

PHR

Physicians for
Human Rights



**MOBILIZING
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
TO ADVANCE HEALTH,
DIGNITY AND JUSTICE**

Annual Report 2003-2004



Protecting Global Health & Human Rights Values

THIS PAST YEAR we were reminded once again of the fragility of governments' commitment to human rights. Decades of advocacy by human rights activists had led many nations, including the United States, to reject torture as an instrument of interrogation and to view it as an abhorrent practice. The Abu Ghraib pictures not only showed appalling abuse, but served as evidence that the moral values we fought so hard to establish were easily abandoned. The US government, while claiming to reject torture, undermined legal standards, refused to allow an independent investigation, and declined to seek accountability for those who created policies allowing torture. PHR fought back, even taking the unprecedented action of opposing the nomination of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General on the basis of his continued support for policies that condone torture.

In Darfur, the United Nations acknowledged that war crimes are taking place, but its members took no effective action to end it or to hold the government of Sudan responsible. We documented the horrors, including the destruction of livelihoods, and never let up on our advocacy for the protection of civilians.

A lack of conviction regarding human rights is evident, too, in the treatment of asylum seekers, whose incarceration mocks the Statue of Liberty's invitation to "breathe free." The Bush Administration even cheapened human rights ideas when it invoked them to justify the war in Iraq after the original rationale became untenable. And even when it took steps to advance human rights, for example through an infusion of resources for AIDS, the US tied the resources to ideologically-driven policies that impede adequate prevention and treatment.

Our response, though, should not be cynicism or despair. After all, we at Physicians for Human Rights pursue an ambitious goal, seeking to transform not only conduct, but values. As Jonathan Mann reminded us years ago, a commitment to human rights is a "conceptual leap" [because it] invariably represents a challenge to the status quo."

In the past two years, we have seen how often the authority, passion, and rigor of our scientists and health experts alter perceptions of what is right and just. More than four hundred child psychiatrists, psychologists,

neurologists and development experts helped persuade state legislators that the cognitive and emotional development of adolescents renders their execution morally unacceptable. The Supreme Court heeded international human rights standards and the scientific evidence we brought before it and ruled that the death penalty for adolescents violates the Constitution.

Our expert panel on racial and ethnic disparities in health care, which showed that African Americans and other minorities receive lower quality care even when they have the same insurance as whites, helped revitalize a waning concern about racial justice in the medical community, in Congress, and beyond. PHR's analysis of AIDS transmission in health care settings and our bold action plan to reduce the exodus of health workers from poor countries, challenged the assumption that patients and clinicians have to accept the lack of protection from infection that people in the developed world take for granted.

This report describes how we at PHR employed our skills and voice over the past two years to protect global health and further the values of human rights. We have even greater aspirations for the future: to build a world where it is unacceptable for people to die of preventable and treatable diseases, to be abandoned and at the mercy of war criminals, or to live in a society that permits torture. With your help and continued support we will get there.



Top: WHO's Dr. Jim Kim, Leonard Rubenstein, and PHR staff at the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok.

Bottom: PHR President Dr. Holly Atkinson (right) and Mariam Walusimbi, Asst. Commissioner of Nursing, Mulago Hospital, Uganda.

Leonard S. Rubenstein, JD
Executive Director

Holly G. Atkinson, MD
President

2003-2004

PHR Program Highlights

Protecting Human Rights in Armed Conflict



Sudan Genocide: Documented indicators of genocide in Darfur, including loss of livelihoods, and advocated for security, protection, justice and reconstruction.

Iraq War Crimes: Conducted two population-based studies, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which assessed the scope of the impact of human rights violations by the regime of Saddam Hussein on civilian populations and exposed the participation of physicians in torture.



Finding and Identifying the Missing: Urged Iraq to secure mass graves, develop plans for investigation, and support relatives of the missing. Identified and returned to families the remains of Nigerian environ-

mental activist Ken Saro Wiwa and other members of the Ogoni Nine.

Landmines: As coordinator of the US Campaign to Ban Landmines, continued to advocate for US accession to the Mine Ban Treaty, despite hostile new policies announced by the Bush Administration.

Protecting the Rights of People in Custody

Health and Justice for Youth: Mobilized US health professionals to promote the well-being, mental health, and development of troubled young people in the juvenile justice system. Brought findings about adolescent development to the Supreme Court, contributing to a decision overturning the death penalty for juveniles.



Dr. Michael Van Rooyen interviewing Darfurian refugees in Chad

Torture by US Forces: Protested egregious abuses against detained combatants and the involvement of medical personnel in these activities. Vigorously advocated a full and independent investigation, reform of interrogation policies, and accountability throughout the chain of command.

Mexico: Launched a groundbreaking project to train forensic physicians in Mexico to document and report torture.

Colleagues at Risk: Campaigned for the release of a dozen incarcerated human rights defenders from the health communities in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Burma, China, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, South Africa, Turkey, and Vietnam.



Promoting Health in Civil Society

Health Action Aids: Mobilized thousands of nurses, physicians, public health specialists, students and other health

professionals to advocate for increased funding and prevention, treatment and care based on sound science and human rights. Produced a seminal report on HIV transmission in health settings and on the problem of brain drain of health professionals. Created an advocacy network of Ugandan health professionals.



Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care: In a report and annotated bibliography prepared by a distinguished panel convened by PHR, documented the pervasive role that race and ethnicity play in determining the quality of clinical medical care in the United States.

Rockefeller Drug Laws:

Showed the insidious effects of mandatory sentencing laws on the lives of fifty men and women who were trapped in an endless cycle of incarceration and release that became more punitive with each conviction.

Advocated for more drug treatment options and judicial discretion on sentencing.



Protecting The Right to Asylum

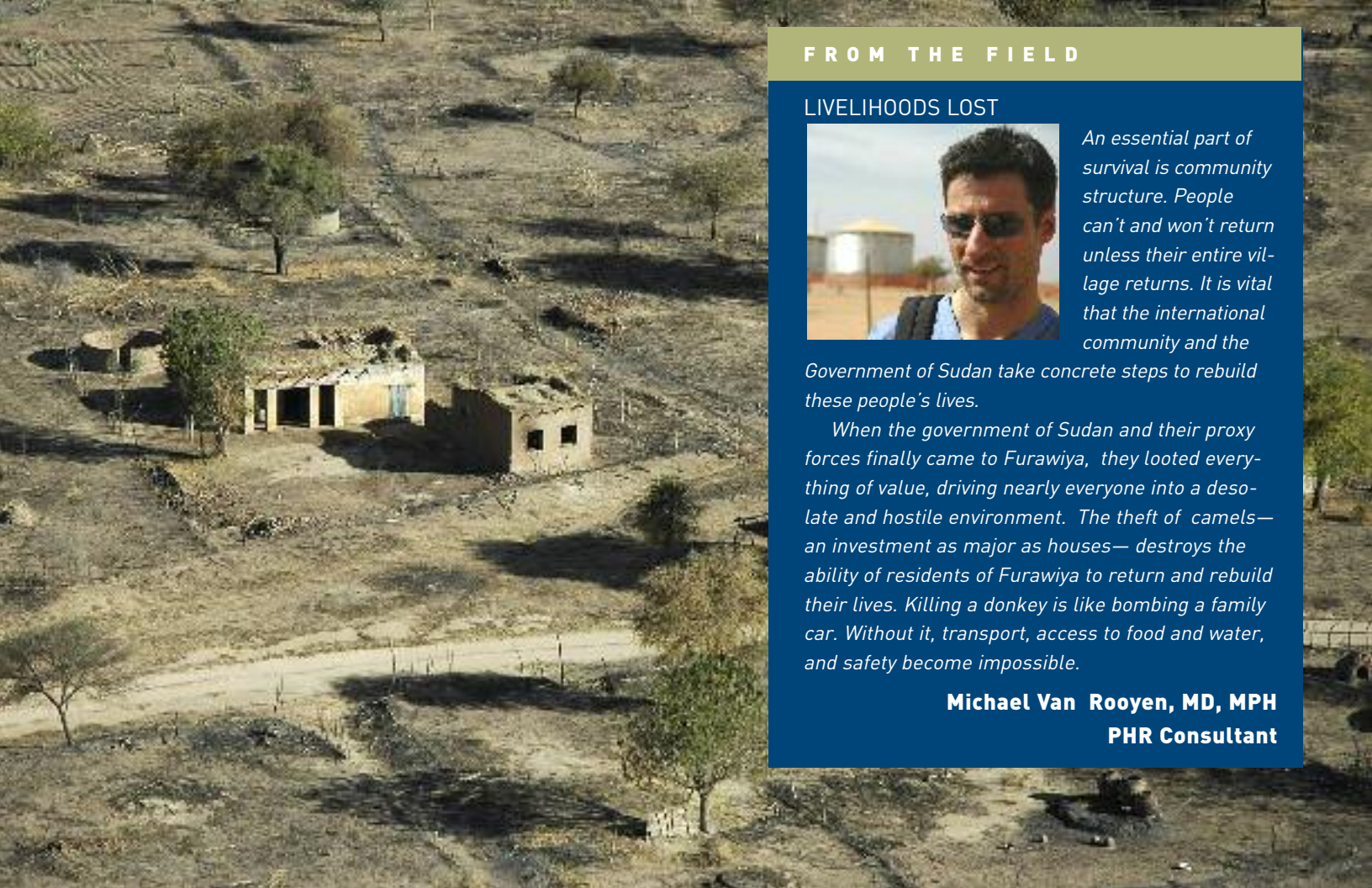
Asylum: Evaluated over three hundred asylum seekers a year, securing asylum status for 90% of individuals referred. Worked to change age-testing practices for minors and to halt the detention of asylum seekers.

Promoting Human Rights in Professional Practice



Student Activism: Mobilized thousands of medical, public health, and nursing students in more than 70 national chapters to effectively engage in the struggle for health and human rights.

Medical Ethics: Advocated for ethical guidelines to prevent military health professionals in the United States from being complicit in torture.



FROM THE FIELD

LIVELIHOODS LOST



An essential part of survival is community structure. People can't and won't return unless their entire village returns. It is vital that the international community and the

Government of Sudan take concrete steps to rebuild these people's lives.

When the government of Sudan and their proxy forces finally came to Furawiya, they looted everything of value, driving nearly everyone into a desolate and hostile environment. The theft of camels—an investment as major as houses—destroys the ability of residents of Furawiya to return and rebuild their lives. Killing a donkey is like bombing a family car. Without it, transport, access to food and water, and safety become impossible.

Michael Van Rooyen, MD, MPH
PHR Consultant