Speak!

jhr

Flying to China's frontier
Notes from a journey to Uighur Xinjiang

Unity, division and Gezi Park
A personal story from Turkey

Homelessness in Canada
What's being done?

Plus: Updates on the biggest human rights headlines in recent news

jhr

Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) @ McGill, a Students' Society of McGill University club since 2003 and the McGill chapter of the national NGO, is a group of students actively engaged in informing their community about local, national, and international human rights issues through media campaigns and other on campus projects.

JHR's goal is to make everyone in the world fully aware of their rights. Creating rights awareness is the first and most necessary step to ending rights abuses. By mobilizing the media to spread human rights awareness, JHR informs people about human rights, empowering marginalized communities to stand up, speak out and protect themselves. By concentrating our programs in post-conflict African countries like the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Sierra Leone, JHR is improving human rights where they are most at risk.

JHR provides unbiased media and capacity building training to African journalists. Typically, a JHR trainer will work alongside an African journalist for 6-8 months, mentoring him or her and helping with field production. JHR stays in each country for only 5 years, in order to promote sustainability without dependency. JHR partners with local media organizations to reach millions of people at risk of abuse with information on how to protect their rights, and the rights of others.

JHR @ McGill also provides students with national and international human rights journalism opportunities. the JHR Chapters Program has offered McGill students opportunities for publication in national magazines and academic journals and the chance to participate in media internships in Ghana. JHR's Train the Trainer Conference on Media and Human Rights has been hosted four times at McGill.

JHR @ McGill is always open to new members, so if you would like to write and edit articles for Speak!, assist with the radio broadcast or TV production, or help organize fundraising or advocacy events, send us an email at jhrmcgill@gmail.com and we will add you to our listserv.

To learn more about JHR's international work, please visit: www.jhr.ca

Check out our Facebook page or email us for more info about JHR @ McGill and our upcoming activities.

Speak! // letter from the editors

Mainstream media outlets are most people's primary source of information on human rights issues and abuses that take place across the globe. In the last year alone, there have been stories on the human rights implications of issues ranging from slave-like working conditions in Qatar's World Cup preparations, to the controversial Quebec Charter of rights, to the uneven rescue efforts for Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Even so, can mainstream media truly cover everything that happens in the news? Is it even within their mandate to cover all rights-related issues and events affecting people today?

Human rights violations easily capture media attention for a limited time by being sensationalized, but soon fall in the background of people's concerns and interests when deemed no longer "trendy" or urgent. However, human rights infringements do not disappear just because mainstream media has lost interest in covering them. As political satirist Jon Stewart said, "The bias of the mainstream media is toward sensationalism, conflict, and laziness."

The 10th volume of *Speak!* sets out to counteract the mainstream media's neglect of ongoing human rights issues. Our writers have worked hard to bring light to the human rights stories that have gone underreported in the news this year – we invite you to support our writers in their coverage of alternative news.

Love,

Anne-Rachelle, Jessica and the *Speak!* team
3 April, 2014

Read the news blog and journal online:
http://jhrmcgillspeak.wordpress.com

Cover photo: the Tian Shan Mountains, Xinjiang (by Noteh Krauss)

NEWS ANALYSIS

Blue gold: Groundwater in Kenya
Resource management in drought-prone Turkana County

Brittany Curry-Sharples

No stranger to the Turkana region of northwest Kenya, drought struck again in January, this time leaving at least one million people in need of food aid. However, two aquifers – underground reservoirs of water – have been discovered that are thought to contain enough water to serve the entire country for the next 70 years.

The discovery of the two aquifers, known as the Lotikipi Basin Aquifer and the Lodwar Basin Aquifer, could insure the region against future drought. The aquifers were discovered in September 2013 by French company, Radar Technologies International. They are estimated to contain 250 billion cubic meters of water.

"People have a lot of hopes toward the discovery, if the water is successfully drilled and managed well, it will change the living standard [and] help to eradicate poverty in the area," Jonathan Nagiyo, a former facilitator of youth travel programs for the NGO Me to We, wrote in an email to *Speak!*

According to UNESCO, 17 million people out of a population of 41 million in Kenya lack clean water access.

Kenya-based company Davis & Shirtliff is leading the borehole-drilling project, which started in January. Although borehole creation will improve access to water in the region, concerns have been raised as to whether the program is ambitious enough.

"The four boreholes [...] are not enough," Stanley Naikuni, an advocate for the land rights of the Maasai people in Kenya, wrote in an email to Speak! "The area is large. We talking of seven sub-counties."

Altogether, it is an area of more than 70,000 square kilometres.

Oil has also been found in Turkana. British company Tullow Oil has dug seven wells, and plans to expand across the region are underway.

Naikuni believes that oil extraction can create jobs and promote infrastructural development, which can bring economic growth to Turkana and offset the effects of future droughts.

However, according to Naikuni, proper management of waste and pollution will be need to be observed.

Turkana is one of the poorest and most arid parts of Kenya. Much of the region is inhabited by pastoralists who travel with their herds in search of water and pastures. Drought has typically taken place about once every decade in Turkana, but has become more frequent in recent years.

According to Naikuni, there is a need for the government to take more proactive measures to prepare for and prevent famine.

"Famine in Turkana is an annual, predictable menace. It should be anticipated and measures should be put in place to [contain] it, [rather] than [risk] losing lives," Naikuni wrote.

For Nagiyo, international communities also has a role to play in exercising oversight on the continuing development of Turkana water resources.

He also hopes that resources will lead to the empowerment of people in the region.

"I would like to see a change Turkana, Turkana without drought and famine, without conflicts," he wrote. "I would like to see Turkana people benefiting from the resources discovered in their land," he wrote.

The first aquifers in Turkana County were discovered in September, 2013. (Photo: Inhabitat)

When the Olympics spotlight fades

LGBT rights in Russia one month after the Olympics

LGBT rights in Russia attracted the world's attention during the Olympics. Now what? (Photo: The Guardian)

Chantal Petgrave

Recently, the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi drew much attention to Russia's controversial anti-LGBT laws. The event has influenced the world to take an interest in this human rights issue. But what's next for the rights of LGBT people now that the Games are over?

A REVIEW OF THE ISSUE

While homosexual relationships were decriminalized in Russia in 1993, and homosexuality declassified as a mental illness in 1999, there are currently no laws in Russia protecting LGBT individuals from harassment or discrimination in employment and other areas of society. Gender identity is not addressed in any laws pertaining to hate crimes, and LGBT hate violence is reported to be on the rise by advocates in Russia.

In more recent years, Russian authorities have routinely denied permits for pride parades, and LGBT activists have reported being arrested or intimidated.

In June 2013, Russia's parliament passed a new law that bans the distribution of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" to minors, thus effectively makes it illegal to suggest that gay and heterosexual relationships are equal. This law attracted much attention from the media and activists, especially those in the West, for its proximity to the Sochi Olympic Games and for having being applied to prominent Western entertainers such as Lady Gaga.

During the months leading up to the Olympic Games, Russia revived a lot of criticism. Many individuals and corporations believed that the Olympics should not be held in Russia because its attitude toward LGBT individuals conflicted with the Olympic ideology, which celebrates individuality and inspiring talent.

Google showed its support for LGBT Olympians heading to the Olympics by releasing a doodle that changed their logo to the colours of the rainbow. Below this, they quoted a portion of the Olympic Charter, "The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play."

Companies such as Coca-Cola and McDonalds, the two Olympic sponsors that have faced the heaviest criticism by activists, also released statements supporting LGBT rights and diversity, activists have criticized their support as being superficial.

American actor and playwright, Harvey Fierstein, drew parallels between the Holocaust and Russia's LGBT laws. In an article for the New York Times, Fierstein stated, "In 1936 the world attended the Olympics in Germany. Few participants said a word about Hitler's campaign against the Jews."

"Supporters of that decision point proudly to the triumph of Jesse Owens, while I point with dread to the Holocaust and world war," he wrote. "There is a price for tolerating intolerance."

Fierstein believed that the international community needed to boycott the Games.

Critics of the Sochi Olympics also drew occasional parallels to the more recent 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Protesters cited China's various alleged human rights violations as well as its continued support of other repressive regimes, such as Zimbabwe, Burma, Sudan and North Korea, as reasons to boycott the Games. Protesters argued that by an event put on by a state that violates human rights, the world was also condoning that state's abuses.

The issue of LGBT laws in Russia became widely discussed in media outlets and in fact, it can be argued that many people would be ignorant to the issues going on in Russia if it were not for the attention generated by the Olympics.

In focus: Child marriage in Malawi

A look at the 2014 Human Rights Watch Report

A 14-year-old girl holds her baby in a village in Kanduku, Mwanza District, Malawi. (Photo: Human Rights Watch)

DEENA TAMAROFF

"Marriage is not good for girls. There is no happiness," Chimwemwe K., a young Malawian woman told the Human Rights Watch in a report released on March 6. "I want change for girls and that is why I want my story to be heard by all girls out there thinking of marriage."

Chimwemwe's story is one of 80 stories included in the HRW's report from girls and young women in central and southern Malawi. The report, called "I've Never Experienced Happiness: Child Marriage in Malawi," seeks to draw global attention to the fact that 50 percent of girls in Malawi will marry before the age of 18, and that this trend is harmful.

The HRW hopes that this report will persuade Malawi president Joyce Fanda, the country's first female president, to voice her support for a proposed piece of legislation called The Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Bill. The bill, also known as the "Marriage Bill," is intended to protect the rights of Malawian women and includes provisions against child marriage.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF MARRIAGE

According to the HRW report, many girls who marry young do so to escape poverty. Sometimes, the girls enter marriages voluntarily because they believe that a man is the key to financial security.

However, most of the time, it is the family of the girl who pushes for the marriage in exchange for a dowry from the groom's family and in order to have one fewer family member to support. Just as a company may liquidate its assets in times of distress, a daughter in Malawi may be seen by her family an asset whose cash value serves as a source of emergency funding.

Pregnancy is a common reason for young girls to enter into marriage. This situation is sometimes brought about unintentionally, such as when contraception is not used. The girls in the report frequently state that their partners urge them not to use protection during sex.

"My boyfriend used to give me money so I could not insist that he use condoms," said a young woman called

HRW: Child marriage in Malawi

ILLUSTRATION BY MARY SU
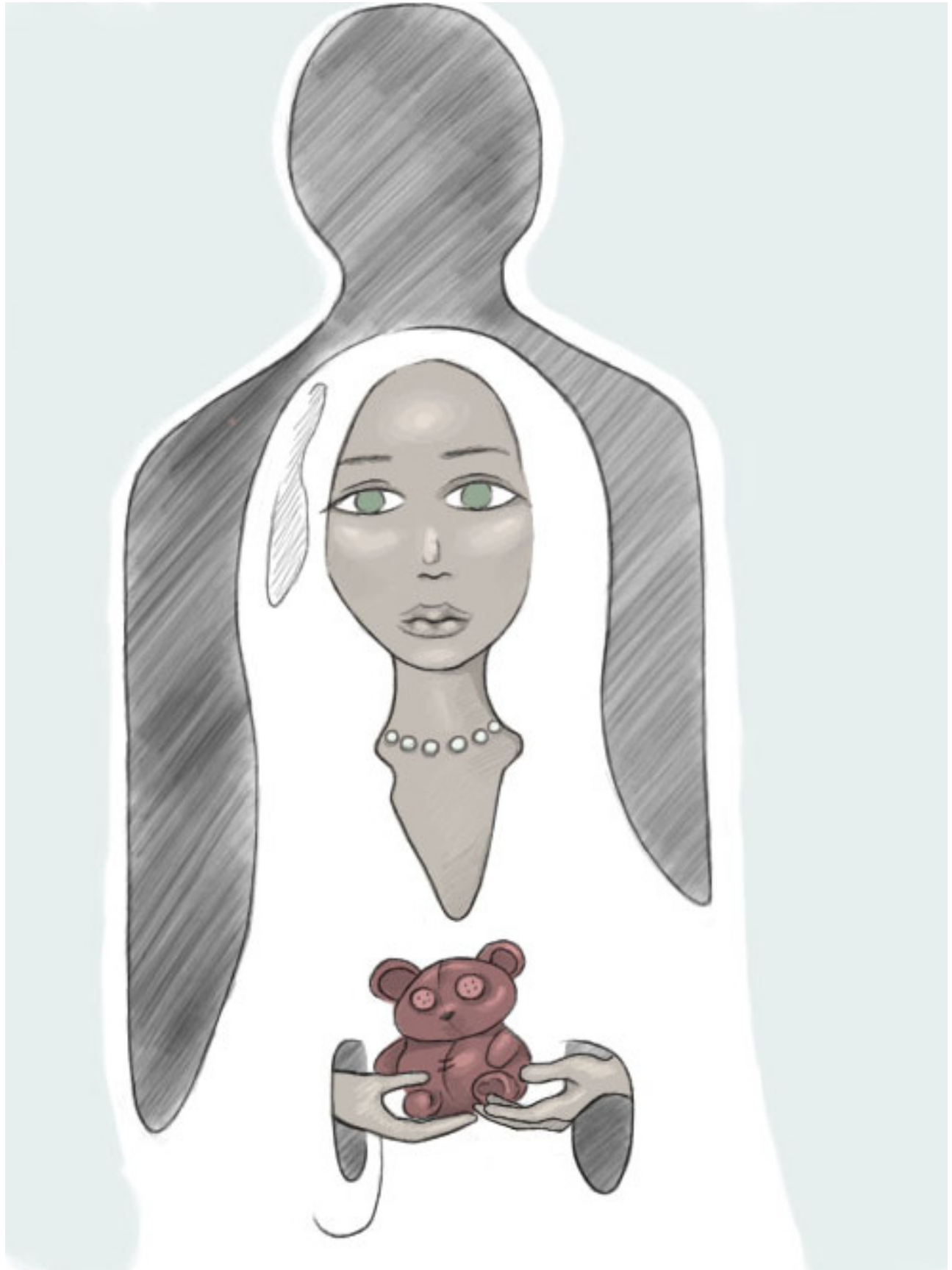
HRW: Child marriage in Malawi

Lucy P. Lucy's family later forced her to marry her boyfriend due to pregnancy.

Other times, families that seek to make a profit off of their daughters actually encourage pregnancy, as they consider it a means to guarantee a marriage. Pregnancy can also result from prostitution that girls are forced to enter is by their families in order to secure food and money.

Consequences of marriage

Marriages prevent girls from reaching the goals that they set for themselves and from taking the steps to achieve equal social and economic opportunities in society. Girls must interrupt their education for their marriage, and it becomes increasingly difficult to resume their schooling once they have children.

In addition, young brides are often abandoned by their husbands for varying periods of time or permanently, and become responsible for raising and supporting the family on their own. Many child brides experience mistreatment from their husbands, which takes a toll on their development.

"I left my husband because the beating became too much. But I had nowhere to stay after I left him," Chikondi R., who was pressured by her boyfriend and family to get married at age 18, told HRW. "A friend of mine agreed to accommodate me and my child [...but] after [three] months she told me, 'Why do you want me to keep looking after you? Why don't you do the work that I do?'"

"That is how I started sex work," Chikondi said.

There are also significant health problems faced by girls who marry and bear children at a young age. Young pregnancies come with a higher risk of complications in childbirth. The maternal mortality rate in Malawi is high: 675 deaths per every 100,000 live births.

Other health risks that come with teenaged childbirth include obstetric fistula, anemia and premature delivery, which can in term lead to a wide array of birth complications and can jeopardize the newborn's chance of survival.

Additionally, there is a high prevalence of infidelity in the loveless marriages that women are forced into, so women are often exposed to STIs from their husbands' other sexual partners.

HRW report: next steps

To go along with the report, HRW created a nine-minute video compilation of the interviews conducted with the girls, healthcare workers and social activists in Malawi. The video is available for viewing online.

With Malawi presidential elections scheduled to take place in May of this year, the politicization the issue of child marriage comes at an opportune time.

As part of her campaigning efforts, Fanda has been appealing to the female population with messages of empowerment and a demonstrated commitment to improve the social status of Malawi's women and girls. The president has started an initiative called Market Women's Activities International (MWAI) to encourage women to engage in small-scale business pursuits.

Fanda believes that financial independence is the key to freeing women from their suffering. At the official first meeting for MWAI, she stated that women should "...not leave for men only to do business and take care of your homes. It is possible for women to empower themselves without involving anybody."

However, the feasibility of her plan of action for improving the lives of women will hinge significantly on whether the Marriage Bill is passed.

The Marriage Bill stipulates neither boys nor girls would be allowed to marry before reaching the age of 18. The bill also claims to offer "equal status to all parties" in a marriage and will require all marriages, including customary marriages brokered by indigenous law, to be registered with a competent authority.

A large issue confronting the Marriage Bill is the task of ensuring that it would be effective if it becomes law. This can only work if child marriage becomes recognized not as a singular, self-contained issue, but as one component of a larger and more systematic problem that endangers and oppresses women and girls.

In light of this, HRW has outlined plans for a comprehensive, long-term process for ensuring that this act of legislation will in fact serve to benefit the lives of Malawi's women. The plan, which was presented in a press release that accompanied the report, emphasizes the need to establish cultural infrastructure that would enable the the law to succeed.

According to the HRW, not only that the law be passed and the consequences of disobeying it be made known, but that the Malawi government must also pass into law develop and implement a national policy strategy on adolescent reproductive health, support nongovernment organizations that work to protect the rights of women and children, and establish and maintain shelters for survivors of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

"The government's failure to mitigate the far-reaching harms of child marriage could have negative implications for Malawi's future development," the HRW's press release read.

However, according to Agnes Odhiambo, the HRW's African Women's rights Researcher, "[While] Malawi faces many economic challenges, [the] rights of the country's girls and women should not be sacrificed as a result."

Power and protest in Turkey: July, 2013

An observer's account of the 2013 anti-government protests

Police used water cannons to disperse anti-government protesters near the Taksim Gezi Park, Istanbul. (Photo: AFP)

Vanessa Ko

She was at Kugulu Park in Ankara since the first day of the demonstrations, helping set up tents in the park. She saw that there was a real hierarchy to the demonstrators, seeing power dynamics form and solidify surely. Rather than unifying the people, the cause brought people who were there for their own self-interested reasons. Everyone is angry, but angry about different things.

In Turkey, there is essentially only one political party, the AKP, with no viable alternative parties for voters to choose. The hope is that the demonstrations will provide a check against the authoritarianism of the AKP party. Overthrow is unlikely, but other parties may become bigger, win a greater share of the votes in the next elections (2013/2014) or more representatives can be elected as independents. Lofty goals from what began as an environmental movement.

People go work in NGOs or environmental organizations with just their minds on growing tomato plants, or building community gardens and talking circles - the idealism. Then, they realize that planting the tomatoes, organizing a garden requires communicating with other people and with sharing with others. That's when it falls apart.

Kugulu Park today and Taksim/Gezi Park has tents set up, a free kitchen, and a book exchange area. Even in the park there are power dynamics among the protesters. There are those who truly care about the cause, but many people are

here because it is the trendy, fashionable thing to do. They want to say that they were part of the protests, that historical moment. But they're not really there because of the environmentalist movement, or because of real political convictions. Or they think they do but their minds are not yet open.

Everyone wants their cause, their face, their convictions to be the central focus. "Save the arts theatre", or "Smash the state" or "Protect our green spaces" - similar but different goals. Without a clear objective, we are just protesting everything.

The first few days, the protests were about the razing of Gezi Park. A clear environmental reason. She saw though, that people who were trying to join the protests, to join in the park, were soon trampling on the flowers and the grass and other plants in order to find a place for themselves to sit or set up camp. The root reason became trampled away for the cause of joining in.

At night, before the police came as they inevitably do with their tear gas and water cannons once night falls, people began to scramble to put away all the books in the free book exchange. As they threw them frantically into a tent, many of the books were ruined and torn. The people taking charge of the book clearing also created a mass feeling of panic amongst the different demonstrators.

In the free food kitchen, there was a real need for help – food supplies were coming in as donations increased from neighbours and supporters, and there was a shortage of hands to hand out the food.

She jumped in behind the table and started helping out. Then, a girl and her group of friends arrived and said: "Okay everyone, me and my friends are running the table now, so everyone else can please go to the other side of the table." Maybe the disorganization is making people more power-hungry under the guise of taking leadership. The real sense of fellowship, helping other, and sharing and giving has gone.

People hold hands as they face counter-protesters against the "Standing Man" protester in Taksim Square, Istanbul, in June 2013. (Photo: Reuters)

The hope is this: that the protests will change the minds of people in Turkey. That supporters of the government will start to question some of their more unethical practices. That previously closed minds are learning to open.

Vanessa Ko spent three months in the summer of 2013 in Turkey, where she spent time documenting the government protests. The views expressed are her own..

Leaving the streets

The Quebec government, municipalities and associations aim to solve homelessness issues together

LÉO ARCAY

There were 30,000 people living in the streets of Montreal in 1998, when the most recent census about homelessness was taken. Today, no one really knows the extent of the problem.

What is certain is that thousands of individuals are homeless and live in dire straits. There are different demographic groups affected, from women to young people, to people addicted to alcohol, drugs or game, to people suffering from physical or mental diseases.

According to Manon Dubois, director of Development and Communications at La Maison du Père, one of the main organizations taking care of homeless people in Montreal, the causes of homelessnessare mainly the lack of social housing and social welfare, precarious jobs and poor consideration of people enduring mental illness.

Many Montreal associations, including la Maison du Père, l'Accueil Bonneau, L'Itinéraire newspaper, and the Old Brewery Mission take care of homeless people on a daily basis. They offer services such as food and clothes distribution, professional reintegration programs and psychosocial help. Some argue that fighting homelessness is everyone's responsibility.

Homelessness in Quebec

"We have support from the public and from companies", Ms. Dubois asserts. "The government must deal with homelessness but this cannot happen without the whole society implicating itself."

ELECTED OFFICIALS ROLLING UP THEIR SLEEVES

Quebec announced, publishing its last budget, that it will finance the construction of 3,250 social residential units, including 500 reserved for homeless people. This is incorporated into a broader set of projects, called the Politique nationale de lutte à l'itinérance (National Policy Against Homelessness) which aims to act as well in matter of health and social services, education, and social and professional insertion.

Premier Marois' policy is widely supported by charities relative to the issue.

"It's an important step forward for a government that seems to get increasingly involved in this problem, and that prefers solving it rather than simply concealing it," Dorian Keller, Communications and Press Relations assistant stated at L'Itinéraire.

Dubois qualifies this optimism. "There is no fund or concrete action for now. We are still waiting."

Montreal's new mayor, Denis Coderre, seems concerned by homelessness, making it a priority in his program. He had announced last January that he was willing to dedicate a certain proportion of his budget to it; and he has been one of the main instigators of Quebec's aforementioned program.

CREATING A CONSCIOUSNESS AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY

The annual event "5 Days for the Homeless" took place from March 9 to 14 at 26 universities throughout Canada. Launched in 2005 in Alberta University, it leads the participants to live five days on campus in homeless-like conditions (being obliged to sleep outside, no shower, no money, no food) while consistently attending classes. They also have to raise awareness about homelessness to students and professors; and gather funds for local charities.

McGill's team was supporting Dans la Rue and Chez Doris, two associations respectively specialized in youth and women's homelessness.

"We want not only to raise funds for a cause, but also to live it. [...] It provides us a lot of visibility and impact, explains Jonathan Bacon, director of external relations for '5 Days for the Homeless' at McGill. "[Even though the conditions are obviously not the same], after five days outside, we have a better idea of what it is to be homeless. The event really changes participants."

He asserts that students, like others, must feel concerned about this issue. "I have volunteered for many different organizations and I have met homeless people who looked like me to a certain extent, but who had just been unfortunate at a point of their lives. Homelessness can happen to everybody, even McGill students."

This article was originally published in French in the Délit on March 11, 2014. It was translated into English by the author. Reprinted with permission.

Students across the country took part in 5 Days for the Homeless March 9-14 this year. Pictured above are participants from the University of Saskatoon. (Photo: CTV)

Fact sheet
Homelessness in Canada

- At least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any year; 30,000 are homeless every night.

- Youth between ages 16 and 24 make up 20 percent of the homeless. An estimated 25 to 40 percent of homeless youth are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual or transgender.

- Aboriginal people are overrepresented among the homeless in almost every Canadian urban centre.

- Homelessness costs the Canadian economy $7 billion per year.

And...
Statistics Canada does not collect monthly or annual data on the number of homeless persons in Canada. Shelter residents are counted by the census every five years.

Source: Canadian Homelessness Research Network

"Working for peace, hungry for justice, is that a labour of love?"

Meeting Liberia's Leymah Gbowee in the Hague

Anne-Rachelle Boulanger

In August of 2013, I was fortunate enough to attend a conference held in The Hague, the international city of peace and justice. While the conference, hosted by the International Criminal Court Student Network, focused on topics that have always been of interest to me, namely peace-building and international law, what drew me to this conference was the attendance of an incredible woman – Leymah Gbowee.

Leymah Gbowee is a Liberian peace activist who played an instrumental part in bringing the Liberian civil war to an end. She did this by bringing together women of all religions around the country, and leading a women's peace movement. I was first introduced to this woman through the documentary, "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," which follows her story during the war. She became an instant inspiration.

At the conference Gbowee spoke about working towards peace after an event like a war. She told the story of a mother whose daughter had unknowingly married the man who killed her son during the war. She told us how the need for peace is not always congruent with our hunger for justice. She

View from the author's hotel room in Den Haag. (Photo: Anne-Rachelle Boulanger)

told us how the mother did not tell her daughter the truth about her husband, she simply kept it to herself. She told us that justice often takes the back seat to love and peace. Finally, she asked us, "working for peace, hungry for justice, is that a labour of love?"

Several months after the conference, I still think about her question. It forces us to reconsider our notions

of justice. I don't believe she was suggesting that we let perpetrators of crime and violence go unpunished. I do, however, believe that she wanted us to truly appreciate that the end of violence does not mean an end of suffering for its victims. When we strive towards justice, we cannot forget her lesson.

Montreal human rights calendar

Upcoming rights events in and around the city

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON MASS ATROCITIES

When: April 23 2014
Where: De Sève Cinema, Concordia University, 1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd West, Montreal

HOWL! ANTI-CAPITALIST ARTS FESTIVAL

When: April 24-29, 2014
Where: independent cultural spaces throughout Montreal including La Sala Rosa, Le Cagibi

MONTREAL UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL OF RADICAL AND ALTERNATIVE CINEMA

When: May 22-24, 2014
Where: Peut-être Vintage 6029A Ave du Parc (at Van Horne), Montreal

Nation and ethnicity in China's Northwest
Photo essay on the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

Text and photos by Noteh Krauss

View of Urumqi and the surrounding landscape from the plane

The Uighurs are a Muslim ethnic group who have far more in common with their Central Asian neighbours than the Han Chinese. Parts of Xinjiang formed an independent country called East Turkestan from 1944 until 1949, when it was taken over and integrated into China under Mao. Since that time, hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese have moved and been encouraged to move to Xinjiang to modernize, develop and sinicize the region – very much to the detriment of Uighur culture.

Street scene of intersection

Da Bazar / Erdaoqiao Market

Language rights for Uighur people have been a major issue in Xinjiang. In Urumuqi (the two "u"s are sometimes spelled with the character *ü*), you can literally see the takeover of Chinese characters, while Uighur script is reduced to smaller type. This is especially true of street signs. The Uighurs people have a language that completely related to Chinese and that uses Arabic-style script, as you can see in this photo.

This is the downtown of the Uighur area of Urumqi. The place represents a traditional Uighur bazaar, but has been converted into a shopping area for Chinese tourists. Note the mosque in the background. Its bottom floor has been converted into a souvenir shop.

I was lucky to get this picture because as soon as Stacy asked a question in Chinese, the Uighur people around would give very bitter and angry answers to her questions. The resentment towards Han Chinese is that they express is forceful and clear. Even the smallest exchange between Stacy and any Uighur individual was filled with resentment on the Uighurs people's behalf. During the 2009 riots in Urumqi, in which at least 200 people were killed and 1,000 injured in inter-ethnic violence, all communication in and out of the Xinjiang region was cut off. There was no Internet, limited phone service, and a maximum of 10 text messages allowed per day.

My couchsurfing host, Stacy (name changed), with a Uighur carpet shop owner

This woman turned away as I took this photo. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of devotion to Islam among Uighurs as a means to reinforce their culture against the incredible sinicization forces that China is introducing in Xinjiang.

"**[When] asked a question in Chinese, the Uighur people would give bitter and angry answers.**"

At the gift shop in the Mosque

Another couchsurfing friend told me of a former Chinese police officer he spoke to, who told him that he personally saw many dead bodies during the 2009 riots and that even the police were scared to arrest Uighurs because the Uighurs would fight and beat up the police. One did not go out late; armoured personnel carriers and riot police vans constantly roamed the streets. Han Chinese were randomly attacked with syringes, killed or injured. Many Uighurs were beaten, arrested, or killed. Although official reports say 200 people died in the riots, the same source told me the number was closer to 2000 people.

Riot police guarding the square

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

SOUTHEAST ASIAN MINORITIES' VULNERABILITY TO HIV

Sandy E. Restrepo Jerez

Although the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) arrived relatively late to Southeast Asia, this region has been one of the most severely affected regions of the world. The first cases of HIV/AIDS were announced in 1988 and in the next four years, the number of people infected increased exponentially, especially amongst ethnic minorities (which I will also refer to as hilltribes). To further aggravate their situation, the few HIV/AIDS education, prevention and treatment programs established have not been made available to ethnic minorities, which not only renders them highly vulnerable to the disease, but also denies them access to the psychological and medical assistance needed after developing HIV infection and seroconversion. In order to understand why this virus is predominantly affects ethnic minorities, why government prevention and education programs on the disease have not been very successful, and how government strategies could be amended so that they can be effective, I will focus on four main topics: first, the political and economic context that facilitates the spread of HIV/AIDS among ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia; second, the role of drug trafficking and drug use in the spread of HIV/AIDS among ethnic minorities; third, ethnic minority women's particular vulnerability to this disease; and finally, the importance of placing HIV/AIDS into a culturally-sensitive context in order for education and prevention programs to be effective.

Political and economic context facilitating the spread of HIV/AIDS

The political context and institutional violence that intensify the spread of HIV/AIDS in Southeast Asia has been well documented (Kammerer et al., 1995; Beyrer et al., 1997; Beyrer, 1998; Symonds, 2004). Political instability, corruption, human rights abuses, modernization programs, and the blatant persecution of ethnic minorities over the past 60 years have limited the resources available to these groups even in the absence of inter- and intra-national conflict (Beyrer, 1998:93; Beyrer et al., 1997:428). In addition, dishonest and incompetent government officials have dissipated donor funds for health programs as well as development assistance (Beyrer, 1998:93). These funds have, in turn, allowed oppressive leaders and regimes to "prolong the political and social situations that [have] lead to [the] explosive HIV spread" (Beyrer, 1998:93-94).

For example, during the bloody revolution of the early 1970s, millions of landmines were planted in rural areas of Cambodia, and there remains six to 10 million landmines that kill or wound up to 400 people every month (Beyrer, 1998:91). To treat these injuries, blood transfusions are often required, but much of the blood supply comes from donors who are desperate for money. The blood has not been comprehensively tested for diseases (Beyrer, 1998:91).

Additionally, many of the people performing the blood transfusions have not had any professional medical training, since most Cambodian health professionals were murdered by the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s. Therefore, many of the injured, especially those living in rural areas and ethnic minorities, are highly vulnerable to HIV infection (Beyrer, 1998:91).

Another instance of institutional violence can be found in Burma. When the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, also known as "the Junta") replaced the Burma Socialist Programme Party in 1988, most health professionals – especially medical and nursing students – were imprisoned, killed, or were forced to emigrate because of their support for the democracy movement at the time (Beyrer, 1998:89-90). Consequently, Burmese medical professionals able to respond to the HIV epidemic in the years following were, and still are, scarce (Beyrer, 1998:89). To make matters worse, the Junta did not allow any non-governmental organization (NGOs) to operate without their permission, making HIV/AIDS education and health care in Burma difficult (Beyrer, 1998:90).

During the period of their rule, from 1988 to 2011, The Burmese Junta also controlled all educational materials and media outlets, which they used to declare that "AIDS kills." However, they did not pursue the establishment of any prevention program, nor inform the general population as to how to reduce the risk of HIV infection (Beyrer, 1998:90). To conclude this example, Beyrer emphasized the importance of empowering and informing affected communities to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially ethnic minorities living in remote areas (1998:90). However, he postulated that the Burmese Junta did not, and will not promote such rhetoric, since it directly contrasts what the Junta wants, given that it was the empowerment of local communities that led to their defeat in the 1990 elections (Beyrer, 1998:90).

The government of Thailand, by contrast, has established a fairly effective education and prevention program that has helped decrease substantially the number of HIV cases since 1993 (Symonds, 2004:353). However, the hill tribes in Thailand have always been seen as outsiders to Thai society, and due to this marginalization, Thailand's successful HIV/AIDS program and assistance have not reached ethnic minorities, especially the hill tribes in northern Thailand (Symonds, 2004:355). In turn, the hill tribes view government officials with distrust and as a source of threat (Symonds, 2004:355). For example, the Hmong people's relationship with the government to date has deeply disrupted their traditional livelihoods, leaving them further marginalized and impoverished (Kammerer et al., 1995:68). As a result, the Hmong do not trust the government's campaign promoting condom use, for

Colourful terraced fields in Yuanyang, southern Yunnan Province, southwestern China. Yunnan is a border province that is home to many ethnic minorities, but is also a hub of drug trafficking in its mountainous border regions. (Photo: Middle-of-Road Tourism)

they see this as a tactic in order to decrease Hmong population growth (Symonds, 2004:355; Kammerer et al., 1995:68).

In addition to the political context influencing the spread of HIV/AIDS, the economic situation for hill-tribe farmers in Southeast Asia has continually worsened over the years due to the compulsory practice monocropping, the eradication of traditional opium poppy cultivation, and the confiscation of much of their land for government-sponsored purposes, such as roads, logging, reforestation, plantations, and tourist bungalows (Kammerer et al., 1995:59). Kammerer et al. place great emphasis on this "capitalist penetration" of developing countries by developed ones, given that ethnic minorities' traditional livelihoods now include greater involvement and interaction with lowland – as well as global – livelihoods and values (1995:56). Farming economies focused on large-scale production have also driven ethnic minorities, and especially women, to be exploited (Kammerer et al., 1995:58). This is demonstrated by the fact that both men and women from hill tribes in northern Thailand, like the Lisu, the Akha, and the Hmong used to be involved in trading, but now that ethnic minority men have been pulled in by "external economies and gendered perspectives," only men still partake in trading activities (Kammerer et al., 1995:58).

Southeast Asian governments' efforts in eradicating opium cultivation have also allowed for the "commercialization of sex" to be a suitable income replacement (Kammerer et al., 1995:56). For example, the presence of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was composed almost entirely of young men, increased substantially the demand for sex services in the region (Beyrer, 1998:91). After years of experiencing poverty and isolation, this high demand and the money it promised encouraged many women to enter the sex industry. This at least partly contributed to the spread of HIV (Beyrer, 1998:91). Factors such as these have led to a disruption of hill tribes' "material base and customary codes," including those regarding sexuality (Kammerer et al., 1995:56). Thus, ethnic minorities have been forced into a cash market where commercial sex and the economic prosperity that can come with it has motivated young women to migrate to these urban centers in search of employment as prostitutes, and have also led men to frequent commercial sex work establishments in lowland urban centres (Kammerer et al., 1995:58).

This collapse in the ethnic minorities' "material base" increases their vulnerability to HIV infection (Kammerer et al., 1995:59). Poverty impels young women (or impels

their parents to pressure them) to migrate to lowland towns to find a temporary job in prostitution (Kammerer et al., 1995:59). The demand for "'AIDS-free' prostitutes" is being met by younger and younger ethnic minority women whose economic hardships and family obligations may pull (or push) them into the commercial sex industry (Kammerer et al., 1995:59).

The role of drug trafficking and drug use in the spread of HIV/AIDS

In Burma and China's Yunnan Province, HIV first began to spread among injecting drug users (IDUs) (Beyrer et al., 2000:76). In fact, most of the initial cases of HIV infection originated in the mountainous border areas of eastern Burma, the Yunnan Province, northern Lao PDR, and northern Thailand, which is where the Shan states – and the world's major opium-growing areas – are located. This is also the home of many ethnic minorities (Beyrer et al., 2000:77). As we will see, this overlap is hardly coincidental.

Opium was "a traditional crop among many hilltribes, and its use is common among some of them" (Beyrer et al., 1997: 428). Its cultivation allowed hill tribes to have a "secure livelihood without associated high levels of addiction," but compulsory government monocropping policies exacerbated the hardships of the ethnic minorities living in that region in particular, placing most of them in poverty (Symonds, 2004:366; Kammerer et al., 1995:60). Now, approximately 60 percent of the world's heroin originates in the remote Shan states, which includes part of Burma and Lao PDR, the first

and third leading producers of heroin in the world (Beyrer et al., 2000:75, 77). Beyrer et al. suggest that a possible way that HIV spread across these border states may have been through the "self-testing" technique of that traffickers practice when buying the drugs, since the main trafficking routes of heroin in Asia traverse the Shan states (2000:78, 81).

When ethnic minorities began to use heroin, they had not been aware of several risks, including HIV infection and the fact that heroin was much more addictive than opium (Symonds, 2004:366). Symonds suggests that the increasing addiction to heroin may be due to ethnic minorities' increasing contact with outside influences. However, Kammerer et al., believe that the increasing use of drugs is rather due to the minorities' "economic and cultural disruption" (2000:366; 1995:60). It is likely that a combination of all these factors caused great numbers of ethnic minorities to contract HIV during the early 1990s. The previous tradition of opium-use and abiding state of poverty among the hill tribes, along with the fact that the media and HIV prevention and education programs have barely made inroads to the areas where the hill tribes reside, led to increasing rates of addiction to heroin among the ethnic minorities in the Shan states (Beyrer et al., 2000:75; Beyrer et al., 1997:428). For example, it was traditional for the Hmong to share their opium pipes with friends and visitors on special occasions, but today, needles have replaced pipes. (Symonds, 2004:366). Factors such as these explain why, by 1994, 60 percent of all infections and 80 percent of all AIDS cases were located in Burma, the majority of which were ethnic minority IDUs living in these border areas, or wives of IDUs (Beyrer et al., 2000:75).

Drugs seized at the China-Burma border being destroyed by security personnel. (Photo: Irrawaddy/CRN)

Ethnic minority women's particular vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

Special attention must be given to ethnic minority women, because they can be "more easily infected [with HIV] than men for physiological reasons," and also because they are much less likely than ethnic minority men to be aware of this disease, its transmission methods and its prevention strategies (Kammerer et al., 1995:69). Access to HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns and educational programs do not reach most rural and ethnic minority women because they tend to remain in their villages, whereas men are more likely to leave in order to trade with other communities (Beyrer, 1998:89). To make matters more difficult, most of the existing prevention and education programs are only available in the country's majority language, but most hill-tribe women cannot understand Thai since they are generally monolingual in a minority language (Beyrer, 1998:360).

In Burma, when Burmese migrant men changed their "sexual behavior and social forms" to fit the more liberal mentality of the Thai society and began frequenting commercial sex work establishments, they put themselves at risk for HIV infection (Wongboonsin et al., 2007:61). Additionally, many migrant Burmese women do not learn much about their own bodies, the reproductive system, or STDs in their village, making them vulnerable to HIV infection via their own husbands (Wongboonsin et al., 2007:61).

The most "important risk" for the acquisition of HIV infection among hill tribes is, by far, involvement in the commercial sex industry, where women are the workers and men are the patrons and the clients (Symonds, 2004:362). Hill-tribe women are disproportionately represented in the commercial sex industry (Bandyopadhyay & Thomas, 2000:50). In northern Thailand, for example, hill-tribe women's prevalence in the sex industry and northern Thai men's frequent patronage of commercial sex work establishments have led this region to attain the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection in the country (Beyrer et al., 1997:428). Gray et al. confirm this by showing that "HIV-1 seroprevalence was [considerably] higher among Hilltribe sex workers (59.2%) […] than in Thai sex workers (46.3%)" (1997:91).

Ethnic minority women's participation in commercial sex work is due to many factors, one of which is sex trafficking. Women and girls from the Shan states, in particular, have been targeted for trafficking or recruitment into the sex industry in order to fulfill the demand for Shan ethnic sex workers from Burma and northern Thailand from wealthy Chinese-Malaysians in southern Thailand (Beyrer et al., 1997:428; Wongboonsin et al., 2007:54). There are also large numbers of Shan ethnic minority women who remain in northern Thailand and become commercial sex workers (CSWs) there, constituting up to 40 percent of the workforce in brothels in the region. Commercial sex work allow these women to maintain a highly mobile lifestyle working in "mining areas, festival settings, and border areas" or to sell their services to "truck drivers, migrant laborers and seafarers" (Beyrer, 1998:89; Wongboonsin et al., 2007:54).

The workers' willing participation in commercial sex work is induced by another factor, poverty, which also serves to explain ethnic minority women's overwhelming presence in this industry, which is poverty. In Cambodia, for example, the Red Cross states that many locals, including minority women, do not consider HIV prevention to be a high priority, as they have other, more important things to worry about such as food, housing, landmines, finding employment and the ending of the war (Beyrer, 1998:92). Commercial sex work allows ethnic minority women to secure employment in order to fill basic necessities. In fact, a study by Wawer et al., showed that almost all the northern Thai participants interviewed firmly believed that any stigma against them for being a CSW was inconsequential if they are receiving a relatively abundant and stable income (Wawer et al., 1996:458).

Similarly, some researchers have seen commercial sex work as an empowerment tool used by women to take control of their own livelihood (Lyttleton and Vorabouth, 2011:S264). Lyttleton and Vorabouth argue that the migration of ethnic minority women into commercial sex is "not simply [due to] gendered exploitation," but also to market liberalization and development programs which have influenced how the rural poor wish to be seen, and how they "imagine a future" for themselves (2011:S268). The economic choice of Khmu women to engage in the commercial sex industry in northern Laos, for example, has given them a "market value" as "saleable youth and cheap recruitment" (Lyttleton and Vorabouth, 2011:S270). Needless to say, while this willing participation in the commercial sex industry and their internalization of the respect they receive as successful wage-earners allow Khmu women to get out of poverty, sex work places them highly at risk for HIV/AIDS infection (Lyttleton and Vorabouth, 2011:S270). The push and pull factors of poverty and recruitment are enhanced by mass medias – such as TV shows showing prosperous houses with water and electricity – further encourage ethnic minorities to leave their villages in search for work (Hsu & de Guerny, 2000:2). However, the future plans of many of the women in Wawer et al.'s study involved returning to their home villages and returning to agricultural work, suggesting that they would have remained there had they had the economic incentives to do so (1996:460).

Particularly worrisome are the facts that many ethnic minority CSWs do not demand amicable regular clients or clients who look "clean" or "healthy" to wear a condom (Wawer et al., 1996:459). The Hmong workers in Symonds' study, for example, do not recognize that HIV/AIDS has a long period of latency, so it can be present in a client without him showing any sign of symptoms (Symonds, 2004:361). In some cases, in fact, the worker asking a client to wear a condom would mean "hurting his feelings" or "insulting him" because it would seem like she does not trust him (Wawer et al., 1996:459). CSWs also admit that they do not insist on wearing condoms because "the fear of poverty is greater than their fear of AIDS" (Wawer et al., 1996:459, 460). All of this leaves CSWs, their clients, and their clients' wives, highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection (Wawer et al., 1996:460).

Additionally, in the late 1980s to early 1990s, the agricultural modernization in the central region of Thailand led to an influx of male labour from the northern rural region. This, along with the military recruitment of ethnic minority men to be porters in Burma and the loss of men to insurgent groups, left behind many ethnic minority women without a breadwinner and with few options to provide for their families apart from commercial sex work (Wawer et al., 1996:454; Beyrer, 1998:89).

Case Study: Hmong Women

An interesting aspect to study from data in 1992 in Chiang Rai shows that although there is a significant number of ethnic minority women working as CSWs in brothels there, Hmong women were not present at all, even though 10,217 Hmong people lived near or around 29 brothels in this region (Symonds, 2004:362). This might be explained by a number of factors. The relative wealth of the Hmong compared to other poorer ethnic groups may allow women to turn down recruitment offers, or allow men to refuse offers of employment for their daughters (Symonds, 2004:362). Another factor may be that both women and men in Hmong groups regard prostitution as risky, since there is a chance that, without knowing it, a woman and a man from the same clan may have intercourse – a big taboo for the Hmong (Symonds, 2004:362).

Other Hmong traditional values and social structures prohibit women from seeking employment in or even travelling to the cities, such as gender stratification and the idea of "obedience to authority and social codes" known as "shyness" (Symonds, 2004:362). These social codes "shame" the women who express themselves and "blame" them for besmirching the "name" their family, clan, or tribe. The social pressure obligates women to conform to the established social codes and shy away from actions such as leaving their husbands or asking them to stop having unprotected sex (Symonds, 2004:363). The notion of brideprice also prevents some Hmong women from joining the commercial sex industry (Symonds, 2004:362). Additionally, Hmong women

don't become full members of Hmong society until they have had a son. Therefore, if a woman were to marry an outsider, she would no longer be considered Hmong and her children would be denied clan affiliation, resulting in "serious loss of contact with the spirit world and with living relatives" (Symonds, 2004:363-364).

The Hmong practice polygamy, which means that a Hmong man may have more than one wife, but may also have multiple partners (Symonds, 2004:365). In the past, Hmong men would participate in sexual activities with unmarried or widowed women. Today, however, Hmong men frequent brothels and other commercial sex work establishments due to increasing contact with Thai society, where these activities are socially acceptable and commonplace (Symonds, 2004:365).

It is important to note that although Hmong women are rarely found in brothels or as CSWs, their risk of HIV/AIDS infection is still high. This is due to the traditional belief that sex is for procreation only, which prevails among Hmong communities and causes Hmong men to eschew using contraception, either with their wives or with prostitutes (Symonds, 2004:365). Symonds asserts that this "double sexual standard that gives men sexual license and restricts women's knowledge and power is proving to be a deadly combination" (Symonds, 2004:365). Moreover, Hmong women's "shyness" renders them powerless to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, as this does not allow them to impede their husbands from going to brothels and having unprotected sex, nor to persuade them to protect themselves by using con-

A demonstration in Vietnam. The words on the banner read "For a world without HIV." (Photo: T.L./Giadinh)

A historical photo of a Hmong woman. (Photo: Culture Cross)

doms (Symonds, 2004:362).

Symonds reports that in a Hmong village, women were significantly less well informed about AIDS than men: 25 out of the 55 women knew about AIDS, in comparison to 43 of the 47 men (2004:360). As stated before, this is probably due to the fact that men may travel into town for trade (and sex), whereas Hmong women tend to stay in the village (Symonds, 2004:360). Alarmingly, many of the Hmong women were indifferent to the disease (Symonds, 2004:360). They regarded HIV/AIDS as something that was inconsequential to them, as a phenomenon that involves men only due to the fact that women stayed at home caring for the children and the fields (Symonds, 2004:360). However, Symonds mentions that once education and prevention programs started being more readily available to Hmong women, they began to take more interest and more fully comprehend the significance of rumours about HIV/AIDS that they had heard from other villages or posters that they had seen but not understood because they were in Thai (Symonds, 2004:360).

PLACING HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND EDUCATION INTO A CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE CONTEXT WITH ETHNIC MINORITIES

In 1991, HIV/AIDS prevention and control became a national priority in Thailand (Wongboonsin et al., 2007:59). The Thai government committed itself to providing adequate treatment for all the people infected and to improving access to these treatments (Wongboonsin et al., 2007:59). Their goal was to reduce HIV prevalence to less than 1 percent of the population and make access to treatment and support available to at least 80 percent of all people infected (Wongboonsin et al., 2007:59). However, it is rare for migrant workers or ethnic minorities to be able to access these services, which include prevention information and programs, exams andmedication, among other things. When these services are available, the communities may sometimes not be particularly eager to receive them (Symonds, 2004:366). For example, like most ethnic minorities, the Hmong distrust towards the government and fear of these outsiders coming in to do the HIV/AIDS tests "for their own good" interferes with accurate testing (Symonds, 2004:366).

Thus, Symonds and Kammerer et al. argue that studies on Southeast Asia's HIV epidemic have barely touched on "interethnic relations," both within the country and between countries (1995:53; 2004:353). They assert that education and prevention programs on HIV might be more effective if they were to take into consideration the cultural context and sexual behaviours of marginalized ethnic minorities (1995:53; 2004:353).

The apprehension that ethnic minorities feel towards outside powers and the monolingualism of women make local and informal channels such as "natural communication pathways" and radio broadcasts essential to stopping the spread of HIV (Kammerer et al., 1995:69). The education on HIV circulated by governments must not only be culturally-sensitive, but also go beyond the factual information and challenge individuals on their pre-conceived notions, such as those against the use of condoms. If CSWs, the Hmong, and other ethnic minority women believe a person cannot be infected with HIV/AIDS if they look "clean," "healthy," and without symptoms, perhaps it would be useful to raise awareness by including drawings or photos of healthy-looking people on posters about HIV/AIDS (Symonds, 2004:361).

Utilizing the "cultural pathways of knowledge and communication," – how knowledge is traditionally diffused among a population and by whom – would be useful strategy for legitimizing HIV/AIDS prevention and education programs (Symonds, 2004:354). For example, in Hmong communities, the elders have the authority to impart knowledge on younger people, but not vice-versa. Therefore, researchers and educators should recognize and respect these traditional lines of authority (Symonds, 2004:354). The fact that many hill tribes do not see disease and spirituality as separate entities is another factor to take into consideration (Symonds, 2004:354). Socio-cultural research taken with these considerations in mind would make HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs significantly more successful, as they would "appeal to the logic of that particular culture" (Symonds, 2004:354).

Facts and statistics can also help guide researchers and educators in targeting vulnerable populations. For example, given that hill-tribe women are more at risk for HIV infection at a younger age than men due to factors such as poverty, limited education, monolingualism, resources for HIV/AIDS education and counselling should begin as early as possible and be able to reach remote areas where hill tribes live (Beyrer et al., 1997:432; Gray et al., 1997:94).

Sometimes, when a community learns that one of its members is infected with HIV/AIDS, they shame and ostracize the individual. In Hmong communities, beliefs about reincarnation may also drive an individual to consider suicide in case of a positive diagnosis (Symonds, 2004:366). These practices could be countered by an educational message now commonly seen in Thailand called "Living with AIDS," which could be "be translated into a culturally-suitable concept for Hmong and other hilltribe communities with similar reincarnation beliefs" (Symonds, 2004:367).

In these ways, researchers and educators may try to respectfully change cultural attitudes, as necessary, to constrain high-risk behaviors without condemning them. This is because certain behaviors that place hill tribe people at high risk for HIV infection are also believed to be "vital" to their cultures, such as the practice of sex without condoms, and the sharing of heroin needles (Symonds, 2004:353, 369).

New prevention programs targeting ethnic minorities have started to be available at border areas of various countries in minority languages such as Hmong, Liso and Yao, and they have also started to provide services such as "educational and employment opportunities for hill-tribe girls at risk of being trafficked into the sex trade," and "methadone maintenance programs for hilltribe IDUs" (Beyrer et al., 1997:429).

Final remarks

Kammerer et al. criticize the language used in existing literature, proclaiming that ethnic minorities are not "*risk groups* that are biologically or genetically more vulnerable to AIDS," as has been claimed, but rather, they are "*social* groups *at* risk for reasons constructed in complex combination by history, political economy, and culture" (italics in original) (1995:70).

Following this thought, I hope this paper has shown that the ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and that vulnerability has been influenced by historical, political, economical, social and cultural factors. Special attention must be paid to hill-tribe women's vulnerabilities, and also to the cultural context under which future prevention and education programs will be introduced in order to be successful.

Many of the academic studies cited in this research found focused particularly on Thailand, so more extensive research outside of Thailand will aid researchers and educators develop a better overview of the situation in Southeast Asia as a whole. Other Southeast Asian governments should implement similar programs and services in order to help ethnic minorities living within their borders, though certain governments' political agenda may not allow this to happen in the near future. With some careful understanding, these efforts can lead to a better understanding of the dynamics between minority status, culture and HIV/AIDS, which will allow prevention and education programs to reach ethnic minorities who infected or who are at risk for infection with greater efficacy. With some more understanding and tact in their messages and actions, Southeast Asian governments will gain the legitimacy needed to gain the trust of ethnic minority groups whose livelihoods have been, and still are, tremendously affected by their previous and current policies.

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And then what happened?

Following up on recent human rights headlines

Map by Yoel Natan
at www.yoel.info

1 SYRIAN CONFLICT DEATH TOLL EXCEEDS 150,000

The Syrian Revolution entered its third year in the winter of 2014. As of April 1, the death toll from the conflict has reached 150,344, according to British monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The conflict is considered to have started on Jan. 26, 2011 in the city of Al Hasakah, when a man named Hasan Ali Akleh poured gasoline and set himself on fire in protest against the Syrian government. In the months following, large demonstrations ensued against the rule of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Backlash against anti-Assad demonstrators was enormously violent and soon transformed into a full blown-out civil war between predominantly Sunni Muslim rebels and the Shiite Alawites government forces, as well as other Shia groups.

The Syrian government has been accused of conducting several attacks with chemical weapons in the course of the war. Both government and rebel forces have been accused of various human rights violations, including torture and sexual violence.

The UN announced in March that 9 million people have been displaced by the conflict, surpassing the number of displaced persons in Afghanistan.

– Jessica Newfield

2 TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION CONCLUDES HEARINGS

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) heard the last testimonies from survivors of Canada's Indian Residential School (IRS) system on March 30.

The testimonies will now be entered into a comprehensive record of the policies and conditions under the IRS system. The TRC will also produce a report that includes recommendations to the federal government concerning the legacy of the IRS system, to be completed by June 2015.

Under the IRS system, close to 150,000 Inuit, Métis and First Nations children were removed from their families and sent to residential schools to be hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, sometimes for years, in accordance with assimilation policies.

Survivors of the system reported

LGBT rights in Russia: one month update

New developments

No country declined to athletes to the 2014 Winter Olympic Games explicitly for reasons related to human rights. However, there were individual countries whose heads of state and other high-level representation chose not to attend the Opening Ceremonies, including the U.S., the U.K. and Germany.

LGBT individuals in Russia continue to be the targets of violence. Central Station, Russia's largest gay nightclub, closed down for good last week after experiencing months of harassment and attack by gunfire and toxic gas. The club's struggle to stay open had been the subject of a two-part Nightline documentary aired in mid-February.

Some of Central Station's performers have fled the country to seek asylum abroad.

"A bad sign was sent when the anti-gay law was passed," Arkady Gyngazov, one of the first staff member to flee, told ABC News.. "The fact that the club finally closed shows us that people are powerless."

The Film "Blue is the Warmest Colour," winner of the prestigious Palme d'Or at the 2013 Cannes International Film Festival, is also being targeted by complaints from Moscow's League of Safe Internet (LBI).

Members of the group have appealed to the Russian ministry of culture to launch a probe into the film, under the premise that it contains child pornography and that its depiction of a lesbian relationship falls under the category of gay propaganda being disseminated to minors under the June 2013 law.

The LBI asserts that the film should not have been allowed a theatrical release in Russia, and are seeking prohibitions from for the film's release on home video and television.

Protesters had also targeted the film in November when it was screened at St. Petersburg's LGBT film festival, Side by Side.

On April 2, Vitaly Milonov, a Russian MP and one of the architects of the June 2013 law, called for the creation of a "morality police" force that could impose fines on those who violate "traditional values."

international response

On March 27, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBT rights advocacy and lobby group in the U.S., announced that it has pledged another $40,000 to support Russia's LGBT Movement, in addition to the $100,000 contribution it made in December.

According to Ty Cobb, director of HRC's Global Engagement Program, the actions such as these remain important the abuse of LGBT people in Russia had finally been exposed to the world.

"The Sochi Olympic Games shined the spotlight on Russia's horrific and dangerous anti-LGBT law," Cobb said in a press release accompanying the announcement, "but with the Olympics over, we can't leave LGBT Russians behind."

U.S. President Barack Obama also took the opportunity of a talk given last week in Belgium on his European tour to address the issue of Russia's anti-gay laws. Speaking to an audience of 2,000 representatives of the European Union and NATO nations, Obama framed his criticism of Russia's intolerance of LGBT people in contrast to ideals of openness and tolerance, which are the aspirations that the U.S. and Europe "hold in common," he said.

On April 1, rights activist and adult film star Michael Lucas's "Campaign of Hate: Russia and Gay Propaganda," was released on DVD. Lucas took the opportunity of the Olympic Games to return to his native country and docu-

The award-winning film "Blue is the Warmest Colour" is being targeted by anti-gay activists, who are seeking prohibitions against the film's release to home theatre due to its depiction of homosexuality (Photo: Amazon)

ment the impacts of anti-gay laws on the lives of LGBT individuals in modern Russia.

In an interview with TGV news in November, during the production of his film, Lucas said that "After the Olympics, I believe there will be a major crackdown on gay people from the authorities and from the Russian mob. That is why it is so important to tell Russia's LGBT story now."

The documentary's release arrives at an opportune time coinciding with what Lucas predicts to be a dire post-Olympics for LGBT rights. Whether it is through the exploration of unique lived realities of LGBT individuals in Russia, as in Lucas's film, or through continued coverage of abuses and actions opposing them, it remains to be seen whether LGBT issues in Russia can grow to become – as Lucas's states in his Kickstarter campaign for the film – more than what's in the headlines.

– additional reporting by Hatty Liu

Human rights news follow-ups

experiencing hunger, beatings and sexual abuse at schools, in addition to separation from siblings and punishment for speaking their native language.

The IRS system officially operated from the 1880s to the 1970s, though the last school was not shut down until 1996. The TRC's hearings began in 2010.

The federal government has yet to fully release its archival records on the IRS system to the TRC.

– Jessica Newfield

3 BANGLADESH BUILDING COLLAPSE COMPENSATIONS BEGIN

More than 1,100 workers were killed and 2,515 injured in the collapse of Rana Plaza, an eight-storey building housing several garment factories and shops in Savar, a suburb of Dhaka, on April 23, 2013. The payment of compensation for victims and families began on March 25, 2014.

However, according to estimates and donation amounts reported by the Rana Plaza Donor's Trust Fund, a general fund for the victims backed by the International Labour Organization, the fund remains short of expected claims by about $33 million (US).

Last week, Wal-mart, Gap and Children's Place became the most recent companies to pledge to the Rana Plaza Donor's Trust Fund, a general fund for the victims backed by the International Labour Organization.

Only 16 companies are confirmed to have contributed to the fund. Of the 28 international companies linked to factories in Rana Plaza, only eight have pledged as of March 18, 2014.

– Hatty Liu

4 UGANDA'S ANTI-GAY BILL BECOMES LAW

Uganda's controversial anti-homosexuality bill, which was first proposed in 2009 to much international criticism, was signed into law by Uganda president Yoweri Museveni on Feb. 24, 2014.

The original bill proposed the death penalty for those engaging in gay sex when HIV-positive. It was later revised to punish first-time offenders with fourteen years of jail or life imprisonment for repeated perpetration.

According to Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, the law was "formulated so broadly that it may lead to abuse of power and accusations against anyone."

In response to the bill, the international community has engaged in divestment and halted foreign aid to Uganda. An estimated $118 million in aid has been retracted.

Uganda is one of 77 countries around the world that criminalizes homosexuality.

– Jessica Newfield

CHAPTER NEWS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: VP TV and crew setting up for November panel on mining; JHR @ McGill joins forces with Amnesty International McGill for the Silent Vigil for Syria in March; the band Voodoo Babies playing at the JHR/STAND fundraiser in February.

JHR @ McGill Executives 2013-2014

President	VP Newspaper	VP Radio
Jenna Topan	Alex Badduke (Fall 2013)	Catherine Gao
	Anne-Rachelle Boulanger	
VP Internal	(Winter 2014)	**VP Advocacy**
Jesse Kim	Jessica Newfield (Fall and Winter)	Brenda Chang
VP Communications	**VP Television**	**VP Events**
Amy Kim	David Henry	Matthew Trisic

JHR's Core Principles

JHR is an organization that:
Seeks to eliminate the need for the work it does.
Creates change without creating dependency.
Runs needs-based programs with sustainable, long-term impact.
Works with local media on pressing local human rights issues.
Believes in the inherent equality of all human beings.
Respects all human rights equally.
Believes in the power of open and free discussion to create positive change.
Upholds the most stringent of human rights standards in its own operations.
Builds long-term and respectful relationships with its partners, volunteers, staff, funders and stakeholders.
Actively works with local partners in countries of operation.
Recognizes the power of all forms of media.
Ensures all projects and programs are ethically responsible.
Is non-partisan.
Respects local knowledge systems.

JHR is an organization that does not:
Deviate from its core mission or principles.
Create a need for itself.
Run short-term programs without substantive follow-up.
Provide band-aid solutions.
Prioritize one human right above another.
Assume it knows better than its local partners and stakeholders.

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