The Year in Review

Human Rights First protects people at risk: refugees who flee persecution, victims of crimes against humanity or other mass human rights violations, victims of discrimination, those whose rights are eroded in the name of national security, and those targeted for defending the rights of others.

Lifeline for Iraqi Refugees

Human Rights First advocates a comprehensive response to the Iraqi refugee crisis, including a much higher level of admissions into the United States.

Pro bono Representation

Pro bono attorneys working with Human Rights First dedicated more than 61,000 hours to helping clients seeking asylum last year.

Fighting Discrimination

Human Rights First documents the rise in hate crimes throughout Europe, and urges governments to combat these crimes.

Defending the Defenders

Human Rights First provides support to human rights defenders under threat and helps amplify their voices with policymakers.
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Actor and Human Rights First Board Member Sigourney Weaver presents the 2007 Human Rights Award to activist Fariba Davoodi Mohajer for her work defending women’s rights in Iran.
Our Charter

Human Rights First was founded in 1978 as the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights to promote laws and policies that advance universal rights and freedoms. We exist to protect and defend the dignity of each individual through respect for human rights and the rule of law.

- We fight for equality and for freedom of thought, expression, and religion;
- We support people who struggle to promote these principles within their own societies;
- We work to hold accountable under the law those who violate these principles;
- We strive to ensure the security of individuals and to protect against the arbitrary exercise of state power;
- We confront human rights challenges with flexible responses that do not compromise our integrity; and
- We are committed to building a global movement of people who share these principles.

Within our organization we value learning, mutual respect, collaboration, and a diversity of viewpoints. We set ambitious goals, achieve measurable results, and make a difference in people’s lives.
A Message from Executive Director, Maureen Byrnes

“To protect and defend the dignity of each individual through respect for human rights and the rule of law.”

As our charter on the opposite page states, that is why Human Rights First exists. That is what guides and inspires all of our work.

Our goal as an organization is not only to take a stand when respect for human rights and the rule of law is challenged or undermined, but to be effective in actually achieving results. To do this we rely on a wide range of advocacy tools and strategies: we build coalitions with likely and unlikely allies, engage with policymakers in Washington, D.C., on both sides of the aisle, and work with leaders in international organizations and foreign governments. We value our long history of working with human rights defenders who put their lives on the line everyday, and we are deeply grateful to the pro bono attorneys who work with us to represent individuals seeking asylum in the United States and help advance our policy goals on many fronts. We view the public as a vital partner in achieving our objectives, and we are committed to growing our public constituency that is currently 100,000 people strong, and growing.

Through our Elect to End Torture ’08 campaign, we are working with the public to put an end to the use of torture in America’s name. We are joined in this effort by an extraordinary group of retired military leaders who are speaking out against torture and for a national security policy that upholds fundamental American values. And through our Lifeline for Iraqi Refugees project we are working with key partners and the public to urge our government to adopt a comprehensive and effective response to the Iraqi refugee crisis.

At a time when human rights issues are often mired in political confrontation and partisanship, Human Rights First is well positioned to build alliances and get results. We pride ourselves on being focused, strategic and making a difference. This report highlights our work, our dedicated and talented staff, and the many partners who make it all possible. I am deeply grateful to all of you who support our work and share our commitment to making a difference. I look forward to your continued engagement in our efforts and to what we can accomplish working together.

Maureen Byrnes, Executive Director
Since the start of the war in Iraq, sectarian fighting and other violence have forced more than 4 million Iraqis to flee their homes. More than 2 million people are displaced within Iraq; an estimated 2.2 million more are in Jordan, Syria, and other countries in the region. Thousands of Iraqis who have worked alongside Americans now find themselves the targets of insurgents and sectarian militias, prompting many of them to seek refuge in the United States or Europe.

Policy Success—An Important First Step

Human Rights First launched the Lifeline for Iraqi Refugees project to push for a comprehensive and effective response to the crisis in the region. Building on our extensive experience in refugee protection, HRF helped win an important victory when the “Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act” passed in December 2007. The act will help bring many Iraqi refugees to this country more quickly. The act also makes 5,000 special visas available for the next five years for Iraqis who have worked for the U.S. government. It also calls for increased humanitarian assistance.

While these 25,000 special visas offer hope for some Iraqis, there are many more Iraqi refugees who are still at risk—including women, children, torture survivors, minorities and others. “The villages and homes of Iraqi religious and ethnic minorities have been bombed and burned down. Iraqis have been targeted for persecution and have fled in search of safety for virtually every reason imaginable,” said Refugee Protection Program Director Eleanor Acer.

Bringing the Voices of Iraqi Refugees to the Debate

In the fall of 2007, HRF staff member Amelia Templeton traveled to Jordan and Lebanon where she met with dozens of displaced Iraqi refugees and gathered their stories to share with policymakers. We brought Iraqi refugees to Capitol Hill to make sure their voices were heard in the halls of power. These persuasive voices contributed to the passage of the “Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act.”

“Given the size of this refugee crisis—and the thousands and thousands of Iraqis who are at risk because of their work with the United States itself—it is both disappointing and shocking that the U.S. is not willing to bring more Iraqis to safety in this country next year.”

Eleanor Acer, Refugee Protection Program Director, quoted in The Los Angeles Times, September 22, 2007
“Nobody is taking responsibility for getting [Iraqi refugees] here in a timely fashion.”
HRF’s Amelia Templeton, quoted in The Washington Post, October 17, 2007
Joining Forces Against Torture

Since 2003 Human Rights First has built a broad and effective network of senior retired U.S. military leaders, including veterans with experience from WWII to the Iraq War. We are working closely with them to end the policy of official cruelty.

Today we are working with more than 50 retired generals and admirals to create effective opportunities for their voices to be heard in the public debate against torture. Their principled opposition to policies of official cruelty has infused the debate with moral and professional authority. Through a series of public letters, opinion articles, congressional testimony and a range of other public appearances, they have conveyed to policymakers and the public that our nation’s commitment to human rights strengthens our national security.

“Human Rights First is uniquely positioned to lead the debate on torture, and has facilitated my role in speaking out and making a difference,” said Rear Admiral John Hutson, an HRF Board member.

Making the Case to Presidential Candidates

In 2007 Human Rights First organized a series of one-on-one private meetings between a group of these retired generals and admirals from all four branches of the military and presidential candidates from both parties. These meetings were held in Concord, New Hampshire, in April, and Des Moines, Iowa, in December. All presidential candidates of both parties were invited to attend, and the group met with Senators Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards and Obama, Governors Huckabee and Richardson, and Representative Kucinich. Each of these candidates took part in separate, hour-long discussions about the role the next U.S. president will have both in undoing the damage caused by current interrogation and prisoner treatment policies and in guaranteeing humane standards for the future. Several of the candidates publicly credited these meetings with having informed their position opposing torture.

Elect to End Torture ‘08

In advance of the presidential election, HRF launched our campaign Elect to End Torture ‘08 not only to ensure that the next president and members of Congress understand the damage done by current detention and interrogation policies, and are equipped with strong national security arguments for rejecting those policies, but also pledge to change them. This nonpartisan campaign is mobilizing our growing public constituency to express their concerns directly to the candidates. We are also educating the news media covering the campaign and policy advisors to the various candidates. We have created an online petition directed at the candidates and a lively blog that offers up-to-the-minute coverage of this vital issue. Please join this effort: go to www.EndTorture08.org.

Since 2003 Human Rights First has built a broad and effective network of senior retired U.S. military leaders, including veterans with experience from WWII to the Iraq War. We are working closely with them to end the policy of official cruelty.

PHOTO: OUTSIDE ABU GHRAIB PRISON, IRAQ. AP PHOTO/JAMIE SAGOLI
In 2007, Human Rights First organized a group of senior retired military leaders to meet with presidential candidates in New Hampshire and Iowa.

“The rules must be firm and absolute; if torture is broached as a possibility, it will become a reality.”

Promoting Law and Security

Human Rights First has played a lead role in challenging official cruelty by influencing public policy and changing the way popular culture depicts torture and abuse.

Torture and other forms of official cruelty are patently illegal under U.S. and international law. Nevertheless the administration has continued to promote policies and practices that allow the use of torture. Human Rights First is challenging policies, such as the use of so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” by the CIA, that are not only illegal but also jeopardize our national security and undermine American leadership in the world.

Bipartisan Advocacy

Our strong working relationships with policymakers on both sides of the aisle have enabled us to play a leadership role in ending torture and official cruelty. And we are making progress. In the fall of 2006 we worked to secure issuance of a new Army Field Manual on interrogations that explicitly prohibits abusive interrogation techniques previously authorized by the administration. And with the help of prominent retired military leaders we successfully worked to convince Congress to support the adoption of these standards for all U.S. agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency.

Challenging CIA Interrogation Practices

Despite these efforts, the Bush Administration continues to seek ways around these laws. The president issued an Executive Order in July 2007 authorizing the CIA’s interrogation program, including the use of so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques.” In short order Human Rights First joined with Physicians for Human Rights to issue Leave No Marks,

Facing Hollywood Torture

Television, and the hit FOX program 24 in particular, has distorted the way the public—and especially junior soldiers—view torture. Human Rights First created the Primetime Torture project to limit the negative impact that popular culture has on the public debate and on soldiers’ actions in the field.

Since September 11, 2001, the number of torture scenes on television has increased exponentially. In the past, only “villains” used torture; today, it’s “heroic” figures like Jack Bauer who use coercive methods in the name of “patriotism.”

The Primetime Torture project works to educate those in the creative community dealing with these issues. HRF organized a series of meetings bringing together Hollywood writers and producers with interrogators and other military experts. In the fall of 2006, for example, HRF organized a meeting between the Dean of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, three interrogators, and writers and producers from 24, Lost and other shows.

HRF also helps military educators respond to the challenges they face in overcoming the treatment of torture in popular culture. We produced a 14-minute training film to educate junior soldiers about the portrayal of torture on television and the dangers of imitating such techniques. We circulated it to more than 1,100 military trainers, many of whom are now using it in their classrooms. This project has also attracted significant media attention, including an article by Jane Mayer in The New Yorker in February 2007. We have also created an Excellence in Television award which was presented to the CBS program Criminal Minds in the fall of 2007.

Fox’s 24 agent Jack Bauer uses questionable techniques to gain information.
a report warning that those who engage in such methods risk criminal liability for torture and other war crimes. The report formed the basis for HRF's closed-session testimony before the Senate Select Intelligence Committee.

On a parallel track, Human Rights First led a successful effort to persuade the American Bar Association to adopt a resolution supporting a single U.S. interrogation standard. That resolution was adopted overwhelmingly by the ABA House of Delegates at its annual meeting in August in San Francisco.

“Medical neutrality is essential to keep the criminal justice system focused on the rule of law. The war on terrorism, on this point, must follow the rule of law.”

H. Handelsman, General Counsel, Human Rights First

“Human Rights First is determined to advance a rights-respecting approach to national security and to ensure humane treatment for all detainees in U.S. custody.”


“No civilized nation permits convictions to rest on coerced evidence, and reliance on such evidence has never been acceptable in military or civilian courts in this country.”

Defending the Defenders

Around the world, Human Rights First seeks to protect human rights defenders, all too often both the champions of progress and the victims of repression.

For 30 years, Human Rights First has defended human rights advocates on the front lines using a range of strategies and finding creative ways to help them carry out their crucial work.

Rapid Intervention

When defenders are imprisoned, threatened, or at imminent risk, Human Rights First uses its access to high-level government officials and the media to galvanize quick action on the defender’s behalf. We also mobilize our growing grassroots constituency through the online Defender Alert Network.

In May 2006 an Egyptian blogger named Alaa Ahmed Seif al-Islam was detained while taking part in a peaceful protest in Cairo. Human Rights First quickly reached out to Egyptian government leaders and to the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, demanding Alaa Ahmed’s release. Our staff met with a senior aide to Senator John McCain the day before he traveled to Egypt, prompting him to raise the case with Egyptian officials. Through the Defender Alert Network, we generated more than 1,000 letters and email messages to Egyptian officials. A few weeks later he was released from prison.

After his release, Alaa Ahmed authored a Human Rights First e-alert calling for the release of two other bloggers who remained in detention, one of whom was tortured in prison. This appeal also generated more than 1,000 letters and emails to the Egyptian government. Three weeks later both bloggers were released. All three continue to express their opinions through their blogs.

“I can testify to the impact of international support, both in providing hope to human rights defenders and in securing their release from prison.”

Alaa Ahmed Seif al-Islam, Egyptian blogger, released from prison with Human Rights First’s help

Continuing Struggles—Enduring Efforts

Human Rights First also invests in long-term efforts on behalf of key defenders such as Munir, a leading Indonesian human rights advocate who was murdered while traveling to the Netherlands in 2004. We have worked closely with Munir’s wife, Suciwati, over several years to bring her husband’s killers to justice.

In 2006 Human Rights First presented its annual human rights award to Munir (posthumously) and arranged meetings for Suciwati with congressional staff, executive branch officials, and a U.N. Special Rapporteur, leading to a congressional letter, U.N. action on the case, and extensive press coverage including a New York Times editorial calling for justice in Munir’s case.

Amplifying Voices of Change: Iván Cepeda

Motivated into activism by the brutal assassination of his father, Iván Cepeda has endured attacks and threats and has twice lived in exile to escape them. Dangers notwithstanding, he has continued his work to help document approximately 40,000 cases of serious human rights violations committed in Colombia since 1966. This last year, Cepeda has been subject to politically motivated charges of slander and libel for implicating government officials in human rights violations.

In June 2007 Human Rights First awarded Cepeda the Roger N. Baldwin Medal of Liberty and brought Cepeda to New York and Washington to meet with officials from Congress, the State Department, the White House, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the United Nations.

On August 8, 2007, Cepeda’s criminal investigation was handed over to a new prosecutor from a jurisdiction with a history of respect for due process. In appointing the new prosecutor, the Attorney General cited a letter from 28 members of Congress, which Human Rights First worked hard to bring about.

“Receiving the Baldwin Award helped bring attention to my case,” said Cepeda who continues his work on behalf of human rights in Colombia.

Iván Cepeda, 2007 recipient of the Roger M. Baldwin Medal of Liberty, with HRF’s Andrew Hudson.
“Human rights defenders risk their lives to show that change is possible. When they become targets of threats and violence, the international community cannot afford to stay silent.”

Matthew Easton, Human Rights Defenders Program Director

As a result of this intensified international interest, Indonesian authorities reinvigorated the dormant investigation into Munir’s death. More than three years after Munir was fatally poisoned, an Indonesian Supreme Court ruling sent one man to prison for 20 years and prosecuted two others for helping him. However those who planned and ordered the crime remain free, and Munir’s case tests Indonesia’s commitment to the rule of law and human rights. Human Rights First continues to work on this case to ensure that justice is done.

“The truth about who killed Mr. Munir is the only antidote for Indonesia’s poisoned justice system.”

Challenging Mass Atrocities

Through our H.O.P.E. for Darfur campaign Human Rights First led a successful call for the creation of a high-level diplomatic post to focus attention on what it will really take to reach a lasting peace in one of the world’s most troubled regions.

As the humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate in Darfur, efforts to reach a political settlement have been thwarted by all sides, most notably by the intransigence of the Sudanese government. Human Rights First helped focus global attention on the need for the United Nations and the U.S. government to take a more active role in ending the violence in Sudan, and we led the call in 2006 to create a new position—a U.N. Special Envoy for Darfur.

“Mobilizing H.O.P.E. for Darfur

Thousands of people around the world joined HRF’s campaign to Help Organize a Peace Envoy, also known as H.O.P.E. for Darfur. To ensure that the call for peace in Darfur was heard around the world, Human Rights First helped spearhead the effort to hold “Global Day for Darfur” events in 40 countries.

Our New Advocates Program worked with middle and high school students, raising awareness and developing new leadership committed to ending the crisis in Darfur.

Annan Appoints Envoy

In November 2006, Human Rights First officials presented a petition to then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan and had an in-depth conversation with him about possible appointees. In December, in one of his last official acts, Secretary Annan appointed Jan Eliasson, former Foreign Secretary of Sweden as the U.N.’s Special Envoy to Darfur.

Challenging Mass Atrocities

“Stand-in” for a Victim in Darfur

Committed constituents played an important role in our H.O.P.E. for Darfur campaign. By taking action and raising their voices they helped us urge the United Nations to appoint a Special Envoy for Darfur. Our campaign toolbox included the “Stand-in for a Victim in Darfur” initiative, which gave supporters who visited our website the chance to “stand-in” for victims of murder, rape and displacement. Each participant received a victim number, and the “Stand-in” was linked to a petition calling for a special U.N. envoy for peace. Over the course of the campaign, we collected more than 32,000 signatures supporting the appointment of an envoy, and generated media attention to the need for such an envoy to be appointed.

HRF Executive Director Maureen Byrnes outside the United Nations before delivering a petition—with more than 32,000 signatures—calling on the U.N. to appoint a high-level peace envoy to Darfur.
Most observers estimate that more than 200,000 people have died and that more than 2 million have been forcibly displaced from their homes in Darfur.

Mr. Eliasson has engaged in political and diplomatic efforts to secure a lasting peace. He is working with African Union officials and other international leaders to seek a political solution in this troubled region.

**Accountability for Mass Atrocities in Darfur and Elsewhere**

Human Rights First has turned its principal attention to the role that China is playing to enable human rights violations in Darfur and also in other trouble spots like Burma. Through outreach to the public, advocacy with officials in the U.S. government, and the U.N., Human Rights First is working to hold China accountable for its actions and demand that it use its influence to enhance respect for human rights and hold accountable those that violate them.  ■

Human Rights First initiated the effort to mobilize human rights advocates around the world to stand together against violence in Darfur. The Global Day for Darfur that we launched grew to include events in 40 countries.
The right to asylum is enshrined in U.S. and international law, but it has become more and more difficult for refugees to receive the protection they deserve, and those who seek asylum without the help of an attorney face a bewildering process and slim chance of gaining asylum. We have a two-fold approach to helping refugees: in addition to direct representation, we also seek policy change. These two aspects of our program support each other: our advocacy produces changes that help our clients, and our work with clients informs our advocacy.

Changing Lives

One of these asylum seekers, Aung Khent, pictured at right, was targeted for his political activism in Burma. He began his advocacy work with the party of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi in 1988, the year that a severe government crackdown resulted in thousands of deaths. Mr. Khent continued his work over the years in spite of being arrested and beaten by military forces. Eventually he managed to flee Burma, and sought refuge in the United States. With the help of HRF and our pro bono attorneys, he was granted asylum, and his attorneys are now helping to bring his wife to join him in the United States.

“Every year tens of thousands of people in the United States apply for asylum, a legal status available to those trying to escape persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, and membership in a social group,” said Refugee Protection Program Director Eleanor Acer. “After receiving asylum, a refugee can start life anew by bringing his or her spouse and children to safety in the United States.”

Asylum seekers have fled persecution—leaving behind their families, their homes and their livelihoods. Many do not speak English and are not familiar with the U.S. legal system. Some are held in mandatory detention and face deportation procedures. They are in urgent need of legal representation, and through our pro bono partnership Human Rights First provides it.

Changing Policy

Drawing on our reputation as a respected advocate, Human Rights First helps to shape the U.S. government’s policies for asylum seekers. Years of immigration “enforcement” measures have built hurdles so formidable that many asylum seekers have little chance of finding safe haven in the United States.

Human Rights First has focused its advocacy on immigration laws that bar anyone who has provided “material support” to organizations that have used armed forces in the past. The so-called “material support” bar is tragically affecting refugees who do not support terrorism at all.

Human Rights First’s critical report Abandoning the Persecuted focused the attention of the media and Congress on the plight of asylum seekers who had been affected by the sweeping immigration law provisions. A few months later, the U.S. government announced it would take steps to exempt some asylum seekers from these provisions.

Examples of asylum seekers who have been affected include:

- A journalist from Nepal who was beaten, threatened and forced to pay Maoists;
- A Colombian nurse who was kidnapped, assaulted and forced to treat terrorists; and
- A teacher from Burma jailed after letting three men affiliated with a resistance group speak in favor of democracy.

Report: Abandoning the Persecuted

Thousands of vulnerable refugees have been prevented from receiving asylum in the United States due to an overly broad application of laws intended to keep out “terrorists”. The so-called “material support” bar is tragically affecting refugees who do not support terrorism at all.

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- A journalist from Nepal who was beaten, threatened and forced to pay Maoists;
- A Colombian nurse who was kidnapped, assaulted and forced to treat terrorists; and
- A teacher from Burma jailed after letting three men affiliated with a resistance group speak in favor of democracy.
A refugee who has legal representation is three times more likely to win asylum than a refugee without an attorney. Human Rights First’s pro bono program provides this expertise.

“Recent legislation [...] intended to bar perpetrators of human rights violations, has been used to prevent victims of serious human rights abuses from gaining protection in the United States.”

HRF Senior Counsel Anwen Hughes, opinion piece in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, July 15, 2007

Recent legislation [...], intended to bar perpetrators of human rights violations, has been used to prevent victims of serious human rights abuses from gaining protection in the United States.

HRF Senior Counsel Anwen Hughes, opinion piece in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, July 15, 2007
Fighting Discrimination

History provides ample evidence that “ordinary” acts of hate violence can quickly escalate to mass campaigns of brutality. The international community must take a firm stand against any hate crime against anyone, anywhere. No one community under threat should be left to stand alone in the face of violent hatred and bigotry. Human Rights First has both examined the reality of bias-driven violence as a serious human rights violation and developed concrete recommendations for governments to combat it.

Original Research
Our 2007 Hate Crime Survey documented scores of hate crimes, analyzed trends, and presented causes and consequences of the violence that occurred in 2006 in the 56 member states comprising the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We also issued detailed country-by-country report cards which show that governments are not doing enough to monitor, report and prosecute crimes of violence motivated by prejudice and hatred.

Targeted Advocacy
Human Rights First presented the survey findings in June 2007 at a high-level diplomatic conference in Bucharest on discrimination and intolerance. In concert with our research findings, we have continued to combat hate crimes and the environments from which they arise in North America, Europe and the Russian Federation. Human Rights First has promoted the creation of tough hate crime laws, effective monitoring systems and improved government enforcement.

Report: Hate Crimes on the Rise

While a handful of governments engage in systematic monitoring of hate crimes, most governments do not even collect baseline data on the problem. Human Rights First has filled the data gap by issuing comprehensive reports that provide governments with the information they need to initiate change.

The 2007 Hate Crime Survey documents dozens of hate crime cases, analyzes trends, and discusses the causes and consequences of hate crime violence. It also offers a ten-point plan for reducing hate crimes by adopting hate crime laws, strengthening law enforcement, and enhancing systems to monitor hate crimes. Separate companion reports examine violence driven by antisemitism, homophobia, and Islamophobia.

The 2007 Hate Crime Report Card examines monitoring and reporting systems as well as the enforcement of hate crime laws, in Europe, Russia, and North America.

Worldwide Reaction
Our survey, covered by mainstream and specialty media around the world, received praise from leaders of prominent non-governmental organizations. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a wire service, named our report one of the top stories of the year, underscoring that “European governments are woefully inept at measuring and thus prosecuting hate crimes.”

In addition, leaders of prominent American and European non-governmental organizations, many of them participants in the June OSCE Conference, expressed strong support for our survey.
“Governments must come to understand that whether the victim is an Israeli Jew, an immigrant from Africa, a Muslim or a gay man, hate crimes are nothing less than human rights violations.”


Ambassador Ömür Orhun, the OSCE Representative on Combating Discrimination Against Muslims, said, “I especially found the ten-point plan for reducing hate crimes most appropriate and useful ... Most governments in Europe still do not track and record anti-Muslim incidents through official state mechanisms.”

Kenneth Jacobson, Anti-Defamation League deputy national director, said, “Human Rights First report is a model for how antisemitism needs to be addressed by non-governmental bodies around the world.”

“The 2007 Hate Crime Survey is nothing short of a wake up call both to law enforcement as well as policymakers that hate crimes are on the rise around the world and deserve to be taken seriously... failure to act now will only bring more of the same in the future.”

Professor Jack Levin, Director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict, Northeastern University
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A Message from our Chairman, William D. Zabel

Since the beginning, the primary work of Human Rights First has been to challenge governments that engage in torture, disappearances and arbitrary detentions without due process of law. Unfortunately, as basic human rights continue to be violated—from Zimbabwe to Burma, from Russia to Colombia, from China to Iran—our country’s credibility and standing have been substantially diminished around the world.

Not so long ago, Chinese students carried replicas of the statue of liberty to inspire them as they faced down the tanks in Tiananmen Square. Around the world, our nation was a shining example of a society dedicated to human rights and respect for the rule of law. But today, images of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo are haunting symbols of what can happen when we lose touch with those values.

We are better than this, and the vast majority of Americans believe it. Fortunately, we are blessed to live in a great country where groups like ours can fight back—and where our protests can lead to meaningful change. So it’s up to all of us to keep up this fight to reaffirm our fundamental values. Many good people around the world are rooting for this country to reclaim its moral leadership and the people at Human Rights First are leading the way to ensure that this great country is able to reestablish its moral compass.

Thirty years ago a group of ambitious and dedicated young lawyers came together to form the organization that has now evolved into Human Rights First. We believed then, and we believe just as strongly today, that respect for the rule of law is the precondition for peace and security, and the only foundation from which civil society can rise and flourish. That is the principle at the heart of Human Rights First. The work we do has never been more necessary.

We are grateful to have the support of partners around the world who aid our causes and share our victories.
Pro Bono Support

Every year, hundreds of dedicated attorneys give their time and talent to support Human Rights First in critical ways—from representing refugees in asylum proceedings, to preparing amicus curiae briefs, to providing invaluable support to our staff in all our endeavors. We could not fulfill our mission without their help.

Law Firms
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Allan & Overy LLP
Alston & Bird LLP
Arent Fox LLP
Arnold & Porter LLP
Baker & McKenzie
Bingham McCutchen LLP
Brown Rudnick Berlack Israels LLP
Bryan Cave LLP
Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP
Carter Ledyard & Milburn LLP
Chadbourne & Parke LLP
Cooley Godward Kronish LLP
Covington & Burling LLP
Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP
Crowell & Moring LLP
Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP
Davis & Gilbert LLP
Davis Polk & Wardwell
Day Pitney LLP
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
Dechert LLP
Dewey & LeBoeuf LLP
Dickstein Shapiro LLP
DLA Piper
Dorsey & Whitney LLP
Dow Lohnes, PLLC
Duane Morris LLP
Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP
Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner LLP
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
Friedman Kaplan Seiler & Adelman LLP
Fross Zelnick Lehrman & Zissu, P.C.
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Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher
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Greenberg Traurig, LLP
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Howrey LLP
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Hunton & Williams LLP
Jackson Lewis LLP
Jenner & Block LLP
Jones Day
Kasowitz, Benson, Torres & Friedman LLP
Kaye Scholer LLP
Kelley Drye & Warren LLP
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham LLP
Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
Latham & Watkins LLP
Law Offices of Susan Taylor
Lief, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein, LLP
Linklaters LLP
Lowenstein Sandler PC
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP
Mayer Brown LLP
Maynard Cooper & Gale, P.C.
McCarter & English, LLP
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Michael Best & Friedrich LLP
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Miles & Stockbridge P.C.
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Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP
Morrison & Foerster LLP
Moses & Singer, LLP
Nixon Peabody LLP
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Onick, Harrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP
Patton Boggs LLP
Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker LLP
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
Pepper Hamilton LLP
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP
Proskauer Rose LLP
Quinn Emanuel Urquhart Oliver & Hedges LLP
Reed Smith LLP
Ropes & Gray LLP
Ross, Dixon & Bell, LLP
Satterlee Stephens Burke & Burke LLP
Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP
Seyfarth Shaw LLP
Shea &umbing & Sterling LLP
Sidley Austin LLP
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Sive Paget & Riesel, P.C.
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Spears & Ims LLP
Steptoe & Johnson LLP
Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP
The Dantzin Law Firm LLP
Thelen Reid Brown Raysman & Steiner LLP
Torys LLP
Van Ness Feldman
Venable LLP
Vinson & Elkins L.L.P.
Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
White & Case LLP
White & Williams LLP
Whiteford, Taylor & Preston, LLP
Wiggin & Dana LLP
Wilkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
Winston & Strawn LLP

Academic Institutions
American University Washington College of Law
Brooklyn Law School
Columbia Law School
CUNY School of Law at Queens College
Fordham Law School
Georgetown University Law Center
Harvard Law School
New York University School of Law
University of Virginia School of Law
Villanova University School of Law
Yale Law School

Other
American Bar Association
American Express Travel Related Services Company, Inc.
Susan Berkowitz
Blue Ridge Partners
Mark E. Brossman
Ashley Jonathan Clements, World Vision
David M. Cohen
Michael I. Davis
Andrea L. Delisi
Nancy C. DiConza
Gregory D. Foster
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Paul A. Gangsei
John C. Garces
Daniel L. Greenberg
Allen S. Keller, M.D.
Frank Kendall III
Staff Sergeant Russell Lee Kiika (USA)
Dick Lavine
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LexisNexis
Mowry International Group
Morgan Stanley
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Ronen Voloshin
Zoe Saltzman
Dean L. Silverberg
Kimberly Summe
MaryAnn J. Sung
Jordan Tamagni
Paul W. Virtue
Lynn Witkowsk

Human Rights First 2007 Annual Report
Who We Are

Human Rights First annually honors the memory of the late Judge Marvin Frankel, one of the country’s leading advocates for human rights and an active member of our board for more than two decades. Since 2002, the Marvin Frankel Award pays tribute to lawyers and law firms that have carried on his dedication to human rights by demonstrating extraordinary commitment to pro bono service. We are deeply appreciative for the meaningful work of the most recent award recipients.

Marvin Frankel Award Winners

2007
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Lowenstein Sandler PC

2006
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

2007 Awardees
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Washington, D.C., for outstanding legal representation for asylum seekers through the pro bono representation program at Human Rights First. The firm took on a particularly challenging case of a refugee who was unfairly subjected to the sweeping “material support” bar to asylum, marshaling resources at all levels to advocate successfully on his behalf. The firm has also supported Human Rights First by providing legal advice and hosting seminars on asylum law and working with victims of torture.

Lowenstein Sandler PC, New York, for its key role in helping Human Rights First build a pro bono representation network for asylum seekers in New Jersey and, in particular, for those detained at the Elizabeth Detention Center. The firm’s lawyers have also handled federal appeals as well as the cases of children seeking asylum in the United States. The firm’s excellent work with Human Rights First reflects its deep commitment to pro bono cases.

2006 Awardee
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, New York and Washington, D.C., for its pro bono representation of more than 100 refugees and their families in New York, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. The firm, which has partnered for 15 years with Human Rights First’s pro bono asylum legal representation program, has secured protection for asylum seekers from Colombia, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Iran, China, and Sierra Leone. Skadden Arps also has contributed to the growth of the HRF representation program by hosting our spring Asylum Law Training. In addition, Steven Koleeny, special counsel, has played a critical role in overseeing the firm’s pro bono asylum representation work in New York and New Jersey. Donald Salzman, pro bono counsel at Skadden Arps, has shared his expertise with attorneys handling asylum cases in Washington, D.C.
Our Donors

Human Rights First is and always has been entirely supported in our work by foundations and individuals from every walk of life and political persuasion, never by government grants. We are enormously grateful to our many contributors, who make our work possible and whose passion for justice, human dignity and the rule of law energize and inspire us every day.

$100,000 and Above
Anonymous (3)
Atlantic Philanthropies
David Berg Foundation
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Charina Endowment Fund
Deborah and Craig Cogut
Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation
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JEHT Foundation
Kaplen Foundation
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
The John Merck Fund
Oak Foundation
Picower Foundation
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Righteous Persons Foundation
Henry Wolf Foundation
Deborah Miller and William D. Zabel

$25,000 – $49,999
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Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Brenner Family Foundation
Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP
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District of Columbia Bar Foundation
Alisa and Daniel Doctoroff
Fiona and Stanley Druckenmiller
Equal Justice Works
Kenneth R. Feinberg
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
Georgetown University
Marc Haas Foundation
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Toni and Arthur Rock
Scherman Foundation
Paul D. Schurgot Foundation
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Harold Snyder and Tamara Hirschl Snyder
Lawson Valentine Foundation
Trish and George A. Vradenburg

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Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Brenner Family Foundation
Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP
Davis Polk & Wardwell
District of Columbia Bar Foundation
Alisa and Daniel Doctoroff
Fiona and Stanley Druckenmiller
Equal Justice Works
Kenneth R. Feinberg
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
Georgetown University
Marc Haas Foundation
Dr. Henry G. Jarecki
Lewis and Ellen Kaden
Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
JoAnn and Robert Todd Lang
Merlin Foundation
NY Mets
Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation
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Donald Francis Donovan and Jennifer Lake
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Muriel & Norman B. Leventhal Family Foundation
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Jesse Margolin
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Siobhan and George Nicolau
Orick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP
Laura Pels
Robert M. Pennoyer
Russell P. Pennoyer
Sybil Shaimwald
Shearman & Sterling LLP
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Smith Family Benevolent Fund
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP
TAUPO Community Fund of Tides Foundation
Time Warner Cable
Tnarc Companies
Sigourney Weaver and Jim Simpson
Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
Winston & Strawn LLP
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Anonymous
Rosalind and Adam Abram
Elsie V. and M. Bernard Aidinoff
Richard and Kerri Bartlett
James R. Berman
Mig Boyle
Leslie and Marvin Brittain
Thomas J. Brokaw
Christie’s
Cisco Systems, Inc.
Lynda M. Clarizio
Clifford Chance US LLP
Betsy and Alan D. Cohn
William and Marjorie Coleman
Covington & Burling LLP
DLA Piper US LLP
Stanley Eisenberg
A. Whitney Ellsworth
Olivia Farr
Fiduciary Trust Company International
Foley Hoag LLP
Fulbright & Jaworski LLP
Anne Gilchrist
Sibyl R. Golden
Myrna and Steve Greenberg
Ralph Sellosstein and Jane Hartley
HBO
Alice and Louis Henkin
Howard Rice Nemerovski Canady Falk & Rabkin
IBM
Keeler & Van Nest LLP
Mathilde Krim
Medeline and Philip A. Lacovara
Michael Lacovara and Carla Foran
Lazar Levine & Felix LLP
The Libra Foundation
Lieff, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein, LLP
Lowenstein Sandler PC
Sidney and Mary Lurie
The Kennedy Marshall Company
McDermott Will & Emery LLP
McKee Nelson LLP
Lisa Minsky-Primus
Mitsubishi International Corporation
New York Bar Foundation
Richard Nye Foundation
O’Melveny & Myers LLP
Michelle Ores and Charles Schorin
Miles and Nancy Rubin
Lynn and John Savenese
Barbara A. Schatz and Frederick P. Schaffer
Douglas Schoen
Jeremy and Susan Shamos
Judith E. Siegel-Baum
Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal
Steelcase
Stetone & Johnson LLP
Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, LLP
Rocio Suarez
U.S. Trust
Bob Vila
George A. Weiss
Shelby White
Honorable John C. Whitehead
Martin and Lois Whitman
Malcolm H. Wiener
Wolf, Block, Schorr and Solis-Cohen LLP

$2,500 – $4,999
Roger Boone
Devon and Peter Briger
Raymond and Wanda Brown
Bonnie Cohen
Rebekah T. Coleman
The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region
Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP
Durst Organization
Edith Everett
Susman Godfrey LLP
Mr. and Mrs. Alan C. Greenberg
Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Greenblatt
Helene and Mark Kaplan
Rabbi Emily F. Korzenik
Bruce R. Kraus
Labaton Sucharow & Rudoff LLP
Jo Backer Laird and I. Michael Danoff
Daryl and Elizabeth Libow
Jay Krieger and Kathryn McAluliffe
Patrick McMullan and Rachel McPherson
Richard and Ronay Menschel
Mindich Family Foundation
Morrison & Foerster Foundation
Morton’s The Steakhouse
Joshua Nash and Beth Goldberg Nash
Orans, Eisel, Luptert & Brown LLP
George W. Rentchler Foundation
Sidney S. Rosdeitcher
Daniel Price and Lisa Rudikoff
Laly Sampedro

2007 Human Rights Award Dinner
Human Rights First presented the 2007 Human Rights Award to Fariba Davoodi Mohajer for her leading role in advancing the women’s rights movement in Iran. Pictured (left to right) HRF Board member Sigourney Weaver, Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, and guest presenter Sam Waterston.
$1,000 – $2,499

Anonymous (4)

Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation
Esta E. Stecher
David and Diane Stern
Jay Topkis
Michael Wenig
Mark Westin

Christopher Eisgruber
Daniel R. Eule
Geraldine Fabrikant and Tim Metz
Gena Feist
Michael J. Festa
Richard L. Fisher
Vicki E. Fishman
Pat and Bob Flynn
William P. and Mary Anne Ford
Austin T. Fragomen
William Frank
Karen Freedman
The Freedom Forum
Cynthia Friedman
Herbert Friedman
Haley and Anita Fromholz
Daniel Futterman
Mr. and Mrs. Michael E. Gellert
John J. Gibbons
Sarah and Seth Glickenhaus
Anne Goudvis
R. Scott Greathed
Greathouse Charitable Land Trust
Deborah and Jack Greenberg
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Terry Hermanson
Jerry Heymann
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Clara Miller Foundation
Frank Kendall III
Kerry Kennedy
T’Keyah Crystal Keymah
Jay and Jean Kislak
Dennis S. Klein
George Klein
Frederick A. Klingenstein
Albert Knapp
Mary-Christy Fisher and Harold Hongju Koh
Peter Krause
Emily Fisher Landau
Robert Lenzner
Florence Levine
Noel and Harriette Levine
William Lewis
Richard and Ellen Lieb
Susan B. Lindemauer
Richard and Amy Lipton
Anthony Lorts
Louis and Helen Lowenstein
Jie Li and Li Lu
Mary Ann and Stanley Mailman
Alan Marks
Angel R. Martinez
Thomas F. McDougal and Sarah J. Duncan
Kathy and Joe Mele
Robert B. Menschel
Danny Meyer
Gertrude and Horace Michelson
Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP
Lane Montgomery
Julia Moore and John Herron
Munger, Tolles & Olson LLP
Arthur C. Nielsen
Matthew Nimetz
Fred and Donna Nives
Nixon Peabody LLP
Bernard W. Nussbaum
Liz and Gus Oliver
Human Rights First presented the 2006 Human Rights Award to leading Indonesian human rights activists Munir (posthumously) and his widow Suciwati for their work exposing human rights abuses and also to the Damas de Blanco from Cuba who have carried out peaceful protests over the arrest of more than 75 rights activists, independent journalists and librarians in 2003. Pictured (left to right) Suciwati, guest presenter Gloria Estefan, and Yolanda Huerga Cedeño, accepting on behalf of the Damas.

Who We Are
Human Rights First continued to maintain a strong financial position in the fiscal year ended May 31, 2007 thanks to generous support from individuals, law firms, corporations, and foundations who share our goal of building respect for human rights and the rule of law.

**2007 Financials**

In-Kind Contributions of more than $21 Million

Human Rights First works with a committed cadre of pro bono attorneys who dedicate their time to protecting the rights of refugees seeking asylum in the United States. In the past year volunteer attorneys in New York, New Jersey, and the Washington, D.C. area put in more than 61,000 hours to represent hundreds of asylum seekers. Their participation—worth more than $21 million—triples the value of each dollar we expend in these areas.

Additional Financial Information

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 Seidman LLP is available upon request.

[Graphs showing expenses and funding]

**Organizational Growth**

[Graph showing growth over years]

Notes

* A portion of monies raised through Human Rights First’s Comprehensive Campaign, designated for program expansion and organizational capacity building.

$21 million in pro bono legal services.

† GAAP accounting principles require that non-profits report multi-year grants and pledges in their entirety as revenue in the year that the pledge is made. During the 2006 fiscal year, Human Rights First received a number of significant multi-year grants and pledges that ranged from two to five years in duration.
Financial Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$4,551,118</td>
<td>$1,120,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments at fair value</td>
<td>1,340,110</td>
<td>4,462,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and pledges receivable, net, current portion</td>
<td>1,914,388</td>
<td>3,519,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and other assets</td>
<td>135,740</td>
<td>251,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total current assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,941,356</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,354,492</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and pledges receivable, less current portion</td>
<td>2,587,478</td>
<td>2,927,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security deposit</td>
<td>5,991</td>
<td>5,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed assets, net</td>
<td>441,444</td>
<td>408,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10,976,269</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,696,542</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Liabilities and Net Assets | | |
| Current liabilities | | |
| Accounts payable, accrued expenses and other liabilities | $579,470 | $497,165 |
| Deferred event revenue, current portion | 132,000 | 128,500 |
| **Total current liabilities** | **711,470** | **625,665** |
| Net assets | | |
| Unrestricted | 3,382,933 | 3,123,881 |
| Unrestricted—Board designated fund for future operations | 2,500,000 | 2,500,000 |
| **Total unrestricted net assets** | **5,882,933** | **5,623,881** |
| Temporarily restricted | 4,381,866 | 6,446,996 |
| **Total net assets** | **10,264,799** | **12,070,877** |

| Liabilities and Net Assets | | |
| **$10,976,269** | **$12,696,542** |

Statement of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenues and Other Support</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grants, pledges and contributions</td>
<td>$5,976,075</td>
<td>$675,000</td>
<td>$6,651,075</td>
<td>$10,116,207†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed program servicesO</td>
<td>21,640,397</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>21,640,397</td>
<td>23,100,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment and other income</td>
<td>412,764</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>412,764</td>
<td>141,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restrictions</td>
<td>2,740,130</td>
<td>(2,740,130)</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total revenues and other support</strong></td>
<td><strong>30,769,366</strong></td>
<td><strong>(2,065,130)</strong></td>
<td><strong>28,704,236</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,358,288</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Expenses | | | |
| Program services | 28,658,889 | − | 28,658,889 | 29,542,304 |

| Supporting Services | | |
| Management and general | 1,018,565 | − | 1,018,565 | 924,186 |
| Fundraising and development | 832,860 | − | 832,860 | 1,014,396 |
| **Total supporting services** | **1,851,425** | − | **1,851,425** | **1,938,582** |
| **Total expenses** | **30,510,314** | − | **30,510,314** | **31,480,886** |

| Change in net assets | (259,052) | (2,065,130) | (1,806,078) | 1,877,402 |
| Net assets, beginning of year, restated | 5,623,881 | 6,446,996 | 12,070,877 | 10,193,475 |
| **Net assets, end of year** | **$5,882,933** | **$4,381,866** | **$10,264,799** | **$12,070,877** |
Our Staff

Michael Posner
President

Maureen Byrnes
Executive Director

Elisa Massimino
Washington Director

Eleanor Acer
Director, Refugee Protection Program

Lori Adams
Staff Attorney, Refugee Protection Program

Jorge Aguilar
Program Assistant, Government Affairs

Jamila Amarshi
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Heather Apollonio
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Betsy Apple
Director, Crimes Against Humanity Program

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Network and Systems Administrator

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Public Programs Assistant

Noah Baird
Desktop Support Analyst

Kelly Bassett
Special Events Manager

Lisa Besa
Chief Information Officer

Ron Bigler
Senior Strategist for Online Advocacy and Technology

Stephen Brownell
Web and Multi-Media Designer

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Pennoyer Fellow, Crimes Against Humanity Program

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Livia Calvet
Front Desk Receptionist

Catherine Carpentieri
Director, Development and Marketing

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John Gardner Fellow, Executive Office

Devon Chaffee
Associate Attorney

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Lillian Dalke
Program Associate/Legal Assistant, Refugee Protection Program

David Danzig
Campaign Manager, Public Programs Department

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Director, Human Rights Defenders Program

Ruthie Epstein
Project Coordinator, Lifeline for Iraqi Refugees

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Executive Assistant to the President

Julia Fromholz
Advocacy Counsel

Niamh Gibbons
Program Associate, Crimes Against Humanity Program

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Michael Greenberg
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Neil Hicks
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Executive Coordinator, Special Projects

Elizabeth Jordan
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An Interview with our President, Michael Posner

For 30 years you have helped guide Human Rights First, how have things changed in the field?

This year we will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we do so the human rights movement stands at a crossroads. Though collectively we have made great strides over the last six decades in building a strong legal rights framework, and in giving human rights issues much greater public prominence, there also has been a recent retreat on core human rights principles, in this country and elsewhere. This makes our work more important than ever, but also more challenging.

How would you describe the new role that HRF has taken on in recent years?

The erosion in U.S. compliance with rights-respecting principles after the 9/11 attacks has undermined the United States’ proud leadership tradition on human rights and diminished its global prestige. Sadly, one consequence has been the muting of the U.S. government’s important voice on these issues. Historically, the U.S. government has been an important ally to many human rights defenders around the world, both setting an example through our constitutional system of government and using our influence abroad to increase respect for human rights by foreign governments. Part of our role now will be to help the United States get back on track as a leader in the global human rights struggle. In answering this challenge, we need to generate a much broader and deeper U.S. public engagement on these issues in ways that resonate with U.S. interests and values.

In the last several years we have spent considerable organizational time and energy countering this erosion of support for core human rights principles in this country, most centrally through our work challenging torture and official cruelty. While we have, at last, begun to make a tangible difference on those issues, the struggle to do so has underscored a fundamental gap—namely the absence of a powerful, effective, broad-based human rights social movement in the United States.

How can the human rights movement adapt to these challenges?

Whether challenging official cruelty in Iraq or forging effective U.S. policy responses to genocide in Darfur, we need to build greater mainstream, bipartisan support for human rights and the rule of law. Internally we are working to enhance our program capacity and rapid response capability, to strengthen the tools through which we engage in these efforts and advocacy.

Building on our work with retired U.S. military leaders, we are extending into other sectors of the national security community, including experienced interrogators and seasoned intelligence officials who tell us that humane treatment contributes to effective interrogation. On a parallel track we are forging stronger ties with the religious community on refugee protection and other issues of mutual concern.

How do you address the threat of terrorism?

We are constantly mindful of the very real threats people in this country and in other parts of the world face from terrorism and targeted political violence. We recognize that governments have the right, indeed the obligation to ensure security. But we also must work to prevent excessive and ineffectual governmental responses. In our view, concerns about national security and civil liberties are not at odds, they actually reinforce each other. The time has come for us to help shape a forward-looking agenda. It should draw lessons from the post-9/11 experiences, but also map out a blueprint for U.S. leadership well into the 21st century, one that is consistent with this country’s history, values and traditions. We firmly believe that Human Rights First is poised to play a strong leadership role in this effort.

“At Human Rights First we work not just to make a point, but to make a difference. Over the long term we will only be able to promote a sustainable U.S. government commitment to human rights if it is responsive to broader public concerns and demands.”

Michael Posner,
President