



FORTIFY
RIGHTS

2016

ANNUAL REPORT

INVESTIGATE. ENGAGE. STRENGTHEN.



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2016 was full of human rights challenges. With unchecked human rights violations happening throughout Southeast Asia, it was easy to feel disillusioned. But as we sifted through the headlines and took stock of our work, we found glimmers of hope in the positive impacts achieved together with our partners and supporters. We saw our strategies working and we saw positive change taking shape.

Together we rose to the challenge. Through our work and with the support of strong partners, laws and policies improved, human rights defenders were protected, perpetrators faced accountability, and collective responses of communities were strengthened.

We expanded our reach. For the second consecutive year, we scaled our impacts to a new country—Malaysia—and expanded our team, welcoming Henry Koh as our Malaysia Human Rights Specialist and John Quinley III as our Associate Human Rights Specialist. Our team at the end of 2016 comprised nine full-time members, including five men and four women hailing from four countries, speaking multiple languages, and bringing impressive expertise and commitment to our human rights work. Four of our five Human Rights Specialists are nationals of the countries where we work: Thailand, Myanmar, and now Malaysia. We stood together with partners. Throughout the year,

we partnered with 39 at-risk human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and affected communities to strengthen collective responses to abuses. We did 16 skill-building trainings for partners in three countries, honing practical skills that can be used to end human rights violations.

We spoke out against human rights violations.

With the support of our partners and in collaboration with at-risk human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and affected communities, we conducted strategic advocacy in countries throughout the world. Whether in Asian towns and capitals, the United Nations in Geneva, or the halls of power in Washington D.C., we engaged more than 645 stakeholders, including high-level government and elected officials, policy-makers, companies, and even human rights abusers.

The news media took notice. In just 12 months, more than 2,900 media publications mentioned the work of our team, helping us reach an astounding 4.7 billion people. That's more than 240 media mentions per month on average.

We exposed abuses. Our specialists conducted eight in-depth investigations and produced 64 original publications, including five full-length reports and long-form publications, 37 news releases, and 17 joint letters or statements. We also published five opinion editorials, including three in prominent international outlets—CNN, Foreign Policy, and the Wall Street Journal—as well as two in prominent regional outlets—the Jakarta Post and Bangkok Post.

2016 brought significant human rights challenges, but we responded and saw that change is possible. ***There is hope for a better future,*** and we are more determined and prepared to take on whatever challenges lie ahead.

Thank you for continuing the fight with us.



MATTHEW SMITH
Co-Founder / Chief Executive Officer



AMY SMITH
Co-Founder / Executive Director

Rohingya children studying in an internment camp in Myanmar's Rakhine State, ©Fortify Rights, 2016.

MISSION & VISIONS

Fortify Rights works to ensure and defend human rights for all. We investigate human rights violations, engage policymakers and the media, and strengthen collective responses by working closely with 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 collaborating with individuals, communities, and movements pushing for change. We are an independent, nonprofit organization based in South-east Asia and registered in the United States and Switzerland.

Banner capturing expressions of support in Sarawak for Bersih 5 mass rallies calling for free and fair elections in Malaysia. Fortify Rights was the only international monitor of the peaceful rallies in Sarawak. ©Fortify Rights, 2016

IN 2016, WE ACHIEVED IMPACTS...



TOGETHER WE IMPROVED LAWS & POLICIES

Thailand strengthened protection for human trafficking survivors —

In 2016, we partnered with the Burmese Rohingya Organization UK (BROUK) to investigate the treatment of Rohingya refugees in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. We published a joint report in March, exposing the ongoing indefinite detention of Rohingya refugees—including children—in squalid, inhumane conditions, as well as other human rights violations against Rohingya trafficking survivors in the region.

Following the report and high-level meetings with Thai authorities, the Thai government issued a Cabinet Resolution that created protections for human trafficking survivors and ordered relevant ministries to immediately comply.

Myanmar took steps to amend a repressive law —

In March 2016, the Myanmar Government announced its intention to amend the Ward and Township Administration Act—almost a year after Fortify Rights released a report exposing how Myanmar authorities were using the law to restrict the rights to freedom of movement, association, and

Boat under construction in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees have fled by boat to escape ongoing persecution in Myanmar. ©Fortify Rights, 2016

privacy, targeting political activists and the poor. Fortify Rights worked closely with the late U Ko Ni and others in advocacy that ultimately led the Parliament to amend the law.

Thailand suspended mining operations due to community concerns —

In 2016, we worked closely with environmental defenders and communities affected by harmful mining practices in Thailand, amplifying their concerns. In December 2016, the Thai government suspended all mining operations in the country following mounting protests by community activists about potentially harmful environmental impacts of Thailand's mining sector.

TOGETHER WE PROTECTED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Myanmar authorities freed political prisoners

In March 2015, Myanmar police brutally cracked down on peaceful protesters in Letpadan in Bago Region. We partnered with the Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic to investigate the crackdown and published a detailed report exposing it, with a Burmese-language forward written by the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU). This was followed by months of sustained and coordinated advocacy within Myanmar that ultimately led the government on April 8, 2016 to free dozens of Letpadan protesters detained in connection with the crackdown.

Thailand halted the refoulement of Rohingya human rights defenders

We investigated and exposed how Thai authorities arbitrarily detained, intimidated, and monitored the movements of several Rohingya community leaders from Myanmar during Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to Thailand in June. Our team accompanied Rohingya to police stations and advocated for their protection, speaking directly with commanding officers, ultimately preventing their refoulement to Myanmar.

Malaysia freed Maria Chin Abdullah

The Malaysian authorities arrested and detained 60-year-old human rights defender Maria Chin Abdullah and held her in solitary confinement for more than 10 days due to her involvement in organizing mass rallies calling for free

and fair elections in Malaysia. Our team monitored the rallies, a women's march, and nightly vigils in Kuala Lumpur following Maria Chin's arrest, and we helped mobilize international organizations to call for her immediate release. In November, following mounting pressure, she was freed.

Thai authorities dropped six lawsuits against environmental defenders

In 2016, Thai authorities brought several lawsuits against human rights defenders involved in speaking out against harmful impacts of mining in northern Thailand. Our team monitored these cases and issued 10 original publications exposing reprisals against the defendants. We worked closely with Thai environmental defenders and affected communities to increase protections and prevent further reprisals. In 2016, Thai courts dismissed six lawsuits against environmental defenders.

Human rights defenders received critical assistance

Since October 2016, we facilitated several grants amounting to several thousand dollars in direct financial assistance for human rights defenders at risk in Myanmar and Thailand. Two human rights defenders and their family members benefited from these grants, including a human rights defender arbitrarily arrested after reporting on forced labor as well as a human rights defender working with refugees in Thailand and reporting on trafficking networks.

► *Rohingya in Thailand protesting in front of the Myanmar Embassy during a visit by Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi. Fortify Rights monitored the peaceful protests and intervened to ensure the protection of Rohingya community leaders.* ©Fortify Rights, 2016

Family in Myanmar's Mandalay Region holding a portrait of their wrongfully detained father. Fortify Rights has been monitoring the cases of Muslims facing arbitrary arrest and detention in Myanmar, calling on the government to immediately release those wrongfully detained. ©Luke Duggleby/Fortify Rights, 2016



TOGETHER WE SPOTLIGHTED HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

Increased awareness of protection concerns for Rohingya refugees in Thailand

We increased Thai public awareness on the situation of Rohingya in Thailand through several events in 2016. In June, more than 130 people attended a Thai-language forum that we co-hosted with civil society organizations in Bangkok to bring attention to the one-year anniversary of the Andaman boat crisis—during which several thousand Rohingya and Bangladeshi survivors of trafficking were stranded at sea—and the continuing protection concerns for Rohingya in Thailand. In November, we also collaborated with award-winning photographer Greg Constantine to show his photo exhibit “Nowhere People” on stateless Rohingya to students in Thailand's Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Fortify Rights also co-hosted a photo exhibition in Bangkok featuring the photography of Rohingya communities in Myanmar and in exile by award-winning Bangladeshi photographer Saiful Huq Omi, which ran from November 29 to December 6, 2016. Fortify Rights facilitated the participation of a Rohingya leader from Myanmar and a Commissioner from the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand during the launch of the exhibit.

Contributed to award winning films, bringing widespread attention to pressing issues

Our work to end human rights violations against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar was featured in several award-winning films in 2016, including:

■ A short-film by ABC News for mainstream news, which received an Emmy Award from the Academy of Tele-

vision Arts and Sciences.

■ The feature-length investigative film *Genocide Agenda*, by Al Jazeera, which exposed human rights violations against Rohingya and received the prestigious Frontline Club 2016 Broadcast Award in October.

Highlighted human rights concerns for the transgender community in Malaysia

In November and December, we brought much-needed attention to the lack of legal services for members of the transgender community in Malaysia at the U.N. Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review session for Malaysia as well as at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Global Forum in Bangkok.

Raised attention on the situation of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia

In December, we increased Malaysian public awareness on the situation of Rohingya through a photo exhibition of the work of Bangladeshi photographer Saiful Huq Omi. The well-attended event provided a platform for Rohingya community leaders and civil society partners to engage on issues related to refugee protection in Malaysia. We facilitated travel arrangements for more than 45 members of the Rohingya refugee community to attend the exhibit in Kuala Lumpur.





TOGETHER WE HELPED ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

Myanmar downgraded for failing to combat human trafficking —

In March, our CEO Matthew Smith testified before the U.S. Congress and our team engaged with U.S. government officials and members of Congress about the ongoing scourge of human trafficking in Myanmar. In June, the U.S. State Department downgraded Myanmar to the lowest tier in its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ranking process, recognizing the government's failures to effectively combat trafficking, spurring Myanmar to do more.

Thailand convicted two military personnel for attacks on human rights defenders —

In June, the Loei Provincial Court in Thailand convicted two Thai military personnel accused of attacking human rights defenders in Loei in May 2014. They were sentenced to just under two years and three years' imprisonment, respectively, and ordered to pay nine villagers more than 160,000 Thai Baht (US\$4,475) in compensation. We had worked with 11 partner organizations to encourage the authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Groundwork laid for a U.N.-mandated investigation into violations against Rohingya

In 2016, we engaged governments and others on the need for a U.N.-mandated investigation to assess and identify solutions to address atrocity crimes perpetrated against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. With Rohingya activists, we engaged ASEAN leaders, prominent human rights leaders and Nobel Laureates, international nongovernmental

organizations, national-level civil society organizations representing a diversity of ethnicities in Myanmar, and Rohingya community leaders, all of whom started to publicly support a call for a U.N.-mandated independent investigation. We then worked with 40 diverse civil society organizations in Myanmar who developed a joint statement calling for a commission of inquiry into the situation in Rakhine.



TOGETHER WE STRENGTHENED THE WORK OF PARTNERS

Chin partners got closer to establishing a human rights mechanism —

We provided technical support to an ethnic-Chin "Steering Committee" for the development of a Chin Human Rights Committee. Together we completed the first draft of a Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Chin Human Rights Committee, and we worked closely with the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO). This committee will be the first sub-national human rights institution in Myanmar and may serve as a model for other ethnic groups.

Supporting the emergence of networks for change —

In November, we co-hosted the first regional gathering of 44 advocates, academics, service providers, and community leaders working with stateless populations within the region. During this meeting, participants agreed to establish the Stateless Network-Asia Pacific (SNAP), a new regional coalition of civil society organizations engaged in statelessness issues.

Members of the Khon Ban Rak Kerd Group, community-based human rights defenders facing reprisals for their environmental activism in Thailand's Loei Province. Fortify Rights has monitored their court cases and called for Thailand to protect their right to free speech. Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group, 2016



We worked closely with Thai partners to assist in the establishment of the Coalition for the Rights of Refugees and Stateless Persons (CRSP), a Thai coalition focused on refugee and statelessness issues and with a particular emphasis on promoting alternatives to detention.

We facilitated opportunities for partners to engage decision-makers and power brokers

In December 2016, we facilitated an opportunity for six partners from Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia to meet with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association Maina Kiai in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. We worked with our partners to develop talking points and English-language submissions to deliver during the respective meetings.

In June, we arranged for a Rohingya partner from Myanmar to attend the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Consultations in Geneva and organized meetings in Geneva with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UNHCR Regional Officer on Statelessness, and the Ambassador of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In June, we arranged for an at-risk ethnic Rakhine human rights defender to meet with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Yanghee Lee during her visit to Myanmar, facilitating an opportunity to share information about his personal security concerns as well as human rights concerns

A Rohingya refugee display his identity card issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia, which provides information protections to refugees. However, access to UNHCR protection is limited. ©Fortify Rights, 2016



Fortify Rights Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttanee Kangkun speaking to a Rohingya survivor of October attacks on Rohingya villages in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State. ©Fortify Rights, 2016

In December, we facilitated arrangements for ethnic Kachin partners from Myanmar to engage in a series of strategic advocacy meetings in Washington D.C., providing an opportunity to directly engage senior policy-makers on issues of concern regarding the escalating conflict in Kachin State, humanitarian restrictions, and the prior lifting of the U.S. jade embargo.

A week after the meetings, the U.S. Embassy in Myanmar issued a statement calling for "immediate, unfettered humanitarian access" in Kachin and northern Shan states.



TOGETHER WE AMPLIFIED VOICES

At the end of November, we provided an opportunity for Rohingya and Kachin partners from Myanmar to speak on a panel about the situation of displacement for their respective communities in Myanmar during a well-attended event at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand in Bangkok.

We organized a panel discussion on Rohingya regional concerns and facilitated the participation of partners from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar during the ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ASCS/APF) in Dili, East Timor in August.

In December, we facilitated the participation of Thai community-based environmental defenders in a public forum to discuss the implementation of the recently adopted Mining Act in Thailand. With Fortify Rights' support, a community-based representative served as one of the speakers of the forum, providing an opportunity to directly represent the community's concern with the new Mining Act.



Thai human rights defender calls on Thai authorities to protect free speech and the environment. Fortify Rights has been working with human rights defenders and affected communities to support their initiatives. ©Luke Duggleby/Fortify Rights, 2016



TOGETHER WE PROVIDED TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES



In 2016, we provided English-language editing assistance to several partners in Thailand to strengthen publications produced by partners.

In February, we co-hosted the first-ever nationwide gathering of Muslim Women's Associations in Thailand, involving more than 100 Muslim women from across Thailand. During this workshop and a follow up workshop in April, we conducted skill-building sessions on institutional capacity building and women's leadership. Following these workshops, members of the Muslim Women's Association began to support Rohingya women and children detained in Thailand's closed shelters.

In February and March, we partnered with the Burmese Rohingya Organization-UK (BROUK) to assist in a regional assessment of the situation of Rohingya refugees in the region. We coordinated meetings with ASEAN policy-makers, U.N. officials, and other others as well as members of the Rohingya refugee communities in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. We worked closely with BROUK to write and publish a joint report entitled, "Everywhere is Trouble," catching the interest of the highest levels of government in Thailand.

In late February, we co-hosted a strategy meeting with 30 ethnic Rohingya leaders, human rights defenders, and allies, providing them with a platform to identify key priority areas of concern and to develop a coordinated strategy plan.



In August, we conducted a five-day workshop on human rights law and documentation for 13 ethnically diverse women from Myanmar working in conflict zones.

In October, we facilitated a four-day human rights documentation and advocacy training for 23 mostly women participants involved with a partner organization in Myanmar.

Training with human rights defenders in Malaysia supported by Fortify Rights. ©Fortify Rights, 2016

In October, we held a two-day security and protection workshop for about 20 Rohingya refugees and community leaders living in Thailand to facilitate individualized security self-assessments and discussions on practical protection measures as well as information on refugee/migrant protections in Thailand.

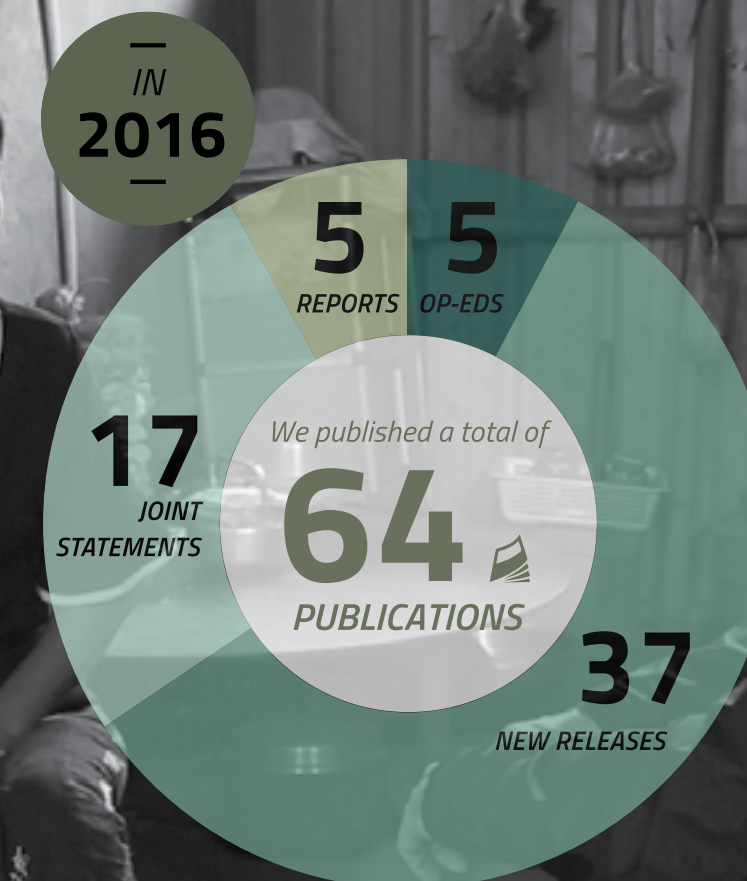
FORTIFY RIGHTS WORKED TO PROMOTE PARTNERS

In 2016, we nominated several community-based partners and human rights defenders for various awards, including community activists from Loei Province for the Taiwan Human Rights and Democracy Award; a Thai human rights lawyer for the Martin Ennals Human Rights Award; and a Thai human rights lawyer representing environmental defenders in Thailand for an award sponsored by Lawyers4Lawyers and another award through the American Bar Association.

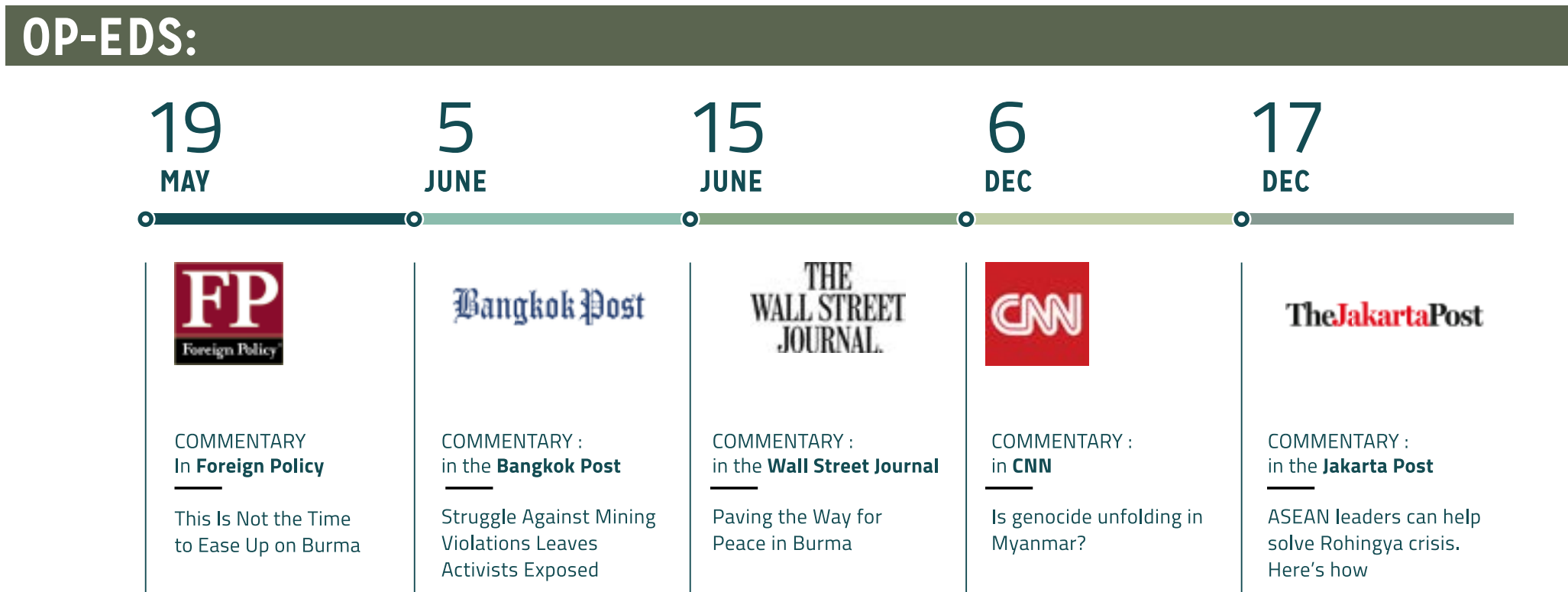
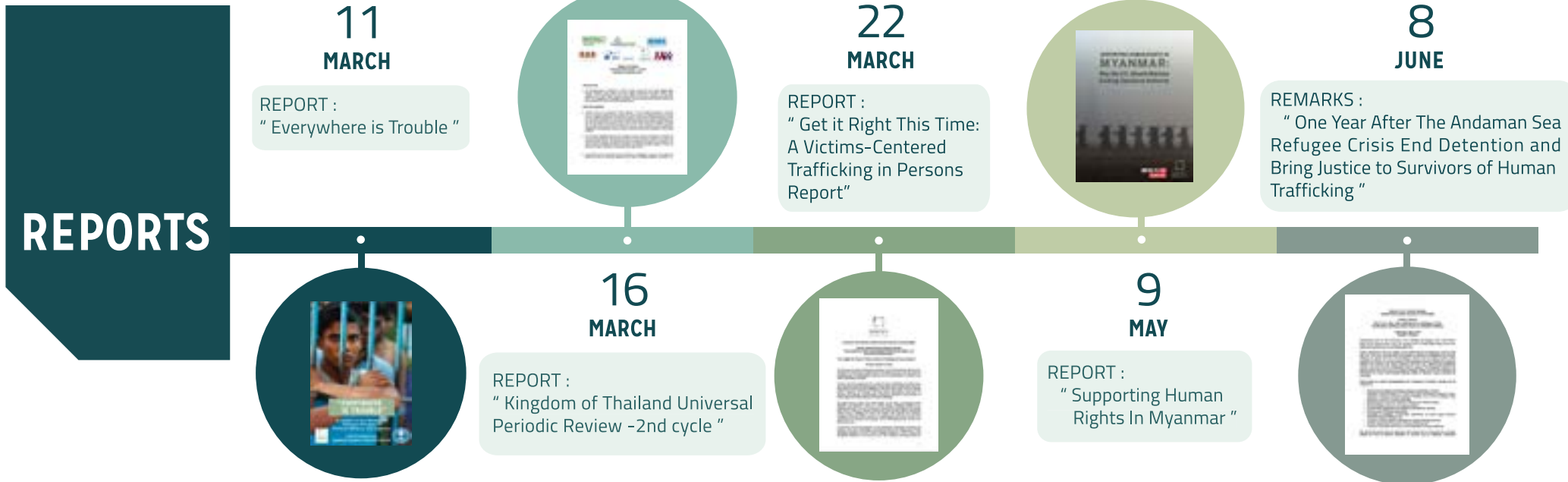
We supported the development of six joint statements with partner organizations and joined as a signatory on 11 joint statements or open letters initiated by partner organizations.

A leader of the Khon Ban Rak Kerd Group, who faces multiple legal challenges for his role in engaging in environmental activism in Thailand's Loei Province. Fortify Rights has been monitoring his case and calling for the authorities to dismiss all wrongful charges against human rights defenders. ©Luke Duggleby/ Fortify Rights, 2016

FORTIFY RIGHTS INVESTIGATED:



Fortify Rights Myanmar Human Rights Specialist David Baulk speaking to displaced ethnic Kachin in northern Myanmar, ©Fortify Rights, 2016.



FORTIFY RIGHTS ENGAGED:

IN 2016

WE ENGAGED PEOPLE, INCLUDING THROUGH:



645

Meeting with policy-makers



2,985

media mentions



4.78b

media reach



1,800

Twitter followers



1,600

Facebook followers

567,000

social media interactions



Fortify Rights' Chief Executive Officer Matthew Smith with U.S. Representative Chris Smith, the author of the Trafficking in Persons legislation. In March, Fortify Rights testified before the U.S. Congress on human trafficking concerns in Southeast Asia. ©Fortify Rights, 2016

FORTIFY RIGHTS STRENGTHENED:

In 2016
Fortify rights
partnered with **39** 

*at risk human rights defenders, civil society organizations,
and affected communities to strengthen collective responses to abuses.*

**Fortify rights
conducted:**
112 *strengthening
-related activities
including:*
16 *trainings
and workshops*

*Members of Khon Ban Rak Kerd Group preparing for a peaceful rally
outside the courthouse in Thailand's Loei Province. Fortify Rights has
called on Thailand to protect the right to protest and free speech.*
©Luke Duggleby/Fortify Rights, 2016



TEAM FORTIFY RIGHTS



WHERE WE WORK



Myanmar



Thailand



Malaysia

FORTIFY RIGHT'S BOARD MEMBERS

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Kerry Kennedy, President of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights



Pillkyu Hwang, human rights lawyer with Gonggam Human Rights Law Foundation and Human Rights Committee Coordinator of the Korean Bar Association



Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch



Tyler Giannini, Clinical Professor and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School



Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar



Victor Biak Lian, human rights and democracy activist, 2010 recipient of St. Stephen's Prize from Norway's Stefanus Alliance International



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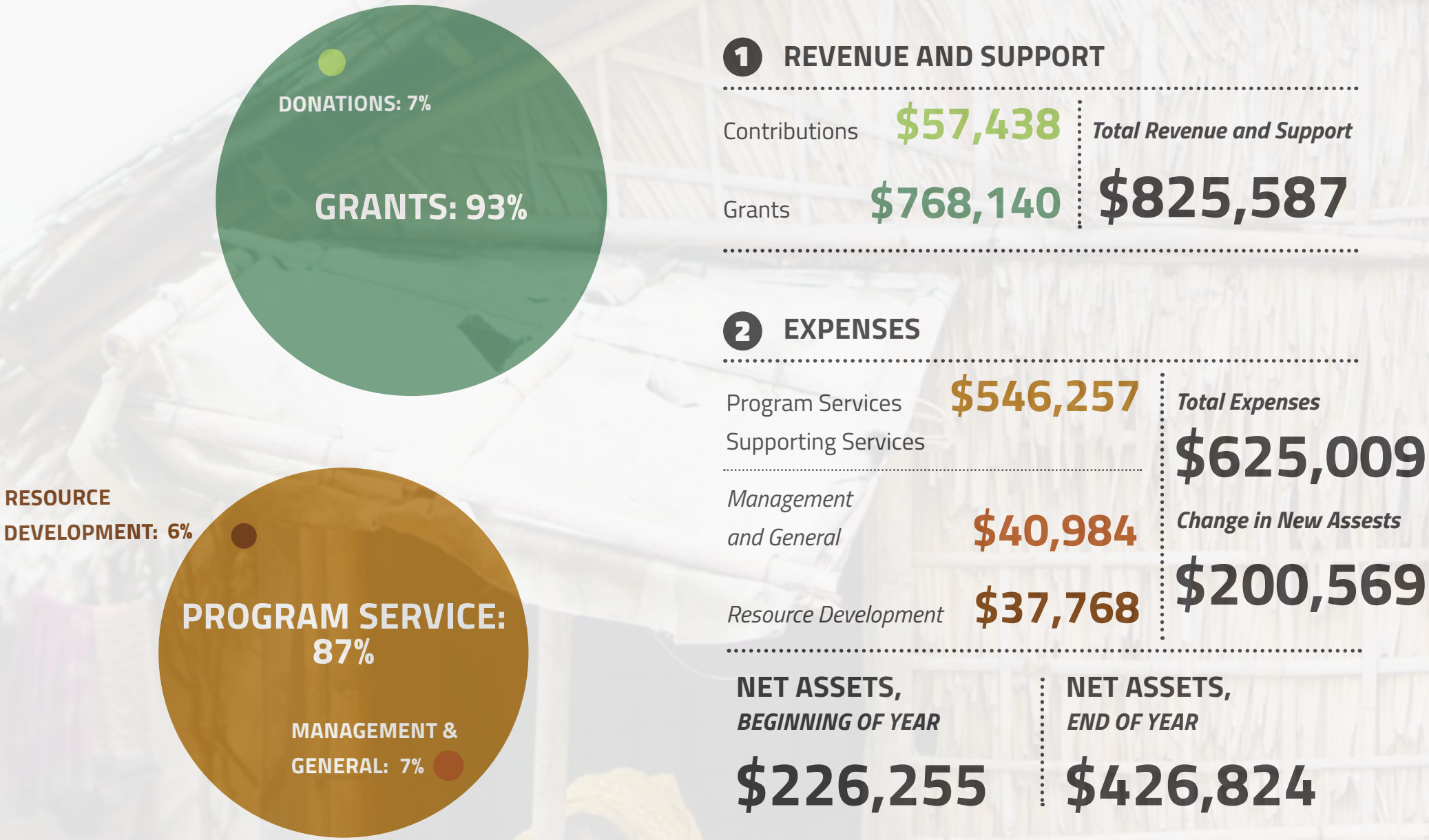


Human rights defenders calling for environmental protections in Thailand's Loei Province. ©Luke Duggleby/Fortify Rights, 2016

FORTIFY RIGHTS' SUPPORTERS



FINANCIAL STATEMENT



Pregnant wife holds portrait of her wrongfully detained husband. Fortify Rights has been monitoring the cases of judicial harassment against Muslims in Myanmar, ©Luke Duggleby/Fortify Rights, 2016



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