such as climate change and natural disasters that devastate farm lands; migration that damages rural economies; and poor health from HIV/AIDS and other diseases that decimates workforces. Regardless of where responsibility lies, the situation has become what the WFP calls a “silent tsunami”—immense and deadly.

This metaphor is apt, because as with natural disasters, the impact of this crisis is most acutely felt by the poorest and most vulnerable populations. Market fluctuations hit those living in poverty the hardest, because, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, most of the world's poor currently spend at least 80 percent of their household income on food. AJWS project partner Kilihi Self Help Project, in Kenya, reported that “food scarcity has been the root cause of poverty and hunger here in our community, where most families survive on less than a dollar a day.”

In regions where many hover on the brink of starvation, a spike in food cost can quickly escalate into political instability and violence. In 2008, rising prices sparked food-related riots and unrest in 30 countries, half in Africa. In places like Somalia, where refugees languish in camps, soaring food prices increase suffering exponentially. AJWS grantee Social Relief and Development Agency, which works

to provide food to the most marginalized of displaced Somalis, reported that “the humanitarian situation in Somalia is the worst in the history of the country.” Conservative estimates say that 43% of the population (3.25 million people) needs urgent humanitarian aid.

Kate Kroeger, AJWS director of grants, says that this crisis will not ebb without a global shift in the way policy-makers, businesses and individuals view

food production and distribution. “The international community must approach the food insecurity crisis not merely as an economic or agricultural challenge, but as a human rights issue,” she says. It is essential, for the survival of millions, to support food sovereignty, to empower local farmers to produce sustainable, plentiful staples for their own communities, and to ensure that our global surplus of food actually feeds those who need it most desperately. ■■



KIDS AGAINST HUNGER

A Haitian student walks past bags of groceries for sale in the slum of Cite-Soleil in Port-au-Prince.

PHOTO EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

AJWS supports organizations that are approaching the food crisis from a grassroots perspective. Among them:

- **World Neighbors, Haiti:** Funded by AJWS since 2001, World Neighbors is helping seven associations of small agricultural producers boost food production in Haiti. The farming associations use shared technology and collaborate to identify local resources and cultivate degraded land.
- **Rural Organization for Social Education, India:** An AJWS grantee since 2002, ROSE works with farmers to develop sustainable agricultural techniques such as soil preparation, seed processing and the use of bio-fertilizers. At ROSE's Field Farmers' Schools, farmers exchange best practices for water conservation, organic farming and low-cost rice cultivation.
- **Kilihi Self Help Project, Kenya:** Supported by AJWS since 2002, KSHP teaches organic farming methods to reverse declining soil fertility and low crop yields and address malnutrition among people living with HIV/AIDS. Last year, KSHP trained more than 2,000 farmers—half of whom are women—and helped its members launch a commercial venture producing immune-system-fortifying porridge.

Empowerment ON THE AIR

Radio is becoming a vital tool for communication in Oaxaca, Mexico, where human rights abuses are flagrant and print and televised media can be highly censored. The low-tech, easily accessible medium is used by local peoples to transmit everything from educational programming and calls to action to messages of solidarity and justice. Radio gives communities an outlet and a voice, and is an important resource for promoting democracy and free speech.

The airwaves are especially important to AJWS grantee CACTUS (an acronym that in English means the "Working Together Center for Community Support"), which among its many human rights programs in rural and indigenous communities of the Mixteca region, trains young people to use radio as a tool of dialogue and expression.

One member of the CACTUS

radio network is Radio Rabiosa ("Rabid Radio"), a station run and produced entirely by teenagers. "La Rabiosa means something that's contagious, energetic," says *locutor* (DJ) Fatima Herrera, 16. Herrera participated in CACTUS's radio-communications training workshop and now runs a regular program that mixes discussion and music. "I got involved so that I could help create a space for young people's varied interests," she says. "That's why I call my program 'Omelette.' It has lots of ingredients—many topics of interest to youth, all tossed in together."

Luni Gonzalez, also 16, is a technician for the station. "Radio Rabiosa is a way to transmit information that's not publicized," he says. "Right now, I'm planning my own program that will focus on social protest music. It will be a way to protest the bad things happening in our communities: discrimination, poverty, exploitation of resources."

Herrera says that the training she received from CACTUS "helped build my self-esteem." Gonzalez adds: "It's *chido* (great) to know that you can help."

Bety Cariño, CACTUS's executive director, sees tremendous value in this project. "The radio programs are the voices of the community," she says. "We've never been invited to speak, never had the opportunity to articulate who we are. This breaks the silence."

—Sara Hahn

In late August 2008, Radio Rabiosa's headquarters was raided by state police, under the direction of the state ministry of communications. CACTUS and Radio Rabiosa were given no prior notice that the ministry would take them off air by force. All of the station's equipment, including transmitters and computers, was confiscated. Using legislation backed by the International Labor Organization guaranteeing indigenous peoples the right to communication, Radio Rabiosa is challenging its closure and plans to be back on the air soon.

Reflections on Hope and Despair: A Conversation about Genocide in Darfur

Distinguished Panelists:

Ann Curry, NBC News Anchor and Correspondent

Daoud Hari, Darfuri refugee and author

Nicholas D. Kristof, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, *The New York Times*

John Prendergast, Co-Chair, ENOUGH Project

with

Ruth W. Messinger, President, American Jewish World Service

To purchase tickets, please visit www.ajws.org/darfurluncheon or contact Kate Greenberg at 212.792.2834 / kgreenberg@ajws.org.

Tuesday, December 2, 2008
12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Luncheon and program

The Yale Club of New York City
50 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY

Jewish dietary laws observed



Pursuing Global Justice
Through Grassroots Change

AJWS Activism at the XVII International AIDS Conference



CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME

A rally for prevention and destigmatization in Mexico City.

PHOTO HENRY ROMERO/REUTERS

TAKING RISKS IN PREVENTION AND HOPE

For the 33 million people living with HIV/AIDS, fighting for the right to treatment, health and survival is a risky business. Will there be a vaccine? Will drug companies agree to produce antiretrovirals at lower costs? Will governments fund strained health systems that cannot deliver? Will husbands wear condoms? Will the violence that women face ever stop? These and many other questions surround both individual and systemic survival of HIV/AIDS.

What gives room for hope and even joy within this bleak landscape is the world-wide grassroots and community-based response. Voices of the many thousands who have been affected and infected and fought to build what is now the largest global social movement in history, resounded throughout the XVII International AIDS conference in Mexico City this past August. I attended along with

AJWS staff and grantees and 23,000 delegates from around the world.

Witnessing this swell of activism was both devastating and thrilling. It was devastating because after 25 years we have not won the battle. We know that HIV infection is both preventable and treatable and yet more people have died or are infected than in any other public health crisis in history. We know that HIV follows the other pandemics of global poverty, gender-based violence and human rights abuse, but political will, economic resources, and socio-cultural norms have prevented us from overcoming it. In the last year alone there has been one disappointing result after another in trials of biomedical prevention tools. Antiretroviral drugs, now wildly successful in lengthening and improving quality of life, are out of reach for millions. While the U.S. increased its funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bush administration

imposed ideological restrictions that severely stunted its applicability.

Yet it was thrilling because being at this convention was being in the presence of greatness. Representatives from every country, religion, class and sexual identity showed how global solidarity begins with an unwavering commitment. Not one of these activists is waiting for governments or medical systems to solve the problem for them. I saw firsthand how much AJWS funding matters in saving lives, mobilizing advocates for human rights and empowering grassroots initiatives. I came home feeling that our work is critical, and that we should prioritize the issue again. One grantee told me: "One of the differences between AJWS and other funders I have met is that AJWS takes risks and goes where others don't. It is going to take many more risks to alter the course of this epidemic."

—Susan Rosenberg

THE PANDEMIC STOPS HERE



PHOTO AJAY VERMA/REUTERS

Twenty-five AJWS grantee organizations attended the XVII International AIDS Conference, taking their pioneering community-organizing techniques and innovative educational models to the international stage. AJWS hosted a partners' meeting before the conference that drew these community leaders from around the world together to network, collaborate and strengthen the local and global movement against the pandemic. Interviews by Sara Hahn and Susan Rosenberg. Condensed and edited by Morgan Soloski.

What are the critical HIV/AIDS-related issues facing your community?

Miriam Miranda, Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH): HIV is a serious problem in Garifuna (Afro-descendants) communities, especially among the immigrant population, where the state does not recognize them or intervene to help. There is a lack of information that has made the incidence of HIV infection in the community much higher. People living with HIV/AIDS suffer from a lot of stigma and discrimination, which in our case, not only comes from carrying HIV or from having AIDS, but from our origins, our roots.

Limota Goroso Giwa, International Women Communication Centre (IWCC), Nigeria: We see HIV as a women's problem. It's a gender issue, as women are accused of being carriers of the virus in Nigeria. We are powerless. We live in a patriarchal, polygamous society, and we have a lot of cultural ambivalence about what women can and cannot do.

Karyn Kaplan, Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group (TTAG): In Thailand, as in much of Asia, the HIV epidemic is rampant among groups that have been criminalized or highly stigmatized and marginalized—things that make them more vulnerable to HIV. Many governments and communities see drug users, sex workers and men who have sex with men as immoral and deserving of punishment, to be deprived of their basic rights. These attitudes are perpetuated by the government as an excuse to not provide services to these groups.

Veronica Kanyongo, Seke Rural Home-Based Care, Zimbabwe: Most [people in my community] don't know the facts about HIV. My job is to make people aware of the links between HIV and cultural practices that might fuel its spread. Some traditions that people think are quite normal, because they've been practiced since the days of our great-grandparents, are now fueling HIV, and many people do not know that.

How has your partnership with AJWS helped address HIV/AIDS issues in your community?

Miriam Miranda, OFRANEH: AJWS funds our work with teenagers and couples on encouraging condom use. It has been harder for the women to negotiate condom use, as men have always had power over them. We are working with men on this issue, and that is very important.

Florence Enyogu, Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare (UCOBAC): We've worked with AJWS since 2004 on HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs for children and women. We have implemented an HIV/AIDS home-based care program in three districts of Uganda to train family caregivers to care for the person living with HIV, to provide childcare, food and nutrition, basic hygiene and income generation.

Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, Equal Ground, Sri Lanka: AJWS is funding a counseling program to address mental

ABOVE School children take part in a campaign for AIDS awareness in the northern Indian city of Chandigarh.

health issues and maintain a safe space for LGBT people. Our HIV/AIDS work focuses primarily on LGBT issues and how HIV affects this community. We are also fighting to decriminalize homosexuality in Sri Lanka and to empower the LGBT community so that they may live with dignity and pride.

Have international funding or policy restrictions directly affected your ability to achieve results?

Karyn Kaplan, TTAG: The hardest thing about our work is that Thailand has been extremely influenced by the United States' federal ban on needle exchange [programs that provide drug users with free clean needles to prevent sharing], which we're trying to repeal. But because Thailand is a recipient of development money and drug-control money from the United States, it is not very receptive to harm-reduction or HIV-prevention methods that injecting drug users need to prevent infection.

Florence Enyogu, UCOBAC: We were fighting HIV through the U.S. government's ABC strategy—abstinence, being faithful and condom use. However, recently, with the new PEPFAR guidelines, we were told to teach only abstinence and monogamy. Before, ABC was working, but the most important component was the C—condom use. We used to receive free condoms from USAID, and

all that has now been cut off because of PEPFAR.

Violet Shivutse, GROOTS Kenya: We have heard rumors that there is to be a shift in international funding, from directly funding HIV/AIDS programs to broader health care system funding. We still don't have enough money to sustain HIV/AIDS programs, and our health care system basically collapsed decades ago, though the international community is just taking note of this. But you cannot shift completely away from HIV/AIDS funding in favor of improving the infrastructure; all aspects must be funded in conjunction.

How do you expect the International AIDS Conference to inform your work?

Florence Enyogu, UCOBAC: This is a chance to bring grassroots women together. After sharing the tactics we apply in our communities and the challenges that we face during project implementation we realize that we have the same vision, and we will explore what actions we must take to fulfill our goals and speak with a collective voice. Coming to this conference will help us form a clearer vision and more defined strategies to achieve our goals.

Limota Goroso Giwa, IWCC: I came to this meeting to see new innovations in the field and to share ideas of what

is working in my community. This conference enables us to comprehend achievements and to find lasting solutions to common problems. We have come to achieve new ideas, gain new knowledge and learn how we can improve our work.

Pisey Ly, Womyn's Agenda for Change, Cambodia: People want their voices to be heard internationally. It's not just HIV/AIDS in Cambodia we are talking about, it's the global issues. If we talk about the need for medication, we're not only discussing Cambodian sex workers and the Cambodian HIV-positive population; the international community and policy makers must be involved. It is essential that people work together. ■■■

AJWS congratulates the four AJWS partners who were honored at the conference with the prestigious UNAIDS Red Ribbon Award 2008: Celebrating Community Leadership and Action on AIDS. These outstanding organizations were among 25 selected out of a pool of 500 nominees:

- Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana
- Social Action for Women, Burma/Thailand
- Empower Foundation, Thailand
- Sankalp Rehabilitation Trust, India

COLLECTIVE VOICE AJWS partners together in Mexico.



PHOTO MIRIAM MORAN

Global Spotlight: Burma

UN-NATURAL DISASTER

AFTER THE STORM
Cyclone Nargis refugees
await aid.

PHOTO: STAN HONDA/REUTERS

On May 2, 2008, when Cyclone Nargis devastated Burma's* Irrawaddy Delta, already destitute populations faced catastrophe as their villages and rice paddies melted to debris. When Burma's military regime slammed its doors against aid, existing funding channels, such as AJWS's partnerships, saved lives.

AJWS has funded NGOs on the Thailand-Burma border since 2002, largely in the refugee camps where human rights abuses against Burma's ethnic minorities are the most profound. Most people in the camps were born into the squalor and sadism inflicted here by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the military junta that has ruled Burma since the early sixties in what is now the longest standing military dictatorship in the world.

Now, in a country where few could imagine that life could get worse, Cyclone Nargis has redefined "suffering." Communities that were violated by generations of military abuse and neglect were hit by a natural assailant—lashed, drowned and some simply washed away.

After the storm, the SPDC attracted international scorn for its blockade against humanitarian relief and its confiscation of supplies that managed to trickle through.

AJWS's senior program officer for Asia, who visited grantees soon after the disaster, was told that the junta prevented villages from helping their neighbors, and that periodic SPDC-issued rations fed and clothed just a fraction of survivors. Compounding the crisis, thousands of people fled to the border, swelling the already overcrowded refugee camps.

Thanks to its grantees in the camps, AJWS was able to circumvent the blockade. To date, it has made five grants totaling more than \$300,000 (largely contributions from AJWS donors after the cyclone), providing critical provisions like water, rice and mosquito nets. These funds have also supported reconstruction efforts through organizations like the Emergency Assistance Team, which is using grassroots networks to reach people in the Irrawaddy and Rangoon areas. AJWS's program



officer says, "We will stand with them through it all. These were our partners before the storm and they will remain our partners after."

—Leah Kaplan Robins

*Pro-democracy activists object to using the country's official name—Myanmar—imposed by the military regime in 1989.

The Hand Behind the Killing

By Ilana Kramer

I spent the summer of 2007 in Mae Sot, Thailand, as part of the AJWS Volunteer Corps. I was assigned to work in the human rights documentation office of Karen Women's Organization (KWO), which advocates for women refugees from Burma who fled their country because of ethnic violence. When I arrived I knew very little about the human rights atrocities committed by the Burmese military regime, the SPDC. I would soon learn why and how it was exploiting, torturing and killing members of the ethnic minority groups that live within Burma's boundaries and in refugee camps along the border, but as a newcomer, I couldn't fathom 60 years of gut-wrenching violence and how the rest of the world had let it go on this long.

My job at KWO was to archive confidential documents cataloguing the kinds of abuses committed against the Karen people, an ethnic minority that represents approximately seven percent of Burma's population of 47 million and has fought for self-determination for Karen State since 1949 with its army, the KNU (Karen National Union). I read story after story of Karen women who were raped, beaten and tortured; women who watched their farms ransacked, their husbands and children murdered, their villages burned to dirt. These abuses aren't 10 years old; they were happening last week, yesterday, only an hour ago.

Out of sheer awe I clung to the women at KWO, who I saw as nothing

less than heroic freedom fighters. They would frequently travel on foot back to their villages to collect the voices of truth and torture, then return and broadcast them to the world via our Mae Sot office, hoping that someone would listen and care. As these brave women would heave the metal office gate closed, leaving for another trip, I prayed that I would see their faces again, prayed that they would not be felled by land mines or the SPDC's guns.

The following summer I returned to Mae Sot through AJWS to work at Palaung Women's Organization (PWO), an advocacy group for the Palaung ethnic minority who live in northern Shan State. I was asked to write a report on the destructive effects of opium



DISPLACED

Karen villagers fleeing to Thailand after forced relocation by the SPDC.

PHOTO: KAREN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP



PHOTO DORCUS MOO

on the community and to teach teen Palaung girls leadership and English language skills.

I thought that the suffering of the Palaung would be similar to what I had witnessed with the Karen, but I quickly learned that this ethnic group suffered differently under the regime. Though Palaung people are also tortured, raped and displaced by the SPDC, these physical attacks are not the primary form of abuse here. The Palaung are victims of a less specific, less bloody—yet still devastating enemy: the drug trade. Hiding behind a seemingly innocuous flower, the poppy, the regime has destroyed Palaung communities by forcing traditional tea farmers to cultivate opium.

PWO staff described horrendous community problems in Palaung State as a result of the military's drug trafficking; widespread addiction in the villages has led to crime and violence; the regime's laws against teaching Palaung language in schools or celebrating Palaung holidays and cultural practices have left people without the support and

prevention that a strong cultural identity provides. The SPDC is reaping the riches of the opium drug on the backs of Palaung communities that are losing their unique identity and falling apart. Palaung women at PWO agree that this is a "slow killing" of the very fabric of their communities. This contrasts with the devastation in Karen State, which continues to be quick and bloody.

For both communities, there is a lack of awareness that what people are experiencing is human rights abuse. Many Palaung grow up thinking that a slow death from drug use, starvation and poor healthcare, lack of education and a weakened family unit are 'normal.' Karen are born into villages in war zones. They move frequently on the run and anticipate rape and murder as the grim realities of life.

Even as people in both communities begin to recognize that they are victims of abuse, there remains a disparity of blame. The Karen witness the soldiers' brutality daily and have a clear target for both the army and community protests. The Palaung also fear the physical attacks

by the military, but have a harder time identifying the source of their slow killing: the societal decline, drug addiction and disintegration of their culture. It's easy to mark a crime—'rape,' 'torture,' 'murder.' But harder to link the red flowering fields of opium to the starving, uneducated child in the Palaung home without medical care, without food, without education, without a future; to link them to the Palaung family units destroyed, the children who won't know their culture of tea farming or Palaung language, who will only know opium and Burmese language.

Thankfully, this veil is slowly lifting. The people of Burma—Karen, Palaung and other ethnic nationalities—are increasingly able to identify and mark the perpetrator of their broken lives and stand up for their rights. From activists in the villages to leaders of the democracy movement, an end to the oppression is being sought through education, protest and civil-society building. In 1990 the National League for Democracy in Burma, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, won an overwhelming majority

in elections but has been prevented from assuming power. Yet Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for thirteen years by the SPDC, remains optimistic that the people of Burma have the tools to overcome the oppression. "There will be change," she says, "because all the military have are guns."

The summers of 2007 and 2008 changed my world view, fueled my human rights passion and pulled on my heartstrings in reflective and provocative ways. We can't quantify and order human rights abuses, nor would we ever want to, but we must identify them and hold the perpetrators accountable. The ethnic minority groups of Burma need peace and justice, education and fresh water, international concern and action. Identifying the hand behind the killing, both quick and slow, is the first step toward making peace, security and human rights 'normal' for all of the people of Burma. ■■



CHANGE THROUGH EDUCATION
Fifth grade students study reading in Burma.

PHOTO STRINGER/REUTERS



PHOTO LIZ VAISBEN

Travel with AJWS to **GHANA**

February 2 to 8, 2009*

Join AJWS for extraordinary encounters in Ghana! Meet activists working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in the slums of Accra, children learning about human rights in a rural village and advocates empowering women refugees. In the coastal fishing town of Cape Coast, experience Ghana's former slave castles, bustling markets and magnificent geography. Intimate conversations with leading activists, journalists, academics and politicians will illuminate the history, culture and politics of this fascinating region.

Scholar in Residence:
Rabbi Gordon Tucker, Temple Israel Center, White Plains, NY
Cost: \$3,600 (single supplement \$600)

Optional travel: Togo and Benin, February 9-12, 2009

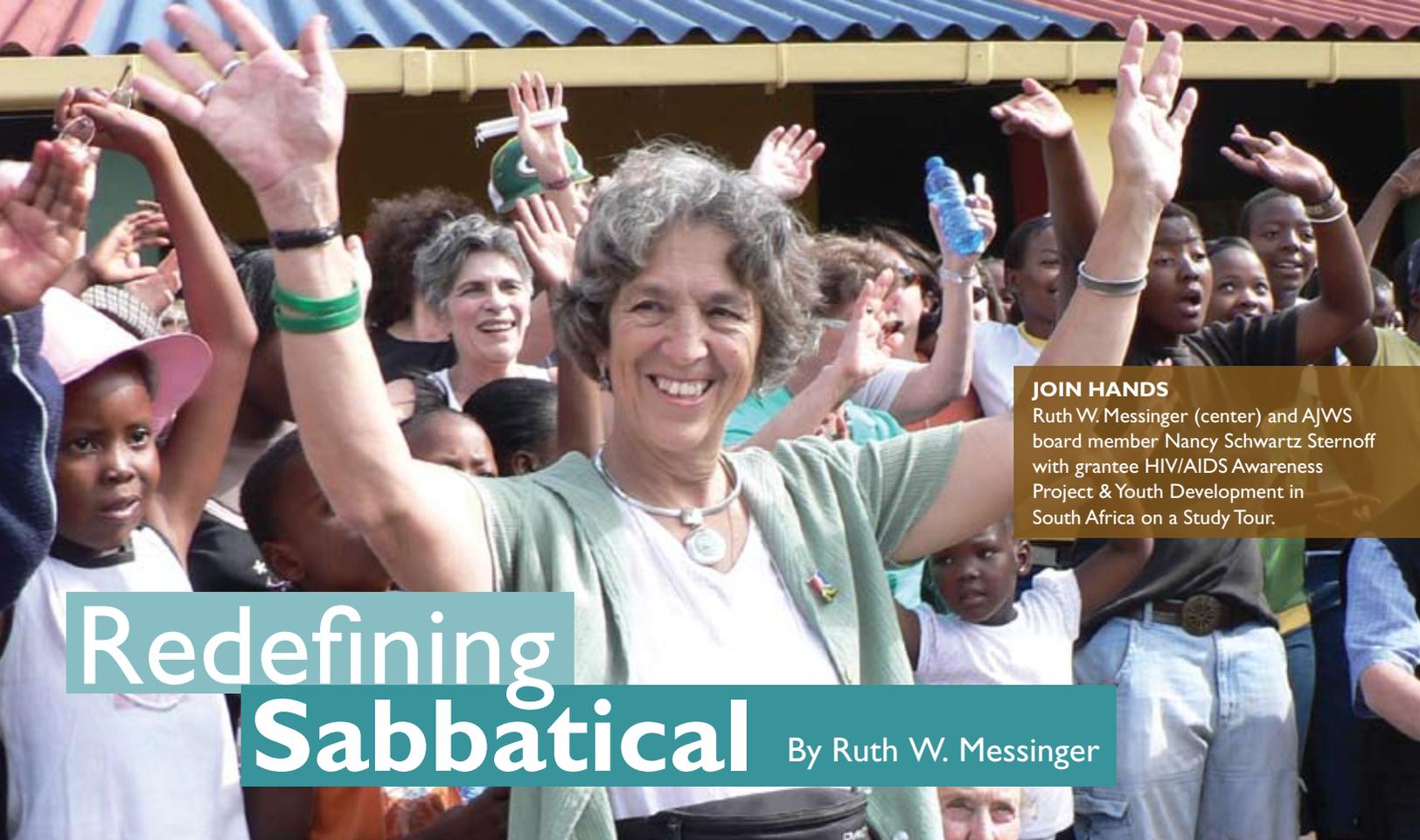
Upcoming Trips:

South Africa, July 13 to 23, 2009*

Peru, October 19 to 25, 2009*

For more information about AJWS Study Tours, please contact Rena Dascal at 212.792.2829, rdascal@ajws.org or visit www.ajws.org/studytours.

*Dates do not include travel and may alter slightly. Preference is given to first-time travelers.



JOIN HANDS
Ruth W. Messinger (center) and AJWS board member Nancy Schwartz Sternoff with grantee HIV/AIDS Awareness Project & Youth Development in South Africa on a Study Tour.

Redefining Sabbatical

By Ruth W. Messinger

PHOTO MARY KOSTMAN

I have long envied the professionals who join the AJWS Volunteer Corps each year, leaving their jobs for a few months or a year to devote their skills and experience to international grassroots organizations. This summer, after ten wonderful years as president of AJWS, I decided to take some time off myself and join them. My husband agreed, and the AJWS staff and board made it possible for us both to go to South Africa to live the life of AJWS volunteers—in my mind, the best possible sabbatical.

Andrew and I were paired with Ikamva Labantu (Xhosa for “the future of our nation”), an NGO with extraordinary vision and scope that AJWS has funded since 2002. Ikamva was founded by Jewish activist Helen Lieberman, who ventured into the townships in the ‘60s as a determined young social worker and decided to take action when she saw the shocking lack of services and opportunities and the alarming rates of poverty,

illiteracy and poor health of blacks living in the slums. Over time, and with the help of friends, staff and volunteers, she built a vast network of pre-schools, youth programs, senior centers, community health programs, gardens, and services for orphans and vulnerable children who have lost family to HIV/AIDS. Helen founded Ikamva in 1992 as an umbrella organization to support these activities, and today it reaches tens of thousands of South Africans still living in the fiercely poor, overcrowded townships. Creating a sense of community ownership and dignity, the NGO and its founder work tirelessly to empower a nation that carries the strengths and the scars of its long struggle against the ravages of apartheid.

I had the privilege of offering personal support to this organization, whose astounding work is desperately needed by the people of South Africa. I worked on a critical plan for opening multi-purpose centers

that would house several different Ikamva programs in a few townships. When complete, the centers will promote new synergies between and among the programs and the staff.

As I worked, I also gained a rough-and-tumble view of the strengths and challenges of sending a volunteer into an organization where—no surprise—people are not waiting around for outsider wisdom and where a volunteer must determine how to be really helpful. Every day I tried to apply what I have gleaned from AJWS staff, board and consultants over ten years: to be the kind of volunteer who responds to expressed rather than perceived needs; who rolls with the punches and looks for ways to make a real contribution.

I had the fascinating privilege of watching another CEO—a remarkable leader—in action. Though Ikamva deals with organizational issues that we never dream of at AJWS, including the problems faced by staff members who live in townships, I now know

that as different as some of the history, circumstances and challenges are, the core problems of running a quality organization look pretty much the same on either side of the ocean. In a way, this is reassuring both to Helen and to me—it is a reminder that we should spend more time learning from each other how to better tackle the problems on our plates.

This journey also afforded me a powerful and often painful understanding of post-apartheid South Africa. I am one of many who worked diligently in the 1980s for divestment against the South African regime, working on one occasion directly with Archbishop Tutu, the Nobel Prize-winning anti-apartheid activist. I rejoiced at Mandela's release from prison, was privileged to meet him when I was in New York City government, and was elated about his presidency. When I came to AJWS I began to learn more about the realities of a country trying to rebuild after years of vicious oppression against

its own people, newly devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and led, most recently, by a government that has not invested sufficiently in the vast majority of its citizens.

Living in South Africa brought this reality acutely home for me. Working in the townships I tried to come to grips with the contrast of this abject poverty with my life in a beautiful borrowed apartment in Cape Town, with weekends devoted to touring the magnificent countryside. Compounding this disparity was the sudden outbreak during my stay of severe political turmoil and xenophobic violence by poor South Africans against their refugee and immigrant neighbors. I witnessed the overnight rise of refugee camps around Cape Town (and many more in Johannesburg) where some 2,000 people now live. I was dismayed by the total inaction of the government and shocked by the conditions in the camp I visited. Yet I am proud that two of the very few groups who stepped forward to help the refugees were the

Treatment Action Campaign, an HIV/AIDS organization that AJWS supports, and the Jewish Habonim youth group.

As South Africa dealt with internal strife, the world continued to crumble in Zimbabwe during the summer, threatening the lives of many of AJWS's project partners there. South African President Mbeki, whose response to AIDS and the xenophobic refugee violence was sub-par, stood much too firmly against the growing determination of the rest of the world to sanction Mugabe and demand a new government in Zimbabwe.

And yet I also witnessed hope in South Africa; I heard Archbishop Tutu speak at the University of Cape Town against the xenophobia and against those who fail to call for Mugabe's ouster. It felt very much like being part of history being shaped again by someone whom I consider one of the world's remaining true heroes. Helen Lieberman and Ikamva are part of this hope, and thanks to an atypical sabbatical, for a brief period, so was I.



THE AFTERMATH

Residents of a Johannesburg township walk past shacks destroyed during anti-foreigner violence in May.

PHOTO MIKE HUTCHINGS/REUTERS

Fighting HIV/AIDS From the Pulpit

By Leah Kaplan Robins

Transforming religious leaders into activists is the mission of INERELA+, an international network of clergy from all faiths who are living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. The organization is the newly-minted offshoot of ANERELA+, which has been galvanizing faith-based leaders in sub-Saharan Africa since 2003. It is now applying its successful model outside Africa, where HIV/AIDS rates continue to rise. AJWS is proud to be a founding collegial partner—the network echoes our belief that global problems are Jewish problems, and that faith-based communities are powerful agents of change.

Jim Matarazzo, a Protestant minister and INERELA+'s acting director, says

that “well over 25 percent of the world-wide HIV response is faith-owned.” This is no surprise, especially in developing countries, where religious leaders have immense status. “Clergy are able to promote change in ways that laity cannot and often won’t,” he says. “They have a moral and ethical voice that shapes their communities, regions and in some cases, governments.” When priests and rabbis stand up and counter the destructive belief that HIV is the mark of immorality, he says, “you get a community-wide shift in attitude that breaks the silence and denial that fuels the disease.”

INERELA+ has devised a unique peer-to-peer education model to reach religious leaders: “We found

that clergy living with HIV are the most effective conduits for changing the thinking patterns of fellow clergy who used to promote negative messages,” says Matarazzo. They are taught that “though it’s much easier to give a sermon about sexual morality, it’s braver to combat stereotypes.”

Bobby Pierce, an HIV-positive Jewish educator and AIDS activist, works with INERELA+ on outreach to the Jewish community. He told AJWS that “it’s just not acceptable that many people living with the disease aren’t comfortable in formal Jewish settings like synagogues. Exclusion is a barrier to religion. Jews are taught that our *mitzvot*, religious laws, can’t be fulfilled by one person alone. Some are applicable to men, some to women, some to clergy. This teaches us that we need the entire community, and if a portion of that community is ostracized, we aren’t fully actualizing Jewish tradition.”

Pierce notes that Jews innately understand what it is to be seen as ‘the other.’ Yet still, he says, “someone has to stand up and say ‘I’m the other. I have AIDS.’” It takes a personal connection for many people to realize that the pandemic is *our* problem.

As its international movement grows, INERELA+ plans to build members’ capacity to implement prevention, treatment and support services in their own communities. Matarazzo says that Jewish involvement in this work is critical. “We’d really like to see Jewish voices be part of our movement, and we hope that our relationship with AJWS will help further this goal.” ■■



FAITH IN ACTION

Bobby Pierce (left) marching with his partner Joshua Love at the first international march against homophobia, Mexico City.

PHOTO DONALD E. MESSER

Funding Women: Meet AJWS Donor Barbara Dobkin



Issues impacting women and girls are paramount for philanthropist Barbara Dobkin, a long-time supporter of AJWS who joined the board of directors in June. Dobkin has taken a lead in supporting visionary organizations that pave the way for women's inclusion, equality and empowerment. She is the founder of Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, founding chair of the

Jewish Women's Archive, and has held leadership roles at the White House Project and the Women's Funding Network to name just a few. Her funding portfolio is heavily invested in general operating support grants, which she believes are especially critical to women's projects, where she says that "incredible things can happen as long as someone ensures that staff is paid and the lights stay on."

AJWS Reports: Why have you chosen to focus on women's causes?

Barbara Dobkin: I once heard it said that if a woman has the means she'll take care of her family; and if her family is strong it will take care of the community. I think that women can be the change agents if given the opportunity. But in so many places, including our own Jewish community, women are prevented from full participation. I support women so that my children's children have the chance to live in a world where equality is a given, and where strong women are able to build viable families and vibrant, sustainable communities.

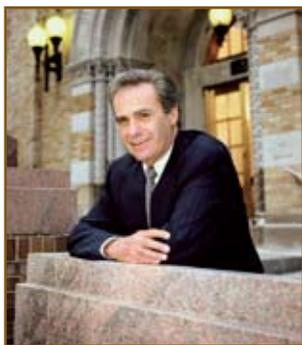
Why has AJWS become a funding priority for you?

In social work school I was taught, "start where your client is." This is AJWS's method, and I find it totally inspirational. As grantmakers it's easy for us to project what we think recipients need; AJWS doesn't make this presumption. It gives local leaders the means to articulate and pursue their own goals. Women are a priority in this organization from inside out, from supporting women-led NGOs in Africa to a favorable parental-leave policy for its own employees. This is a place that values and empowers women at its core.

What should donors know about this work?

Before I encountered AJWS I never believed that I had enough money to change anything internationally. But on my first trip to India with an AJWS group, I learned first-hand that in the developing world you can give a little money and it goes a very, very long way. AJWS opened my eyes to what can be done; most people don't understand that this is very effective money that you're giving. Though we can't fix the world all on our own, together, we can make a huge difference.

In Memoriam



Allan Rosenfield

The board, staff and global grassroots partners of American Jewish World Service mourn the passing of a distinguished member of our board of trustees who has contributed immeasurably to the work of AJWS and to the global fight against HIV/AIDS and the promotion of health care for

women. Allan was a leader in the public health community, a brilliant program innovator and a passionate believer in the importance of a world committed to a greater degree of health and justice for all. He demonstrated how to cope with illness and adversity without abandoning hope; we are all privileged to have known and worked with him and are diminished by his passing.



Makhona Mbaye

AJWS mourns the loss of our partner and friend, Makhona Mbaye, who was director of ASREAD, a Senegalese NGO that AJWS has funded since 2000. Makhona guided his organization's efforts to alleviate poverty at the grassroots level through partnerships, sustainable agricultural and empowerment of women and

youth. Former AJWS program officer Anya L. Guyer, who worked closely with Makhona, remembers him fondly: *I loved having the opportunity to visit ASREAD and watch Makhona at work. He taught me much about how to live a productive and honorable life. His death is a loss for everyone whom he met, taught and cared for during his life, as well as for those who will benefit from the work Makhona did with his life.*

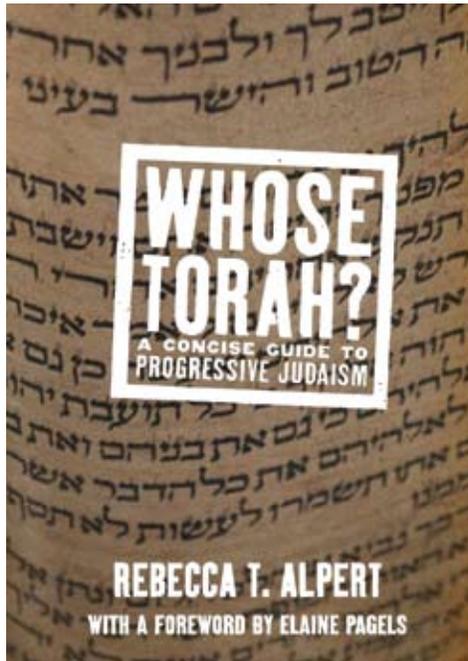
Book Review

Whose Torah? A Concise Guide to Progressive Judaism

By Rebecca T. Alpert
New York: The New Press
176 pages, \$23.95

Author Rebecca T. Alpert sees Judaism “as a vehicle to change the world.” Her book, which applies progressive Jewish views to six themes—sexuality, gender justice, race, war and peace, poverty and the environment—cites Rabbinic sage Hillel’s famous statement, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I, and, if not now, when?” Alpert sees this as a mandate for activism, both within and beyond the Jewish community.

The author, who is a pioneering Jewish feminist and among the first



female congregational rabbis, argues that the Torah is the ultimate justification for helping others. She urges Jews to take the biblical exhortation, “Justice, justice, you shall pursue,” literally. Alpert has embraced a number of secular causes under the imprimatur of Jewish ethics: ending the nuclear arms race, advocating for gay and lesbian rights,

providing sanctuary to Central American refugees, opposing the death penalty and supporting abortion and women’s reproductive rights.

Applying progressive Jewish values to her six themes, she makes a case for Jews to get involved; to work for peace, women’s rights and environmental sustainability; to confront racism, poverty and injustice. The book promotes AJWS and other organizations that are champions of Jewish activism.

In the face of the argument by many within the Jewish community that Jews should concentrate on internal survival rather than on saving others, despite the obvious mandate of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), Alpert asserts the centrality of global justice work as a fundamental Jewish value: “the moral vision in our Torah demands the pursuit of justice.” ■

—Dr. Morton I. Teicher, founding dean, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University and dean emeritus, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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www.globalgoodspartners.org

AJWS Global Snapshot



FEEDING A mother hands her child a kernel of popcorn, a staple snack in Peru. AJWS volunteer, photographer David Rotbard, encountered this intimate moment in Paucartambo, a potato-plantation village in the country's southern highlands.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE WORLD? Send AJWS your global snapshot.

E-mail high-resolution photographs to dpittman@ajws.org.
AJWS reserves the right to print submissions in any future publication.



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AJWS has received an "A" rating from the American Institute of Philanthropy since 2004 and a four-star rating from Charity Navigator for 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.