

PHR 2009: Advancing the Cause of Human Rights

PHR is working around the globe to unearth, document and call to worldwide attention unspeakable atrocities and unconscionable neglect. To do this we mobilize teams who bring impartial, professional expertise and authority to the human rights movement. Our advocacy campaigns bring together skilled scientists, doctors and health workers as expert witnesses along with human rights advocates and supporters like you. Together, we demand accountability.

On every continent, our goal remains the same: stopping atrocities and creating long-lasting, transformative change that will prevent violations from happening again.

When we shine a light on human suffering — when we stop torture, end neglect, discover and document mass graves, work to prevent atrocities such as genocide and rape as a weapon of war and support health systems that are accountable to the most vulnerable people — we kindle a vision of a world where every person can fulfill his or her potential in dignity and freedom. **And we help make that vision a reality.**



Students rally in Washington, DC in April 2009 to call on Congress to re-authorize global AIDS funding. (PHR)

This Year:

- In January we responded to the appeals of our medical colleagues in Zimbabwe by producing *Health in Ruins: A Man-Made Disaster in Zimbabwe* based on our December 2008 emergency investigation into the collapse of the healthcare system.

The report demonstrates that the crisis, which led to a preventable cholera epidemic, was a symptom of failed governance and massive human rights violations. **Our message reached African heads of state, neighboring ministries of health and top echelons of the UN, and enabled Zimbabweans to press for life-saving, systemic changes.**

- Throughout 2009 PHR mounted intensive, highly visible campaigns on behalf of our medical colleagues whose safety and survival were in jeopardy.

We built a website — *IranFreeTheDocs.org* — to pressure the Iranian government for the release of Dr. Arash Alaei and Dr. Kamiar Alaei, Iranian physicians known worldwide for their innovative work on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. **And we successfully called for the release of four Sri Lankan doctors who were detained for providing international media with eyewitness reports during the Sri Lankan Army's assault against internally displaced civilians.**

- In June, PHR released a significant study which debunked Sudan's assertion that widely reported incidents of rape and sexual violence against Darfuri refugees were rare. *Nowhere to Turn: Failure to Protect, Support and Assure Justice for Darfuri Women* documents the scope and long-term impact of sexual violence experienced by women and girls who fled attacks on their villages in Darfur and are now refugees in Chad.

Our report garnered extensive media coverage and is being used to advocate for more effective protection of and support for these women and girls, and to press for prosecution of perpetrators in Chad and Sudan. And hundreds of people from dozens of countries visited *DarfuriWomen.org* to send messages of comfort and hope.



PHR team members meet with sheikas (female camp leaders) at the Farchana camp, Chad, to explain the purpose and methods of a sexual violence study. (Lin Piwowarczyk, MD)

- After PHR supporters helped secure \$48 billion in government funds over five years for global HIV/AIDS in 2008, we worked in 2009 to ensure this money is well spent. **Last month President Obama announced the end of the HIV travel ban for visitors to the US, which PHR had vigorously campaigned on.**

PHR's constant vigilance for women's health has helped transform the United States' policy on women and AIDS from one that denied women comprehensive family planning programming to one that insists that women's health needs be integrated into programs that prevent and treat AIDS and promote human rights.

- This year, thousands of men, women and children arrived in the United States seeking asylum. Many have suffered unimaginable physical and psychological torture. If they are sent back, they face further persecution — even death. PHR has provided more than 350 asylum seekers free medical evaluations through our unique network of trained, dedicated health professionals qualified to provide professional affidavits for victims of torture, rape and violence.

As one asylum attorney recently wrote us, *“The medical report [provided through PHR’s Asylum Network] was invaluable in demonstrating the requisite, well-founded fear that our client had of his home government. I am pleased to say that my client was granted asylum!”*

- In 2008, PHR discovered apparent tampering at the Dasht-e-Leili mass grave site in northern Afghanistan. PHR investigators first located the site in 2002. The large sand-swept area allegedly contained the remains of as many as 2,000 prisoners who were reportedly suffocated in container trucks after surrendering to US and Afghan forces in November 2001.

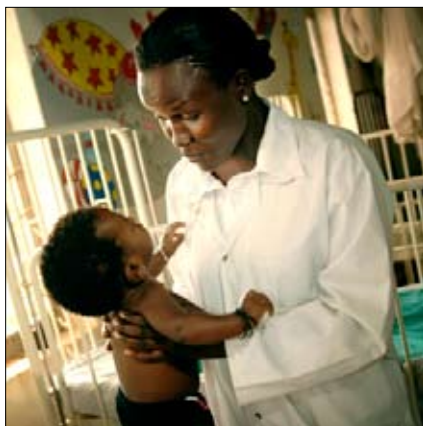
On July 11, a front-page *New York Times* article focused on PHR’s findings and exposed Bush Administration efforts to shut down at least three federal investigations into the reported atrocity, including an FBI criminal probe.

The Times report spurred hundreds more media reports around the world. And within 24 hours, President Obama ordered his national security team to compile what they know about the incidents at Dasht-e-Leili including reported US cover-ups, and bring it to his desk for further action. PHR is not giving up on this critical case. Our website AfghanMassGrave.org documents our work on this issue.

- This year, PHR’s Student Program trained and organized a new generation of medical leaders, convening hundreds of students from our nearly 70 chapters nationwide. **We have inspired thousands of young medical, nursing and public health students to carry on the torch of the human rights movement.**



PHR advisor and Asylum Network member Allen Keller, MD speaks with an asylum seeker. (PHR)



Julian Atim, MD, examines an infant at Mulago Hospital, Kampala, Uganda. (© Vanessa Vick)



A Darfuri girl, living in a Chad refugee camp, enjoys a biscuit. (Sondra Crosby, MD)

Ongoing and New Initiatives: PHR Moving Forward

- PHR has begun a first-of-its-kind investigation of crimes against humanity in Burma. Using interviews with civilians persecuted by the entrenched military dictatorship, the investigation will enable us to **deliver authoritative data to help mobilize policymakers, health professionals and public opinion to end this ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis.**
- In the African nations of Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and now Guinea, tens of thousands of women and girls have been and continue to be sexually assaulted with impunity during and following armed conflict. **PHR's goal is to protect survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict and give them voice in redressing and preventing the violations in their communities and beyond.**
- PHR's International Forensic Program will provide scientific experts to assess crime scenes and identify remains resulting from human rights violations, including mass graves, deaths in detention, rape and excessive use of force. **And increasingly, there is a need to record admissible forensic documentation of harms to people's health, especially among marginalized populations, caused by environmental abuses.**
- PHR's new Global Health Action Campaign will promote effective accountability for the health sector and more meaningful participation of vulnerable groups in making decisions about health and about the implementation of health programs. Our guiding principle is the right of all people to the highest attainable standard of health as we advocate for effective, well-funded, integrated health systems that are equitable and accessible to all. **This campaign will provide the evidence that adoption of a human rights framework to health improves health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups.**
- PHR continues to work for accountability for US officials who justified and ordered torture of detainees. Under the Bush Administration, US anti-terrorism efforts illegally "weaponized" the health professions to design and supervise interrogation techniques that constitute torture. Some health professionals violated their oath to "Do No Harm" by facilitating torture. **We seek accountability for crimes and violations of professional ethics. PHR will restore health professionals' standing and leadership as opponents of torture.**

2009 has been a dramatic year. PHR has equally dynamic programs planned for 2010.

As the leader of a healing community at the heart of the human rights movement, Physicians for Human Rights is changing the world in a way that no one else can. Through steadfast organizing, advocacy, and support of people of conscience within the healing community — the health professionals led by Physicians for Human Rights — the struggle for health, dignity and justice will be waged and won.



<http://physiciansforhumanrights.org>



PHR shared the 1997
Nobel Peace Prize.



Physicians for Human Rights has been awarded Charity Navigator's highest rating for sound fiscal management.