

From: Robert F. Kennedy Memorial
To:
Subject: Visionaries in Action: May Edition



ROBERT F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL
Center For Human Rights

**"Each time a man stands up for an ideal...
he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope...."
Robert F. Kennedy**

A Message from the Executive Director:



**Monika Kalra Varma,
RFK Center Director**

We are proud to announce the appointment of Monika Kalra Varma as the new Director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights. Ms. Varma currently serves as Acting Director of RFK Center having worked with the organization for over 4 years, previously serving as Program Director.

We are fortunate to have Monika at the helm of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial's Center for Human Rights. She has played a pivotal role in transforming cutting edge economic and social rights concepts into some of our most successful and dynamic programs.

Ms. Varma will direct RFK Center, overseeing its day to day operations and programmatic work. She will work with staff, board members, the Kennedy family, and volunteers to construct advocacy programs, which provide on-going support to the Center's partners, the RFK Human Rights Award winners. She will also oversee the annual Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award honoring courageous grassroots human rights defenders.

Since joining RFK Center, Ms. Varma has spearheaded the Center's innovative economic and social rights advocacy and efforts to hold international financial institutions, donor states and UN Member States accountable for human rights violations. A human rights lawyer, Ms. Varma previously worked for the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Hague, Netherlands as a legal officer. Ms. Varma currently also serves on the Editorial Board of Harvard-based François-Xavier Bagnoud's Health and Human Rights journal.

Under Monika's leadership we will continue to make an even greater impact on the movement for human rights.

Warm Regards,

Lynn Delaney, Executive Director
Robert F. Kennedy Memorial

Monthly Updates:

Sonia Pierre (Dominican Republic, 2006)

Fighting to realize the right to nationality of Dominicans of Haitian descent and the fundamental rights of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic.



- In late March, Dominican newspapers announced that the Administrative Chamber of the Electoral Board (JCE), the Dominican agency in charge of the civil registry, had recommended that a judge annul Sonia Pierre's birth certificate. JCE investigators claimed to have uncovered information that Sonia's parents were not legal residents when they registered Sonia in 1963 and therefore she has no right to Dominican nationality. Any such decision would place Sonia in imminent danger of expulsion and make her stateless. RFK Center launched into action after these reports were first published, rallying support from the U.S. Department of State, members of the U.S. Congress, the human rights community and working with members of the international and Dominican press to let the Dominican government know such unilateral disenfranchisement without due process was a violation of human rights and would not stand. [Read our press release here.](#)

- Although RFK Center remains concerned for Sonia, RFK Center, Sonia and MUDHA worry that such non transparent investigations have potentially disastrous implications for the tens of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent living in the Dominican Republic. During the past 6 months, Sonia and MUDHA staff have received reports that JCE offices are arbitrarily voiding birth certificates of Dominico-Haitians across the country. Nullifications have been done administratively, per discretion of JCE employees, and without any due process. RFK Center has called on the Dominican government to be transparent and follow judicial due process in all investigations and dealings with the validity of birth certificates.

- After initial press reports indicated that the JCE board had made a definitive decision to void her birth certificate, JCE President Castaños Guzmán, later clarified that "the JCE does not have the authority to revoke anyone's nationality, [including Sonia's]. Only the country's courts of law have that prerogative." Guzman affirmed that JCE legal department needed to further investigate Sonia's case, and once the investigation concluded they would share their findings with the JCE board, which will determinate what steps to take. Although the JCE will not immediately void her birth certificate, she is still under investigation. Various politicians are still publicly calling for her birth certificate to be voided and are also calling on Dominicans and Haitians to unite against Sonia and her movement. Sonia and her children's personal safety is still at risk. RFK Center and Sonia RFK Center continues to call on the Dominican government to publicly state that a JCE vote does NOT need to occur and for the JCE to declare this issue closed. Furthermore RFK Center has called on the Dominican government to stop the harassment of Sonia through the media.

- On April 20, the EU-Rio Group, a key forum for EU-Latin American relations met recently in Santo Domingo for a yearly meeting, chaired this year by the Dominican Republic. RFK Center sent a letter to the roughly 20 Foreign Ministers participating at the meeting in Dominican Republic about both the need to follow through and monitor compliance with the Interim Cooperation Framework regarding aid to Haiti (see Loune Viaud's update below) and of the need to confront continued human rights violations against Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic.

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Stephen Bradberry (USA, 2005)

Striving for full political participation of the working poor in New Orleans in the government decisions that affect them.



- RFK Center is working with Stephen and ACORN to develop an advocacy strategy supporting the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. The Civic Works project aims to bring 100,000 federally funded and locally managed living wage public works jobs, for displaced people or Katrina survivors who have already moved back, to rebuild the Gulf Coast, similar to jobs under the Works Progress Administration. While similar plans have been proposed in the past year and a half, Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton, a professor at San Jose State University, has garnered significant support from various groups, including local ACLU and NAACP affiliates, and U.S. House Homeland Security Committee Chairman, Bennie Thompson, towards developing such legislation. [Click here to read about the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project.](#)

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Delphine Djiraibe (Chad, 2004)

Advocating for World Bank accountability, corporate social responsibility, access to justice, and governmental transparency in Chad



- Delphine's efforts in establishing the first Public Interest Law Firm in Chad (PILF) have been greatly enhanced with the technological contributions of Thomas McPherson of the Macpherson Consulting Group, LLC. Mr. McPherson donated a variety of technical equipment including, but not limited to, laptops, printers, desktop computers, software, and internet installation and fees. The contributions of Mr. McPherson will undoubtedly make Delphine's organization one of the most technologically advanced in the country of Chad. Mr. McPherson's contribution is greatly appreciated by Delphine and RFK Center staff.

- On April 13th, RFK Center staff met with Delphine in Washington D.C. RFK Center staff discussed the development of PILF as well as Delphine's intended goals for the PILF's continued progress.

- On April 14th-15th, Delphine attended the World Bank Group's 2007 Spring Meeting in Washington D.C. The meeting was held to discuss the status of the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund's current projects. The most critical issue discussed was the Africa Action Plan. An estimated 37 percent of Africans will still be poor in 2015 if current trends continue. Thus, the World Bank hopes that its Africa Action Plan will speed up economic progress and boost the impact of developmental assistance in Africa.

- During the World Bank Group's 2007 Spring Meeting, Delphine, in conjunction with the Center for Environment and Development (from Cameroon) and the Environmental Defense Fund, launched the [final Report](#) on the Chad-Cameroon Oil and Pipeline Project. The Report highlighted the adverse impacts of the Chad-Cameroon Oil and Pipeline Project such as the increased violence and poverty, and the creation of new environmental problems. The Report further asked the World Bank Group to take responsibility for the Project and immediately address the outstanding

environmental, livelihood, and compensation problems.

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Coalition of Immokalee Workers (2003, USA)

Ending modern-day slavery and the exploitation of migrant workers in the U.S. agricultural industry.



- On April 10th, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) reached a historic agreement with the McDonald's Corporation at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia realizing concrete gains for thousands of US farmworkers. McDonald's ceded to the following terms: a pay raise of a penny per pound of tomatoes picked; supply chain transparency and a verifiable zero tolerance policy for modern-day slavery; and the right for farmworkers to participate, through the CIW, in the development and implementation of an enforceable code of conduct. [Read more here.](#)

- The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial's board of directors helped the CIW in their negotiations by reaching out to members of the McDonald's Corporation's board of directors and advocating on behalf of the farmworkers.

- On April 13th, Kerry Kennedy and RFK Center released statements praising the Coalition of Immokalee's efforts. [Read Kerry's Statement.](#) [Read RFK Center Press Release.](#)

- On April 12-14th, RFK Center staff attended the Coalition of Immokalee Worker's (CIW) 2007 Truth Tour in Chicago, the headquarters of the McDonald's Corporation. The Truth Tour was to be the beginning of a nationwide boycott against McDonald's. Since CIW and the McDonald's Corporation had reached an agreement a few days prior, the Chicago events celebrated the CIW's victory and allowed allies to plan the campaign's next step, Burger King.

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Loune Viaud (Haiti, 2002)

Realizing the human right to health for all Haitians.



- In March, the RFK Center made a written submission to the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere's hearing on Haiti's development needs. The submission called on the US government to make public information about US disbursements to the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF), referencing the ICF priority areas, efforts to ensure local participation of Haitian communities in all phases of project development and implementation. RFK Center asked that all information released be accessible to local Haitians. The ICF is a coordinated effort by the Haitian government and international community to ensure funds for Haiti meet Haiti's needs and priorities and the international community's own human rights obligations. The

international community pledged over \$1 billion through this process. Unfortunately, the ICF has not been implemented as originally envisioned and specifically does not have a monitoring mechanism to ensure that donor states follow through on the framework. [Click here to read the submission.](#)

- In April, RFK Center sent letters to several members of the Rio Group, including leaders in Latin America and the European Union, who met in the Dominican Republic. Discussions included the need for the international community to fulfill its obligations to Haiti. The RFK Center asked the Rio Members to call for a monitoring mechanism to track donor states disbursements through the ICF and whether they are complying with the framework laid out by the ICF.

- In March, RFK Center Director joined AT member and director of the NYU Human Rights Clinic, Meg Satterthwaite, Dr. David Walton from Zanmi Lasante, human rights lawyer, Mario Joseph, and Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute of Justice and Democracy at Amnesty International's national general meeting to discuss economic and social rights advocacy on Haiti. RFK Center highlighted the international community's human rights obligations and effective advocacy strategies on a panel entitled "Poverty, Human Rights, and Haiti: Affecting Change through Grassroots Advocacy."

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[Darci Frigo \(Brazil, 2001\)](#)

Promoting rights of the landless and sustainable agriculture in Brazil and combating modern-day slavery.



- The trial of one of the masterminds of the assassination of Sister Dorothy Stang, Viltamiro Bastos de Moura (Bida) will take place on May 14, 2007 in Belém in Pará, Brazil. RFK Center Staff will be present at that trial.

- RFK Center together with an active Stang Family, Jeff Hsu and Brent Rushforth from Heller Ehrman LLP, pro-bono lawyers for the family, have led fierce international pressure compelling the crime to be investigated and prosecuted quickly, as opposed to the vast impunity in other land conflict crimes committed in Brazil. Currently, the hired gunmen Rayfran das Neves Sales and Clodoaldo Carlos Batista, and the middleman Amair Feijoli da Cunha, have all been convicted and are now serving their sentences in jail. The alleged masterminds, Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura (Bida) and Regivaldo Pereira Galvão (Taradão), are awaiting trial. While Bida is awaiting for trial his May 14 trial in jail, Taradão has been released from protective custody by the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) in July 2006, with trial date still pending. A 2005 Federal Senators Report into Sister Dorothy's death, in which Pará's Governor Ana Júlia Carepa played an important role, reported that the conspiracy to kill Sister Dorothy ran much deeper than just these two landowners. Thus, the trials of Bida and Taradão should be viewed as a beginning, and not an end, to this case.

- In the United States, Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) or "Fast Track," grants President Bush the power to submit trade deals for accelerated approval by lawmakers in a straight "yes" or "no" vote, without amendment. This authority expires June 30, 2007. RFK Center and others believe Fast Track, by ceding the regulation of international commerce from the U.S. Congress more directly to the White House, is indeed more hurtful than helpful to developing countries. In late March, RFK Center joined with other 712 US organization in signing on a letter to the U.S. Congressional Democratic Leadership urging Congress not to renew Fast Track authority to President Bush during

the 110th Congress. Frigo's Terra de Direitos (TDD) also joined over 60 organizations from developing countries signing on the international version of the letter. [Read the letter here.](#)

- The International Day for Peasant's Struggle Day commemorates the Massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás on April 17, 1996 in the Brazilian State of Pará, where 19 peasants were killed by Brazilian military policy and 69 were left injured. In honor of those killed in Carajás, Via Campesina International has enacted April 17th the day of international peasant struggle all over the world. In honor of the day and in support of a set of agrarian reform proposals made by Frigo's allies in the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), the RFK Center has signed on a letter to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva asking his administration to implement MST's comprehensive proposal for a sustainable and social responsible agrarian reform. Friends of MST, a organization that supports the MST in the United States, has translated the letter to English. [Please click this link and sign on to the letter.](#)

- After reviewing the applications submitted for the 2007 clerkship position with Terra de Direitos (TDD), TDD and the RFK Center are pleased to announce Maura Prendiville has been chosen for the clerkship position, based on her impressive academic and professional qualifications. Ms. Prendiville is third-year law student at Boalt Hall Law School, University California, Berkley and will spend one year with a clerkship in Curitiba, Brazil, at Terra de Direitos's headquarters. Working with TDD, we are confident Ms. Prendiville will contribute to strengthen human rights and the Brazilian social movements.

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Martin Macwan (India, 2000)

Bringing an end to human rights violations and discrimination against the "untouchable" Dalit population in India.



- Advocacy Team Member, David Armstrong traveled to Gujarat in April to provide data analysis training to Navsarjan staff and begin initial analysis of the data collected on untouchability practices across Gujarat. In addition to gathering a vast amount of data on untouchability practices, the project will provide Navsarjan with the capacity to carry out subsequent surveys on human rights violations against dalits and analyze the findings internally. This information not only assist Navsarjan in gathering evidence for legal actions, but will inform its future campaigns, and assist in tracking the efficacy of such campaigns.

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Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis (Liberia, 1999)

Strengthening Liberian civil society and respect for human rights as a basis for sustainable peace.



- RFK Center staff, on behalf of the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), recently met with Catherine Nielsen, coordinator of the Freedom of Information Project at the National Security Archives (NSA), to follow up on pending Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests regarding human rights abuses during the conflict in Liberia. Ms. Nielsen informed CHR staff that the NSA has filed over 174 requests on behalf of the JPC. From those same requests, 540 documents were

released (a total of 40,000+ pages) by the Department of State (DOS).

- RFK Center facilitated a training by Kristen Cibelli, of Benetech (an organization dedicated to creating new technology solutions that serve humanity and empower people to improve their lives), for the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) personnel on Martus software in Monrovia, Liberia. Martus is a software tool for digitizing information about past and current human rights abuses. Martus will be especially helpful in organizing the material recovered by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and documenting past and present human rights abuses in Liberia. RFK Center donated a laptop to JPC to help with the training.

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Berenice Celeyta, Gloria Florez & Jaime Prieto (1998, Colombia)

Protecting human rights defenders and defending the rights of those marginalized by the internal conflict in Colombia.



- As a plot to assassinate over 175 representatives of human rights organizations, labor unions and members of the political opposition in the Valle del Cauca region, including Berenice Celeyta, Operation Dragon (OD) was discovered in August 2004. In September 2006, a disturbing memo from the Attorney General's Office ((Fiscalia General de la Nación) wrongfully associating Berenice and other human rights defenders with terrorist organizations was discovered. Since then, Berenice and RFK Center have been meeting with Colombian officials in Colombia and Washington, DC, respectively, advocating for a conclusion on the case investigation and prosecution of the persons implicated on the case.

- Colombian authorities claim the case is being investigated, however it is very worrisome that after 3 years of the discovery of Operation Dragon case, the alleged responsible for plotting the assassination scheme, Lt. Col. Julian Villate Leal (Col. Villate) is still untouched. Col. Villate is a former student of the infamous School of the Americas, an employee for the Colombia operations of the US based Drummond Coal Company, and was also employed by the US Embassy in Colombia from December 2004 to July 2005, even after his home was raided by the Fiscalia (Aug 25 2004) and all the info on Operation Dragon was discovered.

- On April 30, 2007, RFK Center Staff participated in a meeting with Colombia's Attorney General (Fiscal General) Mr. Mario Iguarán promoted by the Colombian Embassy in Washington, DC. At that meeting, RFK Center staff has shared with Mr. Iguarán and Deputy Ambassador Mariana Pacheco concerns that Col. Villate, has not yet being brought to justice, even after witnesses testified to Colombian authorities that Col. Villate was involved in plotting Operation Dragon, as well as schemes to assassinate opposition Senators Alexander López Maya and Gustavo Petro.

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Gibson Kamau Kuria (1988, Kenya)

Championing for Kenya's legal and constitutional reform.



• CHR recently donated several American Constitutional Law books to Gibson to help expand his current legal resources.

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