No one leaves home unless...

In her powerful poem Home, Warsan Shire movingly conveys the reality refugees face—the chaos and danger of flight, the excruciating choices, the frightening quest for safety in a land of strangers. In 2015 the western world awoke to a refugee crisis that had been intensifying for several years. Today, more than 60 million people—the highest number ever recorded—are displaced by persecution and violence.

This is the worst humanitarian crisis in a generation. The United States is the only country with the resources, knowledge, and commitment necessary to lead a global effort to relieve the suffering and resolve the crisis.

What it has lacked so far is political will. We are pressing our country to step into this vacuum and lead. Americans have long seen themselves as a nation that welcomes and protects victims of persecution and war. It is time for us to live those values.

For nearly forty years, Human Rights First has worked to protect refugees. Last fall, when the House of Representatives passed legislation to shut out Syrian and Iraqi refugees, we mobilized a bipartisan group of national security leaders who argued that protecting refugees—particularly those fleeing the brutality of ISIS—is critical in our struggle against terrorism. The bill died in the Senate.

We continue to push for a response to the refugee crisis worthy of the United States. President Obama pledged to take in 10,000 Syrians in fiscal year 2016—a welcome but inadequate step. We think that number should be at least 100,000.

In addition, we are urging the United States to increase aid to the frontline states sheltering most of the refugees, and press other countries to do more.

To lead by example, the United States must also deal humanely with refugees fleeing across our southern border. We waged a campaign against the Obama Administration’s cruel “family detention” policy, which locked up Central American refugees and their young children. We won an important victory when Pennsylvania revoked the license of a “family detention” center because of the harm it inflicts on children.

We will never stop challenging our country to live up to its ideals. This report highlights some of our most important accomplishments in 2015.

Thank you for supporting this essential—and life-saving—work.

Excerpts from “Home” by Warsan Shire
Refugees are the very embodiment of upheaval. Today, many are fleeing crises that the U.S. and its allies helped to create. We should work to resolve the underlying causes of flight. But in the meantime, we must help refugees reach safety.

Op-ed by Elisa Massimino and Mark Hatfield

“Last year, 7,000 Jews left France for Israel, more than double the year before, the threat of violence against them having become ‘acute,’ Elisa Massimino, president of Human Rights First, a nongovernmental organization, said.”

Newsweek

“Yet suffering (refugee) mothers and their children remain locked up. They fled some of the most dangerous places on Earth ... and fear for their children’s lives is often why mothers flee.”

Op-ed by Elisa Massimino and Carol Robles-Román

The Miami Herald

“The observer

“Elisa Massimino, president and CEO of Human Rights First... has been influential on everything from the debate on the authorization of military force to the closing of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.”

Defense One

“Elisa Massimino of Human Rights First, faulted the President: ‘Obama hasn’t provided the leadership we would expect from somebody who set out [to end torture] as a priority issue. I think his job is to lead the country to a stronger consensus that we don’t want to do this again, and he failed at that.”

The New Yorker

“The New York Times

“Elisa Massimino, president of the advocacy group Human Rights First, attended Thursday’s meeting and was struck by the juxtaposition of rhetoric and reality: ‘We’re sitting in that room with representatives of governments that are part of the problem,’ she said.”

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bolstering the ban on torture

More than a decade ago, we began building a coalition of distinguished military leaders to challenge the damaging misconception that torture keeps us safe. Together, we changed the debate—and U.S. policy—on torture. President Obama said these generals and admirals “made an extraordinary impression” on him. That’s why they were in the Oval Office when he signed his 2009 executive order banning torture.

It was a major victory for human rights, shutting the door on torture. But we knew that without a public accounting of post-9/11 abuses, the temptation to reopen that door would persist. So we set our sights on the classified Senate intelligence committee’s report on CIA torture.

In 2014, we led a successful effort to secure public release of the report’s executive summary, which proved that torture was not only more brutal and more prevalent than Americans had been led to believe, but was utterly ineffective as an intelligence technique.

In 2015, we used the momentum generated by the report’s release to push for a law that would lock the door to torture. Our allies Senators John McCain and Dianne Feinstein introduced a bill that would ban so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques and preclude the kind of loophole lawyering that government officials had exploited to authorize torture.

Because our ultimate goal is to build a durable consensus against torture, it was important not only for the bill to pass, but for it to attract wide, bipartisan support. To that end, we mobilized the military coalition as well as a group of veteran interrogators to advocate for the bill.

In June, the Senate passed it 78-21, a rare bipartisan victory in a Congress notorious for partisan gridlock. Senators McCain and Feinstein credited our work, and President Obama signed the bill into law in December.

It has been a long way back from the “dark side.” We’ll keep working to ensure that our country never makes a return trip. ■
CLOSING IN ON CLOSURE

The prison at Guantanamo Bay is an affront to the rule of law and a stain on American ideals. And because it alienates allies and helps terrorist groups recruit, it weakens U.S. national security.

We have been at the forefront of the effort to shut it down. Working with our long-time partners—the coalition of retired generals and admirals—we’ve kept the pressure on and made the case that, despite obstruction from Congress, with leadership and determination, President Obama can close Guantanamo.

In 2015, he got the message. President Obama stepped up the pace of transfers, bringing the prison population down to just over 100. In 2016 we will press him to finish the job and make Guantanamo history.
Amid a backlash, we mobilized leaders and championed American ideals.

There are more refugees in flight from persecution and war today than at any time since World War II. The degree of suffering is staggering: the war in Syria alone has forced more than 4.8 million people to flee the country; another 7.6 million are internally displaced. 8.3 million Syrian children are in need of humanitarian aid.

The United States’ response has been conflicted. While it’s been a leader in funding the humanitarian relief effort, it has accepted less than 3,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement—a paltry number in the face of enormous need, and far less than its fair share for a wealthy nation that holds refugee protection as a founding ideal.

This is a global crisis, and it requires a global—and coordinated—response. Informed by fact-finding trips to the region, we’ve called on the United States to spearhead this effort. Doing so would fulfill its historic role as a leader in protecting refugees and secure its strategic interests by safeguarding the stability of Syria’s neighbors, U.S. allies struggling to host millions of refugees.

In 2015, President Obama announced that he would increase resettlement of Syrian refugees to at least 10,000 in 2016. While still woefully insufficient, it was at least a sign of progress.

But then attacks by ISIS supporters in Paris unleashed anti-refugee hysteria. Never mind that many Syrian refugees are victims of ISIS brutality, more than half the nation’s governors declared they would bar refugees from their states, and Congress took up legislation that would shut the door on refugees from Syria and Iraq, including those in danger because they assisted the U.S. military.

Amid mounting hostility fueled by ignorance and fear, we launched an effort to inform politicians and the public. As we made the case on Capitol Hill, we assembled a bipartisan group of national security heavy-hitters who argued in a letter to lawmakers that spurning refugees undermines our counterterrorism efforts and “feeds the narrative of ISIS that there is a war between Islam and the West.”

We helped stop the most draconian effort to shut out refugees, at least for now, and are continuing to press our government for a response to the crisis worthy of the United States.

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Getting 10,000 Syrian Refugees into the United States
Brian Lehrer | 09.14.15

“This country has a long history of being a nation of immigrants and a nation founded by people who are fleeing persecution,” said Human Rights First’s Eleanor Acer. “That’s who we are.”
“Faced with the largest refugee and displacement crisis since World War II, it is time for America to stand up for its values and to lead again. Human Rights First’s approach to addressing this crisis is bold, strategic, and effective.”
–Ambassador Ryan Crocker
We fought for asylum seekers—and against the detention of families and children

In 2014-15, tens of thousands of people—many of them children—fled brutal gang and domestic violence in Central America and sought protection in the United States. Instead, they were met with swift deportation or prolonged detention, as our government sought to deter other desperate people from coming. Human Rights First responded by providing pro bono legal representation and pressing the U.S. government to treat refugees fairly and humanely, in accordance with international law and American ideals.

At the center of the government’s strategy for addressing this vulnerable population is a policy of “family detention”—locking up families with young children. Unprecedented in modern U.S. history, wide-scale family detention is devastating to children and incompatible with international law. We documented poor conditions and barriers to legal counsel at these facilities and pressed the United States to end this cruel and unnecessary policy.

In July, a federal judge agreed, ordering the government to release children and mothers on grounds that their detention violated a 1997 court settlement. But the victory was short-lived; the Obama Administration appealed the ruling and continued its policy.

In the meantime, we decided to pursue a local remedy. We knew that the Department of Homeland Security was holding families at the Berks County Residential Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania. Working with pediatricians, we published a report showing that even short-term detention threatens the physical and emotional health of child refugees. We pressed Pennsylvania’s Department of Human Services to withhold the license for Berks.

We won. Pennsylvania denied the Berks facility a license—a victory for refugees that sent an important message to other states: detention is no place for children.

At the same time, we made progress securing reforms that will alleviate the suffering of refugees and help them get protection. Congress funded an additional 55 judges who will reduce the backlog in immigration courts, the Department of Homeland Security issued new rules limiting the time families spend in detention, and more refugees were allowed to pass through the “credible fear” screening process to access the asylum system.

We’re keeping up the fight against family detention, part of our multifaceted effort to ensure the United States fulfills its rightful role as a safe haven.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

Pa. won’t renew license of immigrant-family detention center

By Michael Matza | 10.23.15

“Human Rights First, a national advocacy group...visited [the facility] twice and issued reports citing pediatricians who said it is an oppressive environment for children...Human Rights First’s Olga Byrne [called the action] ‘a tremendous step in the right direction.’"
HELPING REFUGEES, EXPANDING OUR REACH

In 1980 we began engaging volunteer lawyers to represent refugees. Today this work remains core to our mission. Our pro bono representation program is one of the largest and most successful efforts of its kind and has won protection for thousands of persecuted people. And we’re growing. In 2014 we opened an office in Houston, where there’s a growing need for legal representation. The following year we established a presence in Los Angeles. Our staff is mobilizing the private bar there to help refugees get the protection they deserve. In 2015, volunteer lawyers provided $46.5 million of legal services through our program. Together we won legal protection for 109 clients, and in the process trained and inspired a new generation of human rights advocates.

“Words alone cannot express my gratitude. Human Rights First is my guardian angel in the USA.”
–Refugee from Nigeria, represented by Keller and Heckman LLP
In January 2015, the attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris triggered long overdue public attention to the resurgence of antisemitism in Europe—and why it is so dangerous.

Human Rights First was an early voice raising the alarm about this problem. Thirteen years ago, after a spate of violent attacks on Jews that European governments downplayed and dismissed, we began documenting antisemitic violence and pressing governments to combat it.

That’s why, when the United Nations General Assembly held its first-ever special session on the rise of global antisemitism, our president and CEO Elisa Massimino was invited to be a featured speaker. Massimino argued that the rise of antisemitism is a harbinger of broader societal breakdown that imperils European democracies and the E.U. itself—some of America’s closest allies. She urged the United States and its European allies to view the surge of antisemitic violence not simply as a Jewish problem but as a grave threat to human rights and democratic ideals that demands an aggressive and holistic response.

Our message resonated in Washington, where the Obama Administration began to address the Hungarian government’s slide towards authoritarianism. Pressed on his right by the fascist party Jobbik, Prime Minister Victor Orban has enabled antisemitism, even dabbling in Holocaust revisionism.

Most immediately, we pressed the U.S. government to protest Hungary’s plan to erect a statue honoring Balint Homan, a notorious Nazi collaborator. Ira Forman, the U.S. special envoy on antisemitism, joined a protest at the prospective site. This, along with other forms of pressure from Washington, compelled Orban to scrap the statue—a victory for historical truth.

We also set our sights on France, where the rise of both neo-fascist parties and Islamic extremism is fueling violence against Jews.

We conducted a major investigation into the nature and causes of antisemitism in France. We were in Paris just before and after the horrific terrorist attacks in November 2015. We found civil society, religious leaders, technology executives, and public officials in the United States and France eager to discuss our analysis.

In early 2016, we published a report detailing our findings and putting forth a concrete plan of action for both the U.S. and French governments. Now we are pressing all sectors—government, business, and civil society—to make combating antisemitism a priority.
“Human Rights First gives a brand new perspective to fight antisemitism in Europe by building coalitions and by proposing a U.S.-French Action Plan.”–Ilan Scialom, Vice President, Coexister, a youth organization in France

ABOVE: At our 2015 Human Rights First Award Dinner we honored Jane Braden-Golay (above center), Siavosh Derakhti (left), and Niddal El-Jabri (right)—three young Europeans from diverse faith backgrounds who are challenging the scourge of antisemitism and extremism in their own communities.

RIGHT: Human Rights First’s Elisa Massimino was a featured speaker at the U.N. General Assembly’s first-ever meeting on antisemitism. “At Human Rights First, we view antisemitism as a grave threat to human rights. To us, that is obvious,” Massimino said. She urged a strong response to “the unfinished challenge of the 20th century.”

The Washington Times

U.S. rights groups air concerns for minorities in Hungary

By Nate Madden | 05.20.15

“Growing nationalism, authoritarianism, official corruption, the growing strength of anti-Semitic and racist political parties, and the increasing influence of Russia” are all impediments to better ties with Washington, [said] Tad Stahnke, vice president of analysis and research at Human Rights First.”
targeting the global slave trade

A generation ago, most Americans didn’t realize that slavery was still a major problem in the world. Even fewer knew that it was happening here in the United States.

Today, public awareness is growing, and Congress has passed numerous laws targeting human trafficking. Yet the problem persists, and may even be worsening. The International Labor Organization estimates that some 21 million people are enslaved around the world.

The reason for the lack of progress is no mystery: modern slavery is big business. For perpetrators, the profits are enormous, and the risks small. The number of prosecutions worldwide—10,051 in 2014 with fewer than 4,500 convictions—is a tiny fraction of estimated incidents.

At Human Rights First, we aim to flip the risk-reward equation, so that the chance of punishment far outweighs the potential profit. That means, first of all,

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**We launched a campaign to bankrupt the business of human trafficking**

Lawmakers to demand full accounting on human trafficking report

By Alex Wilts and Matt Spetalnick

8.4.15

“Amy Sobel, vice president of Human Rights First’s anti-trafficking campaign, said Reuters’ findings pointed to broader political interference, which risked ‘eroding the effectiveness’ of the report and undermining international efforts.”
Uniting leaders from the military, business, law enforcement, and civil rights communities, we launched a campaign to bankrupt the business of modern slavery.

“You have been playing such a lead role. Human Rights First has pushed so many businesses to step up to this challenge of eradicating human trafficking.”
– Thomas E. Perez Secretary of Labor

exponentially increasing funding for anti-trafficking efforts.

It also means innovative and aggressive law enforcement strategies and collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector.

In 2015, to help us bring about the changes we seek, we assembled a group of leaders from business, government, law enforcement, the military, and activists. Chaired by General Charles C. Krulak (USMC, ret.) and former FBI director Louis J. Freeh, this group of “ambassadors” launched an advocacy and public education campaign designed to bankrupt the business of modern slavery.

These ambassadors helped make the case to Congress for increased funding for Department of Justice Programs by $7.5 million for regional human trafficking taskforces that foster cooperation between local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement and have a proven track record of success in improving human trafficking investigations and prosecutions.

This an important step in bringing traffickers to justice, and we aim to build on it as we continue our effort to increase the tools, resources, and efforts to put traffickers out of business.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell, a member of our ambassadors group, was one of 60 mayors from around the world invited to participate in a Vatican conference with Pope Francis on climate change and human trafficking.
“Your support meant a lot to me when I was behind prison bars. Huge impact! Thanks again.”
–Tweet from Jawad M. Hussain, Bahraini activist

REPRESSION IN BAHRAIN CONTINUES. In February 2011, mass pro-democracy demonstrations broke out in Bahrain. Peaceful protestors continue to demand respect for their rights, and we are amplifying their voices—in Washington and beyond.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-EXTREMISM CONNECTION. In 2015, we urged the U.S. government to focus on the human rights abuses of its counterterrorism partners, like the Kenyan government, which fuel the very extremism they’re claiming to combat.
Real change in any society comes from within. Movements for change are often led by activists who risk their own freedom—and safety—to press governments to respect rights. Transformative change is possible only in places where activists can operate freely and make their voices heard.

That’s why we invest in deep, respectful partnerships with them. Their perspectives inform our advocacy. We amplify their voices in the corridors of power, defend them from persecution, and work to shape U.S. foreign policy to advance their cause.

Outright brutality can spark popular resistance and global condemnation, so repressive governments often find subtler ways to stifle dissent. In recent years, they’ve used the threat of terrorism as a pretext.

One of their tools has been the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a multi-government organization designed to protect the global financial system from terrorist funding and other threats. FATF regulations cited NGOs as a potential threat and encouraged governments to restrict them. The U.S. Treasury Department plays a key role on the FATF. So in 2015 we pressed Treasury to revise FATF regulations.

It worked. The FATF opened a dialogue with NGOs and revised its guidance, moving away from the presumption that NGOs pose particular risk of being involved in terrorism financing.

At the same time, we played a prominent role in the broader debate over countering violent extremism. In a series of policy blueprints, we argued that effective counterterrorism must be grounded in respect for human rights and that extremists, who exploit anger fueled by repression, thrive when governments choke off avenues of legitimate dissent.

Many U.S. counterterrorism partners thus exacerbate the very violence they claim to be combating. Before President Obama’s trip to Kenya, we pressed him to stress that the Kenyan government’s human rights abuses don’t counter terrorism, they foment it.

He got the message, repeatedly linking security with a strong “civil society,” calling it the “oxygen of democracy.”

Bahrain is another example where the monarchy increasingly frames its brutal crackdown on activists as “counterterrorism.” We worked with our allies in Congress—Senators Ron Wyden and Marco Rubio, and Representatives Jim McGovern and Joe Pitts—to introduce legislation restricting U.S. arms transfers to the monarchy until it cleans up its act.

In 2016, we will continue to defend courageous rights activists. Nothing is more essential to progress than their ability to operate freely. As activists go, so goes the world.

We pressed the U.S. government to support frontline activists

Obama must stand up to abusive Gulf allies

Op-ed by Brian Dooley of Human Rights First, and Maryam Al Khawaja
05.12.15

“Gulf human rights defenders need to hear that ... the United States will no longer stand mute in the face of attacks on civil society, that it cannot afford the dangerous outcomes of their sectarianism and repression, and that there will be consequences if it continues.”

BAHEY EL-DIN HASSAN, director of the Cairo Institute Studies (CIHRS) meets with U.S. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon. We teamed up with CIHRS to urge U.N. and U.S. officials to make respect for human rights a cornerstone of counterterrorism strategies.
leading by example to protect LGBT rights

In Jamaica, we made sure the U.S. government took a stand

The progress towards equality for LGBT people in many countries—including the United States—is one of the great recent human rights success stories. Yet in some countries, the trend is in the opposite direction: repressive governments are exploiting and exacerbating bigotry, often with violent results.

This is an issue where American leadership matters, and the Obama Administration has often provided it. President Obama has championed equality for LGBT people in the United States and around the world, making it a priority in U.S. foreign policy.

In 2015, we sought to convert that commitment into action, pressing the U.S. government to strengthen and expand its support for the human rights of LGBT people around the world. To that end, we urged Secretary of State John Kerry to create a position within the State Department responsible for driving this agenda.

And he did. When foreign service officer Randy Berry was named Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT Persons, we went to work helping him set his priorities.

While most of the U.S. media attention on this issue focused on the oppression and persecution of LGBT people in Russia [see box], Africa, and the Middle East, we urged Berry—and President Obama—to look closer to home and focus on the rights of LGBT people in Caribbean nations. To support that effort, we undertook fact-finding missions and published reports detailing the struggles and needs of LGBT people in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

In some places American support for LGBT equality is best expressed behind the scenes. But in Jamaica, where President Obama is extraordinarily popular, we knew full-throated leadership could make a difference. So when he decided to visit Jamaica, we assembled a coalition of 20 human rights organizations to encourage him to use the opportunity to amplify the voices of LGBT activists.

President Obama did just that, publicly singling out one of our activist partners, Quality of Citizenship Jamaica Executive Director Angeline Jackson. “She cares about her Jamaica,” the President said during his speech, “and making it a place where everybody, no matter their color, or their class, or their sexual orientation, can live in equality.”

“Human Rights First gave us the chance to speak directly to key actors in the fight for respect for LGBT people in Kyrgyzstan.” – Ruslan Kim, Kyrgyz activist
TOP RUSSIAN EXPORT: STATE-SANCTIONED BIGOTRY

In 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a now-infamous anti-LGBT “propaganda” law, which singles out LGBT people for persecution and discrimination under the guise of protecting children. The law turned the 2014 winter Olympics into a flashpoint, and we went to Sochi to support our activist partners as they protested the law.

The homophobic law has spawned offspring in neighboring countries. In 2015, we worked to quash proposals for Russian-style anti-LGBT laws in Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and an effort to stiffen Lithuania’s existing anti-LGBT law.

As always, we took our cue from activists on the ground to make sure that our advocacy reflects their perspectives. We spotlighted Kazakhstan’s anti-LGBT measure in the context of its bid to host the Olympics, and lawmakers ended up withdrawing it for that reason.

The good news is that in 2015 none of these copycat proposals became law. The bad news is that their mere appearance validates and exacerbates bigotry. We’ll continue to work with our activist partners to fight both these measures and the hatred that underlies them.

“The Washington Post

Kerry to appoint gay diplomat for overseas LGBT advocacy

By Josh Hicks | 02.09.15

“Human Rights First legal counsel Shawn Gaylord called it a ‘major milestone in the fight for equality worldwide.’”
creating consensus in washington

Our human rights summit unites advocates and examines solutions

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez praised our new report on human trafficking.

ABOVE: Is the United States doing enough to protect refugees? Panelists included [left to right] Alex Aleinikoff, UNHCR; Manal Omar, Middle East and Africa Center; Michael Gerson, The Washington Post; Eric Schwartz, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota

RIGHT: Ambassador Rick Barton discusses the need to protect human rights in the fight against terrorism.
“The Human Rights First Summit is invaluable. From a military perspective, from a veteran perspective, this is an opportunity for us to continue to serve.”
–Steve Parker, Colonel, U.S. Army Faculty Member, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, U.S. Dept. of Defense

“Human Rights First has a way of putting on the table the important issues we should be thinking about, in a practical way...not just as sentiment, but with a playbook.”
–Steve Clemons, Washington Editor-At-Large, The Atlantic and National Journal

“Events like this that create a safe haven can lead to partnerships— which is the only way you are going to tackle these problems.”
–Carlos Busquets, Director of Public Policy, Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition

“Human Rights First is spot on with the critical topics that really we all need to be discussing today.”
–Bama Athreya, Senior Specialist, Labor and Employment Rights, USAID

ABOVE: Sarah Simmons, Vice President & Senior Consultant at Nielsen, discussed the findings of a Harris Interactive Poll that showed demand from Americans for greater U.S. leadership on human rights.

BELOW: Christopher Walker of the National Endowment for Democracy speaks with Lu Jun, an activist with Yirenping in Beijing, and Barbara von Ow-Freytag of the Prague Civil Society Center.
Nearly 50 years ago, I had the responsibility and privilege of writing the legal brief for the ACLU on behalf of a white construction worker named Richard Loving and his childhood sweetheart Mildred Jeter, who was black. After marrying in Washington, D.C., they went home to Virginia, and were promptly jailed. The case led to the end of bans on interracial marriage.

The Loving case was back in the news in 2015. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy cited it in his majestic majority decision legalizing same-sex marriage. Grounded in the ideals of equality and human dignity, that decisive opinion was one of the reasons we honored Justice Kennedy with our 2015 Beacon Prize (see next page.)

Since our earliest days as the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, we have been guided by an abiding belief in the rule of law—and the role of lawyers—in protecting rights. Although our name has changed, our commitment to law as a vehicle for progress remains part of our DNA, shaping how we work. We are proud of our reputation for pragmatic, results-oriented advocacy that is politically astute, grounded in facts, and driven by sophisticated legal and policy analysis.

We know that laws alone aren’t sufficient to produce lasting change, which also requires engaged citizens and leaders of vision and courage. But the law is an essential tool for advocates, and the rule of law is the backbone of just, rights-respecting societies.

In 2015, one of our central goals was to solidify the ban on torture. While this horrendous practice had long been illegal under federal and international law, after 9/11 political leaders and their unscrupulous lawyers twisted the laws prohibiting torture into justifications for it. To prevent that from happening again, we teamed up with congressional allies, retired military leaders, and veteran interrogators to secure a new law explicitly banning water-boarding and other so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques.

It is the strongest, clearest anti-torture law in American history, and a broad bipartisan majority—78 senators—supported it. We’ve gone a long way toward preventing a return trip to the “dark side.”

That’s just one of the ways we strengthened respect for human rights and the rule of law in 2015. Thank you for the support that makes this progress possible.
Halting refugee resettlement compromises the security of all

Op-ed by Doris Meissner and James W. Ziglar | 12.03.15

Former INS Commissioner and Human Rights First board member Jim Ziglar teamed up with another ex-INS chief to challenge an anti-refugee bill. “Protecting vulnerable refugees and keeping Americans safe are not opposing concepts; they go hand in hand.”

“**This Beacon award reminds us that we must always rededicate ourselves to the proposition that the work of freedom is never done.**” – Judge Anthony Kennedy
Each year, we present our Beacon Prize to a person who embodies American leadership on human rights.

“When new insight reveals discord between the Constitution’s central protections and a received legal stricture, a claim to liberty must be addressed.”

So wrote Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy in his momentous majority opinion legalizing same-sex marriage. The opinion is the capstone to a series of landmark decisions throughout a distinguished career in which Justice Kennedy has used the law to recognize the inherent dignity of LGBT Americans, securing his legacy as a champion of liberty and equality. In these and many other cases, Justice Kennedy has helped make the promise of our Constitution real in the lives of people seeking to ensure that the government respects their human rights.

For his leadership in helping our nation live up to its founding ideals, we honored Justice Kennedy with our 2015 Beacon Prize. Established in 2012 to honor those whose work reflects the best traditions of U.S. leadership on human rights, the Beacon Prize is the highest honor that we bestow on an American.

Previous winners include former Senator Bob Dole for his leadership championing the human rights of people with disabilities and Senators John McCain and Dianne Feinstein for their bold and tireless work opposing torture.
American popular culture has the power to move and educate millions of people—both in the United States and around the world. For the past five years, we’ve presented the Sidney Lumet Award to creators of popular culture that deepens public awareness and understanding of important human rights issues. Named after esteemed film director Sidney Lumet, the award is our way to celebrate—and inspire—work that explores political and social issues with the depth and accuracy that they demand.

The 2015 Lumet award went to HBO Documentary Films for tackling some of the most challenging human rights issues of our time. Its powerful programming strengthens our democracy: it not only entertains but also educates and inspires action.

The inaugural Lumet award went to the creators of the CBS show The Good Wife, for their nuanced exploration of human rights issues, including Internet freedom and repression in China.

The story of the 2012 winner, Showtime’s Homeland, began several years earlier when we learned that military recruits were imitating torture-happy Jack Bauer, hero of the hit show 24. In response, we produced a video for use by military academies showing the truth: that torture didn’t produce reliable information. We also took professional interrogators to Hollywood, where they met with the makers of 24 and urged them to depict torture accurately. 24’s Executive Producer Howard Gordon [above second from left] went on to create Homeland, which won the Lumet Award for its truthful depictions of torture, illegal surveillance, and indiscriminate bombing. Accepting the award, Gordon thanked us for engaging with him and challenging his assumptions.

The 2013 award went to 42—The Jackie Robinson Story, and the 2014 award to 12 Years a Slave.

The inaugural Lumet award went to The Good Wife in 2011. Most of the show’s cast, including Julianna Margulies [left] and Josh Charles [right], were in attendance and celebrated with Human Rights First’s President and CEO Elisa Massimino.
### Law Firms & Corporations

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### Academic Institutions

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Thanks to you our impact increases exponentially.
The 2015 Marvin Frankel Award

Honoring the firms Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Chadbourne & Parke LLP, and Jones Day

The Marvin Frankel Award honors law firms that exemplify Judge Frankel’s extraordinary dedication to human rights and commitment to pro bono service.

This year we paid tribute to Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Chadbourne & Parke LLP, and Jones Day for their outstanding work to ensure that refugee families and unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America and seeking safety here gain the protection they deserve. From direct representation to policy advocacy, these firms have been leaders in the effort to help our country live up to its ideals.

“It is not only our pleasure to work with Human Rights First, but an amazing privilege, and we are so grateful for the opportunities they provide to our attorneys.” –Dan L. Brown, Partner, Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP, New York

Human Rights First Vice-Chair Tom Bernstein (left) congratulates representatives of the 2015 Marvin Frankel Award honorees accepting on behalf of Chadbourne & Parke LLP, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, and Jones Day.

Immigration court backlog worsens

By Lomi Kriel | 05.15.15

“Human Rights First, a national human rights group with offices in Houston, on Friday called for Congress to address the issue, saying it could ‘undermine the integrity of the overall system.’”
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Opt-ed by Raha Wala of Human Rights First | 11.04.2015
“The White House needs to forcefully make the case to Congress and the American people for why Guantanamo should be closed now.”
“Because Human Rights First helped me with my asylum case I was able to overcome the situation I was facing in my country.” – Refugee from Cameroon, represented by Crowell & Moring LLP

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“I’m very grateful to Human Rights First for the opportunity and the terrific support and advice they provided throughout our case.”

–Pro bono attorney, Munger Tolles & Olson LLP, Los Angeles

$2,500-4,999
Anonymous (4)
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Jimmy and Kathy Brandt
Lori Buchbinder
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$1,000-2,499
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We are deeply grateful to donors who have included Human Rights First in their will. Planned gifts help us ensure future generations will benefit from our mission to make sure the United States is a global leader on human rights. Please contact our donor relations team to let us know if you have included Human Rights First in your estate plans: development@humanrightsfirst.org or (212) 845-5202.
Human Rights First works with hundreds of committed pro bono lawyers who dedicate their time and talent to protecting the rights of refugees seeking asylum in the United States. In the past year, volunteer attorneys in the New York and Washington metro areas, New Jersey, Houston, and Los Angeles put in more than 90,000 hours to represent hundreds of asylum seekers. For every dollar we spent to represent refugees, we received more than $12.70 in donated legal services, increasing our impact significantly.

Human Rights First is a 501(c)(3) registered charity, has an annual independent audit performed, and files informational returns with various governmental regulatory agencies. A copy of the full audited financial statements by BDO LLP is available upon request.

**2015 financials**

$46.5 million of legal service contributions

Human Rights First works with hundreds of committed pro bono lawyers who dedicate their time and talent to protecting the rights of refugees seeking asylum in the United States. In the past year, volunteer attorneys in the New York and Washington metro areas, New Jersey, Houston, and Los Angeles put in more than 90,000 hours to represent hundreds of asylum seekers. For every dollar we spent to represent refugees, we received more than $12.70 in donated legal services, increasing our impact significantly.

Human Rights First is a 501(c)(3) registered charity, has an annual independent audit performed, and files informational returns with various governmental regulatory agencies. A copy of the full audited financial statements by BDO LLP is available upon request.

**Pro Bono Legal Services Provided**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$30,822,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$29,368,649</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>$33,420,690</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$39,692,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$46,517,621</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Value [2011-2015] $179,822,009
Financial Position

Assets........................................................................ 2015* ............... 2014

Current Assets
Cash ................................................................. $1,460,675 ............... $558,356
Investments ...................................................... 1,892,918 .............. 4,106,868
Prepaids and Other ................................................. 219,425 ............... 211,841
Total Current Assets ................................................. 3,573,018 ............ 4,877,065

Pledges and Foundation Grants
Pledges Receivable ................................................... 42,157 ................. 85,157
Foundation Grants Receivable .............................. 4,401,470 ............ 5,183,517
Total Pledges and Foundation Grants ...................... 4,443,627 ............ 5,268,674

Fixed Assets
Fixed Assets at Cost ............................................. 2,511,224 ............ 2,399,914
Accumulated Depreciation ..................................... (1,096,627) .............. (772,909)
Total Fixed Assets .................................................. 1,414,597 ............ 1,627,005

Other Assets
Other Assets ........................................................... 204,179 ............... 204,179
Total Assets ........................................................................ 9,635,421 ...... 11,976,923

Liabilities
Current Liabilities ................................................... 707,498 ............... 695,780
Other Liabilities ........................................................ 34,794 ................. 34,794
Deferred Revenue ...................................................... 483,095 ............... 508,905
Total Liabilities .......................................................... 1,225,387 ........ 1,239,478

Net Assets
Unrestricted Net Assets ............................................. (2,174,255)* ............. 153,155
Board Designated Net Assets ................................ 2,500,000 ............ 2,500,000
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets ..................... 8,084,289 ............. 8,084,289
Total Net Assets ...................................................... 8,410,034 ...... 10,737,445
Total Liabilities & Net Assets .......................... $9,635,421 ... $11,976,923

*Unaudited

Top Lobbyists 2015: Grassroots | The Hill staff | 10.28.15

Human Rights First made The Hill’s 2015 list of top “influencers,” and was described as “active on a series of global and domestic human rights issues, such as pushing for the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay and rooting out systems that support human trafficking.”
Human Rights First is an independent advocacy and action organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We believe American leadership is essential in the global struggle for human rights, so we press the U.S. government and private companies to respect human rights and the rule of law. When they fail, we step in to demand reform, accountability and justice. Around the world, we work where we can best harness American influence to secure core freedoms.