

NGO UPDATE

To foster communication among human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an “NGO Update.” This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Human Rights Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of the column.

CHILD FAMILY HEALTH INTERNATIONAL (CFHI)

www.cfhi.org

Child Family Health International (CFHI) is a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, California that builds and strengthens sustainable healthcare services in underserved communities worldwide. By working with local partners in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, India, Mexico, and South Africa, CFHI creates a unique study abroad opportunity for American medical students. The students benefit by directly learning about medicine and healthcare issues in poor countries and the local countries benefit from CFHI's support with its program fees, medical supplies, and volunteer presence in their countries.

Dr. Evaleen Jones, the president and founder of CFHI, launched the organization in 1992, after witnessing babies being born on newspapers during her travels to Ecuador. Since then, CFHI has successfully expanded internationally, and currently works with 145 international partners in the medical profession. Providing a comprehensive curriculum to more than 600 students a year, CFHI has matured into a nationally recognized organization. With the support of its students, CFHI serves hundreds of thousands of patients in rural and urban underserved communities around the world every year.

In addition, CFHI salvages — or “recovers” — medical supplies and equipment that are then distributed by their global partners. CFHI students participate in the collection and distribution of recovered medical sup-

plies, offering American medical students a concrete way to contribute to the areas they visit while abroad. Supplies have been donated to Bolivia, Bosnia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Iraq, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Ukraine, as well as to our own backyard in California. Recently, CFHI joined a larger relief effort by the International Medical Corps, sending supplies to victims of the tsunami in Indonesia.

CFHI considers its mission to include three primary goals: to promote cultural competency and awareness of international health issues; to increase access to and efficient use of medical supplies; and to build health infrastructure at the community level. CFHI accomplishes these goals by combining instruction, experience, service, and reflection to create a model that supports physicians and clinical sites abroad; addressing the healthcare needs of the underserved; and adding an unforgettable experiential element to each program participant's education. CFHI programs bring service-learning into hospitals and clinics around the world, allowing participants to gain insight on the contextual constructs of illness and healing in foreign settings. Program Alumni return from the host country with new perspectives on healthcare systems and delivery in places where resources and supplies are extremely limited. Since 1992, CFHI has arranged for more than 1,180 pre-medical, medical, and other students of the health profession from over 200 of the top universities in the U.S. and the world.

One example of CFHI's work is the medical clinic it built in Than Gaon, a rural village in India. In its first five years, the medical clinic provided medical care to over 12,000 patients. In 2002 alone, the clinic's staff treated over 4,200 people and held over 16 health camps in the remote surrounding villages — all on a budget of less than \$3,000 a year. The clinic and CFHI have been able to raise awareness of hygiene issues, immunization and the importance of preventive medicine.” In conjunction with the community, CFHI is working to provide sustainable, long-term healthcare in the region.

CFHI programs bring service-learning into hospitals and clinics around the world,

allowing participants to gain insight on the contextual constructs of illness and healing in foreign settings. CFHI simultaneously serves American medical students by giving them the opportunity to study medicine in underdeveloped parts of the world, and serves those underdeveloped areas by providing supplies and services to people in need.

Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental healthcare. Despite this recognition, much of the global community lacks access to modern medicine or even basic healthcare supplies. According to the Population Reference Bureau, one billion people globally, lack access to adequate health care systems. The World Health Organization reports that eleven million people die each year from infectious diseases, including one million deaths from malaria and half a million deaths, mostly children, from measles.

CFHI attempts to address this global crisis by linking American medical students and medical supplies with areas that traditionally lack access to medical facilities. By providing vital services to areas in need and changing the lives and outlook of American medical students, CFHI simultaneously addresses an immediate human rights need and trains future doctors who will provide a long-term impact on human rights. By accomplishing both of these goals, CFHI stands as an example of a human rights organization that is successfully making a difference in both the developing and developed world.

THE AMAZONIAN INITIATIVE MOVEMENT A Cutting Edge Approach to Eradicating Female Genital Cutting

aimgn2001@yahoo.uk

Meet Rugiatu Turay — a female genital cutting (FGC) survivor and innovative women's rights activist. Pulling from her own traumatic experience, and the experiences of many other women in Sierra Leone, Turay set out to ensure that other women and girls do not suffer the same tragic consequences of FGC that she did. Specifically, Turay aims to eradicate the traditional practice and to edu-

cate and empower a new generation to value women's bodies in their natural state.

While Turay was a refugee in Guinea during Sierra Leone's 1999-2001 civil war, she joined forces with other FGC survivors to establish the Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM), a grass roots non-profit organization working to end to FGC in Sierra Leone and Guinea. AIM faces an up-hill battle as Sierra Leone's government considers FGC a "vote-winner," politicians sponsor group FGC ceremonies, there is no law banning the practice, and the "initiation" ceremonies appear to bond women in secret women-only "bundu" societies to prepare young girls for adult life, marriage, and motherhood.

ranging in age from 3 to 21. The school is unique in that it incorporates anti-FGC lessons into its curriculum in a non-threatening way. Specifically, teachers integrate anti-FGC messages into one or more of their classes and children are taught to discuss the dangers of FGC freely. The school also arranges community meetings for parents and other community members to discuss the consequences of FGC as a cultural practice.

The school has become well-known throughout the region for its academic success and enrichment opportunities. Children are taught English and French, and are provided after-school activities such as sports, band, and cultural dancing. The school's reputation has also led girls to seek refuge at the school when attempting to escape FGC. Despite minimal funds, these girls have been welcomed with open arms, and cared for with food, shelter, and education.

Turay believes that the Amazonian Bi-Lingual School is an extremely effective way to eradicate FGC because it provides training and access to future leaders, who will spread anti-FGC messages, and offers a benign manner for discussing a taboo topic. Even parents who are suspicious of the school's stance on FGC and think that the children are too young to discuss such issues continue to send their children to the school because of its accomplished reputation.

In addition to educating African youth, parents, and community members about the dangers of FGC, AIM operates a program in Sierra Leone that targets FGC practitioners (soweis), educates them regarding FGC's tragic consequences, and persuades them to abandon the practice. This process is followed by a renouncement ceremony where soweis turn in their cutting tools, publicly renounce the practices, and sign an AIM declaration confirming their commitment to stop practicing FGC.

It is important to note that soweis renouncing FGC not only give up their livelihoods, but their status in Sierra Leonian society as well. Soweis are considered by some to be custodians of the culture. As such, follow-



Amazonian school girls posing for a group photo.

© Courtesy of Amazonian Initiative Movement



A soweis handing over her instruments.

In the face of various roadblocks, Turay moved forward to jumpstart AIM by renting a small room in her father's home and collecting resources for the organization. As the organization grew and expanded outside of her father's home, Turay discovered that a holistic approach to address FGC by bringing together children, parents, religious leaders, and law enforcement officials was the most effective strategy to eliminate the traditional practice.

Turay's multi-sectoral approach includes educating the community regarding the dangers of FGC and persuading practitioners to renounce the tradition, turn in their tools, and seek alternative employment. AIM accomplishes these objectives by running a primary school in Conakry, Guinea (West Africa) focused on educating youth about the dangers and ramifications of FGC, and persuading practitioners (soweis) in Sierra Leone to abandon the practice.

The Amazonian Bi-Lingual School is dedicated to educating Guinean youth about the dangers of FGC. The school that started with only 25 pupils has now grown to 250 pupils,

ing the renouncements, AIM presents the soweis a monetary stipend, provided funds are available, to ease the transition to alternative income generation. AIM also strategizes ways to retain the practitioners' status in society. To date, AIM has convinced over 1200 soweis to renounce FGC.

Turay firmly believes that though African women can justifiably seek asylum for the threat of FGC, they should instead remain in Africa and invest within their own communities to bring an end to the grave practice. Efforts to eradicate FGC must be generated and sustained at the community level, and without the life experiences and survivors of FGC to initiate such change, who will? Through AIM, Turay has initiated her own sea of change, and the lives of girls who have been salvaged from the traditional practice now have the opportunity to take a dramatically different path.

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of the "NGO Update." If your organization has an event or situation it would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu and include "NGO Update" in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations. **HRB**

Jerald Hess, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the NGO Update for the Human Rights Brief.

Jaime M. Gher, a 2007 LL.M. Candidate at the Washington College of Law specializing in gender and human rights, contributed to *The Amazonian Initiative Movement: A Cutting Edge Approach to Eradicating Female Genital Cutting for the Human Rights Brief*. Ms. Gher wishes to thank AIM Director Rugiatu Turay for her perseverance and dedication to uplifting the lives of women and girls throughout Guinea and Sierra Leone.

© Courtesy of Amazonian Initiative Movement