

# AJWS REPORTS

Fall 2010

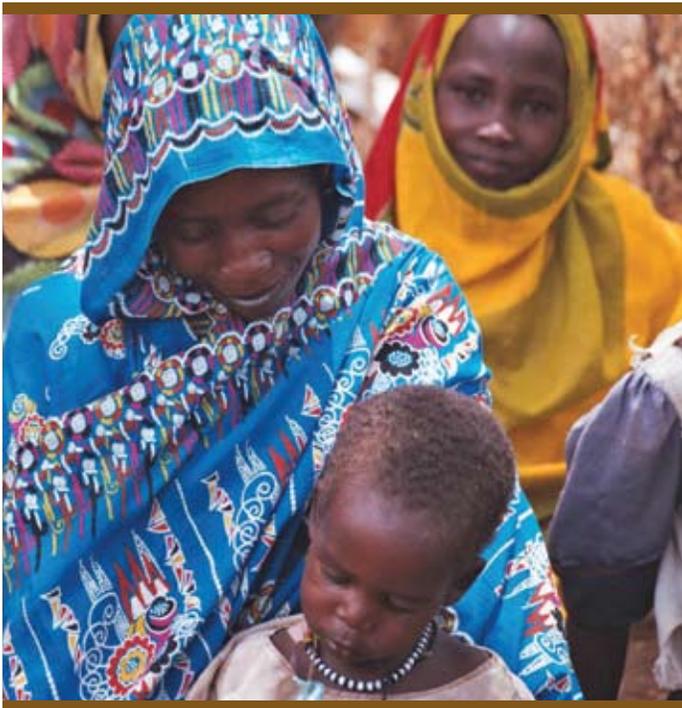
## From Disaster to Development

*25 Years of Emergency Response*

### INSIDE:

On the Ground in Haiti  
Fighting for Global Food Justice  
LGBTI Crisis in Uganda





## AJWS Reports

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## Dear Friends—

We live in a world in which disasters seem to be proliferating, striking more and more frequently in population-dense areas and impacting communities both far away and very close to home. Whether natural—like the earthquake in Haiti—or manmade—like the BP oil spill or the ongoing genocide in Darfur—these crises can make the most optimistic among us feel hopeless and helpless.

At AJWS, we hear of disasters that sometimes don't even make the news: small storms whose destruction far outweighs their force simply because they hit homes built out of mud or thatch; or human rights crises like the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, which looms over the LGBTI community, threatening to make being gay a capital offense.

AJWS provides nearly 70 grants to grassroots organizations annually for emergency assistance in situations like these. This funding responds to calls for help from our grantees conducting search-and-rescue, rebuilding homes, providing medical aid and food supplies, and advocating for relief when lives or rights are threatened by nature or human force.

It's all too easy to wring our hands in the face of this kind of destruction and suffering, but more useful to support people who refuse to be overwhelmed. Day in and day out over the past 25 years, AJWS has supported grantees who do whatever it takes to respond, rebuild and reduce the impact of disasters in the future. We are particularly proud of the 82 grassroots organizations in Southeast Asia that have used our funding to successfully rebuild their communities since the 2004 tsunami.

Their successes give us hope, and remind us that the rubble that still smothers Port-au-Prince will eventually be carted away; that local people working together can overcome seemingly insurmountable devastation.

Thank you for your support of AJWS's grassroots approach to aid. Though we cannot prevent disasters from occurring, we can ensure that affected communities have the opportunity to chart the course of their own recovery, and we can help them emerge stronger, more organized and better prepared for the next challenge that may come.

Wishing you a safe and peaceful New Year,

Sincerely,

**Ruth W. Messinger**  
President

**Barbara Dobkin**  
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**COVER** A young man orphaned by the earthquake in Haiti peers from behind the flaps of his tent in the Tapi Rouge camp outside Port-au-Prince. Evan Abramson for AJWS

**FACING PAGE** Darfuri families wait for aid in Kassab, Sudan. Ruth Messinger

**ABOVE TOP** Volunteers with AJWS grantees MOSCTHA and MUDHA attend to an elderly man in the Marie Therese refugee camp in Pétionville, Haiti. Evan Abramson for AJWS

**ABOVE RIGHT** Shortly after Cyclone Nargis hit Burma in 2008, a woman waits for emergency assistance near Danouk. REUTERS / Stringer

**IN THE AFTERMATH**

Haitian earthquake survivors who lost their homes begin to rebuild their lives from Nan Charls camp in Port-au-Prince.

# From Disaster to Development

By Leah Kaplan Robins

The impact of natural disasters and violent conflicts is deeper than bloodshed and displacement. Crises like major earthquakes, hurricanes, famine and violent conflict stop life in its tracks, disrupting education, destroying livelihoods, inflicting profound psychological trauma and corroding the fabric of society.

AJWS has facilitated recovery efforts from disasters and conflicts since 1986, when it made its first emergency grant to populations in Mozambique hit hard by famine. Over the years, working in places like Honduras, Sierra Leone, Darfur, Indonesia, Burma and Haiti, AJWS has supported local people in their efforts to rebuild and strengthen their communities.

## A local approach to aid

Because AJWS works in some of the most vulnerable communities worldwide, we often have existing grantees in areas

severely affected by natural disasters and conflicts. These grassroots organizations are able to respond immediately when crises arise, often aiding people on the ground before international responders can mobilize, and reaching remote areas often passed over by international relief efforts. AJWS's grantees also have the advantage of intimate knowledge of the unique challenges of local terrain, government and culture that can sometimes stymie international humanitarian efforts.

For example, when Cyclone Nargis hit Burma on May 2, 2008, the ruling military junta blockaded humanitarian workers for more than three weeks and seized all material aid that entered the country. But because AJWS had been funding grassroots organizations on the Thailand/Burma border since 2002, we were able to circumvent the blockade by sending money directly to these grantees. Within the first week, they were using the funds to provide

shelter, clean water and medical attention to survivors. Though Burma is an extreme example, in case after case, local aid has saved time and lives.

Supporting a local response to disasters also empowers people, often rendering communities stronger and more organized after disasters than they were before. This is because community-based organizations focus their efforts beyond the traditional pillars of emergency relief—food, shelter, water and sanitation, basic health, and physical security—and work on major underlying issues that are often neglected and underfunded, such as resettling displaced populations and orphaned children, re-establishing a reliable local food supply, preventing rape and gender-based violence, re-opening schools and addressing psychosocial trauma. They also work on reducing disaster risk, helping communities plan for future natural disasters or promote peaceful conflict resolution.

One of AJWS's most innovative and successful vehicles for empowering local efforts is our peer-exchange model, pioneered in 2003 with a meeting of grantees fighting HIV/AIDS across Africa. Since then, AJWS has orchestrated groups of like-minded organizations around the world to collaborate, build alliances and share best practices. This approach has proven effective in fostering locally-led emergency and disaster recovery, as organizations in the midst of a crisis learn important tactics from peers that have faced similar challenges.

This fall, AJWS and our collegial partner GROOTS will hold exchanges in Haiti for women members of Haitian NGOs to work with their counterparts in India, Turkey, Honduras and Jamaica who have responded to disasters in their own countries. The Haitian women will come away with leadership skills and strategies for recovery efforts, including securing housing, re-establishing livelihoods and restoring basic services.

Time and again, AJWS has found that communities that benefit from this kind of support and other local empowerment efforts emerge from disasters with stronger education and health systems in place, greater participation by women and minorities in community development, and a stronger voice in local government. When local people—particularly

marginalized populations—are given the resources to steer their own development in these ways, they are no longer victims, but actors; a change in status that itself leads to further positive development down the road.

Fadumo Ahmed Muuse, a Somali woman who participated in an AJWS-funded income-generation project after the tsunami, speaks to this long-term impact: “The project has improved and developed the economic situation of the tsunami-affected community in [my village]. It will help us and our people to establish and set the foundation of economic development for our community for the future.”

Sadock Ndanga, a Congolese beneficiary of AJWS grantee Change Agents for Peace International, expressed a similar aspiration: “We need to fly with our own wings.”

## Staying the course

While emergency aid from other countries or international agencies is critical to saving lives in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it isn't a sustainable, long-term solution. Disasters exacerbate existing problems and create new challenges in already complex environments, giving rise to needs that take time to resolve.

AJWS approaches emergency response sequentially, helping our grantees meet

both short- and long-term needs by allocating funding over the course of three to ten years. Eventually, we transition many recipients of emergency aid into our core grantmaking program so that they continue to receive AJWS funding as long as they need it.

In this way, emergencies often change the course of AJWS's grantmaking portfolio: Hurricane Mitch in 1998 led to more than a decade of intensive work in Central America; the tsunami of 2004 led to new relationships with dozens of organizations in five countries; and in the nine months since the earthquake in Haiti, AJWS's work with local Haitian organizations has increased tenfold, and will continue to mount over the next four or more years.

Responding to disasters and emergencies over the past two and a half decades, AJWS has learned that the most effective approach requires a combination of sustained generosity on the part of the global community as well as faith in the resilience and competence of the local people. This is “disaster to development” at its best. ■■■

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: HURRICANE MITCH, 1998

For three days and nights in October 1998, Hurricane Mitch pounded Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala, causing flooding of such intensity that it killed nearly 20,000 people and left 2.7 million homeless. When the hurricane hit, AJWS already had a presence in Honduras and other regions of Central America, and was positioned to respond immediately.

The years of intensified grantmaking that followed had a transformative effect on AJWS's disaster-response strategy, illuminating the need for a “disaster to development” approach that emphasizes long-term support and local

empowerment. Thanks to this strategy, AJWS currently employs local consultants in countries where it works, and has funded some of its Hurricane Mitch grantees for more than a decade.

One such organization is Comité de Emergencia Garífuna, or “Garífuna Emergency Committee” (CEGAH). Immediately after the hurricane, CEGAH worked to repair houses, community centers, schools and businesses. Since then, it has worked on long-term recovery of the Garífuna ethnic community, focusing on developing democratic participation and gender equity, preserving Honduras's

environment and improving the people's ability to defend themselves from abuses of human rights.

AJWS has supported CEGAH for more than eight years, and currently funds its efforts to achieve long-term sustainability. In a recent strategic planning document, the organization declared that it has “been able to document and disseminate its experience through diverse ways in various spaces, achieving a remarkable reputation in work around community development.”

—Elyse Lightman

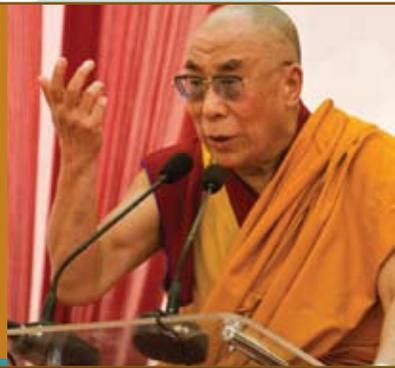
# Timeline of AJWS Emergency Response



**1986:**  
1<sup>st</sup> emergency response: AJWS aids survivors of the volcano disaster in Armero, Colombia.

**1989:**  
AJWS aids communities displaced by civil war in Sri Lanka.

**1991:**  
The Dalai Lama, in recognition of AJWS's collaboration on agricultural projects for the Tibetan exile community, addresses AJWS donors: *"I very much appreciate your genuine concern for our freedom and legitimate rights."*



**1995—1997:**  
AJWS aids communities following the Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe, Japan.  
**\$84,000**



**1998:**  
After catastrophic Hurricane Mitch, AJWS launches more than a decade of intensified work in Central America.  
**\$607,000**

**1998:**  
AJWS funds relief for tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro.  
**\$848,000**

1985

1990

1995



**2003:**  
AJWS aids communities in war-torn Sierra Leone.  
**\$38,700**

**2004—Present:**  
Over six years, AJWS funds NGOs in Darfur and Chad working to save lives and end the genocide. Also in 2004, AJWS co-founded the Save Darfur Coalition.  
**\$4.4 million**

Nicholas Kristof, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, said: “[AJWS was] an early leader and a powerful leader in the movement to end the genocide. There are lots of people alive today who wouldn’t be if it weren’t for AJWS’s work.”



**\$ =** Emergency response grants; not including additional long-term development grantmaking in each region



**2009—Present:**  
AJWS addresses the global hunger crisis with a national campaign and supports 80 grassroots organizations working on food justice.  
**\$1.2 million (by fall 2010)**

**2000:**  
AJWS provides medical supplies and relief after flooding and deadly mudslides claim 60,000 lives in Venezuela.  
**\$158,000**



**2004—Present:**  
AJWS responds immediately to the Indian Ocean tsunami, funding 82 grassroots organizations in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Somalia.  
**\$10.3 million**



**2008—2009:**  
AJWS grantees are among the first responders to Cyclone Nargis in Burma, circumventing the military junta’s humanitarian blockade.  
**\$353,000**

**2010—Present:**  
28,000 donors contribute to the AJWS Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund, enabling AJWS to distribute emergency aid within 48 hours and launch a four-year plan to support Haitian-led redevelopment.  
**\$5-6 million (by 2013)**

In February, President Obama honored AJWS as an example of the “compassion and decency of the American people” following the earthquake.

**1999:**  
AJWS responds after a series of deadly earthquakes in Turkey kills tens of thousands.  
**\$1.03 million**

**2005—2009:**  
AJWS aids survivors of the 6.7 magnitude Pakistan earthquake.  
**\$746,000**

2000

2005

2010

This list is a sampling of AJWS’s major emergency responses. In total, AJWS has responded to more than 150 disasters since 1986.

# ON THE GROUND IN HAITI

## IMAGES OF RELIEF AND RECOVERY

*In July, six months after a 7.3 magnitude earthquake turned Port-au-Prince into rubble and extinguished the lives of as many as 300,000 people, AJWS sent photographer Evan Abramson to Haiti to document relief efforts, yielding images of survival and hope.*

Text by Leah Kaplan Robins; photographs by Evan Abramson



Photographs of Haiti today reveal a difficult truth: Even after months of aid, Port-au-Prince remains hobbled by mountains of broken concrete and 1.5 million people are still corralled in endless rows of plastic tents, with no sign of permanent housing on the horizon.

These images are accurate portrayals of the situation on the ground, but they fail to tell the entire story. On his recent trip to Haiti with AJWS, photographer Evan Abramson encountered something beyond the rubble and homelessness. His camera depicts a state in Haiti rarely seen on the news today: progress.

This is because Abramson spent his time in Haiti visiting AJWS grantees working to mend the devastation and meet the many and diverse needs of people in

the camps and surrounding rural areas. They are a diverse cadre of local Haitian grassroots groups whose community-based work AJWS funded prior to the earthquake, and international NGOs that are supporting our grantees and leveraging local efforts for larger-scale projects. These organizations and volunteers were among the first responders in January, and are now running some of the most innovative and effective projects to work with survivors and restart Haiti's infrastructure and economy.

Thanks to contributions totaling \$6.2 million from more than 28,000 donors, AJWS has granted \$1.19 million to 17 organizations, and plans to disseminate an additional \$4-5 million over the next three and a half years.

Abramson's images of these grantees at work provide an arresting glimpse of empowerment. There is a sense of possibility in the eyes of women who now have solar hand-held lamps to ward off the violence that for months raged unchecked in the nightly blackouts in the camps. There is relief on the faces of the elderly, at last under the care of a doctor or medic attending to wounds that have festered since the earthquake. And there is a rare hope among women and men who have received microloans to start small businesses so that they may again earn an income to support their families free of aid.

These images tell a powerful story behind the headlines—a story of the Haitian people still grappling with tragedy, but beginning to rebuild what they have lost.



## LEADING WOMEN

*(OPPOSITE PAGE)* MUDHA director Sonia Pierre runs a workshop for 30 women representing five different displaced persons camps in Leogane—a town west of Port-au-Prince—teaching them how to make natural cosmetics and household cleaning products to start a small-business cooperative.

*(ABOVE AND LEFT)* MUDHA’s workshops emphasize self-esteem, an important first step toward empowering women and building strong peer networks to prevent rape and violence, which have become increasingly common in the camps in recent months.

*Recognizing her extraordinary work with MUDHA, Pierre recently received the U.S. Department of State’s “International Women of Courage Award,” presented by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama in March. The award honors outstanding women leaders around the world who have demonstrated courage in their struggles for social justice and human rights.*

## LIGHTING UP THE NIGHT

A young woman in Camp Place St. Ann in downtown Port-au-Prince, where there are no streetlights, breaks the blackness of night using a solar-powered flashlight distributed with AJWS funding by Earthspark and KONPAY.



(ABOVE) Empowered by the light, women in the camp are now organizing civilian safety-watch groups and peer counseling programs.



(ABOVE) Judeline Jean, who lost her leg when she was crushed under the rubble of her aunt's home during the earthquake, will soon be fit with a custom-molded prosthesis provided by the BRAC Limb and Brace Center in Haiti. The center—built with AJWS funding and staffed by local Haitian doctors and technicians—will make prosthetics and braces for more than 1,500 earthquake survivors this year, helping them regain their foothold on life.



**BORDERLESS RELIEF**

*(ABOVE)* Doctors from AJWS grantee MOSCTHA's ambulance caravan visit Camp Quistis outside Petit Goave. Just days after the earthquake, MOSCTHA's Dominican Republic-based staff traveled across the border to Haiti with a fleet of ambulances and volunteers, and have continued to travel the country since then, providing medical care to remote communities excluded from international humanitarian efforts.

**BORROWING TO REBUILD**

*(LEFT)* Francia Mercon, 24, a single mother, receives assistance from FONKOZE's "Road to a Better Life" program, created to provide Haiti's poorest families with small grants and training to start businesses.

*(BELOW)* Members of a five-woman microfinance team wait for their next loan from FONKOZE. From left to right, Sosoux Inetude, Charle Marianne, Jesimond Melina, Damzal Auguste and Damzal Merilina all run small businesses near Sodo.



# From Seed Banks to Synagogues to the Senate: Fighting for Global Food Justice

One year after launching the *Fighting Hunger from the Ground Up* campaign, AJWS has supported over 80 grassroots organizations in the developing world that are fighting for food justice. Organizing “kitchen gardens” in urban centers, teaching women how to farm using agro-ecological methods, developing seed banks and innovative storage facilities for harvested crops, and advocating for the land and water rights of marginalized indigenous populations are just a few ways that AJWS’s grantees are responding to the more than one billion people who go hungry every day. Since September 2009, AJWS has raised over \$1 million to support our grantees’ crucial efforts.

In conjunction with this campaign, AJWS also inaugurated Global Hunger Shabbat, an annual initiative to mobilize congregations and independent Jewish communities to alleviate hunger and explore how Jewish tradition informs our commitment to global justice. This past spring, nearly 100 synagogues and 30 college campuses in 20 U.S. states, Canada and New Zealand hosted Global Hunger Shabbat in their communities. An additional 60 AJWS service program volunteers participated in India, Cape Verde, Uganda, Kenya, Cambodia and Thailand.

AJWS has also played a key role in responding to Haiti’s exacerbated food crisis in the aftermath of the earthquake. Our advocacy team in Washington, in partnership with ActionAid, Oxfam and CARE, is helping to pass legislation to ensure that U.S. aid supports Haitian agriculture and local procurement of goods to invigorate the livelihoods of Haitian farmers and to stabilize Haitian markets.

—Jordan Namerow



PHOTO EVAN ABRAMSON

## Fast for Justice this Yom Kippur

**“This is the fast I desire ... To let the oppressed go free; to share your bread with the hungry.”**

— Isaiah 58:6-7

These 2,000-year-old words are chanted in synagogues around the world every Yom Kippur. For those of us who choose to fast or have the luxury of fasting as a spiritual practice, Yom Kippur is an opportunity to contemplate global injustices and examine our role in the political and economic systems that perpetuate hunger.

But what can we do to put Isaiah’s words into practice? How can we integrate our spiritual process with global action?

This year, AJWS encourages you to donate the “savings” of your fast—the money you would ordinarily spend on a day’s worth of food—to help people in the developing world for whom hunger is not a ritual but a chronic reality.

By giving our Yom Kippur fast a renewed sense of purpose and practice, we can continue to live the essence of our tradition by creating a just world—a world in which all who are hungry have the food they need to thrive. ■

# AJWS Grantees Alleviating Hunger Around the Globe



## Total Grantees by Country

Bolivia	2
Cambodia	6
Colombia	9
El Salvador	5
Guatemala	4
Haiti	9
Honduras	2
India	12
Kenya	3
Liberia	1
Mexico	6
Nicaragua	3
Peru	1
Senegal	1
South Africa	2
Sri Lanka	2
Thailand	6
Uganda	4

**Total** 78



**HAITI:** Over the past five years, **Lambi Fund of Haiti** has supported over 100 peasant-led business ventures and trained over 12,500 people in sustainable agriculture techniques.



**COLOMBIA:** With AJWS support, **ASPROCIG** has established 75 new agro-ecological farms in the Sinú River region, where local farming and aquaculture were wiped out by the construction of a hydroelectric dam.



**SENEGAL:** In just the past two years, **GREEN Senegal** has tripled the agricultural output of 60 farming families (400 people).



**KENYA:** **K-MET** feeds over 1,100 malnourished clients with nutrition supplements each day.



**INDIA:** Since its founding in 1993, **ROSE** has trained over 24,000 small-scale farmers, mostly women, to enhance the nutrients in their soil, irrigate crops, manage pests and raise livestock.

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: DARFUR, 2004–PRESENT

**D**arfur remains perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. Since 2003, rebel groups and the bandit Janjaweed have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in civil war.

In April 2004, AJWS began providing grants for humanitarian aid to civilian survivors who had been violently forced from their homes and are now living in refugee camps in Sudan and Chad. The grants—totaling \$4.4 million—have supported an array of NGOs working on health services, rape prevention, education, psychosocial services, water access and

sanitation. They are also orchestrating local efforts to monitor human rights violations, fight impunity and improve access to justice.

One of these grantees (whose name has been withheld to protect its security) has worked to address the chronic shortage of trained health professionals in eastern Chad. The organization's work to train hospital staff and procure equipment and supplies has benefited over 50,000 Sudanese refugees and the local Chadian population. This project is also currently the only program in eastern

Chad providing psychosocial support for survivors—including those suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome.

While the situation in Darfur remains bleak, AJWS's grantees continue every day to make small steps towards restoring the health and dignity of refugees and providing skills that will help the people of Darfur recover from the nightmare they have experienced.

—Elyse Lightman

# EXPOSING HIDDEN OPPRESSION: *Supporting LGBTI Ugandans in Crisis*

By Jordan Namerow

**E**mergency response efforts are often triggered by destruction that we can see—destruction caused by earthquakes, tsunamis or tropical storms. The visual impact of these natural disasters compels us to act from a place of urgency.

But what about the atrocities we can't see? What about crises whose effects are not as visible as the wounds of earthquake victims or the scars of genocide? Often, less visible atrocities—especially those in the developing world—get buried in the avalanche of news. Even more often, they go entirely unreported.

In October 2009, however, the long-standing oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Uganda spilled into the global spotlight when the country's parliament introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill—a piece of proposed legislation that would strengthen existing penalties against homosexuality and make same-sex relations in Uganda punishable by prison or even death. Among the bill's many dangerous provisions, a person who fails to report within 24 hours the identity of anyone perceived to be LGBTI or who supports the human rights of LGBTI people, would be subject to up to three years' imprisonment.

Since the introduction of this bill, international human rights defenders have voiced strong opposition, fearing that the bill's passage would severely threaten efforts to protect the safety and security of LGBTI Ugandans. The human rights community also feared that if the bill became law, it would be nearly impossible for LGBTI rights funders and HIV/AIDS service providers to operate effective health programs to slow the spread of infection.

## Religious voices for change

Media reports have exposed the fact that the ideological and financial thrust behind the Anti-Homosexuality Bill came from the American religious right. It is no secret that there are strong and ever-growing ties between American and African religious conservatives, and many African leaders have adopted some of the American religious right's most vicious homophobic rhetoric as the centerpiece of their political agenda. Like Uganda, other African countries including Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Malawi have denied or threatened to deny LGBTI citizens their basic human rights in the name of religion.

And yet, many Christian groups and clergy from across the political spectrum—including the Vatican—have spoken out against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, recognizing that executing people for their sexual orientation—or penalizing LGBTI supporters—is a blatant violation of human rights. And, thanks to the efforts of AJWS and Jewish communal leaders, the American Jewish community has also voiced its support for LGBTI people in the developing world.

Since the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was first introduced, AJWS has been working to ensure that our grantees in East Africa can strategically and effectively advance human rights on the ground in the face of growing insecurity and violence. Last January, AJWS established the "Urgent LGBTI Uganda Fund" to support Ugandan grassroots organizations working to safeguard the rights of sexual minorities and to defeat the bill. Moved by the outpouring of support from the Jewish community, AJWS raised over \$27,000 to help Ugandan grassroots organizations mobilize opposition, improve security measures for groups supporting LGBTI

Ugandans and develop rapid-response procedures for LGBTI people in crisis.

As part of a growing progressive, faith-based coalition committed to global justice, AJWS also mobilized an interfaith alliance of Jewish leaders and other clergy to speak out against the proposed anti-homosexuality legislation and sign on to an interfaith letter to Congress urging U.S. legislators to swiftly condemn it. AJWS's advocacy team drew signatures from over 90 faith leaders and Jewish legislators, and in April, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution introduced by U.S. Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI), Tom Coburn (R-OK), Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Susan Collins (R-ME) calling on members of the Ugandan Parliament to reject the Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

## From grassroots organizing to human rights policy

AJWS has helped its Ugandan grantees mobilize locally and effect change globally. Julius Kaggwa, founder and program director of Support Initiative for People with Congenital Disorders (SIPD)—a grassroots organization and AJWS grantee in Uganda that promotes the health and human rights of children and people with atypical sexual development (most commonly known as "intersex")—has played a leading role in the Ugandan grassroots organizing effort to condemn the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Kaggwa was instrumental in building the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law, a coalition of more than 25 groups that are supporting HIV/AIDS prevention, advancing the rights of women, children and LGBTI people, and educating communities, politicians and international organizations about the dangerous implications of the bill.



LGBTI activist Anthony Adero wears a rainbow flag in the safety of the offices of AJWS grantee the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya. PHOTO EVAN ABRAMSON

In January, AJWS funded Kaggwa's trip to the U.S. to testify before Congress at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on the Ugandan legislation.

Our grantees' work in Uganda and AJWS's advocacy in the U.S. have certainly paid off. Good news came on May 8<sup>th</sup> when a special committee organized by the president of Uganda recommended the Anti-Homosexuality Bill be withdrawn from Parliament. The committee neglected, however, to reject one of the most worrying stipulations of the bill, regarding the "promotion" of homosexuality—which criminalizes the provision of services and funding to Uganda's LGBTI activist community and health services for LGBTI people. The committee also recommended

that the penal code be amended to include penalties for "aggravated homosexuality"—a term that describes LGBTI people who are HIV positive—even if those penalties are not introduced through the bill.

AJWS's Ugandan partners are viewing the committee's recommendation as a victory, but not yet as an indication that the bill will be quashed. Other provisions of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill that violate rights have been included in a proposed HIV/AIDS bill, so the fight is not yet over.

### Collective Responsibility

As the persecution of LGBTI people intensifies around the globe, the need to respond by safeguarding human rights for

everyone—gay and straight alike—has become all the more urgent. The most challenging part of this work is exposing oppressions that are invisible and giving voice to those who live in hiding. Coming out anywhere takes courage and strong will. But the capacity to build honest, healthful and dignified communities is paralyzed when governments push their citizens back into the closet.

"AJWS's primary core value is the essential dignity of every human being," said AJWS president Ruth Messinger. "In the spirit of *b'tselem elohim*—the understanding that each person is made in the divine image—we recognize that every human life is of equal value. AJWS is committed to being a leader in the Jewish community and in the global community to ensure that all people—regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity—can realize their full, true selves. No one should live in fear."

Indeed, Jewish tradition teaches us to confront our inclination to feel disconnected or overwhelmed by hidden injustices. At the end of the day, human rights abuses are our problems, too. We've known them ourselves and it is our collective responsibility to speak out against them for everyone. ■■■

## AJWS SUPPORTS LGBTI PEOPLE WORLDWIDE

AJWS has been standing in solidarity with LGBTI communities in the developing world for over a decade, and currently supports 14 grassroots organizations that are helping LGBTI people fight for their dignity, their access to health services and their basic human rights. Some examples:

- **Nigeria:** The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIER) is a youth-led organization that defends the human rights of sexual minorities. Since 2008, AJWS has supported TIER's efforts to implement programs on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, expand access to treatment

and offer legal assistance to individuals facing prosecution because of their sexual orientation. AJWS was extraordinarily proud that TIER was a recipient of the UN's 2010 Red Ribbon Award, in recognition of its leadership to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS.

- **Thailand:** Rays of Rainbow, founded in March 2006, works to combat homophobia and empower LGBTI people in Burmese migrant communities in southern Thailand. With AJWS's support, Rays of Rainbow teaches community-organizing skills, reaches out to the broader migrant community, and conducts trainings on

sexual health and the defense of human rights. It also runs a community center that serves as a safe place for LGBTI migrants to gather and share their experiences.

- **Honduras:** AJWS grantee Arcoiris runs "The Rainbow House," a center where it trains community leaders to raise awareness about LGBTI rights, promote HIV/AIDS prevention, and advocate for effective government response to hate crimes against sexual minorities. Arcoiris activist members were among the first in Honduras to give explicit support to transgender people living openly in their communities.

# Beyond Simple Relief:

A VOLUNTEER LEARNS ABOUT DISPARITY, EMPOWERMENT AND RECOVERY IN POST-EARTHQUAKE INDIA

By Andrew Carmona

*Sit here with me*, beckoned my Indian coworker Pratik, gesturing to a dusty brick wall but a few feet high, on the bridge over the dry riverbed in Bhuj, India. The wall was near the office where I worked as an AJWS World Partners Fellow this year. The river hadn't run there for years. As I sat down, Pratik began to speak. *I once spent three days on this wall*, he said.

That was in January 2001, when a devastating 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck the region of Kutch, a border district with Pakistan, in Gujarat, India. Its epicenter was located 20 kilometers from Bhuj, the regional capital and Pratik's home. A quick Wikipedia search revealed that the destruction that followed was extensive: 26,000 people dead, 167,000 injured. Bhuj was devastated; the quake destroyed over one million structures, 90 percent of homes, eight schools, two hospitals, and four kilometers of road. The total damage was estimated at \$5.5 billion, and over 80 percent of usable food and water supplies in the region were lost.

On that fateful day in 2001 when the earth shook his neighborhood, Pratik was 14 years old. His house completely demolished, he told me, he spent the days following the quake just sitting on that wall. Occasionally, he would walk the hundred feet or so back to his house to fish out personal objects from the rubble.

*I too lived through an earthquake*, I impulsively related to him. *In 1994—the Northridge quake, a 6.7. I was nine. It was an important moment in my life*, I said.

The words just barely out of my mouth, I realized that there were major differences between Pratik's quake and mine.

Though the two disasters took place almost exactly seven years apart and Pratik and I lived more or less the same distance from the epicenters, the similarities end there. Wikipedia shows that my quake resulted in 72 deaths and 9,000 injured. India's death toll was almost 360 times greater than that, and injuries were about 19 times as many. While building codes in L.A. existed years before the quake and helped to limit the damage, Bhuj had nothing of the sort. As a result, India's structures crumbled, but we in L.A. lost perhaps a few dozen houses and a building or two. Nor was I left to stand outside my demolished home for days after, picking up the pieces. The only image of destruction that comes back to me from that day 15 years ago was a collapsed brick wall in our backyard—little cause for mourning.

## Communities Rebuild

I came to Bhuj in November 2009 to volunteer for 10 months with Hunnarshala, a local NGO. In the years after the catastrophe, Hunnarshala helped to construct 30,000 interim shelters and 12,000 permanent homes. Today, it works to correct the lack of building codes and earthquake-resilient architecture in this seismic region. It promotes owner-driven disaster-proof construction techniques by training local artisans to build their own houses and teach the techniques to their family members and others in the community. Hunnarshala also promotes sustainable, traditional building practices using low-cost and eco-friendly materials found locally, such as bamboo, mud and stone.

Since its inception in 2003, Hunnarshala has shared these strategies with other disaster-affected regions: It assisted in Indonesia after the Indian Ocean tsunami, conducted post-earthquake reconstruction in Pakistan and Jammu-Kashmir, and helped with rehabilitation in the Indian state of Bihar after floods devastated the region in August 2008.

During my time as a World Partners Fellow I assisted with Hunnarshala's Bihar project, which aims to rebuild 210,000 homes. In the small village of Puraini, 89 homeowners are involved in Hunnarshala's unique owner-driven reconstruction process. Understanding the needs and capacities of their families and neighbors, the homeowners have rebuilt houses twice as large as anyone thought was possible with the amount of money given to them, in many cases using shared walls between houses to maximize space and minimize costs. This is but a small example of the importance of a community-led reconstruction effort, as it is ultimately the affected communities themselves who best know where and how to appropriately allocate resources.

## Lessons from the Rubble

Working with Hunnarshala, I've learned that effective recovery work goes beyond simple relief—that any lasting and sustainable solution must involve input from the affected communities. It is also now clear to me the extreme importance of ensuring the structural integrity of shelters—perhaps humanity's most basic and indispensable asset—in the face of unpredictable natural calamities.

On a deeper level, my colleague Pratik's experience has demonstrated that not all disasters strike evenly and that the Global South stands to lose the most when confronted with earthquakes, floods and other forces of nature.

But my work in India has also shown me that recovery and reconstruction are possible. With the help of local NGOs like Hunnarshala, and funds poured into reconstruction and redevelopment by the National and Gujarat State governments, Bhuj has rebuilt itself. "New Bhuj" boasts track-style housing, paved roads and sturdy buildings. Old Bhuj is still around too; it's a colorful, windy mess of narrow crumbling old brick, packed with stalls selling all kinds of wares, and houses with women washing clothes and making puja in every window. To wander and get lost in that maze and arrive suddenly upon a little shack overflowing with hand-spun Kutchi shawls, manned by a weathered, leathery-faced Kutchi craftsman, is a wonderful experience that I have been fortunate to have.

I know now that the next time another disaster comes on the news, with

reports of the countless dead, injured and displaced in a far-away place, it will no longer be with detachment that I view the events, but with a deeper understanding.



*The World Partners Fellowship is a competitive, 11-month international fellowship awarded to recent Jewish college graduates and young professionals. To apply, visit [www.ajws.org/worldpartners](http://www.ajws.org/worldpartners).*



**A WALL STILL STANDING**  
Andrew and Pratik Zaveri by the wall outside Pratik's home that withstood the Bhuj earthquake.

PHOTO ANDREW CARMONA

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: TSUNAMI, 2004

On December 26, 2004, the world woke up to the news that an undersea earthquake had produced a series of tsunamis that ravaged coastal communities in 14 countries. With waves climbing up to 50-foot high, the disaster killed nearly 230,000 people and displaced 1.7 million.

People around the globe responded with unprecedented generosity, and the record number of donations that came to AJWS in the days that followed brought a dramatic change in AJWS's capacity to provide aid. Before the tsunami, AJWS had 6,000 donors and an annual budget of \$10 million; in the early days of 2005, the organization received 40,000 contributions—totaling \$11.5 million—for tsunami relief.

AJWS made its first grant for emergency aid within 24 hours of the disaster and soon after launched a six-

year intensive plan in the region, funding more than 80 grassroots organizations in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Somalia. One third of all tsunami donors (and nearly 50 percent among the \$1,000+ level) became ongoing AJWS donors in the years that followed, coming to understand and support AJWS's human-rights-based approach to development.

One of AJWS's longstanding tsunami grantees—an Indonesian NGO called SPPN ("Serikat Perempuan Petani dan Nelayan" or "Women's Farmer and Fisherfolk Union")—has worked to address the collapse of rural education systems due to the tsunami. With AJWS's support, SPPN has built five new schools and trained teachers to replace those who died in the disaster. It has also trained women to develop schools in remote coastal villages that have long lacked public education, and taught them to advocate for public

provision of these services. Recently, SPPN earned government funding for six of its schools, a major victory for it and other grassroots organizations in the region that seek greater government accountability for the reconstruction efforts.

On a visit to Indonesia earlier this year, AJWS staff met Rusmawati, SPPN's director, to discuss the phasing out of support now that the organization is self-sustaining. Rusmawati said: "AJWS understands work at the grassroots level, knows how to help us do our best work." Many of AJWS's tsunami grantees are now in the same position as SPPN—well on their way to sustainability.

—Elyse Lightman

# We Want To Know Why: Questioning Responsibility for Disasters

By Rabbi Brent Spodek

We want to know why.

After every tragedy, be it personal or public, we shake our fists at heaven and want to know why God permitted or even caused this to happen. There must be a reason why God allowed my loved one to die, the Holocaust to occur, Haiti to suffer as it does. There simply must be.

From the earliest records of Jewish history, we seek comprehensible explanations for incomprehensible disasters. The Flood from which Noah escaped with his ark was caused by “great wickedness,” and the great Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed because of “baseless hatred.” Modern Jewish tragedy also brings with it a raft of explanations which assume that God is acting on history, and acting according to a plan. Satmar leader Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum wrote that the Holocaust was Divine retribution for the waywardness of liberal Jews, and more recently, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a former chief rabbi of Israel, interpreted Hurricane Katrina as Divine punishment for America’s support for the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

But these are foolish answers to absurd questions. The Divine will is ultimately unknown and unknowable, yet we persist in asking questions of how, why and when God acts. When Abraham Joshua Heschel was asked about the place of God in the Holocaust, he said the question was not “Where was God,” but rather, “Where was man?”

More personally, I would like to ask: Where were we? Perhaps we ask questions of the Divine at moments of crisis in order to evade much harder questions of human agency.

Why were Roosevelt and Churchill indifferent to the suffering of a despised minority? Why didn’t the world demand action? Why did we stand idly by then,

and why do so many of us do so now? These are hard questions to ask, and harder ones to answer.

A classic rabbinic teaching says, “‘The wise man, his eyes are at the beginning’—he is one who inquires from the world’s beginning, from the six days of creation and onward, to the world we live in. ‘But the fool walks in darkness’—he is one who ignores the world that exists and inquires about the darkness, about what was before.” We do not and cannot know why evil persists or why humans suffer—those things lie in a darkness which no light can pierce. We can, however, know things about this world, and because of that, we can change them.

It’s been less than a year since an estimated 300,000 people died in Haiti’s massive earthquake. One can ponder if God caused the earth to shudder and why, and those questions will be no less salient during the next tragedy. But more productively, one can also ask what we did when the earthquake struck on January 12, 2010, and what we were doing on January 11—and the days, months and years before that—when Haiti was already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

All things told, the earthquake that struck Haiti was not particularly

strong—the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen hundreds of quakes more powerful and far less deadly. The quake killed 300,000 Haitians not because the earth shook so hard, but because the human structures built on it were so flimsy. Thousands upon thousands of people died because of human indifference to Haitian suffering before the quake, not the tremors of the earth on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Why did we allow a city and a country to be built in such a way that hundreds of thousands of people died when the earth shook? That is the more frightening question, because an honest reckoning might require that we acknowledge our own responsibility for human suffering.

We will never know the workings of the Divine will or if there is a system of reward and punishment. Those things lie in the darkness we cannot pierce. But we can know that the world as it exists, and that the people in it—those who laugh and those who suffer—are real. We can respond to others or ignore them; we can focus on others or disregard them. We have agency.

When the next tragedy inevitably occurs, let us be prepared to answer the question we will inevitably ask of God: What could we have done to prevent this?



PHOTO EVAN ABRAMSON

# MEET A DONOR | *Questions for Rabbi Steven Leder*

**R**abbi Steven Leder, of Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles, promotes AJWS, global justice and the Jewish value of “discomfort.”

## *HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH AJWS?*

I became personally involved when I went on AJWS’s Study Tour to India in 2008. I was rocked by the magnitude of suffering and the enormity of the challenges facing the poor, but I was also inspired by the work AJWS was doing to alleviate it.

## *WHY ARE YOU SO DEDICATED TO AJWS, OF ALL THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS ON THE LANDSCAPE?*

AJWS is one of the few Jewish organizations that I have found in which I have complete confidence in the integrity, passion and vision of the leadership, the quality of the services and the tangible results of those services. It also fosters moral, meaningful, productive change.

## *SO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR MONEY IS WELL SPENT?*

Definitely. Most people have at one time or another thought to themselves, “If I were Bill Gates, I would be able to really change the lives of the poor. In the developing world, every one of us can be Bill Gates. The leverage, per dollar, of good that can be done is exponentially more than what can be accomplished at home. My \$5,000 contribution in L.A. really can’t affect that many lives, but \$5,000 spent in a developing country can impact hundreds or thousands.

One NGO we visited in India runs schools on train platforms for Dalit (untouchable) children who shovel human waste. I asked how much it costs to run a school for a month, and I was told \$100. For \$5,000, I realized, my wife and I could support four of these schools for an entire year! I decided on the spot to donate \$5,000 to AJWS and said I wanted it used to educate children.

## *YOU RECENTLY ORGANIZED AN AJWS STUDY TOUR TO UGANDA THAT WAS THE FIRST TO INCORPORATE VOLUNTEER SERVICE. WHY WAS THAT SO IMPORTANT?*

When outsiders show they care, it generally inspires insiders to care more. When the villagers see American Jews volunteering for them, it inspires them to work for themselves. Service is also where the hearts and minds of our youth are today.

## *DID THIS WORK STRIKE A PARTICULAR CHORD WITH YOUR YOUNG CONGREGANTS?*

Global poverty is to young Jews today what the Soviet Jewry movement was for my generation in the 1970s—edgy, exciting and far from home. I’m invested in speaking to the next generation, and AJWS is one of the vital ways to connect to them.

## *IS THIS WHY YOU EMBRACE UNIVERSAL ISSUES SO STRONGLY IN YOUR TZEDAKAH?*

I would argue that AJWS’s work isn’t just universal; it’s also particular in its impact



PHOTO STEVEN LEDER

on Jews. Changing the lives of others changes us. The people who traveled with me and AJWS to Uganda were deeply affected in a positive way. It is a very important Jewish value that we treat other people the way we want to be treated.

It was also uncomfortable—a kind of discomfort that’s also a Jewish value. It’s important to see the things in the world and in ourselves that make us uncomfortable. The alternative is indifference—one of the worst sins in Judaism. AJWS’s work is the antidote to indifference. You can’t be a light unto the nations if you’re not among the nations. What I love about AJWS is that it’s among the nations, doing this work within a Jewish context. ■■■

## Travel with AJWS to ETHIOPIA

Join AJWS on an unforgettable journey to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s bustling capital. In a setting of stark contrasts—where glittering skyscrapers abut centuries-old marketplaces and overcrowded slums—we will visit AJWS grantees working to empower vulnerable populations, prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and promote education and human rights. This insiders’ view of grassroots activism will reveal a rarely seen Ethiopia in which courageous local people are overcoming poverty at the community level, and building a more just, equitable society.

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**For more information, please contact Rena Dascal at 212.792.2829, [rdascal@ajws.org](mailto:rdascal@ajws.org) or visit [www.ajws.org/studytours](http://www.ajws.org/studytours).**



Pursuing Global Justice  
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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 eight years. AJWS also meets all 20 of Better Business Bureau's standards for charity accountability.*