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Human Rights Through the Rule of Law



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February 16, 2015

Making Strides in Burma

Dear Friends,

I am happy to report on a new milestone in GJC's mission: successfully bringing international law tools to women democracy advocates on the ground - particularly to women's groups fighting for human rights, accountability and justice in Burma.

In collaboration with Fordham Law School's Leitner Center for International Law and Justice, GJC developed trainings and materials to empower activists in Burma to harness and use international law to achieve gender equality and to enforce human rights. The trainings proved to be both effective and essential because we found that many human rights activists in Burma had limited understanding of the groundbreaking opportunities presented by Burma's upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the Human Rights Council, an essential United Nations (UN) process in which groups within Burma can openly challenge all international law violations by the Burmese government.

In January, a team of lawyers from GJC and the Leitner Center traveled to Burma with suitcases filled with resource books, workbooks, fact sheets, and USB drives loaded with original training materials. Our trainings focused on how activists, including long-time GJC partner the Women's League of Burma which represents 13 ethnic women's groups, can use international law to challenge violations of human rights in Burma, including war crimes such as the use of rape as a weapon of war by the military and illegal land confiscations by the military. Participants attended from all over the country, including from the areas where the conflict still rages.



The trainings outlined the historic opportunity presented by Burma's upcoming UPR, a review of the country's human rights record to take place this November in Geneva. It will mark the first time in over 50 years that groups inside Burma will be able to openly challenge government crimes at the UN level, as the UPR is the only UN process set up to evaluate States' compliance with certain areas of international law, including the Geneva Conventions. During the UPR, each Member State of the United Nations is reviewed by other UN Member States for success in implementing all of its international human rights obligations, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural obligations. This includes women's rights to health, political participation, education, and employment, as well as the right to be free from sexual and gender-based violence. As part of this review process, Burmese civil society groups can submit reports that document human rights violations by the Burmese government, rallying international support for accountability and reform.



We used the trainings to introduce activists to the UPR process, as we found that it is not widely understood inside Burma. In addition, we developed work plans with the activists to aid in the submission of their shadow reports for the Burma UPR, so that participants can put their training into practice and make their voices heard by the international community.

The trainings were a resounding success! Activists left feeling well-equipped to engage in the UPR process and fight to bring true democracy and justice to Burma. And GJC successfully piloted a set of model training materials that can be applied to many other conflict countries.

Burma is just the beginning. In the future, this model toolkit can be deployed in other conflict or post-conflict countries such as Iraq or Sudan.

To view GJC's model training materials used in Burma, visit GJC's website [here](#).

We rely on people like you to make change happen in the parts of the world most in need. Thank you for your continued support of GJC's work.

Sincerely,

Janet Benshoof, President
Global Justice Center

Learn more about GJC's [Burma Law Project](#).