



2015 ANNUAL REPORT

INVESTIGATE.
ENGAGE.
STRENGTHEN.



FORTIFY
RIGHTS

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE

2015 WAS AN EVENTFUL YEAR for human rights in Southeast Asia. Myanmar experienced its first democratic elections in more than a half century, effectively ending direct military rule, while neighboring Thailand initiated its largest-ever human trafficking trial, taking initial steps to hold government officials and others accountable for egregious crimes.

Without the work of human rights defenders, the story may have ended there. We looked deeper.

In reality, Myanmar's 2015 elections were significant not only because of the historic victory by the pro-democracy National League for Democracy party, but also because the government systematically excluded Muslim candidates from the elections and summarily denied ethnic-Rohingya Muslims the right to vote. War in Myanmar's Kachin State raged, activists continued to face violent crackdowns and prison, and impunity reigned.



In neighboring Thailand, amid the noteworthy mass human trafficking trial, the authorities prematurely closed the investigation, failed to protect witnesses—including the chief investigator in the trial, who fled the country—and refused to allow the disembarkation of trafficking survivors abandoned on boats at sea. In the wake of a 2014 military coup in Thailand, the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly dwindled along with space for civil society.

Now more than ever, human rights workers are needed to document the truth and strengthen rights.

2015 was Fortify Rights' second full year in operation—and it was busy. We investigated complex and under-reported issues. We engaged governments, the news media, U.N. officials, and others. And we worked closely with human rights defenders and affected communities to support their initiatives, facilitate opportunities, and provide tailored trainings based on their needs. Our work happened in conflict zones, internment camps, courtrooms, and the halls of

power—from the White House to Geneva, Bangkok to Naypyidaw. We released more than 20 publications based on our in-depth, independent investigations. We met with more than 150 stakeholders, many of whom can help change outcomes. The work of our small but determined team also made headlines globally, receiving coverage in more than 2,445 media mentions and helping to put a spotlight on critical human rights concerns in Southeast Asia.

We helped secure freedom for imprisoned and at-risk human rights defenders; we exposed and helped change unjust laws; and we helped persuade governments to better protect refugees and human trafficking survivors.

None of this work would have been possible without people who share and support our vision. In 2015, more than 90 private donors and 13 grant-makers got behind our work and reinforced our efforts. With this boost of support, we were able to scale our impact from Myanmar to Thailand and welcome dedicated and experienced Human Rights Specialists to our team. For-

tify Rights now includes four women and five men. We hail from five countries and speak four languages.

We're excited about our growing team and the progress we achieved with our partners in 2015, but much work remains to be done. While we reflect and take stock of 2015, our eyes are set on a fortified future. Thank you for joining us!



MATTHEW SMITH

Co-Founder

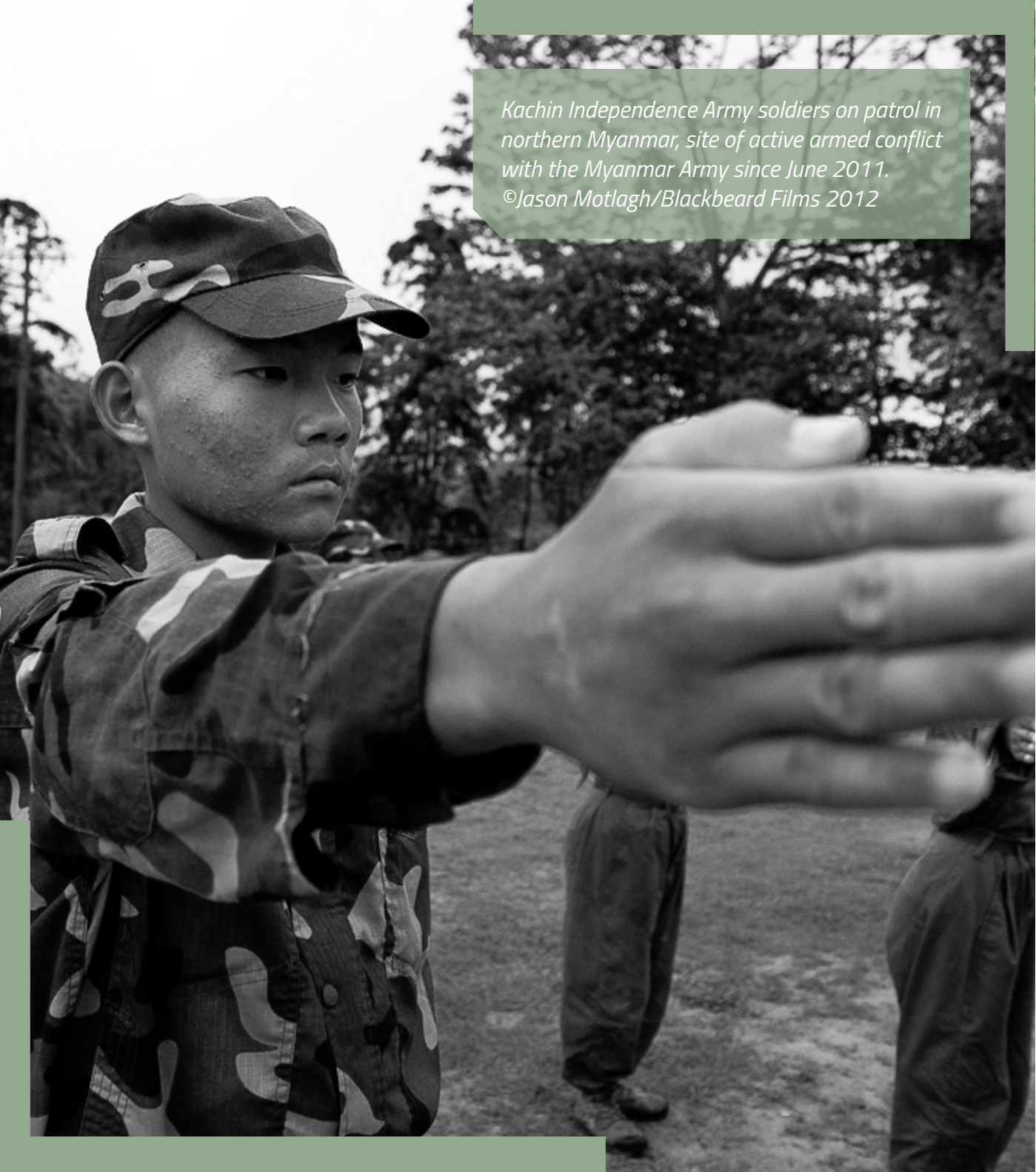
Chief Executive Officer



AMY SMITH

Co-Founder

Executive Director



Kachin Independence Army soldiers on patrol in northern Myanmar, site of active armed conflict with the Myanmar Army since June 2011.

©Jason Motlagh/Blackbeard Films 2012

MISSION & VISION

Fortify Rights works to ensure and defend human rights for all. We **INVESTIGATE** human rights violations, **ENGAGE** stakeholders, and **STRENGTHEN** initiatives led by human rights defenders, affected communities, and civil society. We believe in the influence of evidence-based research, the power of strategic truth-telling, and the importance of working in close collaboration with individuals, communities, and movements pushing for change. We are an independent, nonprofit organization based in Southeast Asia and registered in the United States and Switzerland.



**IN 2015, WE
ACHIEVED IMPACTS...**

WE HELPED ENSURE THE FREEDOM OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

*Mr. Brang Shawng, 49-year-old Ethnic
Kachin Man from Myanmar, is Free*

Brang Shawng faced up to seven years in prison after the Myanmar military charged him with “making false charges” for submitting a complaint to the Myanmar Human Rights Commission about the killing of his 14-year-old daughter Ja Seng Ing by the Myanmar Army.

Fortify Rights provided training on human

rights documentation, media advocacy, and video editing for Kachin activists, who then investigated the killing of Ja Seng Ing. They produced and published a powerful report about their findings and released a short film that received more than 20,000 views on Facebook. Following that, Fortify Rights got six of the world’s most prominent international human rights organizations—including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School—to sign an open letter to President Thein Sein, urging the authorities to drop all charges against Brang Shawng. We connected

*A Rohingya IDP camp in Sittwe, Rakhine State,
Myanmar.*

©2015 Partners Relief & Development

Kachin activists and Brang Shawng to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, who in turn raised the issue with the authorities, and we engaged the news media.

Ultimately, rather than sentence Brang Shawng to many years in prison, the Court issued only a minor fine. Today, he walks free.



Myanmar guest registration documents as required by law, the subject of a Fortify Rights report. ©2014, Spike Johnson

FORTIFY RIGHTS SHAPED PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON PRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

A Repressive Law in Myanmar Received Critical Attention

In March 2015, Fortify Rights released *Midnight Intrusions: Ending Guest Registration and Household Inspections in Myanmar*, a report documenting the harsh impacts of Myanmar's mandatory guest registration and household inspection

law. The law required all Myanmar citizens to seek permission from the state to host overnight houseguests and empowered the authorities to conduct unwarranted searches of private residences at will. This report proved the law was in violation of the rights to freedom of privacy, movement, and association. Fortify Rights held a press conference in Myanmar with civil society partners, human rights defenders, and a prominent Myanmar lawyer to discuss the abusive law. More than 50 people attended the press conference and the report received widespread coverage in both the Burmese and international media. This law is now under review by Myanmar's parliament.

First-Ever Legal Analysis on Genocide in Rakhine State Produced

Fortify Rights partnered with the Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic at Yale Law School to analyze the pattern of abuses against Rohingya Muslims using the framework of the Genocide Convention, prompting long-overdue attention on the risks of genocide in Myanmar. More than 20 regional and

international news outlets covered the report, and it was circulated at the highest levels of government in Myanmar as well as within the U.N. system and among the diplomatic community. Following the publication, the U.N. Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect issued a statement, calling on the Myanmar government to ensure a peaceful environment during the election period.

Fortify Rights also contributed to an Al Jazeera investigative film on the question of genocide with regard to the Rohingya in Myanmar. This film received more than a quarter of a million views on YouTube and reached tens of millions of viewers globally through the Al Jazeera network.

Attention Brought to Arbitrarily Arrested Peaceful Protesters

On March 10, 2015, Myanmar police officers violently cracked down on a group of 200 protesters demonstrating in the town of Letpadan against a recently passed National Education Law. Scores of students, activists, and journalists were beaten and arrested. Fortify Rights teamed up with affected families and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School to conduct a wide-reaching investigation and produce a report documenting the crackdown and arbitrary arrest of protesters. We used the findings from this investigation to engage key stakeholders on the continued arbitrary detention of the detained protesters.

*Myanmar police beating detainee during a
protest in the town of Letpadan.
©2015 Steve Tickner/The Irrawaddy*



WE CONTRIBUTED TO BRINGING LAWS AND PRACTICES IN LINE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

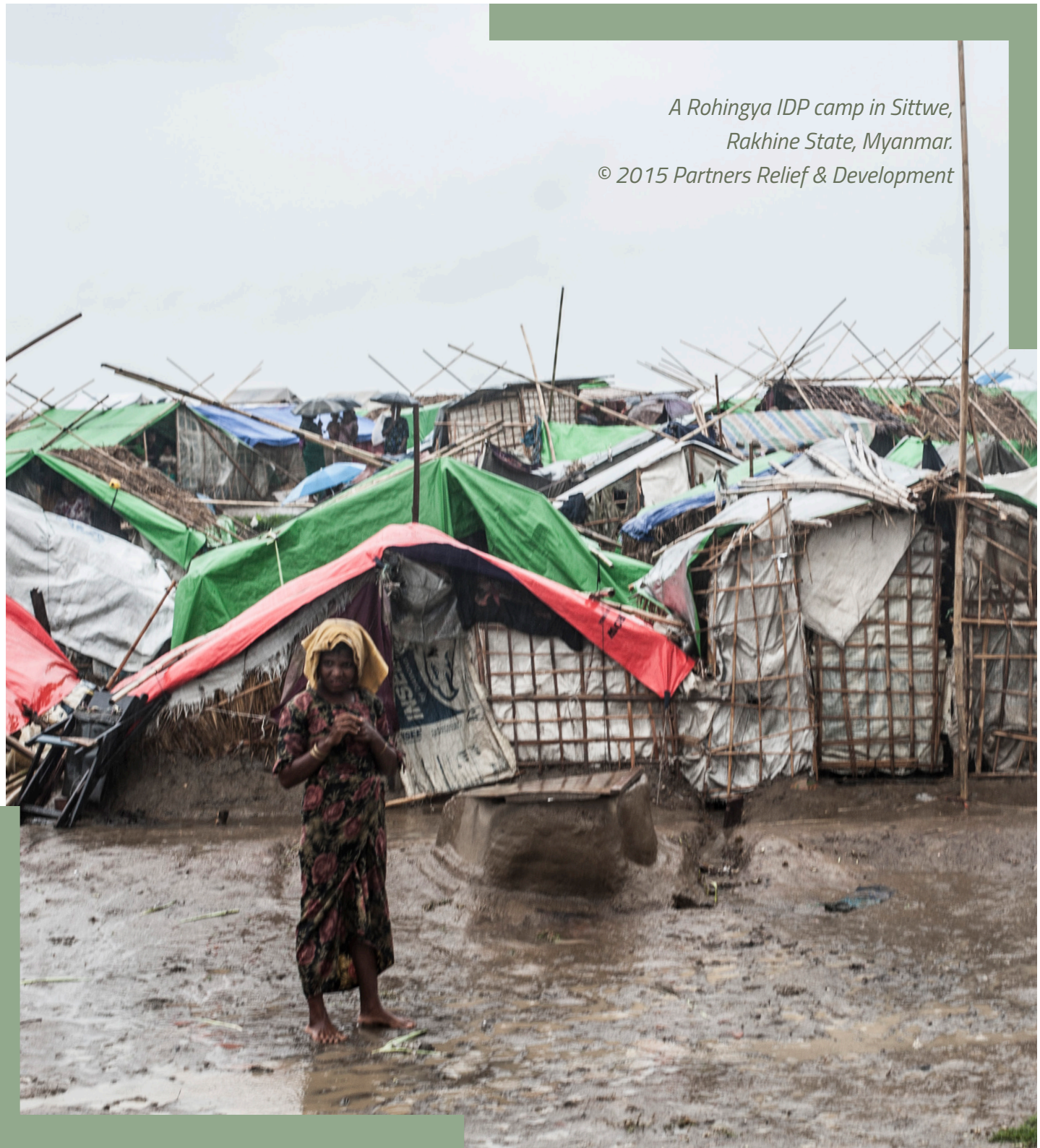
Crackdown on Human Traffickers in Southeast Asia Initiated

In April 2015, Fortify Rights testified before U.S. Congress on the issue of human trafficking in Southeast Asia. We used the occasion to meet directly with senior Thai government officials, including Thailand's deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the U.S. Days later, Thailand exposed the existence of mass graves in trafficking camps on the Thailand-Malaysia border and initiated a widespread crackdown on human traffickers, indicting more than 100 alleged traffickers, including senior government officials.

Southeast Asian Governments Responded to Humanitarian Crisis in Andaman Sea

When human traffickers abandoned at sea several thousand Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi survivors of human trafficking, Fortify Rights sprung to

A Rohingya IDP camp in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar.
© 2015 Partners Relief & Development



action. We mobilized small-scale search and rescue attempts; interviewed survivors and witnesses in Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia; and advocated at the highest levels for governments to find solutions. Fortify Rights was the first—but not the only—international human rights organization to urge a regional response to the boat crisis and engaged heavily with the media during the crisis to bring attention to the situation. The sustained media coverage of the Andaman Sea boat crisis was largely attributed to bringing governments from the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) together to discuss the root causes of the crisis and committing to temporary protections for survivors.

Myanmar Government Committed to Key Human Rights Reforms

In 2015, Myanmar's human rights performance was up for review at the U.N. Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Fortify Rights submitted an evidence-based assessment of Myanmar's performance to

the U.N. Human Rights Council and publicly and privately encouraged Myanmar to make genuine commitments towards human rights reform. At the Human Rights Council, the government accepted several recommendations included in the Fortify Rights UPR submission.

WE STRENGTHENED THE WORK OF OUR PARTNERS

First-Ever Subnational Human Rights Commission Underway in Chin State

Fortify Rights partnered with and provided technical support to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) to assist in the establishment of a state-level human rights institution in Myanmar's Chin State. We drafted Terms of Reference for in-depth consultations with Chin communities and supported our partners to independently take the mechanism to the next stage. Once established, this human rights institution will be the first of its kind in Myanmar and may serve as a state-level model for other ethnic groups in Myanmar and the region.

Human Rights Defenders Met People in Power

We facilitated meetings between Kachin and Rohingya activists in Myanmar with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Myanmar and senior political actors in Southeast Asian states, including the former Foreign Ministers of Thailand and Malaysia, the former head of Malaysia's armed forces, and the former Prime Minister of Malaysia. We provided opportunities for our partners to participate in press conferences and other strategic meetings.

Human Rights Defenders Honed Their Skills

In 2015, we conducted two three-day workshops on international law and human rights documentation for Muslim human rights defenders in Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar. Participants from these workshops later formed a human rights think-tank focused on minority rights issues.

IN 2015, WE INVESTIGATED...

Fortify Rights conducts in-depth, independent investigations into the most pressing human rights concerns.

In 2015, we investigated and exposed crimes of human trafficking, the use of excessive force against protesters, restrictions on basic freedoms, and atrocity crimes, which include war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

We produced 24 publications based on our evidence-based research, exposing human rights violations and providing concrete recommendations for change.

4 FULL LENGTH REPORTS

- **MAR. 19:** *Midnight Intrusions*
- **SEP. 29:** *Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review: Myanmar*

- **OCT. 10:** *Crackdown at Letpadan*
- **OCT. 29:** *Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims*

17 PRESS RELEASES

- **JAN. 15:** *Thailand: Scrap Plan to Send Prison Labor to Fishing Boats*
- **JAN. 27:** *Thailand: Government Drops Prison-Labor Plan, More Protections Needed*
- **FEB. 3:** *Myanmar: Prosecute Perpetrators, Not Human Rights Defenders*
- **FEB. 18:** *Myanmar: Overturn Wrongful Conviction of Brang Shawng*
- **MAR. 14:** *Myanmar: Free Prisoners of Conscience in Rakhine State*
- **MAR. 19:** *Myanmar: Abolish Mandatory Guest Registration, End Household Inspections*
- **APR. 22:** *United States: Assign Tier-3 Rankings to Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh in Annual Trafficking Report*
- **MAY 13:** *Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia: Coordinate Sea Rescues, Protect Asylum Seekers and Trafficking Survivors*
- **JUL 28:** *U.S.: Don't Let Trade Trump Human Rights*
- **SEP. 29:** *Myanmar: End International Crimes, Hold Perpetrators Accountable*
- **OCT. 10:** *Myanmar: Hold Police Accountable for Crackdown at Letpadan, Free Wrongfully Imprisoned Protesters*
- **OCT 14:** *Myanmar: Drop Charges Against Human Rights Lawyer Khin Khin Kyaw*
- **OCT. 29:** *United Nations: Establish Independent Investigation into Genocide in Myanmar*
- **DEC. 6:** *Myanmar: Fair Trial Denied in "Muslim Army" Case, Torture Alleged*
- **DEC. 9:** *Thailand: Human Trafficking Case Obstructed, Chief Investigator in Hiding*
- **DEC. 11:** *Myanmar: Drop Charges Against "Rohingya Calendar" Defendants*
- **DEC. 24:** *Thailand: Threats Continue in Human Trafficking Trial*

3 OPEN LETTERS

- **JAN. 14:** *To Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha: Recruitment of Prisoners to Work on Thai Fishing Boats*
- **MAY 1:** *To The Honorable John F. Kerry Re: Thailand's Designation in the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report*
- **JUL 27:** *To The Honorable John F. Kerry Re: Thailand's Designation in the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report*

3 OP-EDS

- **MAR. 4:** *How China Fuels Myanmar's Wars, New York Times*
- **JUL 20:** *The 'Boat People' Crisis Won't End Until Burma Stops Persecuting the Rohingya, The Guardian*
- **NOV. 27:** *Ethnic Minorities in Myanmar Denied Vote, The Guardian*

TESTIMONY

- **APR. 22:** *Accountability and Transformation: Tier Rankings in the Fight Against Human Trafficking*



Rohingya human rights defender Abdul Rasheed (right) speaking to Rohingya survivors of the 2015 boat crisis in camps in Aceh, Indonesia

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“Human rights reports are **helpful** and **critical**. The reports are important so that all the people across the world can know what is happening, what suffering is taking place, and what **pressure the government is putting on people.**”

— **Mr. Kyaw Hla Aung**, 76-year-old Rohingya human rights defender and former political prisoner, confined to an internment camp in Myanmar, (middle) with Fortify Rights’ Directors Amy Smith and Matthew Smith ©2015 Fortify Rights

IN 2015, WE ENGAGED...

Fortify Rights conducts strategic advocacy for solutions to complex human rights violations.

In 2015, we engaged with more than **150 STAKEHOLDERS**, including high-level government officials, policy-makers, communities, companies, and human rights abusers.

We also reached global audiences and deepened public discourse on human rights issues through more than **2,445 MEDIA MENTIONS**.

Fortify Rights Executive Director Matthew Smith speaking at a conference in Oslo, Norway.
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IN 2015, WE STRENGTHENED...

Fortify Rights works to strengthen initiatives led by human rights defenders, affected communities, and civil society. In 2015, we partnered with at-risk human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and affected communities to strengthen collective responses to abuses.

Fortify Rights speaking before an assembly in Hakha, Chin State, Myanmar
©2014 Fortify Rights

"We have to document who are the perpetrators; who are the abused; and who violated the laws. With proper documentation, we can raise our voices."

— Ethnic-Kachin human rights defender in Myanmar who participated in a workshop conducted by Fortify Rights on media and documentation



THE FORTIFY RIGHTS TEAM

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Chief Executive Officer

AMY SMITH

Executive Director

PUTTANEE KANGKUN

Thailand Human Rights Specialist

SUTHAREE WANNASIRI

Thailand Human Rights Specialist

NICKEY DIAMOND

Myanmar Human Rights Specialist

DAVID BAULK

Myanmar Human Rights Specialist

CATHY AYER

Development Specialist

GUILLERMO FARIAS

2015-2016 Legal Fellow

MATTHEW BUGHER

2015 Legal Fellow and Consultant



OUR SUPPORTERS

Our work was made possible by the steadfast support of our inspiring partners. In 2015, our work was supported by:

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FIRETREE ASIA FOUNDATION

AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE

NATIONAL CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

ECHOING GREEN

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

AVAAZ



*Rohingya survivor from 2015 boat crisis
points where their boat grounded in Aceh,
Indonesia ©2015 Fortify Rights*

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*Human rights workshop, Kachin State,
Myanmar©Fortify Rights*

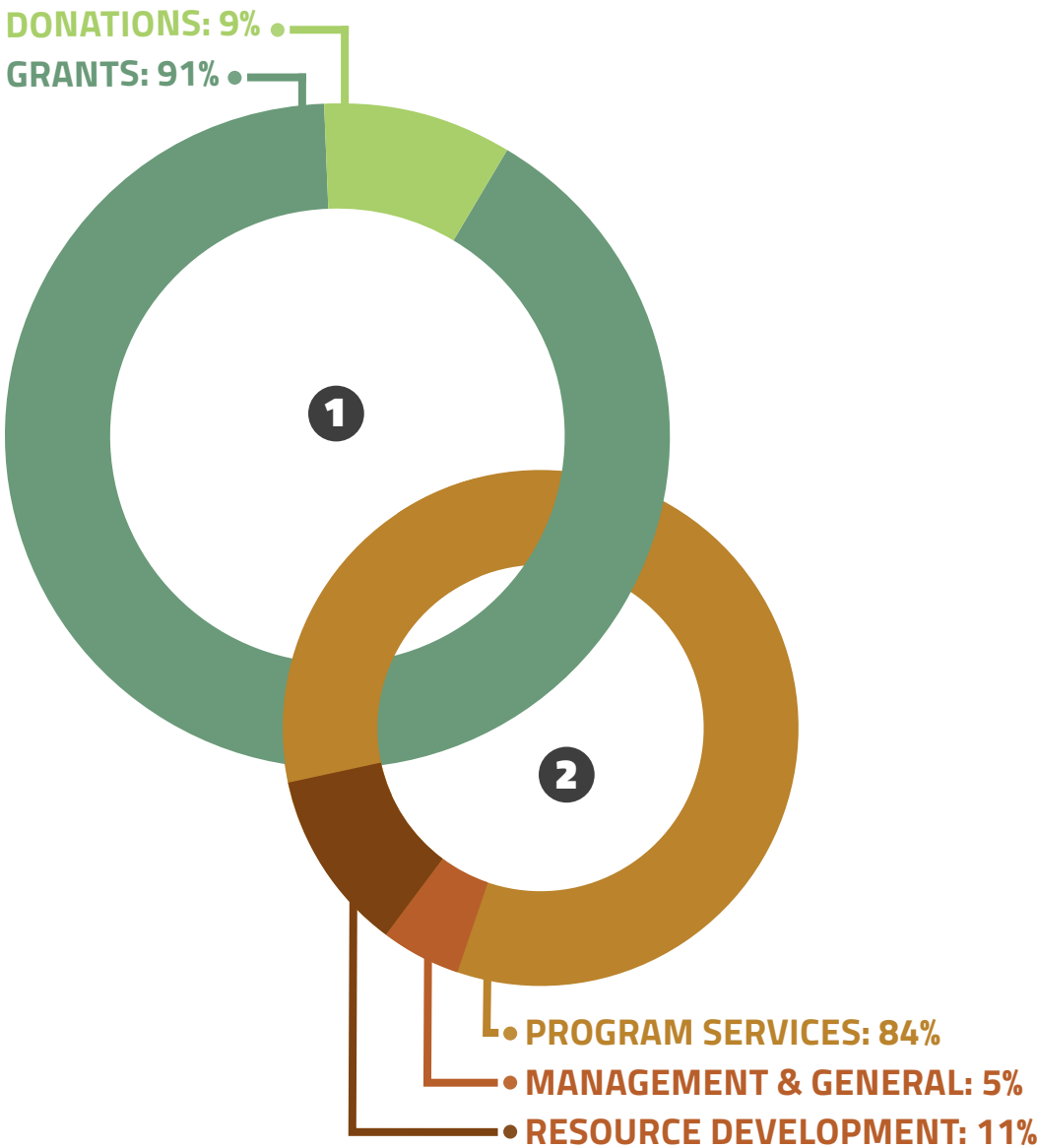
FINANCIAL STATEMENT

1 REVENUE AND SUPPORT

Donations	\$40,217
Grants	\$391,470
Total Revenue and Support	\$431,687

2 EXPENSES

Program Services	\$218,093
Supporting Services	
Management and General	\$13,408
Resource Development	\$29,023
Total Expenses	\$260,524
Change in Net Assets	\$171,163
NET ASSETS, BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$55,092
NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR	\$226,255





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