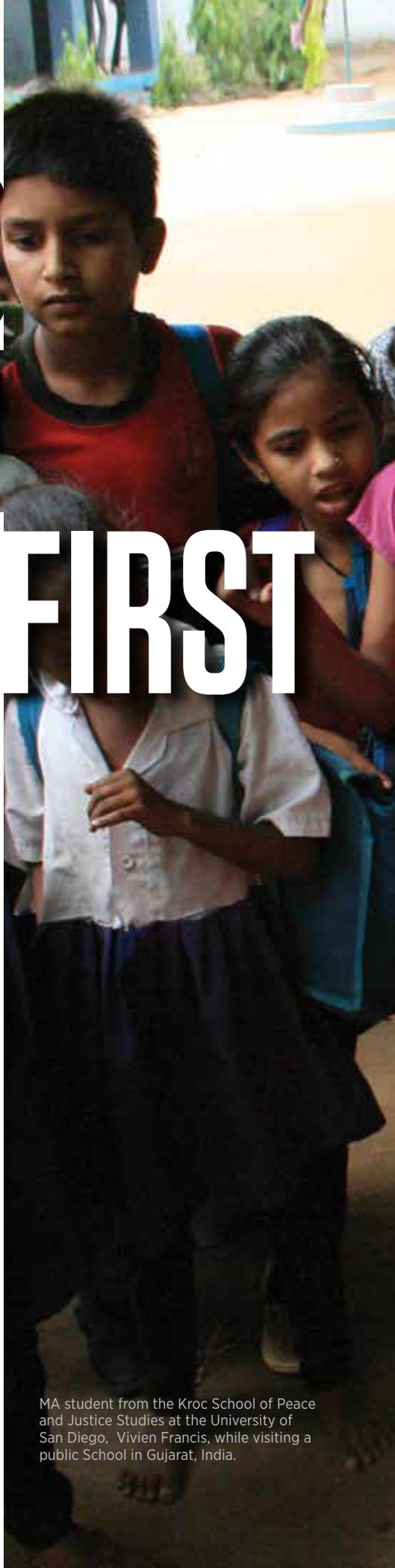


# WOMEN AND CHILDREN



# FIRST

By Susan Ladika

EVEN IN THE RED-LIGHT DISTRICT OF KOLKATA, INDIA, children's dreams are flourishing. They talk of being dancers and doctors when they grow up, far from the lives they know now.

That's what Katherine Forbes learned when she spent four months in the Kalighat district in the fall of 2012, tutoring children, playing with them, and helping them with their English homework as part of her senior year independent study project for the Long Island University Global program, through which undergraduates study around the world.

Forbes spent her time in Kolkata working with New Light, which provides shelter and services for youngsters from the red-light district. She also interviewed the children's mothers about their lives and experiences for her project.

In her interviews with the women she found, "they felt like their own lives were wasted. They wanted their children to be able to stand on their own feet and succeed in a different way," Forbes recalls.

Throughout U.S. universities, students, staff, faculty, and alumni are working to help foster and protect the human rights of women and children around the globe.

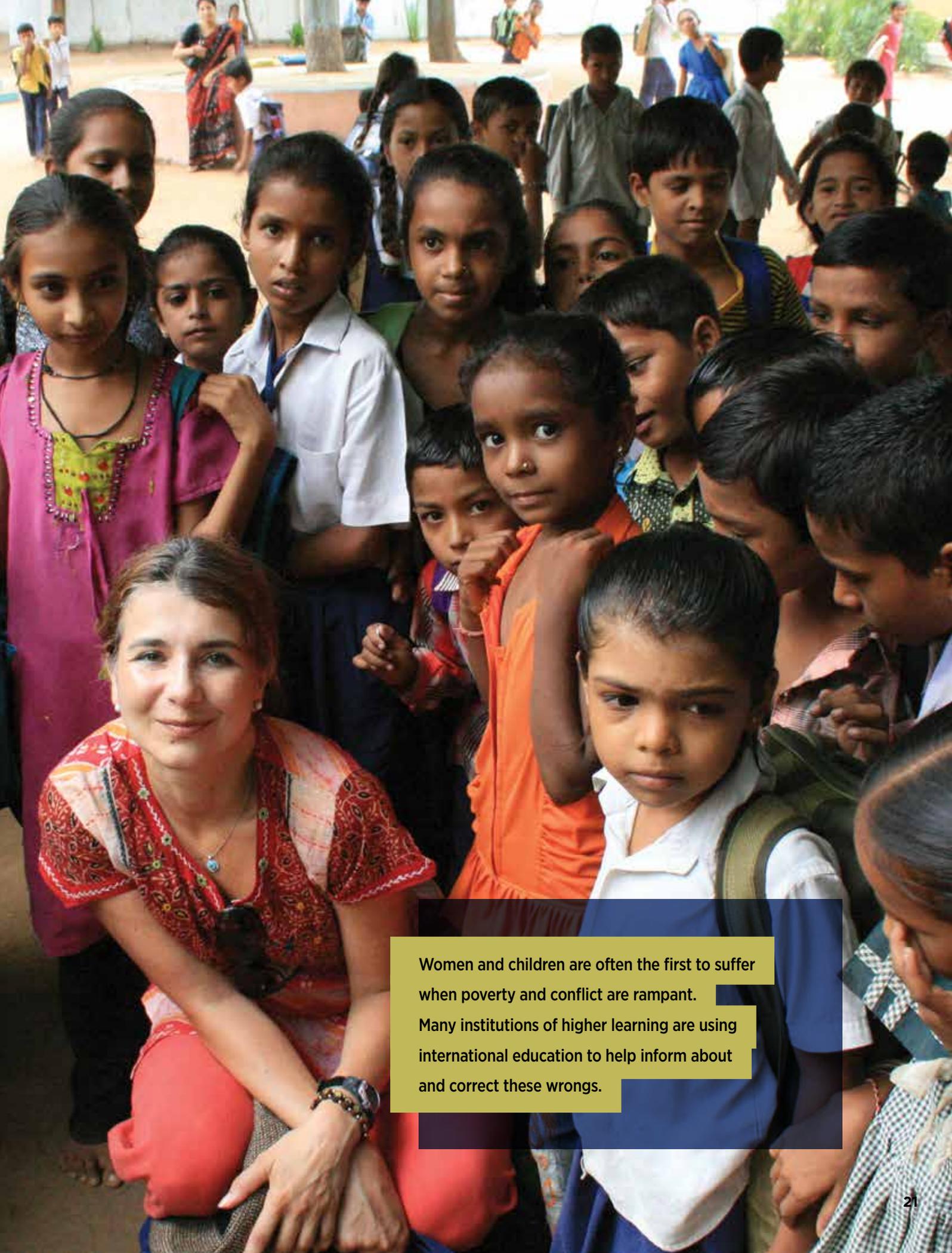
In keeping with the United Nations' view of human rights, they're doing everything from trying to reduce violence against women to improving girls' access to education to curbing sex and labor trafficking.

Interest in human rights issues at university campuses is increasing, and job opportunities in the field are growing.

"People are becoming much more conscious that this is part of the global conversation," says Joanna Regulska, vice president of international and global affairs at Rutgers University's campus in New Brunswick, New Jersey. "These are the global concerns of today and they're not going away."

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article is the sixth in an occasional series of features about peace and social justice issues in international education. The first article, "Leaving Light Footprints," about sustainability in international education, was published in the May/June 2012 issue; the second article, "Transforming Lives" about refugees, was published in the November/December 2012 issue; the third article, "Intimate Proximity: The Human Face of Genocide" was published in the January/February 2013 issue; the fourth article, "Peace Pathways" about conflict resolution, was published in the May/June 2013 issue; the fifth article, "Stop Traffic!" about human trafficking was published in the September/October 2013 issue.

MA student from the Kroc School of Peace and Justice Studies at the University of San Diego, Vivien Francis, while visiting a public School in Gujarat, India.



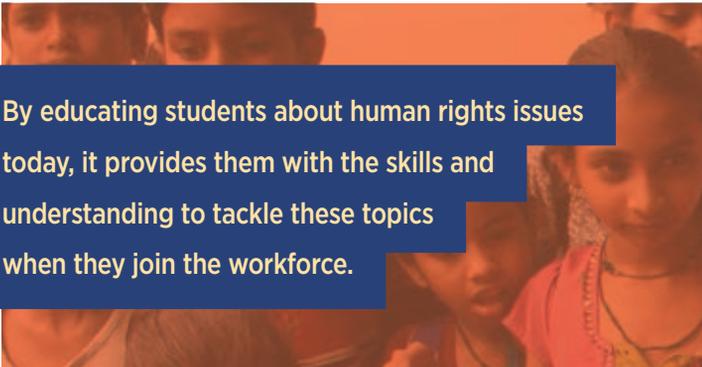
Women and children are often the first to suffer when poverty and conflict are rampant. Many institutions of higher learning are using international education to help inform about and correct these wrongs.

“But there’s a big question. Yes, consciousness is rising; yes, people are more aware; but are we able to eradicate some of the abuses?”

Rutgers is one of the universities sharpening its focus on human rights. In 2011 it created the Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA), designed to pull together the university’s many projects in the field of human rights.

Work at the GAIA Centers is aimed at developing a campuswide set of international initiatives and includes such things as fostering dialogue and setting priorities for faculty members, serving the many international students and scholars who come to Rutgers to study or conduct research, and developing international partnerships.

University programs range from the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, which strengthens women’s leadership roles in human rights and social justice issues; the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights, which focuses on issues such as conflict resolution, justice, and global health; the School of Law’s International Human Rights Clinic, which is involved in domestic and international human rights cases; and the Human Rights House, a residential facility that focuses on human rights theory and practice, particularly as it relates to gender.



By educating students about human rights issues today, it provides them with the skills and understanding to tackle these topics when they join the workforce.

Rutgers also has a highly successful International Service Learning (ISL) program, and funds are available to provide students with scholarships to participate. The university has many lower income, first-generation college students, and a far higher percentage of minorities enroll in the ISL program than they do in study abroad, Regulska says, giving them an opportunity to gain experience abroad.

Among the ISL program opportunities is a trip to Ghana, where students focus on the work of women’s nongovernmental and grassroots organizations. They come to “understand the challenges of how women are engaged and empowered to voice their concerns,” Regulska says.

In another program, students from Rutgers’ School of Social Work travel to Romania to explore that country’s child welfare practices and visit orphanages.

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## Diverse Approaches to Advocate for Women and Children

The University of California, Berkeley, is another school with diverse approaches and programs to educate students and advocate for the human rights of women and children. The work is done through its 20-year-old Human Rights Center, which is an independent research and training center housed in the School of Law. The center works with organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Among its projects are the sexual violence program, which currently is involved in a UN project to evaluate the safety of shelters for refugees and internally displaced persons who are fleeing sexual violence. The Human Rights Center is looking at shelters in Colombia, Haiti, Kenya, and at the Thai-Burma border, says Alexa Koenig, executive director of Berkeley’s Human Rights Center. Through its work, researchers with the sexual violence program are trying to determine what prevents violence in the camps, what additional protections are needed, and what can be done to address the fact that many shelters don’t accept boys, which may make mothers reluctant to stay there.

Another project being undertaken by the sexual violence program examines the measures various African countries are taking in response to sexual- and gender-based violence that occurs with domestic and international crimes. The work is done with local nongovernmental partners as well as government ministries and is aimed at increasing accountability for the crimes and to evaluating how well recently enacted laws meet their objectives, Koenig says.

In 2013 the university launched the Atrocity Response Program, which includes interviewing witnesses who testify at the ICC. As part of that, program director Stephen Smith Cody traveled to northern Uganda to interview men and women who had been victims of violence from the Lord’s Resistance Army about their experiences taking part in cases with the ICC.

He found it easier to interview men because they are more freely able to travel and women do much of the work in the society and have a harder time get-



A Rutgers University student participates in their Social Welfare System in China International Service Learning program, which takes place in Beijing and Tianjin.

ting away to testify before the court. He also found “women may be more hesitant to testify.”

And in the patriarchal society, elders tend to speak for the community. That sort of system “silences the really important voices of women and girls,” Cody says. His work is trying to determine “what is lost by the fact that there is this bias in favor of men testifying rather than women.”

The Human Rights Center at Berkeley also was instrumental in working with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to establish the Pader Girls Academy in Uganda in 2002 to educate girls who escaped from the Lord’s Resistance Army. The girls had been child soldiers and were ostracized from their home villages, particularly if they were pregnant or had given birth.

“They would leave captivity with young children and had no place to go,” Cody says. With the establishment of the academy, the girls could attend school while their children were cared for during the day. Now those first students have graduated or are enrolled in vocational technical programs to learn skills such as hospitality or tailoring. And the school continues on, with 450 girls studying there today, providing a way for pregnant girls and young mothers in Uganda to continue their educations.

Rebecca Peters, who will graduate from Berkeley in May with a double major in international development economics and environmental studies, also is working to ensure girls don’t have to cut short their educations.

She received a fellowship from the Human Rights Center, and through that Peters has been involved with the Pachamama project in Cochabamba, Bolivia, funded by a grant from the Center for Race

and Gender at Berkeley, which focuses on providing clean drinking water and sanitary facilities.

A lack of these basic services has a disproportionate impact on the ability of girls to attend school. It’s a particular problem when girls begin menstruating, and can mean the end of a girl’s education, especially in migrant and indigenous communities. “I couldn’t imagine a world where I wouldn’t go to school because of a lack of water and bathrooms,” Peters says.

She spent two months in 2012 helping to install a water treatment system at a school, and surveying households about their water use and hygiene practices. Through her interviews she worked to determine the impact a lack of sanitary facilities has, and how often girls miss school as a result.

Some girls said the existing bathrooms are scary places, and they’re harassed when they have their period. “Everyone should have equal opportunity and not miss school because of a lack of sanitary facilities and because of water-borne illnesses,” Peters says.

This fall Peters will head to Britain on a Marshall Scholarship, studying at the University of Manchester and Oxford University. Ultimately, she’d like to work toward improving the affordability and the equity of distribution of water and sanitary facilities in the world.

She says that by gaining an education, girls are better able to resist being caught up in sex trafficking, typically have fewer children, and learn skills so they can earn their own income.

Forbes has also found that education and safety are keys to children’s success, seeing it firsthand in her independent study program at New Light in Kolkata.

The organization provides housing, educational opportunities, recreational programs, health care, and other services for more than 150 children, some of whom are just infants. The organization also has a residential program for girls to prevent them from being abused or trafficked, and they learn skills that will help them later in life.

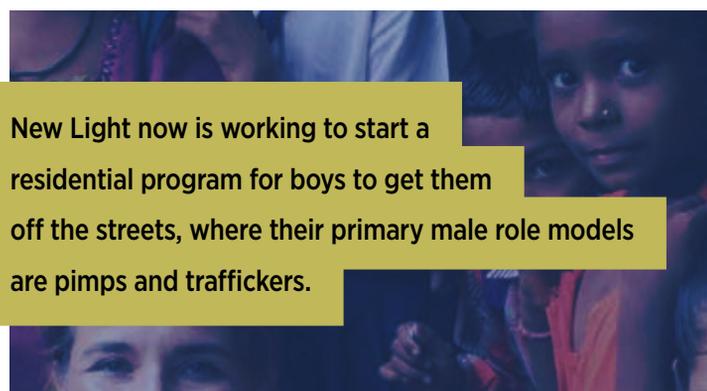
New Light now is working to start a residential program for boys to get them off the streets, where their primary male role models are pimps and traffickers.

With her experience in India to draw on, Forbes, who graduated in May from Long Island University with a degree in global studies, now works as a domestic violence case manager with Safe Horizon, a victims' assistance organization in New York. "It helps me understand why abusers abuse and why women stay with abusers," she says.

## Boys Often Overlooked

Often, boys are forgotten when it comes to abuse and human rights.

Blake Feldman, a law student at the University of Georgia in Athens, who will graduate in May 2015, spent the summer of 2013 interning with the Human Rights League in Bratislava, Slovakia, researching the issue of unaccompanied minors.



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As part of its effort to internationalize educational experience, the University of Georgia School of Law provides funding to encourage students to go on internships abroad.

During his time in Bratislava, Feldman focused on teenage boys, who are typically 15- to 17-year-olds from Afghanistan who are coming to Europe for work. They're picked up by Slovak authorities and sent to centers similar to jails. When they're transferred to less secure facilities, almost all run away, Feldman says.

Slovak authorities are generally unconcerned about the problem. "Indifference has allowed it to be manipulated into a trafficking route," Feldman says.

He also thinks the human trafficking is taken less seriously because boys are involved. "When people think of trafficking they think of pretty young girls," he says. Because these are boys, "that adds to their plight and invisibility." When the teens flee the facilities, they're typically transported to work in Western Europe.

"I realized that anti-immigration policies have led to a decreased political will to enforce their human rights guaranteed by international and regional law," Feldman says. "The attitude is: 'they'll be OK.'"

It's a similar attitude to that encountered by Vivien Francis while on an internship in India working with the Dalits, who hold the lowest rank in Indian society. Children, women, and men from the "untouchables" group face great discrimination from society at large.

Francis spent three months in the Gujarat state in India in 2010, working with Navsarjen Trust, which defends the rights of the Dalits. It was part of her internship for her master of arts in peace and justice studies from the University of San Diego.

Francis, whose undergraduate degree is in graphic design, developed a project to use photography as a tool for human rights advocacy. Her photos of the Dalit community were used in a book she created and displayed in a photo exhibit at the university.

She spent time in the Dalit communities documenting human rights abuses. When she visited schools she found Dalit children were usually seated separately from their peers and ignored by their teachers, who wouldn't correct their homework or touch their books. The youngsters also weren't allowed to drink water from the same container as their classmates and were served lunch separately.

Women faced particular discrimination, even within their own communities, and were taught to accept it gracefully. She met girls who were gang raped, and told they should be grateful they were touched by members of the higher castes. Or girls were brought to serve as dancers in Hindu temples, where they are used as prostitutes.

Through its efforts, Navsarjen Trust works to educate Dalits to stand up to discrimination, providing empowerment training, community leadership skills for women, and legal assistance.

Francis, whose father is Lebanese and whose mother is Palestinian, was born and raised in Guatemala. Although she's well aware of human rights issues and conflicts in the Middle East and has seen discrimination against indigenous people in Guatemala, what she saw in India "was really, really intense. This is worse. I never imagined I'd see this kind of discrimination."



Boy at lunch time at a Public School in Gujarat, India. India's social structure is organized by a caste system. The boy in this picture belongs to the lowest cast, called "Dalits." Because he is a Dalit, this child is forced to eat lunch separately from the rest of his classmates.

Her work focused on funding efforts for the organization and networking with other NGOs.

Before enrolling at the University of Minnesota, Kast spent four years in Oaxaca, Mexico, working with children with disabilities, and she hopes to return to Mexico and continue working in the areas of disabilities or abuse.

## Protecting Women and Children in Latin America

Luz Nagle, a professor at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, has taken an active role in programs to protect the rights of children and women in Latin America. Before coming to the United States, she served as a judge in Medellin, Colombia, and often had dealings with drug lords.

Since coming to the United States she's worked with the International Bar Association, training judges and prosecutors on combatting human trafficking in Latin America. Another focus has been on anti-corruption issues, and Nagle says when government officials steal resources allocated to hospitals, schools, and micro-industries, it has a disproportionate impact on a country's women and children.

And the two issues intersect as human trafficking for sex and labor is the second most lucrative criminal industry, behind drug trafficking. Corruption "affects and exacerbates human trafficking," she says.

Nagle also has taken students on study abroad trips to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where they've learned about the thousands

Francis now works as a program officer with the Trans-Border Institute in the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego. The institute aims to promote understanding and collaboration between the United States and Mexico on transnational issues.

Others are working on human rights issues in Latin America. Nicole Kast, who will graduate in May from the University of Minnesota with a master's degree in public health, spent two months in Cochabamba, Bolivia, through the university's Human Rights Fellowship Program.

During that time she worked with CUBE, or Centro Una Brisa de Esperanza (Breeze of Hope Center), which aims to prevent sexual abuse of children and to provide legal, psychological, and social services to victims. In Bolivia, "the legal structure really doesn't support children," Kast says.

who "disappeared" when the country's last military government was in power in the 1970s and '80s.

During that time women were imprisoned and killed, and their children were given to members of the military regime. Others were adopted overseas. "It's something that to this day affects Argentina and divides the country," Nagle says. Those children, who are now adults, often struggle with psychological issues once they learn the truth. And efforts continue to reunite these children with their biological families.

She's taken the students to visit a military building which once was used as a prison. "You could use the city as a laboratory." The wife of one of the guides was killed during that era and his daughter vanished. By hearing of such events firsthand, "it becomes alive in the eyes of the students."



Luz Nagle, a professor at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, works with the International Bar Association training judges and prosecutors on combatting human trafficking in Latin America. Nagle took a class to the ESMA Museum in Buenos Aires, a public memorial to the disappeared of the “Dirty War” in Argentina. The site of the museum was one of nearly 400 detention and torture camps that operated during this time. The man she is standing next to is a guide at ESMA who was once a prisoner there.

## Building Skills to Protect Human Rights

Some universities focus on supporting and developing the skills of those already actively working on women’s and children’s rights issues.

Columbia University in New York has a strong emphasis on capacity building, particularly through its flagship Human Rights Advocates Program, in which about 10 grassroots organizers from across the world spend four months taking classes and participating in workshops, says Yasmine Ergas, associate director of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights.

Recent participants in the program have included organizers from Liberia who are working to empower women to take on decisionmaking roles on political and environmental issues and Afghans combating gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, through the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability, academics, members

of nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and others discuss the impact conflict and dictatorships have had on their societies.

As part of that program, participants develop projects to “help the communities they come from come to terms with the legacy of the conflicts,” Ergas says. One project in 2012 focused on rape victims in post-conflict Bangladesh.

The school also offers a human rights studies masters of arts and an undergraduate major in human rights, and human rights has gained increasing attention in recent years. “It’s become viable to work in advocacy,” Ergas says. “Governments as well as corporations as well as international organizations realize human rights and gender questions are part of what they need to be able to address.”

At the University of Minnesota, along with providing Human Rights Fellowships for its students, the university takes part in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program. The program brings about a dozen mid-career professionals from developing countries to the United States, where they spend 10 months involved in academic study, professional development, and cultural exchange.

Many of those who take part have an interest in women’s and children’s issues, such as a recent fellow who is a police officer in Bhutan and specializes in dealing with crimes against women and children, says Willa Gelvick, assistant director of fellowship programs.

As part of the program, each Humphrey Fellow is assigned a law student who serves as a research fellow. The students also help the fellow integrate into the law school community, she says.

Through interacting with other fellows as well as the university community, fellows “are able to see their own issues in a global context,” says Kristi Rudelius-Palmer, co-director of the Human Rights Center.

At the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, the emphasis is on its master’s in international peace studies, geared toward those who are practitioners in the field of peace building, says Susan St. Ville, director of the master’s program.

About 20 students are admitted each year to the two-year program, which the university funds. About one-quarter come from the United States, while the majority come from conflict and post-conflict areas. The program combines theory and practice, including a six-month internship. In the classroom the students take electives such as gender and peace building, trauma and peace building, and youth and violence, St. Ville says.

## 2014 RON MOFFAT SEMINAR

### Transcending Boundaries to Build a Global Civil Society: The Role of International Education

The seminar will bring together thought leaders and practitioners in peace building, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, and educators focused on teaching and facilitating transnational education, to explore how educators can help students find their place in and develop a commitment to a global civil society.

This event is part of the NAFSA annual conference and is being held in conjunction with the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego, California, May 30–June 1, 2014.

For more information visit <http://www.nafsa.org/ac14moffattseminar>.

For a student who has grown up in a conflict zone, it's "very much a lived experience for them," she says. Those who are selected for the program are high achievers and are "pretty reflective on what they've gone through."

The students share experiences both inside and outside the classroom, finding similarities as well as differences. Because the students come from such diverse regions, "it gives them a kind of flexibility in terms of how they think," St. Ville says. "They tend to be more innovative."

That exposure to new ideas and critical thinking skills already has been useful for Nancy Abwola, who graduated in May and now works with Raising Voices, in Kampala, Uganda, which is aimed at preventing violence against women and children.

Abwola grew up in northern Uganda, which was wracked by conflict for more than 20 years. "You could really see the impact of war on the people, on the economy, on the region."

She initially worked in her home region, dealing with violence against women in a post-conflict society and helping to connect victims with assistance for physical and mental health issues and legal aid.

Since graduation she's worked as a senior program officer at Raising Voices, working to prevent violence against women. Her work provides technical assistance and assistance implementing programs at other organizations in a number of African nations.

Her education at Notre Dame helped her become quick on her feet and hone her critical thinking skills, which have been useful in dealing with a variety of organizations from various countries.

St. Ville says the program has a very close alumni network that's active online, so alumni can pose questions and issues that arise, and receive feedback and support from other alumni around the world.

Abwola has found that by being in close contact with people from other parts of the world shines a light on stereotypes and "makes you see everything in a different light." She's also seen that there are "similar challenges, no matter where you come from."

Those similarities and opportunities for learning are also highlighted in the Women PeaceMakers Program at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego. The program documents the stories and best peacebuilding practices of women from around the globe who are instrumental in human rights and peace-making efforts in their home nations.

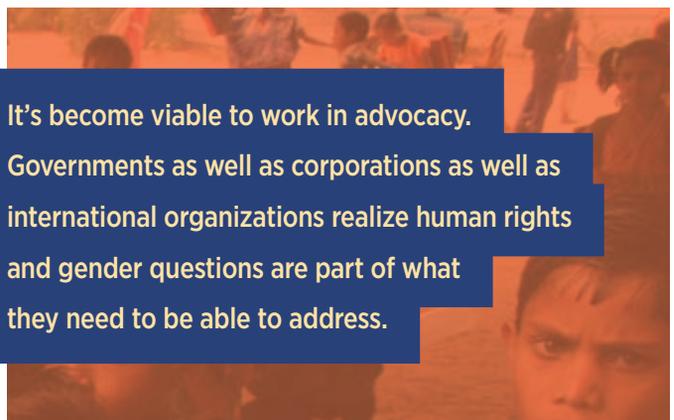
"We are still at such a deficit of having women's experiences recorded," says Jennifer Freeman, the program officer. Typically, society focuses on the male point of view, and historical recordings tend to emphasize war, rather than peace, Freeman says.

Under the Women PeaceMakers Program, four women from different parts of the world, who have long track records in peace building, come to the university for two months in the fall. Each day they spend two and one-half to three hours with a writer who documents their stories and records their insights and expertise. The participants also speak at classes throughout the university and at other universities in Southern California.

Freeman says the program recognizes there's a "gender dimension to human rights, to peace building, to justice." The program is now in its twelfth year, and so far 44 women from 35 countries have taken part.

Along with telling their stories, the women learn from one another, and their experiences are shared both on the university's website and with other organizations.

One woman who took part is Zeinab Mohamed Blandia, who has had a key role to play in creating a sense of community and maintaining peace in the conflicted-riddled Nuba Mountains in Sudan. As part of her work she founded Ruya, or Vision, which trains and develops women peace ambassadors.



It's become viable to work in advocacy. Governments as well as corporations as well as international organizations realize human rights and gender questions are part of what they need to be able to address.

She got her start in the 1980s, after being uprooted by war and ending up living in the city of Omdurman, often near those on the other side of the conflict. During that time she developed the Tray of Peace program, with women from different regions preparing traditional meals and inviting members of other groups to join them to share a meal and peacefully debate the issues behind the conflict.

After returning to the Nuba Mountains she worked on developing the economic skills of women, providing skills training for illiterate women, and continuing peace-building efforts.

Blandia spent two months in 2009 at the University of San Diego and found the time "very, very inspiring to me."

"This model of our work should be shared with others," she says. "Maybe some people can benefit from the ideas and I can benefit from other models as well."

Blandia returned to Sudan but was displaced by conflict again in 2011. She was eventually granted safe haven in the United States

Although she's now living in the United States, she continues to push for peace in her homeland, working with groups such as Act for Sudan and My Sister's Keeper. "It's very important to work for peace because my country is not in a stable situation," Blandia says. "The real victims of war are the women and the children." **IE**

**SUSAN LADIKA** is a freelance writer in Tampa, Florida. Her last article for *IE* was "Storytelling—International Style," about universities internationalizing journalism curricula, which appeared in the January/February 2014 issue.