Ivory Coast
Liberian refugees caught between two wars

feature interview with
President Kaunda
Founding Father, President of Zambia for 27 years

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The separation that exists between Stanford and the rest of the world seems far greater than six degrees. But our connection to the world is real. This publication is committed to providing an arena for Stanford students to create awareness of human rights issues across the globe based on their personal experience and inspiration.
Larry Diamond, Professor of Political Science
Institute for International Studies (IIS); Center for
Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law
The Office of President Hennessy
Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU)
Stanford Department of History
Center for African Studies (CAS)
The Stanford Fund
Professor Helen Stacy
To the Stanford Community:

As students committed to human rights awareness and activism, we come together to create a forum in which Stanford students can express their personal connections to human rights abuses across the globe. We come from a wide range of backgrounds, geographical focuses, majors, and experiences. Some of us have witnessed these abuses first-hand, others have studied them at great length, and some of us are new to these issues and are looking for a way to get involved in the promotion of human rights. This is the beginning of what we hope will be a continuous campaign for human rights awareness on campus. We encourage those interested to get involved in Six Degrees.

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Turkey
Reed is a senior studying archaeology. He spent most of last year studying in Istanbul, Turkey, where he learned some Turkish, drank a lot of tea, and made some good friends. While in Turkey he listened to excellent Turkish and Kurdish folk music and traveled to the Southeastern Anatolia region twice, the basis for his article. He is interested in social movements, religion, cultural change, and survival, especially in Turkey, where he hopes to return sometime in the near future.

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Cape Verde
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The Right to Know
Eric is a senior majoring in history. He is becoming increasingly interested in the role that education plays in building democracy in developing nations, an interest that was increased by his work at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, which inspired this article.
**A View From Mardin**
In southeastern Turkey, one student encounters a people engaged in a fight for cultural existence.

**Gender-Based Violence**
Women in zones of conflict often become victims of a “hidden epidemic” of violence, common across cultures.

**Cape Verde**
Living in Cape Verde shows one student how gender-based violence can become an accepted part of life.

**Between Two Wars**
Caught “between two wars,” Liberian refugees in the Ivory Coast struggle for survival.

**The Right to Know**
An often overlooked right, the right to know is a crucial component of any democratic, human rights-respecting society.

**Kaunda, an Interview**
His Excellency Kenneth Kaunda speaks to Six Degrees about his life, his inspiration, and his commitment to human rights.

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**Mardin, Turkey**

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The flat roofs of the town of Mardin offer a fine view of the broad, endless expanse of the Mesopotamian plains that stretch from Turkey to Syria and beyond. When the intense sunlight of the summer fades in the evening, the lights of the nearby towns begin to twinkle in the dry darkness. The most distant are from Qamishle, a town lying just on the other side of the nearby border with Syria. Closer are the lights from villages on the plain below Mardin, and the moving lights from the headlights of cars on the road that running from Mardin to the nearby town of Kiziltepe, pointing further west. For centuries, Mardin has offered a fine point to keep track of events in a tumultuous region. Its impregnable castle has proven useful to the army of the ruling power—this time the Turkish military occupies its fortifications. Mardin has endured many invasions, the latest being the hopeful convoys of American troops who arrived in the province in late February of 2003. The Turkish newspapers printed large, color photographs of them rumbling eastward from the Mediterranean port of Iskenderun towards Mesopotamia—towards Iraq, or so the Americans hoped. On Turkish television, I watched the Americans wait in Kiziltepe, a town nearby Mardin, until the Turkish parliament passed the bill that would let the Americans go on into Iraq and fight their war. But the parliament rejected the Americans, and after a short stay, they too left, leaving Mardin, Kiziltepe, and the surrounding region with its fragile peace.

Between the two times I passed through Kiziltepe in the past year, my fellow Americans had come and gone, and they probably didn’t have a great impact on the town where they stayed briefly. Kiziltepe, which means red hill in Turkish, lies on the northern flanks of the Mesopotamian plain. Its present name is certainly not the only one the town has had over the years, since over time various linguistic groups have settled here around the small hill. Flattened by invaders over the centuries, and recently, swollen with refugees fleeing the civil war that waged nearby between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), the town is largely a conglomeration of mud-brick houses sprawling across the plain. Women wearing traditional white scarves and long dresses go about their daily chores in muddy lots, maintaining their village customs in this quasi-city. This kind of forced, shocked urbanization preceded any real economic growth in the town, and its poverty is evident. However, the series of concrete high rises whose bottom stories house cell phone shops and furniture stores attests that Kiziltepe is not completely destitute. Of the town’s past, there is only a venerable old mosque that has survived centuries of conflict and invasion.

Like so many invaders, traders, and travelers before me, I came eastward towards Mardin—across the Euphrates River and through the ancient pilgrimage city of Sanliurfa, where thousands of years ago, Muslims believe, the Prophet Abraham
was born in a cave. East of Urfa, the plains of northern Mesopotamia extend uniformly. After three hours crossing the sun-scorched expanse in late June of 2003, my bus arrived at Kızıltepe, a few months after my countrymen had departed. The Kızıltepe otogar, or bus station, where I stopped that day was a half-deserted place. Children waited in the shade of a dirty concrete veranda to hawk candy or shine the shoes of travelers passing through. A handful of bus companies occupied a complex of offices that greatly overestimated the actual need for space. The concrete walls were covered in graffiti, and the vacant rooms contained heaps of trash blown in them over the years. On the day I arrived, three men waited behind their carts piled high with rami, a kind of dry cucumber with an almond-like taste unique to the area. Another vendor sold highly artificial-looking lemonade from a jug he kept in the shade. Apart from this informal commerce, there was one general store at the Kızıltepe otogar, a small, dimly lit room across from a cracked, dusty pavement where our bus had parked. When I disembarked, this was where I headed, thinking that the lemonade wasn’t going to be cold enough to quench the thirst that had grown in me after sitting on the bus for hours on that hot day. In front of a store stood a rusted newspaper rack holding one yellowed copy of Welat, a now-legal Kurdish-language newspaper. In Kurdish, Welat means motherland. I passed by the newspaper rack and out of the heat, into the cool interior.

“Roj bash,” I said, greeting the two men in the store in Kurdish, which I guessed from the newspaper to be the native language of the area. I had learned a few phrases of Kurdish during my first trip to the area that previous January, while eating in a restaurant in Sanliurfa. The Kurds working in the restaurant, like so many in Turkey and elsewhere in the Middle East, proudly asserted their identity and enthusiastically taught us some of their native tongue, of which the Turkish government had banned all expression for many years. The Kurds continue to fight for their rights to speak, learn, and broadcast in their own language.

The two men responded, looking surprised, but pleased. I went to pick a bottle of cherry-flavored sparkling water from the refrigerator cabinet, and I handed my lira to the cashier. He asked me the usual question:

“Where are you from?”

“America,” I said.

I was quick to add: “But I don’t like George Bush. I didn’t want the war in Iraq.”

“Us, too,” said the man behind the cashier. I thought of a newspaper article I had read a few months earlier while the Americans had been in Kızıltepe. The town’s mayor, who belonged to the pro-Kurdish, left wing Democratic People’s Party (DEHAP), had voiced his opposition to the war. The mayor, who had been arrested and tortured in the past, wanted a peaceful solution to the problems in the region, which has seen so much violence in recent years. The Iraq war threatened to upset the
delicate balance in the region, where serious fighting had ceased only three years earlier, and where only a few months earlier the Turkish government had finally lifted emergency rule.

I asked, “So the American soldiers came, and now they are gone?”

“Yes, all of them.”

“Were they just here, or also in Mardin?”

“Only here. We didn’t like them, but now they are gone.”

I wondered if the two men harbored any ill feelings towards me, as an American. Many people in the Middle East who have lived under oppressive rule know that the state’s intentions often differ greatly from those of the people it claims to represent, and from the two men I sensed nothing but good will towards me.

I glanced out of the store and saw the passengers snuffing out their cigarettes, turning off their mobile phones, and then boarding the bus again. I thanked the two men in one of the other Kurdish phrases I knew, “gelleck spas,” and when I left, said goodbye, “khatire te.”

Mardin, not Kiziltepe, was my final destination. I could see it rising like a falcon’s nest above the flatlands. It was only 20 minutes away, but we didn’t make it that far before our next stop. As we cruised slowly past the teahouses, greengrocers, and kebab stands lining the highway in Kiziltepe, our driver decided to reverse the bus. He drove not to Mardin, but to the local auto repair sanayi sitesi, a series of low-slung cinder block buildings that housed a number of mechanic and parts stores. There was a problem with the bus and it wasn’t going anywhere for a while. In the heat of the afternoon, I waited with other passengers and a few local old men wearing shalvar, the baggy pants religious-minded men wear for modesty, in the shade in front of an auto mechanic’s shop. We watched while the bus attendant, the driver, and some mechanics removed the cover and poked about in the engine. The passengers waited restlessly. The first person who approached me was a young soldier from the Fethiye, a beautiful tourist beach town on the western coast of Turkey. He was coming to Mardin to finish his military service, mandatory for all males who live in Turkey. About the East, and Mardin in particular, he had nothing good to say. We went to a nearby hole-in-the-wall tea stand, and he complained as we sipped strong cups of black tea from the glass cups with plastic saucers that are ubiquitous in Turkey.

“It’s foreign, smuggled. They don’t drink Turkish tea around here. This tea is bitter.”

As we sat sipping our cay, an old beggar emerged, hobbled over to us with a splintered wooden crutch, held out his hands for some coins, and then wandered off. Apart from him and the frenzy of action around our broken bus, the auto repair lots were still and stiflingly hot. A wind pushed dust and trash across the dirty lot. The ramshackle buildings were stained with grease and soot. I tired of the soldier’s complaints, so I returned to the crowd gathered around the back of the bus. The old men continued sitting on plastic chairs in the shade, chatting and flipping their prayer beads in a slow rhythm. To their right, a young boy cleaned out the bus’ radiator with a long, thin stick. Other scrawny children with greasy fingers and feet clad in half-broken sandals scurried among the mechanics working on the bus, leaving and returning with various tools. As the work progressed slowly, some of the other passengers grew nervous. I called my friend Yusuf who was waiting for me in Mardin, but he had no car. I had already traveled over 20 hours to Kiziltepe, but Mardin, only 20 minutes away, was still out of reach. I asked the attendant how soon he thought the bus would be ready, but his answer was as ambiguous as I expected.

“Half-hour, one hour, it is not clear,” he said as he waved his hands. He didn’t seem concerned much about our delay, but he was working: grease stained his white uniform shirt and sweat beaded on his forehead. A yellow DEHAP key chain with the party’s torch logo hung out of his pocket.

Near me were two timid looking girls holding notebooks from the teaching college at Sanliurfa. They complained to the attendant; they were going to Sirnak, a provincial capital farther east, and needed to get to Mardin before the last bus left for their hometown. The services end early in this part of Turkey, especially to troubled Sirnak, which lies in mountainous country adjacent to the Iraqi frontier. In Sirnak during the civil war, nationalist paramilitary groups working with the unofficial approval of the Turkish state murdered suspected PKK sympathizers and used the local dump to dispose of their bodies. In addition, the Turkish
military destroyed large parts of the town of 25,000 inhabitants in order to punish them for their separatist tendencies.¹ I wanted to speak with the girls, but I didn’t. Being from Sirnak, they were quite courageous—two female students trying to be independent in a conservative, troubled corner of Turkey. Like so many in this region, they were survivors, struggling to forge ahead in a difficult reality—the possibility of renewed conflict threatening to eliminate whatever gains they had made in their lives.

I overheard two younger men speaking in Kurdish with a few of the locals, and later when I saw them standing near me, I went to introduce myself. Both men spoke English very well; they were Kurds living in Sweden, and now they were returning to their homes in northern Iraq for the first time in years. They had traveled much farther than I, and had not seen their homeland in decades. Though having gotten this far, they did not seem overly impatient, and told me they expected to stay the night along Turkey’s frontier with Iraq. Now with Saddam Hussein finally gone, they felt safe enough to make the journey back to their home city of Arbil. We spoke (not surprisingly) about politics, until the bus attendant announced that it was time to leave the oto sanayi sitesi. I wished the two men good luck on their journey, they did the same to me, and we re-boarded the bus for what we hoped would be the last time.

Eventually, as the light rays grew long, we left Kiziltepe and wound up the hill to Mardin. Compared to the hardscrabble settlements on the plains below, and certainly in its own right, Mardin is a wonderful place—and not just because of its dramatic, sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. It has been victim to the ubiquitous concrete constructions found in cities and towns all over the world, but the core of the city remains essentially a tangle of medieval alleys too narrow for cars, winding among ancient houses, mosques, and churches belonging to the Syriac Orthodox rite. The flat-roofed, honey-colored stone buildings—many of which have intricate carving relief on their walls—descend like a multitude of staircases from the castle that dominates the town. The bus passed through the town, and let me off at the makeshift bus station, where I called Yusuf. He was waiting for me in the newer, lower part of the city, across the street from the town hall. I boarded a minibus and took a seat next to a bearded old man wearing shalvar and a woven cap on his head. The passengers conversed mainly in Arabic, the first language of many Mardinliler. Mardin’s cultural composition is truly a mosaic: though the outlying villages are mostly Kurdish, the majority of inhabitants of the city center are Arabic-speaking Muslims, and Syriac Orthodox Christians have called Mardin home for centuries.

Our first night in Mardin in January, Yusuf and his friends took us to listen to traditional music performed by a local band from Kiziltepe. The band played in the middle of the large room, two men played drums, another played the zurna (a kind of horn with a shrill pitch), and others played the baglama and saz, (two stringed instruments that are the sustenance of Turkish and Kurdish folk music). The band played songs in both Kurdish and Turkish, and after a few numbers, groups of people got up from their tables and began to dance. The atmosphere became more intense and festive as the dancers grew in number. Both men and women were dancing to the fast-paced music called halay. Halay is a general term for a kind of upbeat music played at festivals and weddings, particularly in eastern Turkey. In the small, increasingly hot room, groups of four or five stepped in unison forwards and then backwards, or side-to-side. They linked their pinkies together, and swayed their arms up and down with the rhythm. Those on the ends waved small cloths or napkins ecstatically. Occasionally, everyone would let out a loud, ululating call that filled the whole room. Soon we were also dancing, as Yusuf and his friends were teaching us the simple steps. We locked pinkies and moved back and forth in unison across the room, occasionally shaking our shoulders to the frenetic beat. When the band finally

The ancient streets of Mardin are the core of the city.
stopped playing, we were exhausted, but very satisfied. Our first night in Mardin set the tone for the following day-and-a-half we spent exploring in the town.

After a few days of glorious sunshine, winter weather began to descend on southeastern Turkey. Our time in Mardin was finished; we were to meet friends the next day in a town some 12 hours to the west. As the sky grew gray, we wrapped up in our coats and boarded a minibus to eastern Turkey’s most populous city and transportation hub, Diyarbakir, the de-facto capital of eastern Turkey. As the major Kurdish city in Turkey, the PKK’s enigmatic, Stalinesque leader, Abdullah Ocalan, stated that Diyarbakir was to become the capital of Kurdistan after the region gained independence from Turkey. Ocalan now sits in jail on an isolated island in the Marmara Sea, not far from Istanbul, and military presence in Diyarbakir is heavy. Whether the military has done much to protect ordinary citizens of the city is unclear. During the early 1990’s, a terrorist group called Hezbollah (no connection with the one in Lebanon), with links to the then-ruling party in the Turkish government, terrorized Christians, Kurdish nationalists, and women’s activists. That the ruling party of a theoretically secular state would clandestinely support a fundamentalist Islamic terrorist group reveals something of the complex, shadowy web of violence that took so many lives during the civil war.

Though recent events seem to dominate perceptions of the city, Diyarbakir has been around for a long time. Its nearly complete black basalt city wall encloses a warren of lanes where historical mosques, commercial hans, and Syriac Orthodox, Armenian and Chaldean churches hide amidst markets teeming with shoppers. Many residents claim that the walls are the second longest in the world, after the great wall of China, and that they were built by the Assyrians who ruled the area thousands of years before Christ.

Though both assertions are exaggerated, the walls are formidable and ancient. Beyond them stretch the newer quarters of the city: concrete apartments and a sea of slums where refugees fled after the Turkish military burned many of their villages. The situation of the migrants is often desperate: I saw it in the faces of the hordes of begging, shoeless children in the minibus station. It was not, however, the abject poverty and the sinister recent history that struck me most during my two visits to Diyarbakir, but rather the hospitality and proud spirit of its residents that persisted—perhaps stronger now than ever before.

In late January, we only had a few hours in Diyarbakir. My two traveling companions and I wanted to get a view of the famous Tigris River, so we proceeded to an old keep that, like the fortress in Mardin, provided a place for the Turkish military to keep an eye on the city. At the entrance, two guards from the Jandarma, the Turkish military police, stopped us. We handed them our identification passes, and waited while they flipped through them.

“Okay, you will have to wait,” said one of the guards.

A few moments later a young soldier who spoke English walked over to us.

“I will show you around. No pictures please, it’s against the rules.”

Our military guide was an amiable young man from the western city of Izmir, who had the misfortune to be posted in this region so far and so different from his own. He had learned English while studying at university; now only two more months of military service remained before he could go home. He didn’t like serving in Diyarbakir—his native territory was a place of turquoise waters and olive groves—but he had grown to appreciate some aspects of the place. He took us to a half-collapsed ancient church inside of the Jandarma station, and then to a viewpoint on the city walls. It offered a wide panorama looking towards the Tigris, which flowed meekly a kilometer or so away from the city. Between the
river and us lay green fields, and immediately below the walls, some squatters had hastily erected brick dwellings. Wood smoke drifted up from the makeshift chimneys, and a boy chased a herd of goats that was foraging among the rocks below. The air grew chilly and the light was fading; the bus was leaving in an hour. As we walked back towards the gate, we thanked the soldier, and wished him the best of luck with the rest of his military service.

By the end of February, winter was in full stride all over Turkey, and the talk of war coming from the American administration grew stronger. When the Iraq war finally began and we watched in dismay as the first bombs dropped on Baghdad, I called my friends in Mardin to wish them God’s protection during the war and beyond. Fortunately, they reported that everything was calm. By that time, the Americans had traveled to Kiziltepe and set up shop in an old cooking oil factory. The days were uneasy and tense, the weather damp and gloomy. The Turkish parliament rejected both bills that would have allowed the American troops to open the northern front in Iraq. A few weeks after the war had begun, the Americans were gone from Kiziltepe and elsewhere in the Southeast. As the convoys of trucks headed west towards the Mediterranean Sea, a group of youngsters threw rocks at the passing vehicles. Another more serious incident flared up in a village in the province of Sanliurfa. During the first days of the war, an American bomber had “mis-aimed,” and dropped its payload near a hamlet along the Syrian border. Luckily, the bomb did not explode, but when the Americans came to investigate, the villagers expressed their dismay. Groups of men and women wearing traditional clothing and expressions of anger on their faces pelted the American military vehicles with eggs and even some rocks. Though the region otherwise remained tensely uneventful, the misfired American bomb and the temporary stationing of US troops in Kiziltepe are events that will not be forgotten in Turkey, especially in the Southeast.

Though the war dragged on, winter in Turkey finally ended, and during the last week in May, the Kurdish rock group, *Agira Jiyan*, performed a concert at the university where I was studying in Istanbul. It was the first time a primarily Kurdish band played a concert at the school; the proceeds from ticket sales went to the victims of an earthquake that struck eastern Turkey a few weeks before. The band played some slow numbers while members of the crowd swayed and held their hands high with fingers formed into peace signs, which in Turkey has connotations with Kurdish nationalism. Then the songs picked up, and everyone began to dance the *halay*, similar to the way that I had learned in Mardin some months before. I joined in with a group of students from Syria seated near me, and was soaked with sweat within a few minutes. The crowd cheered frenetically when *Agira Jiyan*, which in Kurdish means “life flame,” struck up the Syrian Kurdish pop star Jiwan Hajo’s song, “Diyarbakir.” For most Kurds, Diyarbakir, or Amed as it is called in Kurdish, is the capital city of a country yet unrealized—a symbol of hope in the sometimes-impossible struggle for cultural existence.

But the music and dancing were real, and Kurdish music has not only survived, but also flourished for many years despite government prohibition against it in Turkey. For centuries, Kurds—like the Turks they live with—passed down their culture, their stories, their tradition, and their identities through music. I am certainly not able to describe Kurdish music in a way to do it justice, but I know that it contains a wide, rich library of songs. Kurdish singers strum their sazes and sing ballads telling long tales of love, deceit, and revolt against foreign empires such as the Ottomans or the Persians who ruled Kurdistan for centuries. Alongside the sobering melodies, there exists a host of songs meant for celebration and dancing; they provide a joyous release from the struggles of life. Kurdish music seems to aptly capture both of these extremes of human emotion in its melodies. The king of contemporary Kurdish music is Siwan Perver, who lives in exile in Europe, forbidden to return to his native Turkey. Across Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and every other country where Kurds reside, one can find their music. Minibus drivers in eastern Turkey bounce along potholed roads that wind through breathtaking mountain scenery or across dusty plains, their stereos blasting cheaply-made Kurdish wedding songs or sad laments. Kurdish vendors gather in the market districts of Van, Diyarbakir, and even Istanbul, hawking their cassettes from carts equipped with stereos. The traditional themes that current singers and bands adapt to modern times make many of the songs both deeply connected to the past but also highly relevant to the present.

When I returned to Mardin in June of 2003, my friend Yusuf again took me to listen to music with his friends in the small café...
we had visited that previous winter. I was tired from the long ride, which included the delay in Kiziltepe, but my excitement to be back with friends in Mardin overwhelmed any exhaustion I was feeling. After sunset, we dined on tender grilled lamb’s liver at a restaurant in the newer part of the city, and then proceeded to the cafe. Before the show began, a secret policeman entered the room and checked all of our identification cards, looking for terrorists among the crowd. This is not a rare event in Mardin, though the frequency of such security operations is on the decline. After the security agent left, the music began, and shortly afterwards, the dancing. As in the winter and the concert, I danced halay along with a dozen others in the smoky, hot room. The concert wound down and we left to take a stroll in the cool evening. Families chatted in the greenery of the park, girls with scarves over their heads walked together arm in arm: the Mardinililer were savoring a cool evening after the scorching heat of a summer day.

The next night Yusuf and I went to stay with his uncle, also named Yusuf. Yusuf Amca (amca means uncle in Turkish) owned an old house in the city center, where most of the streets are too narrow to allow car access. When we approached Yusuf Amca’s house, it offered nothing but a wall of stone with a small entrance. We entered through a metal door that led into a corridor with a vaulted ceiling. The Arab-style houses of Mardin have vaulted ceilings, designed to keep them warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and Yusuf Amca’s was functioning well. There was a small, immaculately clean bathroom with a squat toilet and bucket shower, a simple but well-stocked kitchen, and a living room with couches and Qur’anic inscriptions on the wall. The main corridor of the house opened onto a courtyard with washbasins and clotheslines. A small fig tree shaded the entranceway to Yusuf Amca’s pigeon coops and another set of rooms.

Yusuf Amca’s house is not one of the most remarkable in Mardin—it lacks any stone carvings and some years ago, an ugly two-story cinder-block addition was built on the older, lower story. Nevertheless, the atmosphere and simple, functional beauty of the house remain. Atop one of the rooms, Yusuf Amca had put together a large, elevated wooden bed. In southeastern Turkey, residents often sleep on their flat roofs in the summer to escape the torrid heat and catch whatever evening breezes happen to be blowing. I had heard of this, and throughout the cold, damp Istanbul winter, I dreamed of sleeping on a rooftop in Mardin on a warm summer night. When Yusuf offered the bed to me for the night, I was thrilled, and I sat in awe on the roof, enjoying the atmosphere and the view. From the roof, I looked out at the lights of Qamishle twinkling just across the Syrian border, and at Kiziltepe on the plain below. Between them and me lay the other roofs of Mardin, lower down on the hill. Above the house a floodlit minaret pierced the darkness—not far was the dominating castle, also floodlit. It was a Friday, June 13th, and a full moon shone brightly in the night sky. As music drifted up from a wedding somewhere down below, I drifted peacefully to sleep.

At certain moments, Mardin seemed like a surreal place, a vestige of another world trapped in time. Traditions continued unchanged in many ways; donkeys still provide the main transportation in the town’s colorful, sprawling bazaar. However, not all in Mardin is tradition, and not all traditions—if they can be so-called—are so innocuous. In Mardin province this past winter, the male relatives of a woman stoned her because she became pregnant out of wedlock. The woman’s male relatives felt a duty to kill her in order to preserve the honor of their family. These honor killings are, unfortunately, not uncommon among more conservative groups in southeastern Turkey. Violence has long been a part of life here: the fighting between the PKK and the Turkish Military that raged the past decade was only the most recent in an endless list of wars stretching back thousands of years. Guerilla uprisings, honor killings, and underdevelopment are often all many people who have not ventured east of western Turkey’s cosmopolitan cities or coastal resorts know about southeastern Turkey.

Until 10 years ago, Turkey denied the existence of the Kurds as a separate ethnic group, labeling them “Mountain Turks.” Attitudes have shifted recently, and diehard Turkish nationalists now acknowledge the Kurds, not as equal citizens in the Republic, but as an inferior, inherently lazy people. Some Turkish nationalists go so far as to claim that the Kurdish language was fabricated in foreign countries as a conspiracy against the inherently monolithic unity of the Turkish state. In reality Kurdish, which belongs to the Indo-Iranian language family, pre-dates the arrival of Turkish in the Middle East by at least a thousand years. However, to extend nationalist ideas into the past is to tread on dangerous ground. Only recently has the idea of nations come to exist in the Middle East, and the notion of both Turk and Kurd is, in
a sense, fabricated. Across the area known as Kurdistan, people speak many Kurdish dialects, some so distinct that they deserve classification as separate languages. In addition, other minority groups live in this area, including the Arabic-speaking Muslims in Mardin and the Syriac Orthodox Christians, whose monastic center of learning lies on a wrinkled upland plateau an hour east of Mardin. At times, including the present, the Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish speaking Muslims have intermarried, and many speak all three languages. The Christian groups have survived—uneasily at times—as minorities among Muslims for a thousand years. Despite the long history of war, invasion, and conquest, there is a high degree of diversity and a fragile tolerance of it in the Southeast.

Along with showing us the historic mosques and medresses (places of Islamic religious learning) of Mardin, and taking us to listen to local music, Yusuf and his friends and family were eager to show us the numerous Syriac Orthodox churches and monasteries in and around the town of Mardin. Not far from Mardin is the Deyrul Zafaran Monastery, a formidable structure built after the Persians destroyed it back in the seventh century AD—roughly the same time that Muhammad was gathering his army of newly converted Muslims in the deserts of Arabia. The Muslims didn't reach Mardin until a few centuries later, and the Christian communities in the region have survived amidst historical difficulties. The Syriac Orthodox community's liturgical language is Syriac, a close relative of the Aramaic language that scholars believe Jesus himself spoke. The young ten year-old boy who guided us around the monastery listed Syriac and Hebrew as two of the five languages he already spoke; he had learned them as part of his religious education.

Though the buildings and setting of Deyrul Zafaran are more picturesque, the Mor Gabriel Monastery is the center of the Syriac Orthodox Church. During the past few decades, conflict between the PKK and the Turkish military resulted in the migration of 90 percent of the Syriac Christians. In the past few years, the Syriac Orthodox Community has been renewing itself, and in the summer of 2003, Mor Gabriel seemed to be flourishing as the ancient center of Christianity in a predominantly Muslim region.

When Islam reached southeastern Turkey in the 12th century, it spread some of its first roots in Diyarbakir, whose Ulu Cami (Great Mosque) is one of the first mosques in the area now included in the Turkish Republic. Its style reflects Syrian elements, but its builder was Malik Shah, the Turkish sultan who emerged from Central Asia, conquered much of the Islamic world, and later ruled it with a title containing both Persian and Arabic words. Like many of the other mosques in Diyarbakir—and like the city itself—Malik Shah's Ulu Cami is at once beautiful, formidable, and austere. Its black and white banded stone minaret pierces the often-clear sky, and its shape reflects the Christian church that the mosque was probably built on. The mosque provides a place for a cast of characters from all walks of life to sit, drink water, pray, or read the Qu'ran. I visited the Ulu Cami on a hot summer day in June with a Japanese friend of mine and two friends of ours from Diyarbakir. As we passed out of the main gate, I noticed an old man sitting on the steps of the mosque's closest entrance. He wore the shalvar pants, and a long gray beard flowed from his wrinkled and weathered face. His eyes shined—no, rather, they burned—and I nodded at him. He vigorously replied by smiling and shaking his head. I have no idea who he was, one of many old men who like to congregate at the mosque. He could have been half-crazy, or an owner of a small shop in the city center. Though I will never understand the real motivations behind his simple gesture and his fiery eyes, they became a symbol to me of the fierce will to survive that runs deeper than anything else in this land.
Eighty percent of the world’s 37 million refugees and internally displaced persons are women and children, and most studies agree that one in three or four women experiences gender-based violence at some point during her lifetime. At that rate, around 7.4 million refugee females have experienced some form of gender-based violence. Moreover, those suffering the stress of forced removal from their homes under threats of violence or famine suffer a greater incidence of gender-based violence than the general population.

Gender-based violence remains a hidden epidemic around the world, debilitating women both physically and mentally. Yet, aside from a few sensational headlines during intense periods of conflict, the international community relegates this issue to the background. While this problem affects all women, those in conflict and post-conflict refugee
and internally displaced situations are inherently at greater risk because of the violence and instability of their surroundings.

Why are women more vulnerable to attacks of violence based upon their gender? Women experience violence because they are women throughout their lifetime. This starts even before they are born with sex-selective abortion and battering during pregnancy. Other types of violence women suffer includes: female infanticide, differential access to food and medical care, child marriage, genital mutilation, sexual abuse by family members and strangers, economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees), rape, sexual harassment, arranged marriage, and trafficking to name the most common.

What exactly is meant by gender-based violence (GBV)? First, gender refers to the roles, responsibilities, and expectations given to people based upon whether they are male or female. Gender denotes the way men and women are expected and allowed to act, and varies among geographic areas, cultures, religions, and time periods. The term gender is different from the term sex. Sex is determined by biological characteristics (reproductive functions) at birth, and cannot change over a person’s lifetime. Gender, on the other hand, is learned through interaction with a particular society, and thus gender-based roles can transform over time.

Gender-based violence differs from common violence because the aggressor attacks based upon and because of the gender of the victim. Gender-based violence encompasses physical, sexual and psychological violence, coercion, or the threat of violence to accomplish a goal. Gender based violence can also extend throughout the entire lifetime of a female. While gender-based violence occurs in all societies at all times, certain conditions—especially conflict—can bring the situation to epidemic levels.

Researchers spoke to one girl, very small and shy, who was only about four feet-tall, perhaps 80 pounds—and pregnant. She was 14 and told them she had been in the bush [in Sierra Leone] for several years with the rebels. They forced her to cook for them and raped her regularly.

The horrific accounts of rape in Sierra Leone are unfortunately not the first, nor the last account of whole-scale attacks on women during wartime. While gender-based violence exists in all societies, its frequency and severity increase during times of conflict. Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia, Rwanda, China and Uganda are only some of the countries where documented mass rape during wartime occurred, and many undocumented examples also exist. A European Community fact-finding team estimates that more than 20,000 Muslim women were raped during the war in Bosnia. Ninety-four percent of displaced households surveyed in Sierra Leone have reported incidents of sexual assault, including rape, torture, and sexual slavery. At least 250,000 women, perhaps as many as 500,000, were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This is not an isolated or a minor problem, but a historical phenomenon that destroys the lives of women around the globe.

The underlying cause of gender-based violence during peacetime—the assertion of power by one group over another—remains and becomes exacerbated by the violence and power struggles that characterize periods of conflict. During periods of conflict, women and girls experience violence, forced pregnancy, intentional HIV infection, abduction, sexual abuse, and slavery. Perpetrators use women’s bodies as “envelopes” to send messages to the “enemy.”

Several characteristics of conflict situations lead to an increase of violence against women. First, the general breakdown in law and order leads to an increase in all forms of violence that existed prior to the conflict. Second, conflict leads to a general breakdown in the social structures and normal mores of society that control acceptable behavior in the community. Third, in the turbulence of wartime and the history of past experience, there is the perception that perpetrators will not be brought to justice for gender-based and sexual violence. Fourth, gender roles become polarized during armed conflict, with the development or enhancement of macho and aggressive ideals of masculinity and the idealization of women as bearers of the cultural identity (who, as such, come under attack by enemy forces). Finally, often during wartime, the perception emerges of women’s bodies as “territory”
to be conquered. When a woman is raped it can send the message
to other men that the more powerful opponent has conquered
“human territory.” In addition, rape, forced pregnancy, and
other forms of gender-based violence can be weapons of ethnic
cleansing, either directly or by attempting to destroy individuals
mentally and the social bonds within a group.\footnote{Such attacks are as old as conflict itself, but have often fallen out of
mainstream historical accounts. For example, according to
cautious estimates, 110,000 women were raped in the Berlin area
after World War II. Less conservative estimates cite the number
as 900,000 raped and abused women.\footnote{The Japanese Army
abducted an estimated 100,000-200,000 Korean women and
forced them into sexual slavery during World War II.} An estimated
250,000-400,000 women were raped during the Bangladesh war
for independence in 1971. Thirty-nine percent of Vietnamese
women aged 11-40 fleeing their country in 1985 were
abducted or raped.\footnote{The incidents and statistics go on and on, but
rarely appear in mainstream histories of conflicts.}

International Law has only just recognized violence against
women as a punishable wartime offence. The 1998 Rome Statute
of the International Criminal Court defines rape, sexual slavery,
enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization,
or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity as
a crime against humanity. The trials of war criminals in Bosnia-
Herzegovina mark the first time anyone has been accused and
brought to trial on such charges. The international community is
starting to hear the screams of women around the
world.

Acts of war—crimes against humanity—shatter women's
lives and often end them. Not only does gender-based violence
harm women physically, often causing severe tissue damage,
broken bones, infertility, HIV/AIDS infection, and frequently death,
but it also inflicts untold emotional, psychological, and social

Growing up in Cape Verde, I often went swimming with my friends in the ocean after school. I became painfully aware of my own
sexuality during our walks to the beach, as older men stood outside, waiting for us to come by in the afternoons, yelling lewd remarks,
and calling out to me and my friends by name. I had never before received this kind of attention from boys, let alone from older men
with families and daughters of their own. My friends, however, had been accustomed to this jeering since they were small—observing
as their older friends and sisters calmly walked home, acting oblivious to these same men. It was not until weeks before I left Africa that
I fully understood the horrifying nature of these men and their words as they beckoned to us, expounding on their desire to do things
with us that were incomprehensible to me. We walked quickly and talked rapidly to each other, trying to drown out the ugly words that
were being hurled in our direction. At last the ocean would be in front of us and then we swam, safe and happy until we all went home,
sheltered from the threats that seemed to have been left along our path to the water.

When I turned thirteen, many of my friends became pregnant, and soon there were very few of us going to school or the beach.
After a few months, their bellies would grow round and they would stay home to help take care of both their younger siblings and soon,
their own child. The fathers of these children were never mentioned, nor did they have any obligation to the women who had their
children, or the child itself. It was as though they had all been immaculately conceived. It was common for girls to be mothers as soon
as they started menstruating—unlike in America, their shame was never associated with having a child out of wedlock.

There is no word for rape in the Creole dialect spoken where I lived. Cape Verdeans have no concept of rape because women,
with rare exception, never say, “No,” when men in their village approach them. From a very young age, their bodies do not belong to
themselves, but instead are the possession of their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and older male cousins. The majority of my friends
who became pregnant did so as a result of the sexual exploitation they were victims of in their homes. Sadly, for most of them this did
not begin at age 13 when they became pregnant, but instead at a much younger age, by eight or nine years old. As small children, they
were subject to the sexual urges of men three or four times their age, who they were supposed to trust and obey. While they watched
their older sisters ignore the men outside, they also saw them submit to the male figures inside their own families.

After I first moved to Cape Verde a neighbor gave birth to a little girl named Rosa. She was beautiful—with dark skin and green
eyes—and I took care of her almost every day, entertaining both her and myself while her mother worked. During the time I lived there
I spent much of my time with her, watching her grow and learn about the small island we lived on.

One day when Rosa was barely three, I walked by her house on my way home from a soccer game and saw her mother screaming
harm on the individual. Often, women who have been raped or experienced domestic violence are ostracized by their society and become clinically depressed and economically unproductive.

Violence against women during wartime does not occur in a vacuum. One analyst surmised, “war rapes in the former Yugoslavia [or elsewhere] would not be such an effective weapon of torture and terror if it were not for concepts of honor, shame and sexuality that are attached to women’s bodies in peacetime.”

Conflict situations, especially in the 20th century in Africa and Asia, often cause massive movements of people—either across borders into refugee camps or from one part of the country to another into internally displaced persons camps. While women may be at a lower risk of rape by combatants in a refugee camp than in a combat zone, often levels of domestic violence increase. Also, women become much more susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation in their attempts to secure food and survive.

While organizations such as the UN and other peacekeeping forces are mandated to keep the peace and provide security and supplies in refugee situations, their arrival often causes an explosion in prostitution, if not in outright assault and abuse. This issue came to the forefront when a joint UNHCR/Save the Children-UK report came out in 2002 documenting abuse of refugee women and children by aid workers in West African camps. Unfortunately, the phenomenon is certainly not limited to this geographic area.

In Kisangani and Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, members of local communities reported that peacekeepers were buying sex from young girls and that condoms were visibly in the doorway. I ran into my own Rosa over since there was clearly that Rosa had passed away that her while her mother was out getting bled to death during the following returned. I assume now that that had fact that I had so frequently kept her from predators I had not even known in my care, away from her grandfather, in some small way, it did.

Despite being overcome by my to Rosa’s death closely. People were he had sex with his granddaughter, but law on the island, raping her at such a friends, many of whom were mothers I told them how devastated and repulsed I was by the idea that such an old man could do this to his own flesh and blood—the blank, uncomprehending looks on their faces horrified and silenced me as I realized that the men in their family had raped them also. They saw nothing wrong with the acts of incest and molestation that had taken place, only that Rosa had been a toddler and so physically small.

These smart and beautiful girls did not view what happened to them after we went swimming as rape or incest, but instead as the result of male relatives exercising their rights to the young female bodies that were my friends. They grew up never saying, “No,” never realizing that they didn’t have to be violated by the men they lived with, or that they were free to wait for someone they loved to have sex. Instead, my peers grew up subject to the whims of those patriarchal figures that approached them every day, taking from them that which should be held most sacred. The sexual harassment that I experienced with them while walking to the beach was nothing compared to the hideous reality of sexual subjugation they endured and accepted as inevitable nearly every day of their young lives.

Almost 95 percent of Cape Verdeans are of mixed race.
scattered in the fields near UN compounds. In Sierra Leone one woman reported, “If [a girl] refuses when the time comes for the supply of food items, you will be told that your name is not on the list.” Men often regard female family members as bartering chips in their attempt to survive in such camps.

Sex for survival becomes a common phenomenon among displaced persons. Refugee women and girls barter sex for basic services when no other economic possibilities exist. Sexual violence against women and prostitution, especially child prostitution, may increase with the influx of relatively well-off personnel in situations where local economies have been devastated and women do not have options for employment. For example, one survey of refugees in Eastern and Central Sudan in 1983 found that 27 percent of single mothers who were heads of households had resorted to prostitution to earn a living. According to a 1999 governmental survey, more than 80 percent of prostitutes in Sierra Leone were unaccompanied, displaced children. While camps aim to help refugees get back on their feet, all too often they become scenes of violent struggles of survival for refugee women.

Women who experience GBV are a largely unacknowledged risk group for HIV infection, and neglecting to focus specifically on HIV prevention and treatment plans in their situation will lead to an unmitigated AIDS disaster. Women are exposed deliberately to HIV through rape, often in the context of ethnic violence as in Rwanda and Kosovo. In addition, military personnel often have much higher rates of infection than do civilians, and this is the population that refugees often come into contact with. GBV and refugee situations increase prostitution and strip women of sexual decision-making power, leading to unprotected sex and assault. Finally, women who are demoralized and damaged by past gender-based violence may turn to other high-risk behaviors such as drug use or promiscuity.

You need to understand. I am so stressed because of the war. It is inevitable that I beat my wife. That’s just life. — Man in Macedonia

In peacetime, sexually-transmitted disease infection rates
among armed forces are generally two to five times higher than in civilian populations; in times of conflict the difference can be more than 50-fold. HIV infection rates are thought to range up to 30 percent of all soldiers in Tanzania and 40-60 percent in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Zimbabwe, which has troops deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, may have up to 70 percent of its troops infected.

In addition, rebel and insurgent forces have even higher rates of infection and are often more responsible for acts of sexual violence against civilian populations, especially in the areas of the world with the greatest number of refugees. Levels of HIV/STD infections among these populations have been estimated at up to 50 percent. When soldiers and rebels rape women or force them to barter sex for food, shelter, or protection, they not only abuse the women’s human rights but also put their very lives in danger.

Exposure to gender-based violence can greatly increase a woman’s risk of HIV infection. A World Health Organization study showed that 30 percent of women who have been abused reported that their husbands refused to use condoms, compared to 10 percent of non-abused women. Women who experience GBV and prostitutes without any alternative sorts of income have almost no control over their own sexual activity or the use of protection. This greatly increases their risk of HIV infection. In addition, women who disclose their HIV status are at risk of being battered.

Women comprise half of the world’s HIV positive population, but make up 60 percent of new infections. In sub-Saharan Africa, teenage girls are five times as likely to be infected as teenage boys, due to biological and social risk factors. When women are raped or engage in prostitution to survive, especially with military personnel, they lose all control over their sexual safety and are at dangerous risk for HIV infection. Attempting to fight HIV without an explicit central focus on women and gender-based violence will not only fail, but is a travesty of human rights.

Violence against women occurs as an outgrowth of unequal power relationships between men and women. It is used as a weapon of war to demoralize the enemy and commit acts of genocide. In situations of conflict, refugees and displaced persons increase the risk of gender-based violence, both from intimate partners and people in positions of power. These same women are also put at higher risk for HIV/AIDS infection, a serious issue in the exploding pandemic. This problem affects the lives of women around the world and cannot be ignored any longer.

Gender-based violence, despite its long history, is not an unsolvable problem. Strong action on the local, national and international level can help respond to and prevent the victimization of women in conflict-afflicted settings and around the world. Prevention is possible, as the outcomes of anti-GBV initiatives serving conflict-affected populations have proven. Most often, it is the work of local women’s organizations that provides the most inspiring examples of efforts to combat GBV in refugee, internally-displaced, and post-conflict settings. However, if they are to continue to be effective, local women’s organizations must receive ongoing technical and financial assistance from the international community, governments, and private donors. Local women’s organizations must not bear the sole responsibility for combating gender-based violence in their communities. Any attempts to address GBV—both in terms of prevention and response—must be the outcome of coordinated activities between the constituent community, health and social services, and the legal and security sectors. National government bodies should be responsible for overseeing this coordination. Governments must require and monitor GBV data collection across sectors. In addition, men must play a role in raising awareness of gender-based violence in their communities, and take personal responsibility for their actions towards women. All programs must address the harmful expectations of masculinity and work to free men, as well as women, from the rigid expectations of gender roles. Concerted action from the local to the global level will free some of the world’s most vulnerable women from lives of pain and the fear of death.
Here in brief are the human rights abuses examined in this issue of Six Degrees. It is our aim to select articles that cover a large part of the globe. Please turn to the topic’s respective page numbers to learn more.

**Interview with Kenneth Kaunda**
Six Degrees interviews freedom fighter and former President of Zambia, His Excellency Kenneth Kaunda, during his visit to Boston. An instrumental figure in the deliverance of many African countries from colonial rule, Kaunda remains a galvanizing figure in the human rights community. pg. 31

**Cape Verde**
Growing up in the multi-island nation of Cape Verde, one student is witness to endemic gender-based violence in her own community. Deeply ingrained in those around her is a view of women as sexual property—often, with tragic results. pg. 18

**Between Two Wars**
Civil wars in the neighboring nations of Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire have created a crisis in Liberian refugee camps, in which displaced Liberians are forced to fight on behalf of the Ivorian government. Unable to return to their own country, refugees must choose between forced servitude and certain death. pg. 24

**The Right to Know**
The end of South Africa’s apartheid rule has increased civil liberties for all, yet knowledge of how to access these civil liberties among the oppressed communities is lacking. As a result, the present society still resembles the system of vigilante justice that prevailed during the anti-apartheid struggle. pg. 28
A View from Mardin
Turkey is home to a wide variety of cultural and ethnic groups, and has historically struggled to keep them within state borders, sometimes using brutal means. In southeastern Turkey, epicenter to the Kurdish liberation movement, there is an ongoing fight for cultural existence.

Gender-Based Violence
Acts of brutality are inherent to situations of conflict worldwide, and often women and children, themselves, become weapons of war. In particular, war and refugee settings serve to intensify violence against women, where rape, torture, sexual slavery, and murder are common practices. Rwanda is but one recent example of this phenomenon.

Global Gag Rule
United States aid to foreign organizations dedicated to family planning and AIDS prevention often comes with many strings attached. By denying funds to any group with direct or tangential connections to groups that counsel abortions, the US has taken an ideological position with significant ramifications, especially in Africa.

The Right to Know
The end of South Africa’s apartheid rule has brought civil liberties for all, yet knowledge to access these civil liberties among oppressed communities is lacking. As a result, the present society still resembles a form of vigilante justice that prevailed during the anti-apartheid struggle.
The soldier grabbed my passport and looked it over. “Americain?” I nodded. “What are you doing here, don’t you know there’s a war going on?” “I’m just a tourist. The war’s over, isn’t it?” “Yeah,” he replied, giving me a suspicious glance. “Sure it is.”

The soldier eyed me again and, with a nod of his head, motioned for me to pass through the roadblock and get back on the bus. By now, this had become routine. Every few miles, the bus would stop, passengers would get off, and soldiers would search us and ask for bribes. It took 42 hours to cover the 500 miles between Accra, the capital of Ghana, and Guiglo, a small town in an area of Côte d’Ivoire known as the “Wild West.” This is a lawless region where the civil wars in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire collide head-on.

As a volunteer for the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, I came to Côte d’Ivoire to assess the possibility of establishing an early warning network in the Liberian refugee camps so that the world would know more about their conditions. Through this network, volunteers would be stationed in refugee camps to watch for human rights abuses against the refugees, and determine if rebel soldiers were using the camps to recruit more fighters for the civil war in Liberia. I traveled with a Liberian refugee named Malayee. We had become good friends over the past few weeks—I rented a room in a house he shared with six other refugees—and he had family in many of the refugee camps along the Liberian border. The plan was to find the family he hadn’t seen in 10 years, and stay with them while I conducted my research.

I could usually get by the roadblocks without too much difficulty. As one person explained, “The soldiers are afraid to mess with Americans. They think there is a satellite up there watching you. Who knows? Maybe there is.” Malayee, being Liberian, had a harder time. Côte d’Ivoire is notorious for its xenophobia and mistreatment of immigrants. On several occasions, the soldiers at the roadblocks brandished their AK-47’s and rounded up all the Liberians on the bus. They arrested them for being rebel fighters and put them in a makeshift jail until they paid their “bail.” Once the refugees gathered up enough money to pay this bribe, they were free to go.
The civil war in Côte d’Ivoire started on September 19, 2002 when several hundred soldiers attempted to overthrow the government. The coup was unsuccessful, but it triggered a rebellion in the North that gained popular support by vowing to end the government policies that discriminated against immigrants and northern ethnic groups. The rebels quickly advanced and would have taken over the entire country had the French not stepped in and negotiated a settlement. The country is now split in half—the rebels control the North and the government holds the South. The French peacekeepers in the middle do their best to enforce the cease-fire along the frontline.

The refugee camp in Guiglo is called Peace Town. It is one day’s walk from the fighting in Liberia and sits right on the frontline of the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire; calling it “Peace Town” is a bit optimistic. We found Malayee’s aunt and uncle—his mother had left the camp a few years ago—and they offered us a place to stay. After three days on a bus, their mud hut felt like home. As I questioned some of the refugees in the camp, a crowd gathered, and I noticed a man in the background who kept trying to get my attention. When I began to interview him, a camp official quickly interrupted: “Oh you don’t want to talk to him. What he’s got to say is very political and we don’t want to upset the government here.” The official yelled at the man and warned him not to talk to me.

The camp officials were under the impression that I was only planning to spend a few hours in the camp—they didn’t realize I would be spending the next few days there. In the morning, no longer under their supervision, I set out to find the man in the crowd. Malayee and I spent more than an hour walking around the camp and describing the man to everyone we passed. We had just about given up when he walked up behind us and introduced himself. He had been looking for us. In the privacy of a mud hut, he told us what he had been so anxious to say: “When the war came, the soldiers…they forced us to fight…”

The man recounted how the government soldiers of Côte d’Ivoire blamed their civil war on the Liberians, since the rebels were rumored to have come from across the border. As the rebels advanced, the government soldiers came into the camp and rounded up hundreds of refugees. “They said that if we didn’t fight, they would kill us before the rebels had a chance to.”

As I spoke to more people, I heard this story confirmed repeatedly. The members of one family said they had something to show me. They led me outside the camp and into the surrounding forest. After several minutes of walking, we stopped in front of a...
series of giant dirt mounds.

“What are these?” I asked, already suspecting the answer.

“This is where the victims are buried.”

These mass graves concealed the remains of hundreds of refugees who had died after being forced to fight in the civil war. The red dirt looked fresh. When I asked the family how long ago this happened, they explained that the government stopped recruiting refugees at the end of April. The graves were three months-old.

A week after I left the refugee camp, Human Rights Watch published a report about the violence against civilians in Western Côte d’Ivoire that confirmed the stories I heard in the camp. They spoke to a refugee in Peace Town who described the events of the past few months: “The Ivorian soldiers came and started to beat all the people. They said that Liberians are guilty of supporting the rebels.” The report, however, goes further, and describes how “the UNHCR’s calls for relocation and protection of the refugees became desperate, but went unanswered by the government.” This meant that, “in the absence of protection from the government of Côte d’Ivoire and offers for resettlement to another country, many refugees were forced to choose between two untenable options: return to Liberia or survival in an increasingly violent environment.” The refugees were trapped between two wars.

Many of the fighters in Côte d’Ivoire’s civil war are actually Liberian mercenaries—so when the soldiers blame their civil war on Liberians, they are exaggerating, but they’re not entirely wrong. This provides an excuse for the government of Côte d’Ivoire to abuse the rights of the innocent refugees who seek shelter from the violence that surrounds them. What is needed is an improvement in the ability to differentiate between combatants and victims in the refugee camps, something that can only be achieved with a greater international presence in the camps.

Under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, the host country is responsible for ensuring the safety of the refugees present within its territory. However, in the midst of a civil war, Côte d’Ivoire is both unable and unwilling to protect its refugees. This means that the United Nations and humanitarian organizations must play a greater role in caring for the refugees. UNHCR, unfortunately, only provides oversight for the refugee camps to ensure that rations are distributed. Non-governmental organizations, like Human Rights Watch, are the key to protecting the rights of
refugees around the world. Unfortunately, the word is not getting out. Aside from the few paragraphs that were devoted to the plight of the refugees in this Human Rights Watch article, very little attention has been paid to this atrocious situation, and absolutely no action has been taken by the United States, the United Nations, or any European powers.

Although NGOs cannot physically protect the refugees or coerce the host countries into providing better care for the refugees, they can alert the international community to these abuses and provide information about mercenary activity and the militarization of the refugee camps. With a host country that is, at best, indifferent to the plight of the refugees and a UNHCR that has little real power, information is ultimately the only way to protect their human rights. Unfortunately, many of these organizations, such as the one I volunteered for, are under-funded and understaffed. They are not able to speak out against these abuses because they lack the resources and the manpower.

The fragile cease-fire that was in place while I visited Côte d'Ivoire is quickly deteriorating, and there is a high risk that the war will resume. If the violence and human rights abuses against refugees are to be prevented in the future, more attention needs to be paid to the refugees’ situation and more resources need to be provided to the organizations that can make a difference. We can’t allow the refugees to keep suffering in silence.

Chased from Liberia, refugees settled here (about four miles from the Liberian border) on the front lines of a civil war, hoping to start over.
Is the right to know fundamental? Is knowledge a basic right that all humans inherently deserve, and not merely a privilege that fortunate people enjoy? As someone who is interested in both education and human rights, I struggle with these questions often. During my time in South Africa working for Idasa (The Institute for Democracy in South Africa), I continued to grapple with these questions. My experience leads me to strongly believe that, while knowledge does not appear to be a vital, life sustaining human right, it is, as Richard Calland, the chair of South Africa’s Open Democracy Advice Center, argues, “a right that unlocks the door to so many other rights.” Thus, knowledge is a crucial element of any democratic society that respects human rights.

There is a basic problem in South Africa, a problem that is undoubtedly encountered by many countries after a political transition: many people simply do not know what their rights are and what they can do to protect them. Every month, elderly women in rural communities are robbed of their pension money by their own grandchildren and, not knowing where to go or who to turn to, must accept that they have lost their sole source of income. Communities fear losing water taps because of their inability to pay the fees privately-owned water companies require—they are unaware of how to enforce their right to water that the South African Constitution protects. Young women and girls are sexually assaulted in schools—a practice so common that one women’s rights worker refers to it as a “perk of the job” for many male teachers. These young women are reduced to a position of powerlessness, unaware of their rights, and receiving minimal support from school administration (see Human Rights Watch Report, Scared at School, 2001).

South Africa’s constitution and legal framework are among the most progressive and respectful of rights in the world. Nevertheless, it is a nation ridden with countless violations of basic rights, such as physical and sexual assault against women and girls, abuse of the elderly, and gender violence in schools.

How can such clear violations of human rights exist within such a liberal and progressive policy framework? Through many of my experiences in South Africa, the answers began to reveal themselves.

I am at a conference in a beautiful hotel just outside of Cape Town, listening to my friend Soyiso, a young community activist from Cape Town’s Khayelitsha township, beg parliamentarians and policy makers to speak in a language he can understand. Soyiso is not asking for them to speak in his native language Xhosa, for his English is fine. He is instead pleading for government language that is not overly academic and complex. He is pleading for his right to understand the law and how it can protect him and people close to him.

I am in a crime prevention strategy meeting in the rural province of the Orange Free State, encouraging an unwilling member of the local government to involve local people in his area’s policy-making process. I urge him to make them aware of what they can do to help reduce the crime that pervades their community, holding them hostage in a state of both confusion and fear.

There are several major factors that prevent many South Africans from gaining the knowledge they need to protect their basic rights. An important problem is a structural issue that relates to the nature of urban-rural relations. One of the major legacies of South Africa’s apartheid history is a distinct difference between the political interests and awareness of the urban and rural areas, which were ruled separately. Rural areas were ruled indirectly through the homeland system, and urban areas were ruled directly...
by the central state. The different political histories of rural and urban areas have led to a serious disconnect. Furthermore, as Xolela Mangcu’s article “Johannesburg In Flight From Itself” illustrates, the modernist development paradigm that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) adopted has resulted in an urban-centered approach to policy making, marginalizing the interests of the rural areas. Due to this development approach, the rural areas have become increasingly disconnected from the central government. A major result of this alienation is that many people from rural areas, especially the elderly who have spent the majority of their lives under the apartheid system, have little understanding of the rights that are promised them within South Africa’s legal framework. Most of these people are accustomed to the oppressive nature of apartheid rule and simply do not know the avenues that exist for protecting their fundamental rights. Furthermore, the rural areas are deprived of many resources that would provide people with the information necessary to protect their rights. Many rural communities have no police stations of their own. Since people lack the money, time and resources necessary for travel, they rarely make the long trips to other towns to file complaints or to access information. Therefore, it is no surprise that, in many of these areas, domestic abuse is high, rape and sexual assault are prevalent, and elderly women consistently have their pension checks stolen—all without recourse and generally without legal action from the victims.

A tragic result of such a state, in which people lack the knowledge to protect their rights, revealed itself to me in a brief experience one weekend night in Johannesburg. A haze of smoke, emerging from the shanty towns and the squatter camps, overlooked us as we drove through the so-called coloured township of El Dorado Park, an area infamous for its gang activity, violence, and criminality. I was a little nervous, but trusting my friend and his family's status in the community, I was sure that my safety was ensured. We were driving through what they called “Extension Seven,” where we saw two young men, walking quickly and suspiciously through the neighborhood. Identifying the young men as a potential threat to his community, our driver slammed on the brakes. From the car, I watched as my companions threw the young men to the ground, searching them for weapons and questioning them as to their business in the area. Clearly, the answer they gave was not sufficient and I watched as my friends, turned enforcers of justice, chased them out of the area throwing bottles, trash, and any other items that could be found in the polluted street.

“It’s guys like that that steal my car.” “It is those guys who break into our houses. The cops are scared to come around here,” I am told when they return. They ask, “What else are we supposed to do?” “No one protects us, there is nothing to do, we must do it ourselves.”

“Welcome to South Africa,” my roommate says later on, “tonight you witnessed mob justice.”

Mob justice, this particularly shocking phenomenon that stems from the feelings of utter powerlessness that must arise as people continually witness terrible crimes committed without penalty, is on the rise. Necklacing, a horrifying manifestation
of mob justice, is a ritual dating back to the days of the anti-apartheid struggle. Beginning as a punishment of informants and traitors to the anti-apartheid movement, necklacing involves pinning the individual to the ground with a burning car tire around his neck. The recipient of the necklace suffers as the tire melts into his skin and he is left to lie in public burning, a visual warning for all to see. Currently, this form of mob justice punishment is becoming ever prevalent in many areas of South Africa, and poses a major threat to democracy. Such treatment also represents an inhumane and unjust form of punishment.

There are numerous groups in South Africa, including the Institute for Democracy and the Open Democracy Advice Center, that are working hard to inform citizens of their rights and enable them to protect themselves through legal and democratic processes. Nevertheless, groups such as these cannot touch all South Africans. Abuses against people’s basic rights continue to pervade South African society, while tensions and frustrations, manifesting in acts such as mob justice, are rapidly intensifying.

Currently, too many people are having their rights violated because they do not know what to do. Too many women and elderly people are abused, too many people are losing their access to water, and too many young girls attend school in fear of sexual assault, all without legal recourse or punishment.

Knowledge is power. It is the power to secure oneself, the power of self-reliance in the maintenance one’s humanity. It is the power to enforce one’s right to live free of human rights abuses. Therefore it cannot be treated as a luxury available to a select few, but instead as a right that all humans must enjoy. Viewed in this way, knowledge is a crucial element in any society that aims to do more than pay lip service to its commitment to human rights protection. Viewed in this way, the right to knowledge is an integral part of the right to live.
On Friday, October 31, we crowded around a speakerphone in a small, crowded office on the second floor of the African and African American Studies building. With two dictaphones in hand, we dialed the number of the Boston hotel where former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda was spending the week. The excitement in the room was palpable as President Kaunda’s warm voice filled the room.

Kenneth Kaunda was the first president of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia), and the father of its independence. Originally a school teacher, Kaunda was inspired to become politically active as a result of civil unrest under the oppressive British colonial regime. After touring Rhodesia on his bicycle while singing inspirational freedom hymns, Kaunda eventually became the Secretary General of the African National Congress (ANC). His formation of the Zambian African National Congress resulted in his imprisonment. Upon his release, he was appointed president of the newly-established United National Independence Party (UNIP). When Northern Rhodesia was finally granted independence in...
1963, Kaunda was elected president of Zambia. For 27 years, he worked to build a united Zambia and curb human rights violations there. He played a key role in the release of the prominent civil rights leader, Nelson Mandela. Since 1991, Kaunda has been traveling the globe fighting the AIDS epidemic, in addition to raising awareness of many other pressing human rights issues.

We felt privileged to have the opportunity to speak with someone who has contributed to the progress of human rights on such a global scale. After Six Degrees Editor-in-chief, Jared Cohen, introduced himself to President Kaunda, we smiled to each other as His Excellency began to eagerly describe the view from his hotel window. As he finished his poetic account of the bustling Boston streets, we began to ask President Kaunda about his life as an important human rights advocate.

SD: Your Excellency, our readers want to know what ambitions you had in your youth—who inspired you?

KK: My mission was to become a reverend of my father’s church. My father was a reverend and I wanted to become one. That was my inspiration, along with my mother.

SD: You began as a teacher. What prompted you to leave your profession and become a social activist, and eventually an active politician?

KK: I began as a professional teacher. I loved teaching, and I loved being a teacher. But the situation of the country at that time was such that I was inspired by what was taking place, the suffering of the people, the regime. All that suffering made me feel pushed towards the struggle, to become an activist for the country. The situation, itself, inspired me to move away from teaching to political activism.

SD: You have one of the most impressive human rights records in Africa. How did you become interested in human rights?

KK: Well you see, you can’t be a genuine freedom fighter without being inspired by the suffering of the people, without being pushed by the situation itself. Now, that was my parent’s teaching: the gospel, loving God the creator with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, all your strength, teaching us how to relate to our creator, to deliver us. I will always believe in that—and then of course loving thy neighbor. These commandments have always guided me in the struggle for human rights. For your enemy, do unto him as you would have him do unto us. If we can’t do that, we can’t build another world.

SD: The Rwandan genocide is considered to be one of the most significant tragedies in world history. Considering your prominent role in African politics, how do you view this horrific period of African history?

KK: It is very sad, very sad indeed. It is unforgivable. This happened because of the problem of the Cold War. That is why all that happened. I don’t know how we could have sunk to that situation with the rest of the world watching and doing nothing about it. I think it is unforgivable. I don’t know how we can ever explain that.

SD: When human rights violations were at their peak in Africa, how did you manage to maintain a standard of adherence to basic human rights?

KK: Well, what you stand for matters. For example, if you are thinking of leading a nation you must think of [the people’s] education, their health, how they move about, how they travel. How’s your police force? Is it humane? Be concerned with the affairs of the people. For example, when we took over in 1964, there were only 100 [college] graduates, in 70 years of [recording unclear] rule. Of those 100 graduates, only three were medical doctors. We seek to bring about a better situation for our people. Build schools, primary schools, all over the country. Build secondary schools, where people can come, regardless of tribe or ethnic group. North, south, east,
west, one Zambia, one nation. This is how we organized our society. With the schools, some of our country was built. At the time, we had two universities. Now, we have six universities. We now have 55,000 graduates—engineers, medical doctors. This was our concern: our concern was based on accepting human beings as human beings. We tried to help our people.

SD: You were instrumental in the release of Nelson Mandela. How would you characterize your first meeting with him upon his release?

KK: Yes indeed, we took a lot of time from everything we were doing. He, himself, was kind enough to say that. I remember, he was very kind to show that. The occasion was the funeral of a colleague of his. [Nelson Mandela] came to a funeral at the church. When he came in, he turned and addressed the people. He was pointing at me, my humble self, and the people clapped hands. Then he invited me over to his school in South Africa and he was addressing his crowd and was pointing at me. He said on a number of occasions, “I’m grateful.” I don’t feel it’s right to get credit from Nelson Mandela. It was right for us to do that, love your neighbor as you love yourself. It is true that Zambia would be the first country he was going to visit. He said thank you to the Zambian people, not to me, but to the people. Thousands turned out to the airport. It was full of Zambians. When he arrived, he said, “Thank you for everything,” and we embraced very warmly, very warmly indeed. He kept on saying, “Thank you.” I don’t think he could have said more than that. Human beings are willed by God to be free. People are to act as they wish in any situation, to act as they like. To build your own selves, your own country, I think this is what inspired us [to work for Mandela’s release]. You had to have strength in the struggle for South Africa.

SD: On your bike tour of northern Rhodesia you carried a guitar and spread folk freedom songs. How effective were these songs in creating a political movement and how big a role do you think art and music can play in the instigation of social change?

KK: Songs were very, very useful. I had a guitar—I’m a guitar player. I’m still playing it now, I’m still singing songs. I play hymns, songs focusing on a certain issue. They are inspiring, they are very inspiring indeed. In the struggle there are many good times, bad times, rough times, so you have to have know how to inspire yourself. I sang to crowds of people. You know, the guitar played a big role in our struggle in Zambia. I loved it, I loved it. In both sad occasions and happy occasions, the guitar was there to help. Now in terms of AIDS, I sing about AIDS, and one song which I currently sing, in terms of fighting AIDS, is, “Sons of Africa rise and fight, girls of Africa rise and shine, in the name of great Africa, we shall fight and conquer AIDS. Oh Everyone...in the name of great Africa, we shall fight and conquer AIDS. We shall fight and conquer AIDS. We shall fight and conquer AIDS.”

In June of 1998, President Kaunda retired from Zambian politics, setting an important precedent for nations in the south of Africa.
SD: What is the most serious human rights violation occurring globally today? How would you characterize the current situation in Africa?
KK: Well, in general the situation has gotten a little better. So, about Africa now, for example, the violations of human rights in Africa were by leaders, in terms of colonialism. But that period has now passed. With the independence of South Africa, we are in a much, much better position now. And leaders are making reparations in countries. They are doing very well now in regards to human rights and others are following. In America, I see something happening in Asia. Standards have been reached. We are making progress. There are programs in the USA and Russia to change the world and they are having more influence. Russia is emerging, if you look at China it is improving. There are of course many, many problems in terms of human rights going on in various parts of the world, in different levels of development. It’s hard to say if there is one in particular. There are many problems in Africa and elsewhere, but it is difficult for me to pinpoint one in this interview. We have to help each other, which will allow us to face [these issues] more widely and pinpoint certain places, in this country or that country.

SD: Mr. President, if you had one piece of advice to give to aspiring human rights activists around the world, what would it be?
KK: I don’t know what advice I can give you. I believe that there’s nothing more important—whether you are Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Hindus—whatever we are. As students, it is important to remember that teaching is about loving your neighbor. I think that for students this is the key, in my humble opinion. We are humble beings in one world. Some scientists call it a global village. I can’t agree more with that. Because students are our future leaders, and today students are fortunate they are getting the necessary education. I didn’t get the education you are getting now. I didn’t get an education like that because there was no place for it in Zambia. So please remember, as students, you are preparing yourself as leaders in the world. And please remember that you are not only leaders of your respective countries. You are leaders of this whole world, and you must understand the things other people are doing. What’s the name of that system where they send people to Africa?

SD: The Peace Corps?
KK: Yes. Send young people out so they can see what is going on in other parts of the world. That helps to build bridges, and expose them to what other people are doing, their problems, their successes, and their failures. Get students involved in programs. Students should be involved so they can help and learn. They should be conscious of certain things taking place.

As an ex-President of Zambia, Kaunda travels the world promoting human rights and democracy.

“...So please remember, as students, you are preparing yourself as leaders in the world. And please remember that you are not only leaders of your respective countries. You are leaders of this whole world.”
Over the past several decades, titanic clashes over the question of abortion have become commonplace in the domain of US politics. Almost unmentioned, however, is the political struggle and partisan rancor over the use of foreign aid to impose America’s abortion beliefs on countries abroad. The issue has embroiled the two parties in an unending game of ideological tug-of-war, deemed so pivotal to both sides that it was the first decision made in office by each of the last two US presidents. The policy is called the “global gag rule,” and to the victor goes the fate of over 10 million women in the third world.

The global gag rule prohibits US money from reaching overseas family planning centers that provide information on abortions, participate in abortion debates, or even utter the word “abortion.” By literally “gagging” the mouths and pocketbooks of these multi-purposed healthcare facilities, the gag rule pillages dependent clinics and forces women to look elsewhere for abortion information or counseling. Proponents of the gag rule, including President George W. Bush and his more ardently conservative allies, argue that the ban is necessary to reduce the number of abortions worldwide. Conservatives in Congress proclaim that when it comes to foreign policy, “We want to make sure a country is abortion-free, not moving towards free abortion.” However, this position plays smoke and mirrors with the fact that no US dollars have been allowed to fund abortions since 1973. Furthermore, the infusion of moral righteousness into the sphere of foreign policy creates a slew of noxious byproducts. The two most odious are the rise of “back-alley” abortions, leading to countless deaths, and the even greater spread of the AIDS epidemic due to the gag rule’s undermining of AIDS treatment and prevention facilities.

By drying up funding to family planning centers, The Economist in 2003 points out that the global gag rule is “more likely to raise the rate of unsafe abortions,” which is a major threat to women’s health. The World Health Organization estimates that over 600,000 women and girls die each year from pregnancy-related complications, with anywhere between 78,000 and 400,000 coming from unsafe, back-alley abortions. Many of the remaining deaths are attributable to pregnancies that endanger the life of the mother. Both of these primary causes of maternal deaths would be “entirely preventable” if the gag rule were lifted and underprivileged women were once again allowed access to professional counseling services. In addition to these deaths from botched abortions, the gag rule not only hinders access to AIDS facilities, but even undermines them. The gutting of healthcare clinics by the gag rule “means the increase of the spread of HIV/AIDS,” which makes matters worse for the more than three million women who die from AIDS each year.

To put the magnitude of these deaths from unsafe abortions and AIDS in historical perspective, roughly 800,000 Tutsis and Hutus were slaughtered during the Rwandan genocide. This makes the annual deaths from the gag rule—not just from a solitary event, but deaths occurring each and every year—roughly on par with the figures from the Rwandan atrocity, yet the gag rule remains relatively unnoticed. As one Zambian woman exclaimed, “The gag rule has changed everything and taken [us] back 100 years.”

The global gag rule represents the current manifestation of a federal policy that has become divisively partisan in recent decades. In 1961, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act, which gave the president power to grant monetary aid to family planning clinics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in third world nations. President Kennedy delegated the task of FAA funding to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which allocated the money unchecked until the passage of the Helms Amendment in 1973. The divisive Helms Amendment barred any FAA money from directly funding abortions, but it still allowed for NGOs and family planning centers to receive USAID grants if they funded abortions with their own money. In August of 1984, Ronald Reagan eliminated this
exemption by creating the “Mexico City Policy,” which blocked the allocation of USAID funds to any international NGO or family planning center that performed, supported, or even discussed abortion services around the world—even in countries where abortion had been legalized. The “Mexico City Policy” was so strict that USAID money could not be used to fund malaria treatment, screenings for cervical cancer, or prenatal care at health clinics that also indirectly supported abortion information or counseling.

The far-reaching “Mexico City Policy” created a zero-sum decision for international NGOs, which were forced to choose between their primary source of funding and their mission of family planning. Penniless clinics in destitute regions that chose to adhere to their mission goals faced the almost insurmountable challenge of raising funds from outside sources. The contentious “Mexico City Policy” remained in effect throughout the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and his successor, George H. W. Bush, but was rescinded by Bill Clinton on his first day in office. Clinton brought the issue to the forefront of the political battle in the early 1990’s, and the vague, official title of the “Mexico City Policy” was informally replaced with the less palatable—albeit more descriptive—nomenclature of the “global gag rule.”

During the eight years of Clinton’s presidency, international NGOs could once again pursue and discuss the full spectrum of family planning options without fear of their funds being revoked. However, as his first act of office in 2001, President George W. Bush issued an executive order to overturn Clinton’s policy and reinstate the global gag rule. This pronouncement came on the anniversary of the landmark Roe v. Wade decision, and signaled an administrative return to anti-abortion operations abroad. Within the span of a year, 59 NGOs and family planning centers worldwide were shut down or silenced. In Uganda alone, 17 family planning centers that used to receive USAID funds were forced to close by the end of the year.

The President’s stance against women’s reproductive rights triggered a bipartisan response from members of Congress, who attempted to permanently revoke the gag rule in 2001 by attaching an amendment to a State Department reauthorization bill. This provision passed the Senate and sparked a heated debate in the House of Representatives, but, in the end, the conservative majority defeated the provision in a narrow 218-210 vote.

In February of 2003, the White House issued a directive to expand the gag rule to cover the entire gambit of State Department programs—not just USAID programs. Although lost upon the public, this intended second expansion reverberated throughout Congress, and in July of 2003, the Republican-controlled Senate voted 53-43 on an amendment to permanently jettison the gag rule from US foreign policy. In the vote, roughly 20 percent of Senate Republicans broke rank and voted with the Democrats. The President threatened to veto the bill, and once again the overwhelmingly conservative House of Representatives followed his lead and voted to strike out the amendment. Although the gag rule survived, the Senate
had not yet thrown in the towel. In early September of 2003, Republicans in the Senate Appropriations Committee voted alongside Democrats to block the intended expansion of the gag rule that would have subsumed all State Department programs.

To exemplify the deleterious rigidity of the gag rule, one Zambian family planning center—that actually opposes abortion—lost $30,000 of USAID funds for “telling adolescents and young adults that unsafe and potentially fatal abortions are one possible consequence of unprotected sex and unwanted pregnancies.”

Throughout Africa, whole communities are often dependent on a single, all-purpose health center to treat the entire gambit of their healthcare needs. When America’s gag rule erodes their funding—for such reasons as being loosely affiliated with, or even having worked with, a family planning organization like the Zambian example above—large swaths of these communities are left without any access to medical attention, and completely defenseless to disease or death.

When family planning facilities close down or become inaccessible, an estimated 20 million women in third world nations—facing a lack of information and contraceptive resources—turn to the black market for relief. Moral righteousness aside, the gag rule leads to the deaths and maiming of hundreds of thousands of women and girls every year due to unsafe, ‘back-alley’ abortions. With no family planning centers to turn to and their lives perhaps in jeopardy, many women are forced to make the tough decisions that trained professionals once assisted them in making. The consequences of this can be deadly: “Many of these desperate women will inject pomegranate juice into their vaginas and uteruses to induce abortion. They don’t realize how potent or dangerous the juice is, and they get badly burned inside. Women die as a result. The ‘lucky’ ones are forced to have hysterectomies.”

In the US, only .007 percent of abortions result in death. In the rest of the world, where the gag rule has taken effect, the statistics are not as cheery. The gag rule has caused botched abortions to become the number-one killer of women in South Asian nations. Women in Ethiopia also face black market abortions as the leading cause of death. In South Africa alone, the gag rule has caused over 15,000 maternal deaths, 92,000 infant deaths, and 2.2 million unsafe abortions. In Bolivia, one woman dies each day from the complications of unsafe abortions—in Nepal, that number is six.

Many of these underprivileged women are victims of rape, incest, or complications during pregnancy, yet they are still incapable of obtaining abortion information as a direct result of the gag rule. For example, in Peru, a 17 year-old girl discovered within the first trimester that her baby would be born without a brain. The fetus had no chance of survival, and the doctors knew that giving birth to the baby would pose a grave threat to the life of the young girl. The girl sought counseling on methods to save her life—perhaps by aborting the fetus—but neither those doctors nor any other doctor would perform or advise her on getting an abortion out of fear of losing their funding, even though abortions are legal in Peru. Instead of risking a ‘back-alley’ abortion, the girl saw the ghastly process through until the end: “The baby was delivered, face first and with fluid where there should have been a brain. Hospital workers forced the girl to breast-feed the infant, with its shriveled body and distorted features, until death. Today the woman is still in psychiatric care.”

Even President Bush, himself, has come forward and acknowledged his support for abortion in cases of incest, rape, or threat to the life of a mother—that is, to an American mother. However, current US foreign policy adamantly holds women abroad to a different standard; this results in deaths and tragedies, as in the case of the 17 year-old Peruvian girl.

The zero-sum nature of the gag rule stifles all family planning access and dooms many women to painful deaths in highly unsanitary conditions. In Bolivia, one-third of all maternal deaths are from botched, black-market abortions. The statistics are the same in Kenya, and numerous other sub-Saharan nations, as a result of the gag rule. Speaking about this calamity, one Nigerian woman stated, “How do Americans talk about equality of women and run from reproductive health? The gag rule has made women suffer. The gag rule has made more women die because they can’t access safe family planning.”

These
Global Gag Rule

sentiments resonated with Dr. Eunice Brookman-Amissahm, the former Minister of Health in Ghana, who declared, “The gag rule’s impact on Africa is tragic...We cannot and will not be gagged. We must speak out and we must do something to stop unsafe abortions from killing our women and girls.”

A significant expansion of the gag rule came in January of 2003, when the President unveiled his pledge to establish a new global “AIDS Initiative” in his State of the Union address. The magnanimous AIDS Initiative—formerly named the “Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief”—called for $15 billion over five years to combat the disease in 14 countries in Africa and the Caribbean.

In trying to get the bill through Congress, the White House issued the deceptively bittersweet “compromise” that the AIDS funding would only be “partially restricted” by the gag rule. In other words, healthcare centers that served AIDS patients were eligible to receive funds, but only if they were physically located in different buildings than family planning centers that discussed “abortions.”

The feigned nobility of the President’s ‘concession’ was illusory, however, because the gag rule had never applied to AIDS assistance before. Thus, the White House’s AIDS Initiative expanded de facto the jurisdiction of the gag rule to encompass USAID-funded anti-AIDS programs.

Most AIDS organizations share their clinic space with various other health associations, including family planning organizations, so the President’s proposal presented an immense financial burden on groups that he was purportedly trying to help.

The lofty AIDS Initiative calls for the establishment of a new US AIDS Fund to distribute the proposed $15 billion to third world clinics, most of which will be in desperate need due to the gag rule choking off their previous funds. The US AIDS Fund has three striking disadvantages. First, the US Fund will cripple the UN Global Fund. Second, the US Fund will not be disbursed anywhere near the proposed $15 billion. Third, the US AIDS Fund will be chaired by a pharmaceutical CEO, who has much to gain from World Trade Organization patent protections.

All three of these factors will likely cause the US AIDS Fund to be hopelessly inadequate.

The “Separate Facility Solution” represents the end-product of formerly compassionate USAID funding getting caught in the vise of anti-abortion ideology. AIDS organizations across the third world, many of them totally independent and unrelated to the goals of family planning NGOs, are nevertheless treated as abortion conspirators if they happen to share the same medical workers or clinic building.

As the Guttmacher Report on Public Policy concedes, “It would be counterproductive, if not impossible, to build a wall of separation between family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention.”

Despite the current administration’s progressive rhetoric, its policy of forcing AIDS organizations to pay for new health centers directly undercuts their ability to function, and jeopardizes their continued existence in many regions.

Countless AIDS organizations in poor and rural communities lack the resources necessary to sustain themselves, let alone the capital to uproot and build new facilities. As Frances Kissling of the Boston Globe reports, “In many poor countries where US-funded family planning clinics are the only healthcare providers within miles, this simply will not happen.”

In Ghana, for example, 697,000 clients—both men and women—have lost access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention services because of the gag rule. Many of these clients, frequently entire communities, will be left without any form of healthcare at all.

In Nairobi, the recent closure of the Mathare Valley facility left 300,000 impoverished residents with “no healthcare services” at all.

The gutting of the UN Global Fund by diverting its funding into the proposed AIDS Initiative, along with the de facto expansion of the gag rule, points to a grim future for developing countries. The undercutting of AIDS clinics due to the gag will have dire consequences for the ability to treat and prevent AIDS, and the undermining of other global AIDS organizations ensures that no other actor can ameliorate the crisis. AIDS used to be a death sentence, but anti-retroviral technology—that inhibits HIV replication, disables the virus, and reverses immune deterioration—can actually undo much of the process and bring AIDS symptoms back to nearly undetectable levels, ensuring a longer and happier life.

Unfortunately, this life-saving and relatively cheap equipment cannot be distributed because AIDS clinics are being de-funded and, as a result, are shutting down. Currently, over 40 million people outside of the Western world have HIV/AIDS, with roughly 4.25 million new infections and over three million new deaths each year. That equates to approximately eight people acquiring the disease each minute, and one new death every 10 seconds. By the year 2010, more than 100 million people will have contracted HIV/AIDS, and there will be over 20 million AIDS orphans worldwide.

The spiraling AIDS epidemic places a massive burden on already destitute societies, decreasing both household and national productivity and creating a cycle of poverty by forcing children to drop out of school and seek low-skill work.

Speaking to this tragedy of life and subsistence, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney articulated, “The President has taken [the] domestic fight on choice and exported it around the world. Its victims are people who can’t vote him out of office.”

In the wake of the US foreign policy decision to cut funding...
for family planning, Poul Nielson, the E.U. Commissioner of Development and Humanitarian Aid, disgustedly remarked that others must now fill the “decency gap” left by the US. These “others” include the United Nations, the European Union, philanthropic donors, and wealthy NGOs that can survive in the absence of US funding. Actors like these are necessary to at least partially offset the adverse consequences of back alley deaths and the spread of AIDS in troubled regions. However, many of these potential “others” are already under siege by United States policy.

The White House launched the opening salvo in December of 2001 against the United Nations, slashing $34 million of aid that Congress had earmarked for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)—roughly 12.5 percent of its budget—that the UNFPA used for the procurement and distribution of contraceptives and anti-retrovirals. The irony is that the UNFPA does not support abortion services, but merely recognizes unsafe abortions as a “major health concern.”

In July of 2002—and again in 2003—Congress appropriated sums of $34 million and $50 million, respectively, for the UNFPA. These funding attempts, however, were twice rebuffed. The US’s abrupt about-face over the past two years has been so drastic that the UNFPA, once a proud vanguard in the field, has been dealt a lethal blow and is now “dried up.” International NGOs possessing enough funds to repudiate the gag rule presented another avenue for deliverance, yet many of these NGOs could not survive the hardships of both the gag rule and the deterioration of the UNFPA. On the AIDS front, the fate of the beleaguered “UN Global Fund to Fight AIDS” is yet to be determined.

This leaves only the EU and wealthy philanthropists to bear the standard of salvation. Although generous in their contributions, their efforts can do little more than keep organizations barely above water. EU monetary assistance has been focused on contraceptive distribution, but allows the NGOs to use funding for abortion information and promotion services as well. This freedom allows the NGOs to adapt their services to the needs of the communities in varying regions worldwide. Independently wealthy and altruistic donors can also alleviate some burdens, but the scope of their efforts is quite limited. One of South Africa’s leading organizations, the National Progressive Primary Healthcare Network (NPPHCN), now receives monetary support from the US-based Kaiser Family Foundation. The Kaiser Foundation is an independent NGO committed to fostering all forms of reproductive health services, and its donations have allowed the continuation of vulnerable family planning programs in South Africa. However, to achieve significant results that actually carve inroads into the mounting death toll, these forms of localized philanthropy must be greatly expanded. Even a resumption of UNFPA funding is not enough to truly abate the global crises; what is needed is a repeal of the unilateral gag rule.

As Steven Radelet, (former Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Treasury Department) wrote, the reinstatement of the gag rule “was taken to appease a domestic conservative audience, [and] will reduce effective family planning programs that have nothing to do with abortion, much to the detriment of poor women worldwide.” The only obstacle standing in the way is the White House’s fallacious opinion that, without the gag rule, USAID funding would be used to support and actually increase the number of abortions. This is erroneous. What the gag rule accomplishes is to undermine family planning centers, which—in the White House’s own words—are actually necessary to decrease abortions: “One of the best ways to prevent abortion is by providing quality voluntary family planning services.” The White House’s circular reasoning should be apparent, and the gag rule’s injurious futility ought to be excised from US foreign policy. Every year, many more women—by orders of magnitude—die from the gag rule’s injurious effects than Americans troops died during the entire 12-year Vietnam War. There is no evidence—and alarmingly very few assertions outside of the White House—that the gag rule actually decreases the number of abortions, yet there is a preponderance of evidence that the gag rule leads to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of women each year from HIV/AIDS and unsafe abortions. In fact, much of the research points to the fact that the gag rule actually increases the number of abortions, thus pulling the rug from beneath the sole rationale used to sustain the ban. No matter if one is liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat, pro-life or pro-choice, there should be very little reason to support the global gag rule. The American populace knows this, the international community knows this, and now the White House just needs to listen.

In Ghana, for example, 697,000 clients—both men and women—have lost access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention services because of the gag rule.
Reaching Out

Human Rights-Related Fellowships & Internships

Many students who have published in Six Degrees traveled abroad to explore human rights issues through research, hands-on community development, and activism. Below is a short listing of fellowship and internship opportunities through which you can become involved throughout the world.

Fellowships

For more information on summer and post-graduate opportunities through the Haas Center, visit http://haas.stanford.edu, e-mail fellowships@haas.stanford.edu, or call (650) 725-7408. The first seven listings include a $3,000 stipend and last nine weeks.

- **African Service Fellowship**: work on social issues in southern Africa
- **Edith & Norman Abrams Service Fellowships in Public Interest Law**: gain experience in the practice of public interest law
- **Stanford Pride Summer Fellowship**: promote activism and civil rights work in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities
- **Urban Summer Fellowship**: work with an organization that addresses urban issues
- **Haas Summer Fellowship Program**: develop and implement a community service project
- **Andrew Daher Fellowship**: design a project combining economics or business, and public service
- **Sand Hill Fellowship in Philanthropy**: learn about philanthropy by working with a Bay Area foundation
- **Tom Ford Fellowship in Philanthropy**: explore philanthropic work as a possible career path
- **John Gardner Public Service Fellowship Program**: work with a mentor who can help foster professional growth and development for recent graduates devoted to public service

Internships

- **Center for Constitutional Rights: Ella Baker Internship Program**: encourages young law professionals to become “people’s lawyers” and activists. Contact Denise Reinhardt at denise@ccr-ny.org
- **Human Rights Resource Center: Center for Justice and International Law**: gain comprehensive knowledge of the function of the inter-American system of human rights protection, a firm grasp of the human rights situation in Latin America, and extensive practical experience in the day-to-day operation of an international NGO. Visit http://www.hrusa.org/field/internships/cejilintern.shtm
- **International Rescue Committee**: conduct legal research and draft memoranda on international law and humanitarian aid. Visit http://www.theirc.org/jobs/index.cfm/number/2003-425
- **Medicins San Frontiers (Doctors without Borders)**: volunteer in the medical field or in the New York and Los Angeles-based offices. Visit http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/volunteer/
- **Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (TIDE)**: help promote sustainable development, and assist cultural groups by monitoring both marine and terrestrial reserves through community outreach programs. Visit http://www.tidebelize.org
- **Urban Justice Center**: work on a community development project. Visit http://www.urbanjustice.org/opportunities/index.html

An additional listing of internships is available through Global Action Network at: www.globalactionnetwork.org/partners/fellowships/prof/index.php
the existence and validity of human rights are not written in the stars. the ideals concerning the conduct of men toward each other and the desirable structure of the community have been conceived and taught by enlightened individuals in the course of history. those ideals and convictions which resulted from historical experience, from the craving for beauty and harmony, have been readily accepted in theory by man—and at all times, have been trampled upon by the same people under the pressure of their animal instincts. a large part of history is therefore replete with the struggle for those human rights, an eternal struggle in which a final victory can never be won. to tire in that struggle would mean the ruin of society.

-albert einstein

submit to sixdegrees:

email your human rights-related articles to stanfordsixdegrees@hotmail.com. submissions should be 500-2000 words; articles written from in-depth study or personal experience are preferred. all submissions are judged anonymously and objectively.

get involved:

email stanfordsixdegrees@hotmail.com to find out about our monthly open meetings. comments/suggestions are welcome. students interested in becoming part of sixdegrees production are encouraged to attend an open meeting to learn more.