

Annual Report

2018

#rights4all



MESSAGE FROM THE FORTIFY RIGHTS TEAM

This year, Fortify Rights was honored to receive the Roger E. Joseph Prize, an annual award given by the Joseph family and Joseph Prize Endowment recognizing “exceptional individuals and institutions” for their “lasting contribution to the causes of human rights.” Marking the 40th anniversary of the prize, we were humbled to be included among the ranks of past recipients, including U.S. civil rights leader Rosa Parks, Raoul Wallenberg, who sheltered and rescued Jews during the Holocaust, and the family who sheltered Anne Frank during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

Reflecting on the remarkable progress achieved by human rights defenders in the past 40 years, we have hope for what human rights defenders might achieve in the next 40 years and beyond.

But that progress will only come when human rights defenders are supported and protected—this is the core work of Fortify Rights.

We are a team of human rights defenders—and we work to support and strengthen other human rights defenders.

In 2018, we worked together with partners in Southeast Asia to advance accountability for genocide and mass atrocities committed against communities in Myanmar. We contributed to efforts to reunite and ensure the release of detained refugee families. We supported human rights defenders facing judicial harassment to prevent their detention and protect their right to speak out and engage in human rights work.

Through these efforts, we changed laws, policies, and practices in 2018. This has given us new hope and new energy to achieve #Rights4All. Please join us and our partners in this mission.

—The Team at Fortify Rights



Fortify Rights' co-founders Matthew Smith and Amy Smith receiving the Roger E. Joseph Prize on behalf of the Fortify Rights team. ©Fortify Rights, May 2018



MISSION & VISION

Fortify Rights works to ensure human rights for all. We investigate human rights violations, engage people with power on solutions, and strengthen the work of human rights defenders and affected communities. We believe in the power of strategic truth-telling, the influence of evidence-based research, and the importance of working with individuals, communities, and movements pushing for change.

A Rohingya refugee uses one of the many man-made dams in Balokhall 2 refugee camp, Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh. Patrick Brown ©Panos/ UNICEF, 2018

WHAT WE DO



Rohingya survivor of the Maung Nu massacre draws a map outlining where the Myanmar Army systematically killed men, women, and children, including his father and nephew, during an interview with Fortify Rights. ©Fortify Rights, 2018

INVESTIGATE



06 full-length reports



76 news releases and other publications



12 short #FortiFilms



Responding to human rights violations requires an accurate understanding of the facts. We conduct in-depth, independent investigations. We produce detailed advocacy materials, including public and private reports, statements, briefings, and multimedia materials that provide rights-based analyses and concrete, realistic solutions.



Rohingya refugee researchers practicing surveying skills using smart phones for a participatory research project in Bangladesh supported by Fortify Rights. ©Fortify Rights, July 2018



Report cover of Fortify Rights' publication "No Politics on Campus: Violations of the Rights to Freedom of Expression, Peaceful Assembly, and Association Against University Students in Malaysia. ©Fortify Rights, June 2018



Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttanee Kangkun conducting interviews with Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. ©Fortify Rights, 2018

Thailand Human Rights
Specialist Puttanee Kangkun
submitting a letter to the
National Human Rights
Commission of Thailand,
calling for an investigation
into immigration raids in
Bangkok.
©National Human Rights
Commission of Thailand,
October 2018



ENGAGE



82 private meetings
with people with
power



15 private
submissions to
people with power



14 strategic speaking
engagements



2,199
mentions of Fortify Rights
in the media



40,473
engagements on social
media

We conduct strategic advocacy, sharing our in-depth research and realistic recommendations with senior government officials, high-level U.N. representatives, and other members of the international community to increase awareness and influence policy decisions. We also engage the news media and general public to ensure an accurate reporting of the facts and create truthful understanding of human rights more widely.



Malaysia Human Rights Specialist speaking on restrictions on freedoms for students in Malaysia during Fortify Rights' press conference and report launch in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ©Fortify Rights, June 2018

Fortify Rights' press conference in Yangon, Myanmar for the launch of the Fortify Rights report, "They Block Everything," documenting how the Myanmar government and authorities have systematically obstructed aid to Kachin internally displaced persons since 2011. ©Fortify Rights, 2018

Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttanee Kangkun commenting on the situation of refugees in Thailand during an interview with Thai PBS. ©Fortify Rights, 2018



Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttanee Kangkun participating on a panel with Thai authorities to discuss initiatives to end the detention of children in immigration facilities in Thailand. ©Fortify Rights, August 2018





Rohingya refugee researchers practicing surveying skills using smart phones for a participatory research project in Bangladesh supported by Fortify Rights.
©Fortify Rights, July 2018



We partner with human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and affected communities to support local-led solutions to human rights problems. We facilitate skill-building workshops and trainings, expand opportunities for partners to directly engage people with power, and increase protections for human rights defenders at risk.

STRENGTHEN



43 trainings, workshops, and other technical support activities



19 activities conducted to ensure protection for partners



18 opportunities facilitated for partners to access people with power



\$15,240

secured in emergency support for human rights defenders at risk



Thailand Human Rights Specialist Sutharee Wannasiri providing training on digital security and media for community-based activists in southern Thailand. ©Fortify Rights, April 2018



A social media card profiling student activist Anis Syafiqah, one of the students in Malaysia featured in Fortify Rights' report "No Politics on Campus." ©Fortify Rights, June 2018



A Kachin partner addressing media requests following the report of Fortify Rights report, "They Block Everything." ©Fortify Rights, August 2018

OUR IMPACTS

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ATROCITIES AGAINST ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN MYANMAR

In 2016 and 2017, Myanmar authorities massacred Rohingya Muslim men, women and children, and soldiers raped women and girls *en masse* and razed hundreds of villages, forcing more than 800,000 to Bangladesh. These crimes occurred with impunity.

We Investigated:

In July, we published the 160-page report, “They Gave Them Long Swords”: Preparations for Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity Against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar, exposing new details about genocide in Myanmar. We exposed how the Myanmar authorities made “extensive and systematic preparations” for attacks against Rohingya civilians during the weeks and months before Rohingya militants attacked police on August 25, 2017, and we identified 20 police and military officials who should be investigated and possibly prosecuted for genocide and other crimes. Several were subsequently sanctioned by western governments as well as identified by U.N. investigators as responsible for genocide.



Cover of the 160-page Fortify Rights report, “They Gave Them Long Swords”: Preparations for Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity Against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar, released in July 2018.
©Fortify Rights, 2018

We Engaged:

With our partners, we engaged government officials in Southeast Asia, Europe, and the U.S., including at the White House. We engaged diplomats, the news media, and U.N. investigators and officials, providing accurate and actionable information about atrocities against Rohingya.

We Strengthened:

We worked with Rohingya human rights defenders to ensure their protection, facilitate strategic advocacy opportunities, and strengthen their capacity to advance solutions. In March, we facilitated a strategy coordination workshop of Rohingya human rights defenders and international allies to identify common goals and develop strategies to advance accountability initiatives and prevent fresh attacks on Rohingya.



Fortify Rights' press conference in Bangkok in July 2018 to launch the report "They Gave Them Long Swords:" Preparations for Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity Against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar. This report exposed how the Myanmar authorities made "extensive and systematic preparations" for attacks against Rohingya civilians during the weeks and months before Rohingya militants attacked police on August 25, 2017. ©Fortify Rights, June 2018



Our Impacts

INCREASED MOVEMENT TOWARD ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ATROCITIES IN MYANMAR

In a landmark ruling in September, the International Criminal Court (ICC) granted the prosecutor jurisdiction over the deportation of Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh as crimes against humanity. This is a major step towards holding perpetrators liable for crimes against humanity committed against Rohingya.

In September, the U.N. Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar also concluded that Myanmar's top military generals should be investigated and prosecuted for the crime of genocide against Rohingya in Rakhine State as well as for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan states, and the U.N. Human Rights Council created a mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of atrocities in Myanmar. Several countries, including the U.S., announced sanctions against members of the Myanmar state security forces.

Stranded on the Myanmar border with limited or no food and water for up to 20 days after fleeing Myanmar Army-led attacks, Rohingya refugees finally cross the Naf River on a makeshift raft made of bamboo and empty palm-oil cans—a five to seven-hour-long journey.
Patrick Brown ©Panos/UNICEF, 2018



PROTECTION FOR REFUGEES, SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND OTHER PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

In Thailand and Malaysia, refugees, migrants, and survivors of human trafficking faced serious human rights violations. Governments denied refugees and migrants access to legal status, arbitrarily detained them, and forced refugees to places where they may face further persecution.

Women and children arrested during immigration raids in Bangkok, Thailand in 2018. Fortify Rights documented the detention and separation of families during the raids.
©Fortify Rights, October 2018



Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttaneek Kangkun speaking during the National Roundtable Discussion on Ending the Detention of Children in Thailand.

©National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, August 2018



Thailand Human Rights Specialist Puttaneek Kangkun submitting a letter to the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, calling for an investigation into immigration raids in Bangkok.

©National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, August 2018



We Investigated:

We monitored and brought attention to immigration raids that took place in October and called on the Thai government to ensure children are not separated from their parents and migrants are not detained solely on the basis of their immigration status.

We Engaged:

Alongside our Thai partners, we engaged relevant Thai government agencies on developing policies to protect the immigration detention of children and regulations to identify and protect refugees in the country.

We Strengthened:

We worked with local partners to submit a petition to the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, calling for an investigation into the mass arrest of refugees by immigration officials.

Our Impact

REFUGEE WOMEN AND CHILDREN FREED FROM IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTERS IN THAILAND

In November, the government of Thailand released 40 detained refugee women and children from immigration detention centers. Many of the refugees had been detained and separated from their children during raids in Bangkok.



*Thai authorities taking young children into custody following immigration raids in Bangkok, Thailand.
©Fortify Rights, October 2018*

PREVENTING FORCED RETURN OF REFUGEES

While hosting more than one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, the Government of Bangladesh threatened to move huge numbers of refugees to a remote and flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal, further violating their human rights.



Kerry Kennedy—President of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and member of the international advisory board of Fortify Rights—meeting Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. She later raised protection concerns with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. © HUMAN / RFK Human Rights 2018

We Investigated:

We used our documentation to publicly comment on plans by Bangladesh to relocate Rohingya to Bhasan Char and advocated for the plans to be scrapped.

We Engaged:

In July, Fortify Rights International Advisory Board Kerry Kennedy—President of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights— and Fortify Rights Senior Advisor and former member of the U.S. Congress Tom Andrews joined former Assistant Secretary of State Mike Posner in meeting with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to discuss protection concerns for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Working closely with our team, the delegation advocated for Bangladesh to halt plans to move Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char. Kerry Kennedy also sent a follow-up letter to the Prime Minister, calling for Bangladesh to prevent the forced return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

We Strengthened:

In January, we published a long-form film, “No Man’s Land,” to allow Rohingya refugees an opportunity to contribute to public discourse on repatriation plans. The film was picked up by CNN and Al Jazeera, reaching tens of millions globally.

Our Impact

THE PLAN IS POSTPONED

In response to growing international pressure, including pressure spearheaded by our team and partners, the Government of Bangladesh postponed plans to return Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

ADDRESSING REPRISALS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS EXERCISING THEIR RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Throughout Southeast Asia, human rights defenders were at risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, and other legal and extra-judicial action for engaging in free speech activities and peaceful protests. During the year, we witnessed reprisals against human rights defenders and noted laws that restrict basic rights and freedoms. Governments arbitrarily detained human rights defenders and subjected others to judicial harassment.



Student leader Asheeq Ali speaking to journalists about restrictions on basic freedoms for students in Malaysia following the Fortify Rights press conference and report launch.
©Fortify Rights, June 2018

We Investigated:

In June, we published a 63-page report entitled, “No Politics on Camps:” *Violations of the Rights to Freedom of Expression, Peaceful Assembly, and Association Against University Students in Malaysia*. This report is based on an 18-month long investigation and more than 60 interviews with students, university representatives, and government officials in Malaysia and exposes arbitrary restrictions on student activism both on and off the campus. For decades, the government in Malaysia denied university students in Malaysia their fundamental rights.

We Engaged:

In June, we launched the report at a press conference with student activists who faced disciplinary action by their universities for engaging in political activities, drawing national media attention.

We Supported:

Fortify Rights amplified the voice of student activists affected by the restrictions by profiling their work in a short film, facilitating opportunities for the student activists to engage the public on issues of concern, and ensuring their security through monitoring and securing more than US\$5,025 in emergency relief to ensure their protection.



Student protesters involved in a rally on August 27, 2016, involving more than 1,000 participants to call on the Malaysian government to identify and arrest the person known as MO1, who had allegedly embezzled US\$680 million of state funds. Student leaders of the rally later faced disciplinary action for their role in the off-campus rally. ©Malaysiakini, August 27, 2016



Student leader Anis Syafiqah speaking at the Fortify Rights press conference and report launch of "No Politics on Campus." ©Fortify Rights, June 2018

Our Impact

AN END TO RESTRICTIONS ON THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, after months of work led by civil society, the government proposed three bills in December to amend the laws that restrict the rights of university students to engage in political activities.

PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM REPRISALS IN THAILAND

Thai authorities and a Thai gold-mining company targeted and violated the rights of local environmental defenders in a mining-affected community in Wang Sa Phung District, Loei Province. Our partners endured judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, death threats, and violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and a healthy environment. Rivers and streams surrounding the gold mine were contaminated and a local-led movement—the Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group (KRBKG)—was advocating for positive change.



Residents of Na Nong Bong village at a peaceful protest against Tungkum Limited gold-mining company. ©KRBKG, November 2016



Seven women human rights defenders outside the Loei Province court house. The women face criminal defamation charges for engaging in peaceful environmental activism. Fortify Rights has monitored the cases against these women, calling for the charges to be dropped. ©Fortify Rights, 2017

We Investigated:

In October, we published a 90-page report “We Fight to Protect Our Home,” exposing reprisals spanning more than three years committed against environmental defenders in Loei Province, including violations of the right to liberty, the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and the right to a healthy environment. Throughout the year, we brought attention to the cases against the seven peaceful protesters and the journalist through news releases.

We Engaged:

For the launch of the report, community-based activists joined Fortify Rights on an all-women panel of Thai environmental defenders at a press conference in Bangkok.

We Supported:

We supported KRBKG to press for change by securing US\$4,059 in emergency funding from the World Organization Against Torture. This fund supported their legal fees and bail money. In March 2018, we secured US\$950 in emergency funding to support an environmental defender’s travel to Loei in order to comply with the terms of his bail while his case remained pending.

Our Impact

PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM REPRISALS

In December, the Loei Provincial Court granted almost US\$500,000 in compensation to 149 residents in Loei Province for damage to their health and livelihoods and ordered the a mining company to restore the environment to a livable condition. Thai authorities also dismissed all charges against seven environmental defenders from Loei Province and dropped a case against Jamon Sonpednarin, a freelance journalist involved in producing films on environmental justice in Thailand.

Report cover of Fortify Rights’ publication “We Fight to Protect Our Home:” Reprisals Against Environmental Defenders in Loei Province, Thailand.” ©Fortify Rights, 2018



Women leaders from the community-based Khon Ban Rak Kerd Group speaking at the press conference and report launch of “We Fight to Protect Our Home” in Bangkok, Thailand. ©Fortify Rights, October 2018

FREEDOM FOR ARBITRARILY DETAINED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MYANMAR

Myanmar authorities imprisoned Rakhine human rights defender Khaing Myo Htun for his involvement in a statement alleging that the Myanmar military used forced labor and tortured civilians in Rakhine State in 2016. The authorities also detained Kachin pastors Dumdaw Nawng Lat and Langjaw Gam Seng after they assisted journalists in documenting Myanmar military airstrikes on a church in northern Shan State at the end of 2016.

We Investigated:

With support from local partners, Fortify Rights monitored the trials of Khaing Myo Htun, Dumdaw Nawng Lat, and Langjaw Gam Seng, bringing attention to their respective cases through news releases and FortiFilms.

We Engaged:

We privately raised these cases with senior U.N. officials and members of the diplomatic community, ensuring they were not forgotten in strategic public statements.

We Supported:

We secured more than US\$10,000 in emergency grants to support these human rights defenders and their families while they were detained and after their release.



*Kachin religious leaders
Dumdaw Nawng Lat
and Langjaw Gam Seng
following their release
from detention in
Myanmar.
©Private, 2018.*

Our Impact

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FREED

The Myanmar authorities released ethnic Rakhine human rights defender Khaing Myo Htun in February and two ethnic-Kachin religious leaders Dumdaw Nawng Lat and Langjaw Gam Seng along with more than 30 other political prisoners in April. Fortify Rights consistently monitored these cases for more than 20 months and 15 months, respectively.



Screen-shot from Fortify Rights' film highlighting the arbitrary arrest and detention of Rakhine human rights defender Khaing Myo Htun. ©Fortify Rights, July 2017



Rakhine human rights defender Khaing Myo Htun.
©EarthRights International

OUR PEOPLE

FORTIFY RIGHTS TEAM

Matthew Smith

Co-founder and Chief
Executive Officer

Eric Paulsen

Legal Director

Henry Koh

Malaysia Human Rights Specialist

David Baulk

Myanmar Human Rights Specialist

Nickey Diamond

Myanmar Human Rights Specialist

Puttanee Kangkun

Thailand Human Rights Specialist

Sutharee Wannasiri

Thailand Human Rights Specialist

Amy Smith

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John Quinley III

Associate Human Rights Specialist

Iuri Kato

Visual Design Specialist

Taimoor Sobhan

Multimedia Specialist

Pornpun Yipkanchana

Operations Associate

Jillian Tuck

Partnerships Manager



The Fortify Rights Team, 2018 ©Fortify Rights, 2018

GOVERNANCE BOARD

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Sidney J. Jansma III

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Pilkyu Hwang

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

Kerry Kennedy

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

Tomas Ojea Quintana

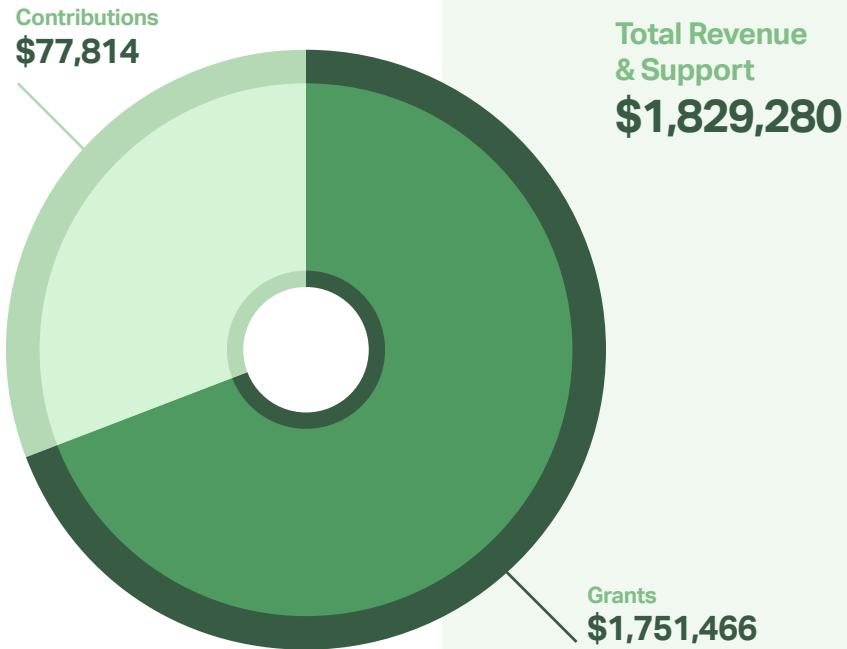
Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar

Phil Robertson

Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch

| 2018 FINANCIALS

REVENUE AND SUPPORT



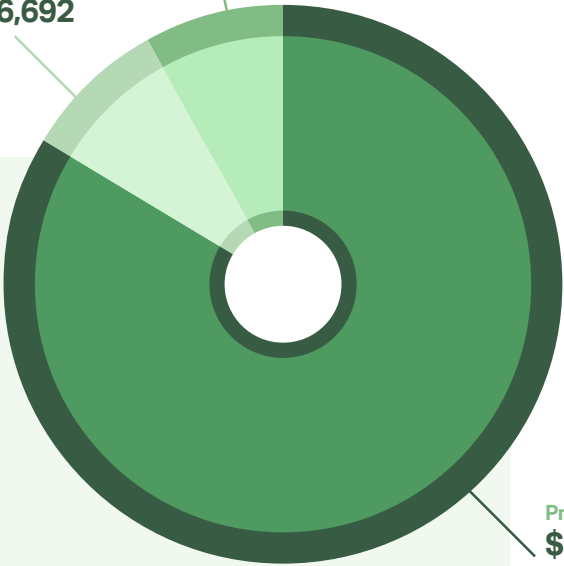
EXPENSES

Supporting services

Management and general
\$78,682

Resource development
\$76,692

Total Expenses
\$957,096



Program services
\$801,722

OUR PARTNERS

Our ability to ensure human rights depends on our global community of partners. Thank you for your support!



Kingdom of the Netherlands



SEMNANI FAMILY FOUNDATION

newventurefund

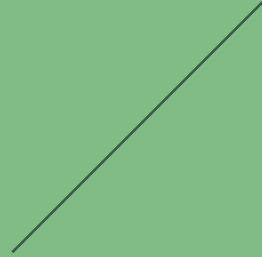


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