

# HRAP 2024-25

Human Rights Advocates Program



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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HRAP is on YouTube!





# 1

## Introduction

### “HRAP has taught me to dream big,”

said **Adija Adamu** when asked about her experience in the 2024–25 program during one of the final networking meetings of the 2024–25 program. Reflections like Adija’s as well as many others over the years continue to validate what the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University has been doing through its Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) since 1989.

Founded in 1989, HRAP leverages the resources of Columbia University and those offered by NYC as a hub of NGOs and international organizations to provide human rights advocates like Adija Adamu with academic, skill-building, mentoring and networking opportunities. Through seminars, participation in University courses, and workshops led by staff from leading human rights organizations as well as meetings with policy makers and funders, advocates share their experiences, reflect critically on their work, and plan future advocacy campaigns.

375 advocates from 100 countries have participated in HRAP since 1989. The cumulative reach of HRAP alumni is extraordinary: alumni have worked with organizations whose memberships range from the thousands to the millions. They can be found at grassroots human rights organizations, serving in their national governments, with intergovernmental bodies and at the UN, and teaching at universities around the globe.



Even on a day off, the advocates contributed to the greater good by joining a clean up in Central Park.



# 2

The  
Advocates  
In Their  
Own  
Words





# ADIJA ADAMU

**Africa Grants Coordinator**

*Ayni Fund*

*International Indigenous  
Women's Forum*

**CAMEROON**

My journey as a human rights activist stems directly from my childhood. As an Indigenous Mbororo girl growing up in the city I experienced a lot of discrimination. At the time few Mbororo kids were going to school, so we were subjected to name calling at school and everywhere we were noticed.

It was during my teenage years when I recognized the systemic issues. I started noticing how Mbororo people were generally viewed as backward and not civilised—that is when I started looking closer at my community. It was evident that our indigenous lifestyle was considered backward and Mbororo people uneducated.

These observations made so much sense to me that I started questioning why my parents are not educated and why my mother stays home while other women in the city are working. I then noticed the glaring gap in opportunities and rights available to my community, especially women and girls. The trends of girls my age getting married instead of being in school, more women staying home. That is when I started building resistance towards the system that violates human rights—especially for women and girls.

As a result of my experiences growing up, I felt the urge to be a voice for change and the first step was to resist early marriage and pursue education. I wanted to be an example for those that were silenced by cultural norms and society.

I started speaking against discrimination based on ethnicity, male dominance in my community, and the right to education. I participated in youth movements at the university with the goal to be part of the leadership of the organisation as a sign of power to challenge men's dominance.

I also sought out platforms that advocate for rights to education and women empowerment, helping to build courageous, resilient women and girls who could support each other in our shared fight for justice. I realized that the work wasn't just about protesting, it was about education, policy changes against discrimination.

It hasn't always been easy. We face resistance from those uncomfortable with change. But every time I meet an Indigenous woman or girl who refuses to stay silent, who fights for her rights despite the odds, I am reminded of the incredible strength that resides in our communities.

For this reason, I continue to advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples focusing on women and girls and using my capacity to empower and mentor them to enjoy their individual and collective rights.

**“As a result of my experiences growing up, I felt the urge to be a voice for change and the first step was to resist early marriage and pursue education. I wanted to be an example for those that were silenced by cultural norms and society.”**



Adija and the advocates visited DC in February.



**FACULTY MENTOR**

**Elsa Stamatopoulou**

*Director, Indigenous Peoples' Program*  
ISHR

**CLASSES**

Climate Justice  
Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

**NETWORKING**

Amnesty International-USA  
Ford Foundation  
Indian Law Resource Center  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)  
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State

**SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Women Advocating for Social Change, Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race and ISHR, Columbia University



Adija spoke with students at Columbia about her work.





A portrait of Bojana Jokic, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a dark blue knit beanie and a dark blue coat. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred image of a classical building with large windows and columns.

## BOJANA JOKIC

President, Board of Directors

*LGBT Forum*

**MONTENEGRO**

My journey as a human rights advocate began with an inherent sense of justice rather than formal training. Before I knew the terminology of activism, I questioned inequity and sought spaces where people could exist authentically.

Initially, my career path led me toward tourism. I envisioned creating an agency specializing in inclusive experiences for LGBTQ+ travelers in Montenegro—providing not just vacations, but safe, affirming journeys. This interest connected me with NGO “LGBT Forum Progress,” where I planned to conduct fieldwork for developing my inclusive tourism model.

What began as market research transformed into something far more profound. Working alongside local and international partners, I witnessed firsthand the depth of discrimination that LGBTQ+ individuals face daily. These weren't abstract concepts but lived realities—stories of violence, exclusion, and systemic oppression. Similarly, as a single mother navigating life after a difficult divorce, I experienced the challenges faced by those society often categorizes as “vulnerable.” These intersecting perspectives fundamentally changed my worldview and purpose.

My advocacy evolved gradually through direct engagement rather than through a single defining moment. Even during periods when I stepped into formal institutional roles, serving on Montenegro's Public Broadcaster Council and later on the National Anti-Corruption Council, I maintained connections to grassroots movements. While I believe in creating change from within systems, the most meaningful impact consistently came from community-based activism.

This conviction ultimately led me to law school, where I am now in my final year. This educational path represented a natural progression in my advocacy work—equipping me with the legal knowledge and credentials to more effectively challenge structural inequalities. The legal framework provides tools to transform individual advocacy into systemic change, allowing me to address the root causes of human rights violations rather than merely their symptoms.

Despite the undeniable challenges of activism—the burnout, setbacks, and emotional toll—the work remains essential. Once you've confronted injustice directly and committed to opposing it, that awareness becomes irreversible. It transforms from something you do into something you are.

My advocacy isn't merely professional; it's personal. It emerges from lived experience and observation, strengthened by formal education but rooted in human connection. Whether organizing at community levels or applying legal strategies to policy reform, the core motivation remains consistent: ensuring that human dignity is recognized as non-negotiable for all people, regardless of their identity or circumstances.

I didn't choose to become a human rights advocate—I recognized that I already was one, and every subsequent choice has been about becoming more effective in that role.

**“While I believe in creating change from within systems, the most meaningful impact consistently came from community-based activism.”**



**FACULTY MENTOR**

**Yasmine Ergas**  
*Director, Specialization on Gender and Public Policy*  
*Senior Lecturer in International and Public Affairs*  
School of International and Public Affairs

**CLASSES**

International Human Rights Law  
Internet Governance

**NETWORKING**

Amnesty International-USA  
Arcus Foundation  
ESCR-net  
Ford Foundation  
Human Rights Campaign  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State

**SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

A Conversation with Human Rights Advocates on the State of LGBTQI Rights Around the World, ISHR, Columbia Pre-Law Society and Columbia POLIS  
Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center for Global Justice and Human Rights



The graphic features a blue background with a white wavy line at the top. On the left, a hand is shown drawing a line. The central text reads "ILHR FELLOWSHIP WORKSHOP" in white, with "Resilience & Responsiveness in Human Rights Work" below it. To the right, there are eight circular portraits of participants, each with their name underneath: Adija Adamu, Bojana Jokic, Connex Khomba, Erick Luwongo, Gustavo Miranda Coutinho, Kathia Carrillo, Kutlwano Magashula, and Thehoya Dy. At the bottom left, a box labeled "in conversation with" contains portraits of Youssef Farhat and Diana Rangel. The bottom right corner features the NYU Law logo and the text "center for HUMAN RIGHTS & GLOBAL JUSTICE".







## CONNEX KHOMBA

Advocacy and Grants Officer

*Ivy Foundation*

**MALAWI**

I am a human rights advocate because I have personally experienced the systemic injustices that LGBTIQ+ people face in Malawi. As a transgender man living in Malawi, I have endured housing denial, property grabbing, physical assault and emotional abuse by transphobic individuals as well as denial of healthcare. All this was simply because of my gender identity. These experiences shaped my reality and fueled my determination to fight for a society where every person, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, can live with dignity, safety and equality.

Malawi's laws continue to criminalize same-sex relationships, reinforcing a culture of discrimination, violence and fear for all LGBTIQ+ individuals. This legal framework not only denies people their fundamental rights but also does not hold accountable those who perpetrate violence and discrimination against our community. The lack of legal protection leaves many LGBTIQ+ individuals vulnerable to injustices, with no access to justice or safe spaces to exist freely.

Recognizing these harsh realities, I became an advocate to bridge the gap between LGBTIQ+ individuals and the broader society, particularly policymakers and other key stakeholders. My advocacy focuses on building understanding, alliances and pushing for policy reforms that protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. I personally believe that change happens when we engage with both allies as well as neutral individuals and institutions, changing them into allies who can use their influence to champion our rights.

Through my advocacy work, I fight to call out injustices against LGBTIQ+ individuals, ensuring that every act of discrimination is met with resistance and that every violation of human rights is brought to light. My ultimate goal is to contribute to the decriminalization of same-sex relationships in Malawi. By influencing policies and engaging in meaningful dialogue, I hope to create a future where the law protects, and not persecutes people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Advocacy is not just a profession for me. It is a personal mission. I envision a Malawi where no one lives in fear because of who they are. A country where access to healthcare, housing and public services is not determined by one's gender identity or sexual orientation. A society that upholds the fundamental principle that human rights are universal, indivisible and non-negotiable.

This journey is not easy, but it is necessary. I advocate because I refuse to accept a world where injustice is the norm. I advocate because I believe in the power of change. I advocate because no one should have to suffer in silence. And I will continue to advocate until every LGBTIQ+ person in Malawi can live freely, without fear of persecution, discrimination or violence.

**“I advocate because I refuse to accept a world where injustice is the norm. I advocate because I believe in the power of change. I advocate because no one should have to suffer in silence. And I will continue to advocate until every LGBTIQ+ person in Malawi can live freely, without fear of persecution, discrimination or violence.”**



FACULTY MENTORS

**Joanne Csete**  
Adjunct Associate Professor of Population and Family Health  
Mailman School of Public Health

**Widney Brown**  
Professor, Human Rights  
Barnard College

CLASSES

Advocacy for Socio-Economic Rights  
Transnational LGBTI Rights

NETWORKING

Amnesty International-USA  
Arcus Foundation  
Ford Foundation  
Human Rights Campaign  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
OutRight International  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State  
Vital Voices

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

A Conversation with Human Rights Advocates on the State of LGBTQI Rights Around the World, ISHR, Columbia Pre-Law Society and Columbia POLIS

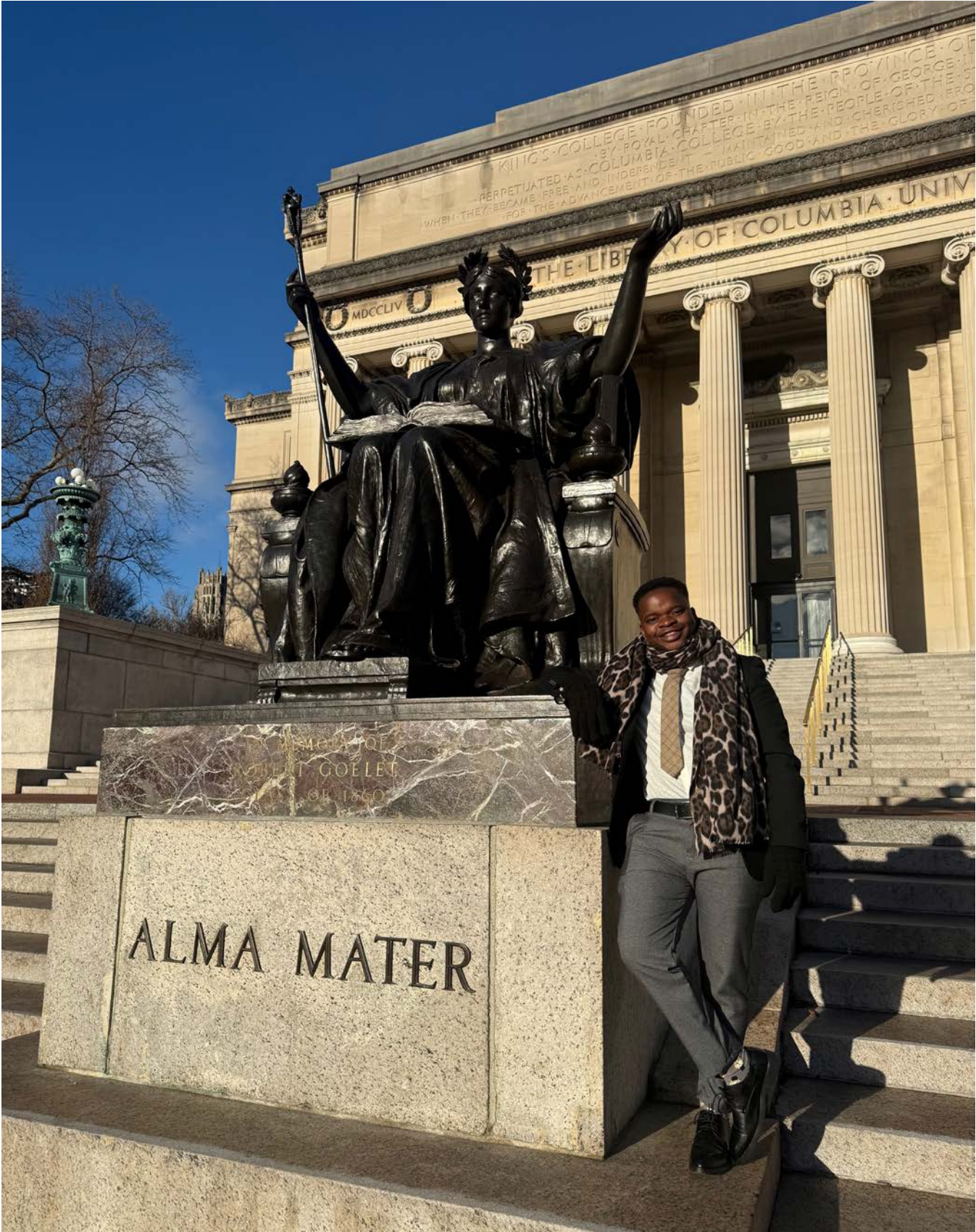
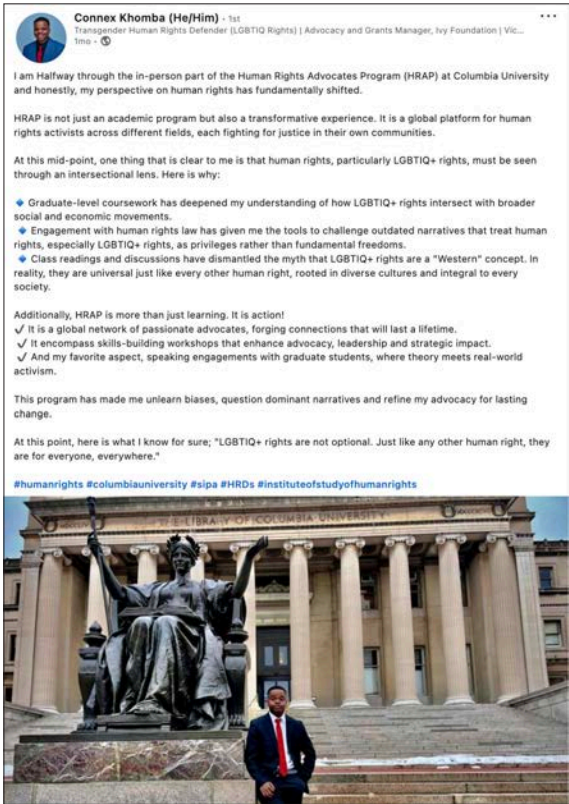
Learning Lessons from Malawi and Motivational Talk with Students, Realizing Global LGBTI Health & Human Rights: Activism, Advocacy and Humanitarian Action class, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

Listening & Learning with LGBT Advocates engaging in LGBTQI+ Advocacy Work in Africa, Teachers College, Columbia University

Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center for Global Justice and Human Rights



Connex spoke on a panel on LGBTQI+ rights moderated by Luiza Veado of UNDP.







## ERICK LUWONGO

Human Rights and  
Legal Empowerment Officer

*HakiMadini*

**TANZANIA**

Growing up in Tanzania, I witnessed firsthand the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly artisanal and small-scale miners, in asserting their rights. Powerful interests often prevailed, leaving communities displaced, workers exploited, and basic social services out of reach. These injustices ignited my passion for human rights advocacy and instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility to fight for justice, equality, and dignity for all.

My journey as a human rights advocate has been shaped by my work with grassroots communities, civil society organizations, and international networks committed to social justice. As the head of Human Rights and Legal Empowerment Program at HakiMadini, I have been at the forefront of advocating for marginalized groups in Tanzania's mining sector. Extractive industries have long been plagued by human rights violations, including land dispossession, environmental degradation, and labor exploitation. Through legal empowerment, advocacy, and policy engagement, I have dedicated my career to ensuring that affected communities have a voice in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

One of the defining moments in my advocacy work was witnessing the power of legal education in transforming lives. By training paralegals and human rights monitors, I have helped equip communities with the knowledge and skills to assert their rights, challenge injustices, and seek legal remedies. Empowering individuals to stand up for themselves is a crucial step toward long-term systemic change. I firmly believe that when people understand their rights, they are better positioned to demand accountability from both the government and corporate entities.

Beyond my work in the mining sector, I have been actively engaged in broader human rights and governance issues, including combating illicit financial flows, promoting transparency, and defending civic space. My engagement with the African human rights system, including regional advocacy efforts, has strengthened my commitment to ensuring that economic and social rights are not merely aspirational but actively realized in policy and practice. Whether through lobbying policymakers, conducting fact-finding missions, or engaging in litigation, I have seen the impact of persistent advocacy in influencing governance structures and policy frameworks.

Human rights advocacy is not without challenges. Standing up for the rights of the vulnerable often comes with risks, including threats, intimidation, and systemic resistance. However, I have remained steadfast in my belief that justice is worth fighting for, even in the face of

adversity. My participation in initiatives such as the Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) has further equipped me with the tools and networks to continue my work on a global scale, fostering collaborations that amplify the voices of those who are often unheard.

Ultimately, I am a human rights advocate because I believe in a world where dignity, equality, and justice are not privileges but rights enjoyed by all. My work is a testament to this commitment, and I will continue to push for a society where human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. This work is more than a profession—it is a lifelong commitment to creating a more just and equitable society.

*Erick Luwongo attended HRAP in memory of 2016 Advocate Raoul Kitungano. Raoul was the Coordinator of Justice Pour Tous (Justice For All), a non-profit organization that advocates for the political, economic, cultural, and environmental rights of local communities impacted by mining corporations and other extractive enterprises in the DRC. He died in 2022. His memory continues to be cherished in HRAP and beyond.*

**“Standing up for the rights of the vulnerable often comes with risks, including threats, intimidation, and systemic resistance. However, I have remained steadfast in my belief that justice is worth fighting for, even in the face of adversity.”**



**FACULTY MENTOR**

**Jenik Radon**  
Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs  
School of International and Public Affairs

**CLASSES**

Energy, Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights  
Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

**NETWORKING**

Amnesty International-USA  
ESCR-net  
Ford Foundation  
Free the Slaves  
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State  
Vital Voices

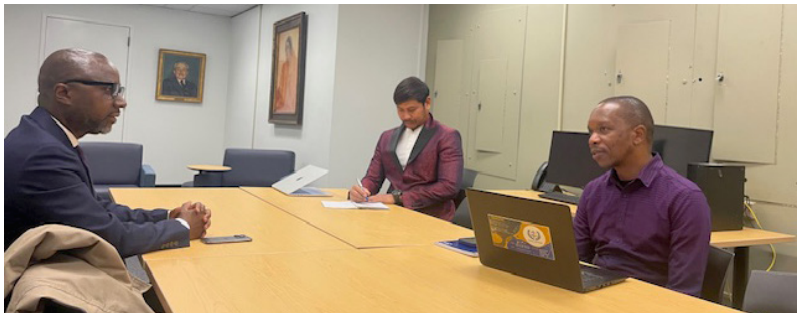
**SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

A Conversation with Human Rights Advocates on Challenges in Cambodia and Tanzania, moderated by Bukeni Waruzi of Free the Slaves, ISHR  
Practicing Human Rights Law: A Global South Perspective, Athena Pre-Law Society, IGNITE, and Columbia Undergraduate Law Review  
Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center for Global Justice and Human Rights

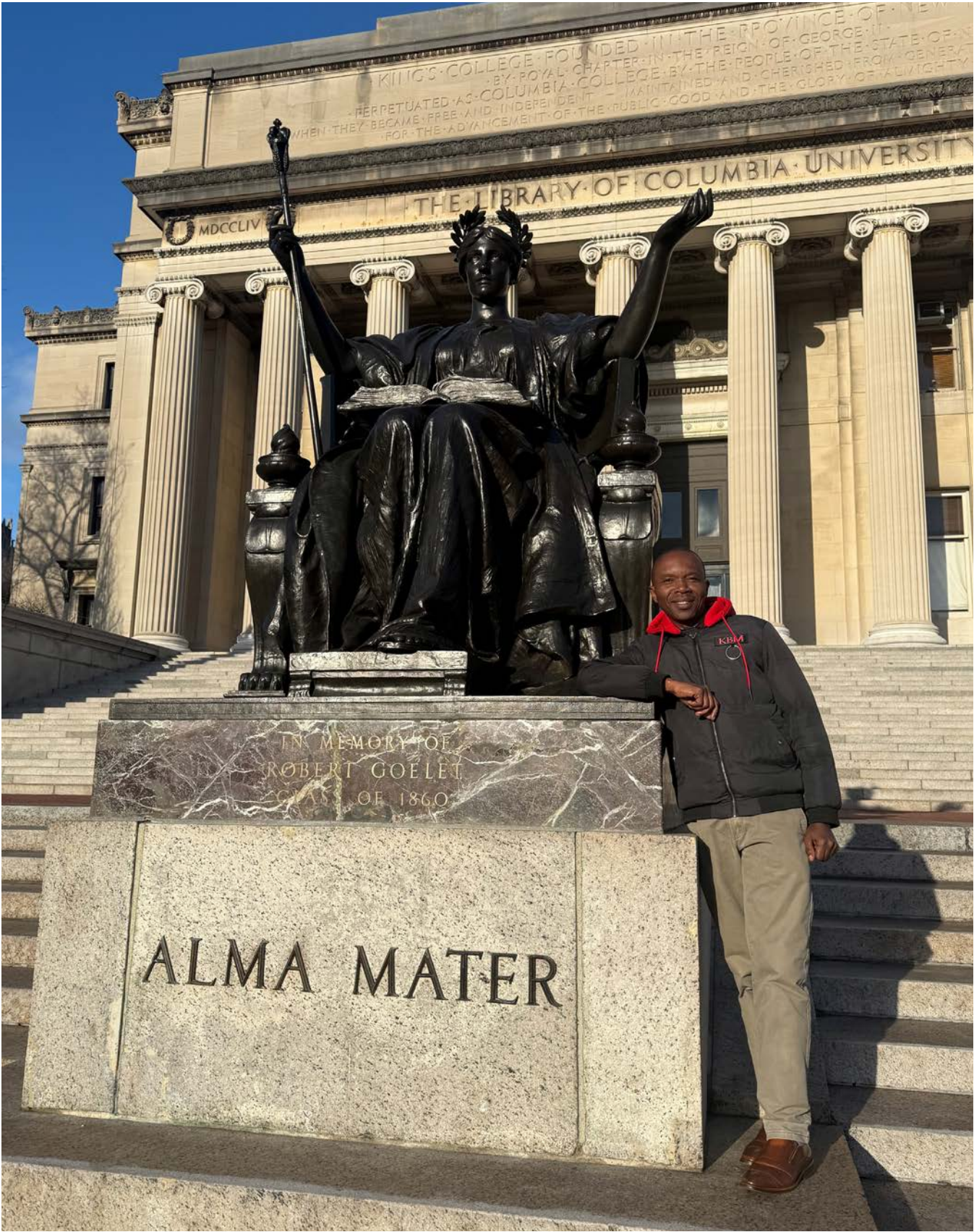
*Erick Luwongo attended HRAP in memory of 2016 Advocate Raoul Kitungano. Raoul was the Coordinator of Justice Pour Tous (Justice For All), a non-profit organization that advocates for the political, economic, cultural, and environmental rights of local communities impacted by mining corporations and other extractive enterprises in the DRC. He died in 2022. His memory continues to be cherished in HRAP and beyond.*



Erick and the advocates enjoyed cultural outings during the DC networking trip.



Erick and Hoya had a speaking engagement moderated by Bukeni Waruzi of Free the Slaves.







**GUSTAVO MIRANDA  
COUTINHO**

**Operations Coordinator**  
**ILGA LAC**  
**BRAZIL**

To be a human rights defender is an inescapable condition of mine. It guides not only my professional and political choices, but also my way of being in the world. It's a daily exercise to recognize oneself in others, advocating for equality and for the radical understanding that all people deserve to live well with freedom, fulfillment and happiness.

In a context where human rights of LGBTI+ persons are often neglected and violated, It is also giving space for anger to act as a means of transforming situations of injustices and inequalities. It's being often outraged and, at the same time, finding the balance to act on behalf of those who are more vulnerable. As we say in Brazil, it's being a "spearhead": it is forging new paths, being firm enough to accurately meet the target but wise enough to sense the direction of the wind.

This is not an easy mission, considering the increasingly difficult contexts of growing violence against our peers. Over the course of 10 years, I have lost friends to hate crimes and to physical and mental illnesses. In order to carry on, I find refuge in a deep sense of hope that it is possible to collectively build other possibilities of existence that are more dignified and respectful of each other and the world.

I believe that the defense of human rights should be inherently political, in the sense that it requires choosing a side. Sometimes, the hard day-to-day work with regulations, legislation and decision-making spaces imposes a distanced relationship with people's real problems, and an approach from a more formalist perspective that is, in a way, empty of meaning and colorblind. I defend that the mission of those who believe in true transformation is to color all these spaces, to bring out stories and make room for more voices to be present.

The LGBTI+ movement has endured backlashes throughout its history in many parts of the world: the restriction of civic space, hate crimes, not having access to basic rights such as education, healthcare or housing is unfortunately a common reality for our people. But being able to still fight for the freedom of being who we are even in adversity has saved us and will continue to do so.

Coming from a humble background and a small town, I never believed that making a living off of working

with LGBTI+ rights and being in spaces like the Human Rights Advocates Program at Columbia University were possible for me. And to do so at a time when the global agenda is backsliding was both challenging and special. Challenging, because it puts us in a responsibility to play a leading role in difficult times and to keep our communities strong and moving forward. And special, because it provides a privileged opportunity for learning and networking with stakeholders and colleagues, to reenergize, develop strategies and future projects that will surely bear good fruit.

Let us be the rainbow after the storm.

**“To be a human  
rights defender  
is an inescapable  
condition of mine.”**



Gustavo spoke on a panel moderated by Luiza Veado of UNDP.



**FACULTY MENTOR**

**Daniela Romero Amaya**

Lecturer, International and  
Comparative Education  
Teachers College

## CLASSES

## Equality Identity and Rights

Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

## Transnational LGBTI Rights

## NETWORKING

Amnesty International-USA

Arcus Foundation

ESCR-net

Ford Foundation

Human Rights Campaign

MADRE

National Endowment for Democracy

NYU Center for Global Justice  
and Human Rights

Open Society Foundations

RFK Human Rights

United Nations Development Program

US Department of State

## Vital Voices

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

A Conversation with Human Rights  
Advocates on the State of LGBTQI Rights  
Around the World, ISHR, Columbia Pre-  
Law Society and Columbia POLIS

Participatory Approaches for Human Rights Advocacy, Integrative Project (IP) Research & Writing Practicum, Teachers College

Practicing Human Rights Law: A Global South Perspective, Athena Pre-Law Society, IGNITE, and Columbia Undergraduate Law Review

Resilience and Responsiveness in  
Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center  
for Global Justice and Human Rights

## A Conversation with Human Rights Advocates on the Current State of LGBTQI+ Rights around the World

**Tuesday, February 11 | 1 pm to 2 pm**  
**International Affairs Building, Room 802**

Join us for a conversation moderated by Luiza Veado, a Brazilian human rights attorney currently serving as a Policy Specialist on LGBTI+ Inclusion and Drug Policy at UNDP, with the following participants in the Human Rights Advocates Program:



**GUSTAVO  
MIRANDA COUTINHO**  
Lawyer and Operations Coordinator,  
ILGA-LAC, Brazil



**KUTLWANO  
MAGASHULA**  
Lawyer Executive Officer for  
Programs, The Other Foundation,  
South Africa



**CONNEX  
KHOMBA**  
Advocacy and Grants Officer,  
The Ivy Foundation, Malawi



**BOJANA  
JOKIC**  
President of the board of directors,  
LGBT Forum Progress, Montenegro



**LUÍZA  
DRUMMOND VEADO**  
Policy Specialist on LGBTI+ Inclusion  
and Drug Policy for UNDP

Please register here to attend:  
<https://bit.ly/3CeYerb>

Please register no later than  
9 am on Monday, February  
10th. CUID or a govt-issued  
ID will be required to enter  
SIPA.



**HRAP**  
Human Rights Advocates Program  
Coordinating Body  
of the Human Rights Institute



**ILGA**  
INTERNATIONAL  
LIGUE  
GAYE  
LESBIENNE

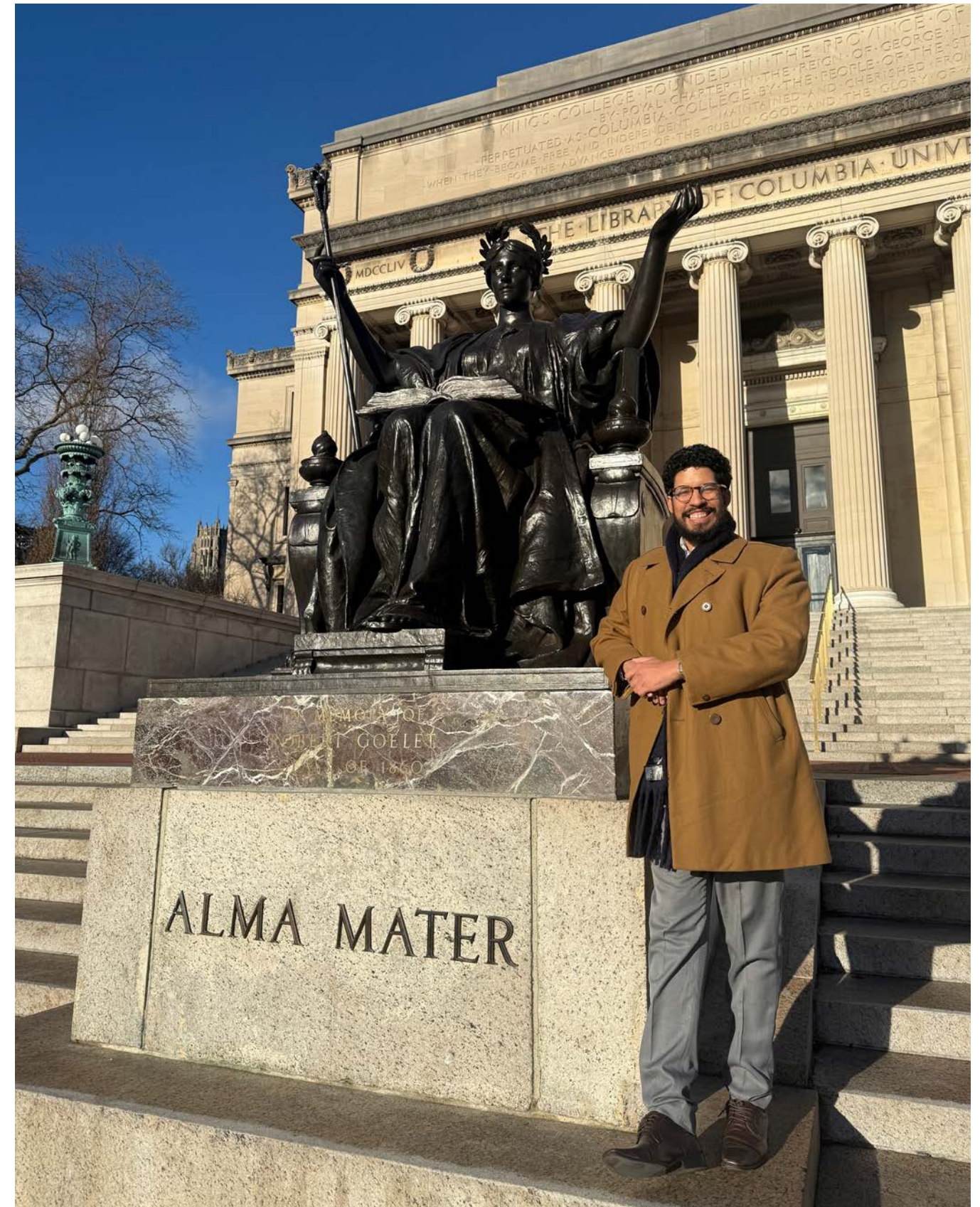


**COLUMBIA  
LAW  
SCHOOL**





**ISHR**  
Institute for  
the Study of  
Human Rights





# KATHIA CARRILLO

President

Asociación Las Comunes

PERU

Growing up in Peru, I witnessed injustice and silent suffering normalized as “just the way things are.” But there is nothing natural about colonial patterns of oppression and exploitation—only a persistent expectation to ignore them and prioritize individual success, even at others’ expense. For me, being an advocate means breaking that silence: pointing to injustice and refusing to look away, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

For over a decade, I worked as a communications specialist alongside Indigenous organizations and autonomous governments in the Peruvian Amazon. My role was to support their struggles against extractive industries and a failing state, using media advocacy to challenge harmful narratives about Indigenous peoples in national discourse. This required constant learning—and unlearning—to navigate cultural differences and histories with humility and respect.

Early in my activism, I saw firsthand the transformative power of art and popular communication. Through music, percussion, and film, I found new ways to convey messages and reclaim my Afro-Indigenous heritage. As a communications officer, I blended creativity with advocacy, producing rap videos with Indigenous young leaders and even having heavy metal bands collaborate with campaigns alongside the Indigenous representatives. A decolonial approach, to me, means centering the voices of Indigenous communities—listening to their realities and co-designing strategies that truly serve their struggles.

But my journey also implied learning about the contradictions within human rights, conservation and social movements. I have myself experienced first hand the consequences of systemic violence in these fields, which reinforced my belief that social movements must be intersectional—addressing gender, race, environment, and other injustices—or they risk replicating the very oppression they fight. These lessons led me to write “*How to Approach Amazonian Contexts from Activism?*,” a handbook for dismantling colonial power dynamics in climate movements, commissioned by Movimiento Ciudadano Frente al Cambio Climático.

In 2024, I co-founded Las Comunes (Common Femmes) with fellow activists to support women-led liberation movements. Today, we work with community kitchens in Lima and create safe spaces for women climate leaders confronting gender-based political violence.

I believe being an advocate isn’t just a role—it’s a long-term commitment towards social change.

“Through music, percussion, and film, I found new ways to convey messages and reclaim my Afro-Indigenous heritage.”



Kathia and the advocates visited the UN during CSW.



**FACULTY MENTOR**

**Daniela Romero Amaya**

Lecturer, International and Comparative Education

Teachers College

**CLASSES**

Climate Justice

Storytelling for Social Change:  
Skills and Narrative

**NETWORKING**

ESCR-net

Ford Foundation

MADRE

Open Society Foundations

United Nations Development Program

**SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

Shifting the Narrative: Changing Minds in  
a Time of Crisis, NYU Democracy Project  
and Columbia Forum on Democracy

Women Advocating for Social Change,  
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and  
Race and ISHR, Columbia University

**WOMEN ADVOCATING FOR  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

The Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race invite you to a panel discussion with two Human Rights Advocates, part of ISHR's Human Rights Advocates Program



**Adija Adamu**  
Grants Coordinator Africa,  
International Indigenous Women's Forum  
Indigenous Women's Rights to Finance  
Cameroon



**Kathia Carrillo**  
Chairperson,  
Las Comunes  
Decolonizing Advocacy with Arts and Communications  
Peru

Moderator: **Elsa Stamatopoulou**, Director, Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program, ISHR

**MONDAY, MARCH 31ST, 2025, 1:15-2:30 PM,  
420 HAMILTON HALL**

Organized by the Institute for the Study of Human Rights  
Co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race

Register here: <https://bit.ly/41MT0vc> or scan code below







Kathia and Adija spoke at an event moderated by their mentor Elsa Stamatopoulou.

THE ADVOCATES IN THEIR OWN WORDS



28

29



# KUTLWANO MAGASHULA

Executive Officer for Programs

*The Other Foundation*

**SOUTH AFRICA**

I was born at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana. By 1999, when I was just 11 years old, the HIV prevalence rate was as high as 30 percent, leaving many children orphaned. Some of my friends growing up, as well as my cousins, lost their parents to AIDS. Others were born HIV positive, facing not only illness but also stigma, neglect and extreme poverty.

When I was 16, our priest started a Saturday Kids Club for orphans and vulnerable children in our village. The Kids Club provided psycho-social support and meals for children aged 3 to 17 years old. I volunteered as a youth leader. Amongst other activities, we ran capacity building camps that encouraged teamwork and talent exploration, offered bereavement counselling, and fostered the development of stress management skills. The camps created a safe space for the children to share their experiences. I heard many heartbreaking stories—children who had experienced neglect, abuse and hunger and lacked adequate access to shelter, healthcare and education.

At 17, I became a Kids Club Facilitator and attended an advocacy training on children's rights with UNICEF. That is when I realized that what these children were going through was not just unfortunate—it was a violation of their human rights. That realization ignited something in me: a deep sense of responsibility to do something about it and to advocate for the protection of all children in similar situations. That was the beginning of my journey as a human rights advocate.

At the same time that I was developing my understanding of human rights, I was also experiencing my own struggles with identity and acceptance. Although I was raised and socialized as a girl, I never felt that quite fit, even though I did not yet have the language to articulate that experience. I expressed and presented myself in a masculine way and secretly questioned whether I was truly a girl. Growing up in a conservative, patriarchal society, my gender non-conformity led to conflict—first at home with my parents, then in public spaces. I felt stigmatized, policed and unwelcome simply for being my authentic self.

As I grew older, I realized that the discrimination and violence I experienced were not just about my gender expression—they were also my being read as a woman. I became attuned to the reality that women are subjected

to social restrictions, violence and systemic discrimination that deny them equal opportunities and full participation in society. Once again, I wanted to change this reality.

For the past 12 years, I have dedicated my life to defending the rights of women and LGBTI people. My goal is to help create just and inclusive laws and promote freedom, equality, and recognition for all people. I advocate for freedom from violence, discrimination and exclusion, and I work to transform society into one where everyone—regardless of gender, identity, or background—can live life to the full, make their own choices, define their destinies without fear and discrimination, and contribute as active members of society. This is why I am a human rights advocate.

**“My goal is to help create just and inclusive laws and promote freedom, equality, and recognition for all people.”**



Kutlwano won a prize from Thomas R. Lansner at the Media Advocacy workshop.



### FACULTY MENTOR

**Suzanne B. Goldberg**

*Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical  
Professor of Law  
Columbia Law*

## CLASSES

Campaigning for Change through Media  
Transnational LGBTI Rights

## NETWORKING

Amnesty International-USA  
Arcus Foundation  
Ford Foundation  
Human Rights Campaign  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and  
Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State  
Vital Voices

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

A Conversation with Human Rights  
Advocates on the State of LGBTQI Rights  
Around the World, ISHR, Columbia  
Pre-Law Society and Columbia POLIS

Listening & Learning with LGBT Advocates  
engaging in LGBTQI+ Advocacy Work  
in Africa, Teachers College, Columbia  
University

Practicing Human Rights Law:  
A Global South Perspective, Athena  
Pre-Law Society, IGNITE, and Columbia  
Undergraduate Law Review

Resilience and Responsiveness in  
Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center  
for Global Justice and Human Rights



Kutlwano answers a question posed by the leadership team of the Teachers College Coaching Club.





**WANJA NGURE****Grant Manager***UHAI EASHRI***KENYA**

My journey as a human rights advocate is deeply rooted in personal conviction and lived experience. I grew up in rural Kenya, in a place where poverty was not just a condition—it was a way of life. I witnessed families struggle for necessities like food, healthcare, and education. Many children never made it to school. Some lacked shelter, lived in makeshift homes, and depended on the generosity of neighbors for a meal. In the village, we called these areas “Gichagi”—a term that carried layers of marginalization. Many were landless, voiceless, and invisible to the state.

What struck me most was the sense of abandonment. Despite our Constitution promising third-generation rights—like the right to health, education, and shelter—these remained only words on paper. And then there was HIV. It swept through our communities with a devastating impact, especially on the ultra-poor. I remember questioning why the world was cruel to some while others remained untouched. That was the beginning of my thirst for social justice.

After university, I worked in the informal settlements of Nairobi, where these injustices were magnified. I saw children dying of hunger. I saw young girls trading sex for survival. I met young people in Malawi who were jailed simply for being who they were—because their identities didn’t conform to societal expectations. These realities were too painful to ignore. They pushed me toward advocacy—not as a career but as a calling.

Today, I work with UHAI EASHRI, Africa’s first indigenous activist fund that supports the rights of sex workers and sexual and gender minorities. This work has deepened my belief in justice, dignity, and communities’ power to drive change.

The context in which we operate is often hostile. Across Eastern Africa, LGBTQ+ individuals and sex workers face criminalization, violence, and systemic exclusion. In some places, existing openly is itself a risk. Yet, amid adversity, I have seen remarkable courage. I have worked with trans-led groups building trauma-informed mental health services with minimal resources. I have seen sex workers organizing against police brutality. I have listened to queer

youth reimagining safety, belonging, and joy. These aren’t just stories—they are the pulse of powerful grassroots movements.

My commitment is fueled by injustice and the possibilities I’ve witnessed when communities are resourced, trusted, and affirmed. Advocacy is not about speaking for others—it’s about standing beside them, holding space, and helping shift power to where it belongs.

My values guide me: autonomy, equity, solidarity. I believe communities know what they need best. I think those most marginalized must be at the center—not the periphery—of decision-making. And I feel justice must be intersectional—because none of us are free until we’re all free.

UHAI’s participatory grantmaking is an extension of these values. We don’t just fund movements—we walk with them. Because a better world is not only possible—it’s already being built by those the world has tried to silence. My role is to help ensure they are never silenced again.

**“My commitment is fueled by injustice and the possibilities I’ve witnessed when communities are resourced, trusted, and affirmed.”**



FACULTY MENTORS

**Peter Twyman**  
Deputy Director  
Columbia World Projects

**Harry Verhoeven**  
Adjunct Senior Research Scholar  
Columbia Business School

CLASSES


Gender, Politics and Development  
Internet Governance

NETWORKING

Amnesty International-USA  
Arcus Foundation  
Ford Foundation  
Human Rights Campaign  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Listening & Learning with LGBT Advocates engaging in LGBTQI+ Advocacy Work in Africa, Teachers College, Columbia University  
Resilience and Responsiveness in Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center for Global Justice and Human Rights



Center for African Education  
Teachers College, Columbia University

IS  
HR

Institute for  
the Study of  
Human Rights

HRAP

Human Rights Advocates Program  
Columbia University  
Institute for the Study of Human Rights

LISTENING & LEARNING

with Human Rights Advocates engaging in LGBTQIA+ advocacy work in Africa



CONNEX KHOMBA  
Advocacy and Grants Officer  
Ivy Foundation  
MALAWI



KUTLWANO MAGASHULA  
Executive Officer for Programs  
The Other Foundation  
SOUTH AFRICA



WANJA NGURE  
Grant Manager UHAI  
EASHRI KENYA

March 4, 2025

12:30pm-1:30pm

Grace Dodge 455

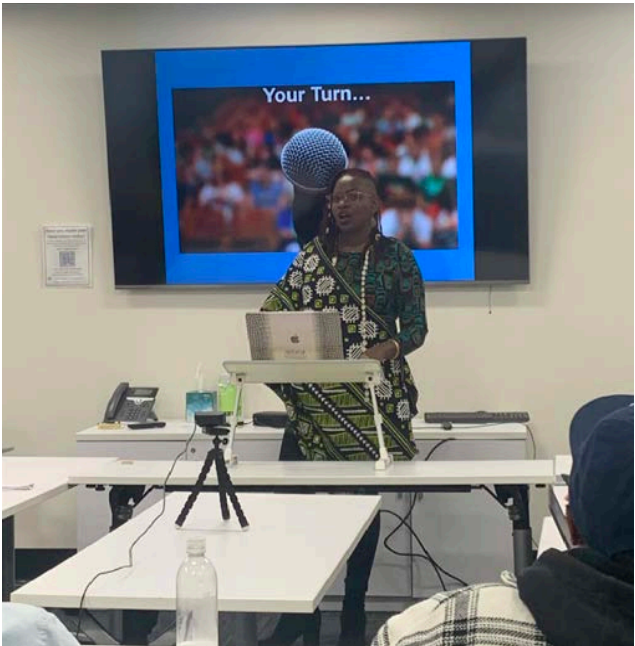
Snacks and refreshments will be provided!

RVSP HERE:

<https://tinyurl.com/CAE-HRAP-RSVP>



TO REQUEST DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS CONTACT OASID AT OASID@TC.EDU  
(212) 678-3689, (212) 678-3853 TTY (646) 755-3144 VIDEO PHONE, AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.



Wanja and the advocates participated in a two-part workshop on Speechwriting.





# THEHOYA DY

**Head of Anti-Human Trafficking  
and Migration Unit**

*Center for Alliance of Labor  
and Human Rights*

**CAMBODIA**

Human rights advocacy is a path that demands dedication, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to justice. It is hard work, but a type which I have come to love. My journey as a human rights advocate is deeply rooted in my personal experiences, education, and the stark realities of my country, Cambodia. The pervasive injustices, inequality, and oppression I have witnessed and experienced firsthand have fueled my passion for standing up for the rights of the vulnerable and marginalized.

Growing up in Cambodia, I was surrounded by an environment where injustice and inequality were widespread. Issues such as land grabbing, forced evictions, and corruption were rampant, benefiting only the powerful elite while leaving the poor to suffer. My educational background played a crucial role in shaping my perspective and commitment to social justice. I spent nearly 20 years in monkhood, an experience that instilled in me values of compassion and service. Later, I pursued a degree in Political Science, which deepened my understanding of governance, rights, and advocacy.

My passion for advocacy solidified when I joined the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) in 2008. Working on land rights, labor rights, access to justice, and good governance opened my eyes to the dire struggles of innocent and marginalized people. Witnessing the suffering of marginalized communities made me deeply invested in the fight for justice. Beyond my formal work, I dedicated time to youth training on civil rights, leadership, and strategic organizing. Sharing my knowledge and experience with young political activists empowered them to take part in shaping a better future.

Throughout my journey, I have witnessed numerous injustices that have further solidified my commitment to advocacy. One of the most pressing issues I have encountered is land grabbing. The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) reported in 2014 that the government allocated approximately three million hectares of land to national and foreign investors, resulting in the forced eviction of at least 800,000 families. As a consequence, countless individuals lost their homes and livelihoods, which has contributed to rising poverty and widespread despair within affected communities.

In addition to the issues surrounding land rights, the labor force in Cambodia faces severe exploitation. In 2008 according to the World Bank, workers in garment factories earned a meager wage of just \$45 per month, which was insufficient to meet basic living needs. Many workers suffered from malnutrition and frequent fainting due to unsafe working conditions. Moreover, the rights to freedom of association and expression were heavily restricted, with union leaders facing arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Corruption further exacerbated these problems, causing Cambodia to lose at least \$1.5 billion annually, including \$500 million from the garment industry alone.



Hoya and the advocates visited DC.



The suppression of dissent has also been a significant issue. According to Amnesty International, at least 15 journalists and analysts have been killed since 1993, and more than 200 activists have been unjustly arrested and imprisoned. The absence of free and fair elections further undermines democracy, as the government manipulates electoral processes, controls state media, and silences opposition leaders.

Cambodia's political system operates more under a rule of men than a rule of law, with power concentrated in the hands of a single family that controls national institutions, legislation, and executive bodies. This concentration of power has resulted in severe economic inequality. While millions of Cambodians are forced to migrate abroad in search of employment due to unemployment, low wages, and heavy debt burdens, the wealth of the elite continues to grow unchecked. According to a 2014 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), many Cambodians seek work overseas because of a lack of job opportunities and insufficient wages at home. Meanwhile, the elite display ostentatious lifestyles, exacerbating the socio-economic divide.

Having worked in NGOs for nearly two decades, I have had the opportunity to compare Cambodia's governance with international standards. This experience has provided me with valuable insights into leadership models and systems that foster justice and equality. Witnessing firsthand the suffering of innocent individuals has made a profound impact on me, driving me to continue advocating for change despite the challenges I face.

Every challenge I have faced has strengthened my knowledge and resilience, further reinforcing my commitment to advocating for human rights. I firmly believe that change is inevitable, as history has consistently demonstrated that people are the most powerful agents of transformation. I am dedicated to empowering individuals to stand up and demand their rights.

My vision for Cambodia is one where democracy, good governance, and social justice are at the forefront. When political systems are fair and just, economic and social development will naturally follow. Building strong human resources is crucial for fostering sustainable change, which is why I am committed to educating and empowering individuals to become catalysts for progress.

Although I have spent years raising awareness about the injustices and human rights violations in Cambodia, my journey as an advocate for human rights is only beginning. I urge all Cambodians, especially those who have endured oppression, to rise and demand their rights. Together, we can create a future where justice, equality, and human dignity triumph.

**“I firmly believe that change is inevitable, as history has consistently demonstrated that people are the most powerful agents of transformation.”**



Hoya and Erick spoke at an event moderated by Bukeni Waruzi of Free the Slaves.



FACULTY MENTOR

**Judy Gearheart**  
Adjunct Associate Professor of  
International and Public Affairs  
School of International and Public Affairs

CLASSES

Advocacy for Socio-Economic Rights  
Human Rights and the Politics of Inequality

NETWORKING

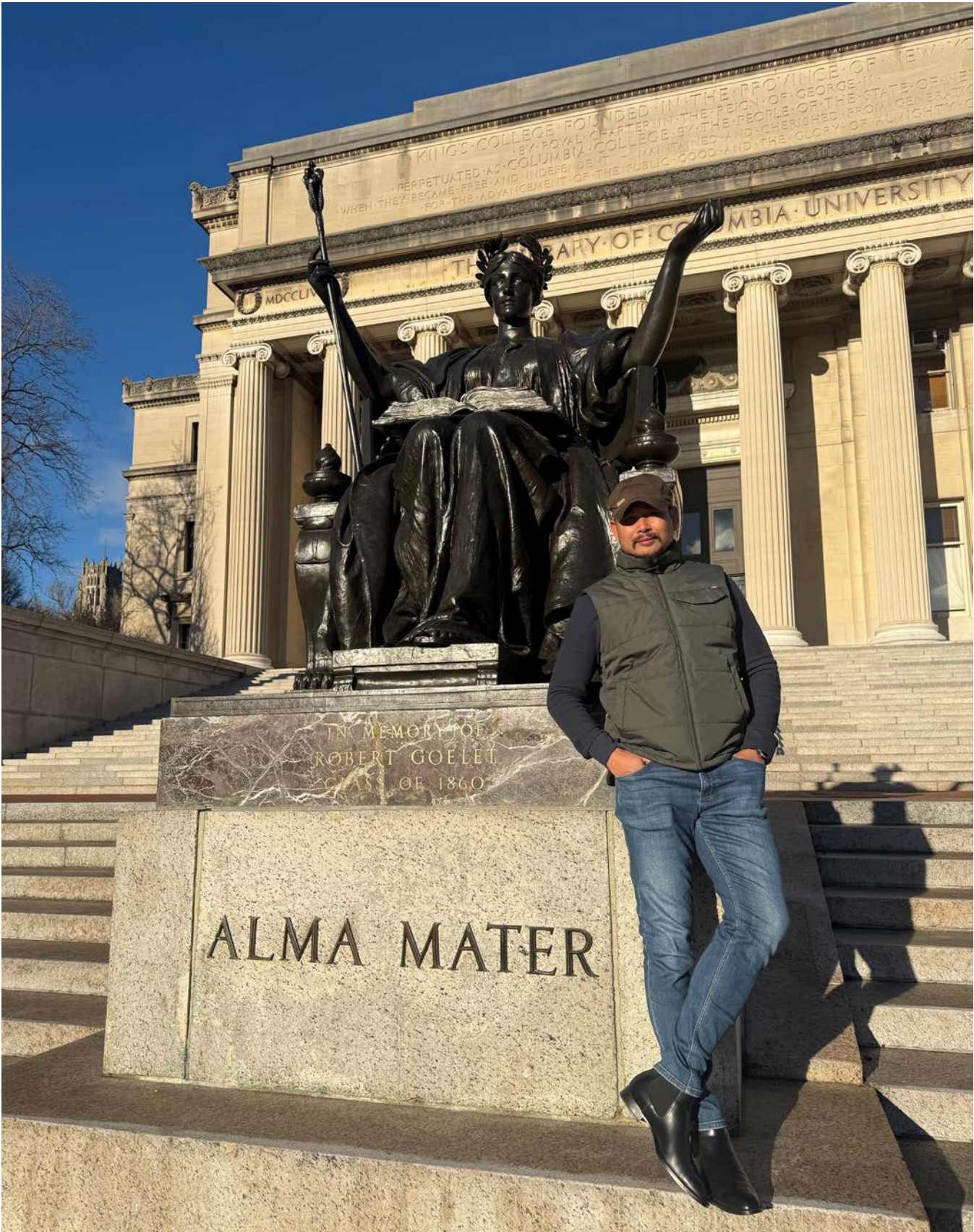
Amnesty International-USA  
ESCR-net  
Ford Foundation  
International Corporate Accountability  
Roundtable  
MADRE  
National Endowment for Democracy  
NYU Center for Global Justice and  
Human Rights  
Open Society Foundations  
RFK Human Rights  
United Nations Development Program  
US Department of State

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

A Conversation with Human Rights  
Advocates on Challenges in Cambodia and  
Tanzania Moderated by Bukeni Waruzi of  
Free the Slaves, ISHR  
Resilience and Responsiveness in  
Human Rights Work, NYU Law Center  
for Global Justice and Human Rights



HOYA RadioFree Asia interviewed Hoya about his work at CENTRAL.





# 3

## Workshops, Conversations, and Lectures

### Ethical Approaches to Oral History: Working with Vulnerable Narratives

FANNY GARCIA

*Oral Historian*

This workshop introduced the fundamentals of oral history while exploring ethical considerations when working with precarious populations. With audio examples, guided discussion, and practical application, participants learned core principles of trauma-informed storytelling that center dignity and agency. The session covered essential documentation practices and frameworks for navigating safety concerns with narrators made vulnerable by state-inflicted violence.

### Fundraising

ERIK DETIGER

*Founder and Managing Director  
PHILANTROPIA, INC.*

With more than a decade of experience working in the field of international philanthropy and fundraising, Erik provided the advocates with an overview of concepts and strategies in international fundraising. The four-part workshop series focused on fundraising from institutional donors and individuals.

### Research, Documentation, and Writing

MICHAEL GARCIA BOCHENEK

*Senior Counsel, Children's Rights Division*

Michael Garcia Bochenek led a six-part workshop that covered the conceptualization of a research project, interviewing victims and witnesses, interviewing perpetrators and accomplices, and writing.

### Human Rights Documentation

PAMELA GRAHAM, PHD

*Director, Humanities & Global Studies*

*Director, Center for Human Rights Documentation*

KAOUKAB CHEBARO

*Head, Global Studies*

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

The Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research at Columbia University holds an extensive collection of archives of human rights NGOs. Pamela and Kaoukab discussed the collecting program and the process of working with NGOs to preserve their records. They noted the value and importance of preserving the record of human rights advocacy. The CHRDR is also developing the Human Rights Web Archive, an online resource that captures and preserves the websites of human rights organizations and blogs. They demonstrated the HRWA and discussed the issues associated with preserving this information, and encouraged advocates to consider contributing their websites to this collecting effort.



The advocates attended a six-part workshop on Research, Writing and Documentation led by Michael Bochenek of Human Rights Watch.

## WORKSHOPS, CONVERSATIONS, AND LECTURES



Professor Jim Holtje led a two-part workshop on Speechwriting.

### Speechwriting & Public Speaking

JAMES HOLTJE

*Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS*

James Holtje led a two-part workshop on the theory and practice of writing and delivering speeches for multiple audiences. The advocates wrote speeches as homework and delivered their remarks in class. Edited remarks and individual speech delivery videos now serve as benchmarks for the advocates to continue their ongoing communications efforts back home.

The 2019 recipient of SIPA's Outstanding Teaching Award, Holtje is a 30-year communication veteran who has worked as a speechwriter for several multinational corporations in the US and Europe and currently heads his own NYC-based consultancy, Speak Up International, LLC. He earned the MIA from SIPA in 1990.





Dr. Hawthorne Smith of Survivors of Torture at NYU Langone spoke with the advocates about resilience.

## Resilience in the Face of Systemic Challenges

**DR. HAWTHORNE SMITH**

*Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry at NYU Grossman School of Medicine*

*Director, Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture*

Dr. Hawthorne Smith provided guidance and facilitated a thoughtful discussion about being resilient in the face of systemic challenges.

## Introduction to Columbia University Libraries

**YUUSUF CARUSO, PHD**

*African Studies Librarian*

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

Yuusuf introduced the advocates to the Columbia University Libraries, which comprises 13 million volumes, over 160,000 journals and serials, as well as extensive electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, maps, and graphic and audio-visual materials.

## Introduction to Candid

**TRACY KAUFMAN**

*Programs Manager*

**CANDID**

Tracy Kaufman offered the advocates a comprehensive look at the resources available through Candid's online resources.

## Introduction to Vergil

**BROOKE AUDRA BLACKBURN**

*Master's Student, Anthropology*

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

*Work-study student*

**HRAP**

Brooke introduced the advocates to Vergil, the platform used by Columbia for course planning.

## Effective Presentations

**DAVID MEJIA**

*DOCUMENTA*

**2023–24 HRAP**

**STEPHANIE V. GREPO**

*Institute for the Study of Human Rights*

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

The Advocates learned how to make concise and effective presentations on their work in a supportive environment based on constructive feedback from one another and their instructors.

## Session with HRAP Alumni

HRAP alumni shared their experiences with the 2024–25 advocates in a lively and laugh-filled session before the new advocates traveled to NYC. The new advocates said the session allayed their concerns and fears about living in NYC and made them look forward to meeting even more HRAP alumni.

## Video Advocacy

**ADEBAYO OKEOWO**

*Associate Director of Programs, Regional & Partner Engagement*

**WITNESS**

Adebayo Okeowo led a workshop on the effective use of video advocacy as a complement to traditional approaches to human rights advocacy. The advocates learned the ways in which stories, visual evidence and personal testimony can be used as part of a human rights advocacy strategy to inform policy.



Thomas R. Lansner led a workshop on media advocacy.

## Introduction to the Foundation Directory

**STEPHANIE V. GREPO**

*Institute for the Study of Human Rights*

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

Stephanie introduced the advocates to the online Foundation Directory, the most comprehensive prospect research tool for fundraisers, with over 239,000+ grant maker profiles. She taught them how to search for grant makers who have funded organizations working on causes and with communities similar to those they serve.



Officer Ricardo Morales of Columbia Public Safety talked with the advocates about keeping safe.

## Coping Strategies for International Students

**YANIV PHILLIPS, PHD**

*Senior Psychologist*

**COLUMBIA HEALTH**

Dr. Phillips discussed the timeline of emotions facing international students new to campus and offered coping strategies. He addresses ways to maximize the classroom experience, how to navigate forming new relationships when living in a language and a culture that are not your own, getting comfortable, learning social norms, and managing expectations.



# 4

## Support

The Institute for the Study of Human Rights is grateful to the following for their financial support of the advocates in the 2024–25 program.

JOANNE CSETE

JOAN M. FERRANTE AND CAREY MCINTOSH

ARCUS FOUNDATION

INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S FORUM  
(IIWF/FIMI)

PACKARD FOUNDATION

UHAI EASHRI

WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER,  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



FIMI's support over the years has enabled advocates like Adija to attend HRAP.



# 5

## Testimonials

ESCR-Net - International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is grateful for the important space provided by HRAP for advocates to reflect and learn from one another, fellow advocates, and publicly engaged scholars. We appreciate our shared commitments to building cross-regional solidarity and strengthening intersecting struggles for a future in which human rights and social justice are a reality for all. Several leaders from our member organizations—social movements, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, and NGOs across 80 countries—have benefited immensely from HRAP. In turn, ESCR-Net's secretariat has learned from visiting advocates and formed new alliances. We very much appreciate the leadership of Stephanie V. Grepo in guiding this program, as a member of the exceptional staff and faculty who make the Institute for the Study of Human Rights a critical beacon in deeply troubled times. In this current political moment—when solidarity, international cooperation, intergovernmental organizations, and the human rights framework itself are under attack by powerful actors—HRAP and its role in building global connections and reinforcing human rights struggles are vital.

**Chris Grove**  
*Executive Director*  
ESCR-NET

For more than a decade now, meeting the advocates every year was a powerful experience that deepened my understanding of diverse cultures, perspectives, and human rights issues, especially those affecting communities I was less familiar with, such as Indigenous peoples. It reminded me of the passion and purpose I felt when I was once an advocate in the same program, and it reignited that motivation in meaningful ways. I have developed lasting connections with fellow advocates, some of whom I remain in touch with to this day. For my work at Arcus Foundation, which focuses on advancing LGBTQ human rights and their intersection with other movements, this program has been an invaluable source of insight and learning.

**Adrian Coman (he/él)**  
*International Social Justice Program Director*  
ARCUS FOUNDATION

We had the pleasure of hosting scholars and practitioners from Columbia University's Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) for a rich and thought-provoking exchange with our International Law and Human Rights Fellows at NYU School of Law. Drawing on deep regional and organizational experience, the advocates shared critical insights on adaptive strategies in human rights work, navigating institutional constraints, and sustaining purpose in the face of burnout. The conversation explored the importance of humility in international engagement, the value of community-rooted leadership, and the mindset shifts that sustain long-term advocacy. It resonated deeply with our fellows and stood out as a generous, timely, and powerful experience—leaving a lasting impression on our students.

**Youssef Farhat**  
*Executive Director,*  
*Center for Human Rights & Global Justice*  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW



Erick and the advocates visited DC.





The advocates met the faculty who agreed to mentor them at a lunch at Faculty House.

It was an absolute honor to host Erick Luwongo, Kutlwano Magashula, and Connex Khomba for an engaging and insightful conversation about their powerful work in human rights advocacy—particularly in advancing protections and support for LGBTQIA communities. Their passion, dedication, and lived experience sparked meaningful dialogue and helped us explore exciting synergies with the work we do at Vital Voices.

Together with my colleagues, we shared insights into our leadership programs, crisis response efforts, and urgent assistance funding. The fellows brought valuable perspectives, a deep eagerness to learn, and a collaborative spirit that enriched the discussion—especially around navigating advocacy in challenging and restricted environments.

We deeply appreciated their expertise, thoughtful reflections, and empathetic approach to leadership. It's clear that their impact will be both lasting and far-reaching. We wish them continued success in their important journeys.

**Te'a Williams**  
Program Assistant  
VITAL VOICES GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

It was a pleasure to have Gustavo in our course, Equality, Identity, and Rights (ISHR), this semester. A thoughtful and enthusiastic participant, Gustavo consistently enriched our discussions by drawing on his extensive experience as a human rights lawyer in Brazil, particularly in the areas of gender and racial discrimination. He skillfully bridged theory and practice, frequently grounding abstract concepts in concrete cases. Whether contributing on Canvas or in the classroom, he remained deeply engaged and often sparked further debate with his insights.

**Daniela Ikawa**  
Adjunct Professor  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Erick Luwongo was an asset in my class and gave a solid and good presentation of the development challenges of Tanzania. I look forward to mentoring more advocates in the future.

**Jenik Radon**  
Adjunct Professor  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Kathia Alicia Carrillo Garrido joined my Spring 2025 course Storytelling for Social Change from the Human Rights Advocates Program (ISHR). Kathia was an immensely valuable voice and scholar for the class, as she brought personal and professional insights from her own storytelling and activist work, as well as powerful insights from her home country of Peru, into the class. Her passion for elevating the stories and agency of Peru's Indigenous population—from maintaining native languages to honoring their work as land stewards—helped to expand our class discussions and, I believe, the perspectives of everyone present. For example, Kathia had previously produced a music video/PSA centering the voices of young Indigenous Wampis leaders from the Autonomous Territorial Government of the Wampis Nation in Peru who composed, sang, recorded and interpreted a song to get their message out to public and she graciously allowed me to share the video with the class; she also spoke about the process and why the work is important. The care she has for storytelling was evident during the SIPA Oscar Awards in April, as she won the written storytelling category for a reporting piece she had crafted over the semester. And when she shared feedback for others in the class, she did so with compassion and genuine curiosity, even letting me know that another student had won an award so that we could collectively and publicly cheer on that student as well. It is important to note that Kathia's own personal experiences and her passions for Indigenous storytelling really helped to stretch the ideas of everyone in the classroom regarding long-held U.S.-centric beliefs around race, gender, and South America. It is crucial for a course like mine to have as many varying viewpoints as possible, especially when they understand that the human element is where progress lies. More students like Kathia are needed.

**N. Jamiyla Chisholm**  
Adjunct Associate Professor  
of International and Public Affairs  
SIPA, COLUMBIA

This was the first time I had the chance to train HRAP advocates in speechwriting and public speaking based on my SIPA course. Hearing these human rights leaders' stories was truly inspirational and I was humbled by their courage. As a professor, it was a real pleasure watching them both improve their speechwriting and delivery skills over the course of the workshop but also knowing that they're now going to take these skills back with them in their advocacy work to make a difference around the world. I look forward to staying in touch with each of them and wish them much success.

**James P. Holtje, MIA '90**  
Adjunct Professor of International & Public Affairs  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL & PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

It was a pleasure to join the HRAP 2025 cohort to teach a session on oral history and the ethics of working with stories of people made vulnerable by state violence. The students were attentive and engaged and demonstrated a deep interest in ethical storytelling practices that would benefit the communities they work with on a day to day basis. It was heartening to learn about their incredible work and know that the human rights of people around the world are being defended and protected. Their commitment to centering dignity and agency in their documentary practices gives me hope for the future of human rights advocacy.

**Fanny Garcia**  
VOICE OF WITNESS



The advocates visited Amnesty International USA as part of the DC trip.



# 6

## ISHR Staff

### IRENE ATAMIAN

Business Manager

### JOANNE BAUER

Senior Researcher,  
Business and Human Rights

### JACKIE DUGARD

Senior Lecturer in the Discipline  
of Human Rights and Director,  
Graduate Studies

### YASMINE ERGAS

Director of the  
Woman and Gender in  
Global Affairs Network

### STEPHANIE V. GREPO

Director, Capacity Building

### CRISTIANA GRIGORE

Founder of the Roma  
Peoples Project

### GERGANA HALPERN

Director, Education

### JULIA MANNES

Undergraduate Studies  
Coordinator

### MAGDALENA MEDLEY

Communications and  
Outreach Coordinator

### ANNA MILLER

Graduate Program Manager

### GLENN MITOMA

Lecturer in the Discipline of  
Human Rights and Director,  
Undergraduate Studies

### ELSA STAMATOPOULOU

Director, Indigenous Peoples'  
Rights Program

### TIM WYMAN-MCCARTHY

Lecturer in the Discipline  
of Human Rights

### YVETTE ZAPATA

Finance Coordinator



Erick and Hoya visited Activist  
New York at the Museum of the  
City of New York.



# 7

## HRAP Administration



The advocates visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art when they arrived in NYC.

**STEPHANIE V. GREPO** (she/her) joined ISHR in 2008. Since then, she has secured funding to dedicate openings in HRAP to LGBTQI+, Indigenous Peoples, and disability rights advocates; encouraged HRAP alumni—who can be found in 100 countries around the globe—to cooperate across class years and geographic boundaries, and advised advocates on raising funds for their organizations. She has guided alumni on their work ranging from youth empowerment in South Sudan and Bosnia-Herzegovina to capacity building for Indigenous Peoples to advocacy around prisoners’ rights in Nigeria and Zambia. In 2011, she created a summer program at ISHR through which Columbia University students have volunteered at organizations led by alumni of ISHR’s fellowships programs around the globe. She has organized side events on advocacy tools and strategies at the Committee on the Status of Women and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She designed and secured funds for ISHR’s first massive open online course.

With the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe from 2000 to 2007, Stephanie developed multi-ethnic experiential education programs in Kosovo; created

and led a grant making program to support confidence-building projects in North Macedonia; worked on return and integration issues and led a field office of 10 staff in one of the most politically sensitive regions of Croatia; and served as the youth and education advisor to the OSCE Head of Mission in Serbia. She has observed elections in Bosnia and Georgia.

For nearly a decade, she was a lecturer at The New School where she led graduate students through practicums with clients including the International Rescue Committee and Transparency International. At The School of The New York Times, she developed and taught the school’s first human rights course for high school students. She has also taught human rights in the Pre-College Program at Columbia University. She is a graduate of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a student in the EdM program in Adult Learning & Leadership at Teachers College. Her volunteer work in resettlement with Catholic Charities of Greater Boston led her to focus on human rights.

**BROOKE BLACKBURN** is a current graduate student in the MA program for Sociocultural Anthropology at Columbia University. Before arriving at Columbia University, Brooke received a dual bachelor’s degree in international relations and communications from Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire. During her undergraduate career, Brooke was a very civically engaged student. She was a co-chair of the communications committee for the New Hampshire Institute of Politics Student Ambassador Program as well as an intern with No Labels, an organization focused on promoting collaboration, compromise and bipartisan respect throughout the U.S.’s political landscape. After completing her degree, Brooke transitioned to direct service and spent three years as the senior case manager at the Marjorie Kovler Center for Survivors of Torture in Chicago. Brooke has continued to use her experiences supporting asylum seekers and other immigrants to motivate her academic research. As a graduate student in anthropology, Brooke currently focuses on questions of American identity, especially as it relates to understandings of what it means to be American according to immigrants, as well as transcultural perspectives on the American dream. Outside of her academic work, Brooke has been a program assistant with the Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) since 2024. She looks forward to staying on to support the 2025–26 program!

**CARLY POLISTINA** is an MFA Writing for TV and Film candidate at Columbia University. She is an actor, stand-up comedian, and published writer. She is thrilled to have been part of the 2024–2025 HRAP.



During the DC trip, the advocates enjoyed a private tour of the presidents portraits at the National Portrait Gallery.





▲ **1990 Advocate Tiawan Saye Gongloe** of Liberia (3rd from the left) was the keynote speaker at a public forum in September hosted by the Liberia Massacre Survivors Association with support from the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund. During the forum, participants expressed their opinions on the establishment of a war crimes court in the country. In “Victims Cooperation: A necessary condition for the success of the War and Economic Crimes Court,” Gongloe said: “For the War

and Economic Crimes Court to truly succeed, it requires the active participation and cooperation of those who suffered the most during the dark days of our civil conflict. The court cannot fulfill its mandate without the testimonies, evidence, and accounts of the victims and survivors. It is through their courage to come forward and tell their stories that justice can be delivered. Without their voices, the truth remains hidden, and the healing of our nation will be incomplete.”



◀ **1993 Advocate Luis Felipe Polo** returned to Columbia University in February to meet the current HRAP cohort at the ISHR Winter Reception. He shared with them his memories of HRAP as well as his Columbia ID card—which he still carries with him! While at the reception, he was thrilled to see retired

Columbia Professors Joan Ferrante and Carey McIntosh who regularly hosted HRAP advocates, including him, at their home in Western Massachusetts during the first two decades of the program.

“I look at my life in two sections: before HRAP and after HRAP,” said Felipe. He said the program helped him to develop his thinking on human rights both as an academic and as a practitioner. He fondly remembered taking Louis Henkin's class on international human rights law and said he still has an autographed textbook by Henkin. Felipe said he is still in contact with members of the 1993 cohort. He remained in close contact with Professor Paul Martin who led the Center for the Study of Human Rights when Felipe attended HRAP. In fact, they were co-authoring an article before Professor Martin passed away in early 2024. Since HRAP, Felipe has been involved in international development, human rights, public policy, and education. He has several publications including *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights* (2000, 2010, 2013 and 2020), *Theology of Inclusion and Diversity*, *Humanizing Politics from Politics*, and *The Death Penalty and Human Rights*. In 2001, Felipe was appointed as Rector of the Universidad Rafael Landívar-Quetzaltenango Campus. He managed the university's 11 undergraduate and graduate programs, which included 5,000 students and 350 faculty and staff. Felipe introduced human rights courses to the university. In 2005, he left academia to serve as the Principal Advisor to Dr. Eduardo Stein Barillas,

the Vice President of the Republic of Guatemala. He served as the Executive Director of the Latin American office of Human Rights of Journalists where he defended journalists accused of political crimes in Latin America and helped to free several journalists from prison. Felipe was Division Chief of the Inter-American Development Bank, Political Affairs Officer at the United Nations Organization, Academic Researcher for the Andean Commission of Jurists, and a consultant for a number of organizations including the Organization of American States, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Program, and Human Rights Watch.



▲ **2004 Advocate Lillian Keene-Mugerwa** (center) of Uganda shared the following news: “On 4th April 2025 I had the privilege to visit Ashoka's offices in Virginia, USA. At a brown bag lunch organized by Ashoka, I shared insights on my work of founding the Platform for Labour Action (PLA), which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. The discussion revolved around scaling impact, forging partnerships, providing legal aid, child labour education, and conducting policy analysis. ....Ashoka has been integral to my journey since I was elected as a fellow, receiving a monthly stipend for three years between 2002 and 2005. This support allowed me to fully commit my time and efforts to addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable and marginalized workers.”





▲ **2010 Advocate Bakary Tandia** (right) joined fellow anti-slavery activists Biram Dah Abeid, the founder of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (Mauritania), and Sean Tenner, who co-founded The Abolition Institute (USA) with Tandia, on a panel discussion at the 2025 Human Rights & Humanitarian Forum sponsored by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. The forum brings together leading humanitarians, legal advocates, scholars, and students to explore how we can work across sectors to build a more resilient and just world.

▲ **2014 Advocate Sandra Creamer** has been appointed CEO of the Australian Women’s Health Alliance, a national collective that works to respect and amplify the voices of all women and fight for positive change.



▲ In April, **2018 Advocate Pepe Onziema** spoke at the University of Paris-Nanterre in France at the invitation of ADUH and STOP Homophobie. His talk focused on the criminalization of homosexuality and the legal challenges surrounding the persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals by states. Pepe emphasized the importance of grounding legal advocacy in the lived experiences of queer people on the ground. He underscored that queer communities should be empowered to choose their own legal representation, rather than having lawyers select their clients. This, he noted, is crucial for securing community buy-in and fostering collective action. He referenced the landmark lawsuit filed by SMUG and the Center for Constitutional Rights against Scott Lively, in which the judge found that Lively’s actions in Uganda amounted to crimes against humanity. Pepe also expressed pride in hearing scholars and advocates reference the Strategic Response Team reports—which he coordinates—as valuable tools in advancing LGBTQ+ justice.

◀ **2018 Advocate Marijana Savić** from the Belgrade-based NGO Atina was recognized as a TIP (Trafficking in Persons) Report Hero by the US Department of State in a ceremony in Washington, DC, in June 2024. Cindy Dyer, then the US ambassador-at-large for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, said that Marijana Savić was among the 10 individuals chosen for the award “in recognition of her acclaimed anti trafficking work in Serbia, relentless push for sustainable policy solutions, insistence on the provision of victim-centered approaches, prioritization of vulnerable survivors, and innovative work promoting long-term economic integration for survivors to prevent revictimization.” Marijana received the award from then Secretary of State Antony Blinken.



▲ **2020–21 Advocate Ito Douglas Ekanem** of Nigeria reports: “I am excited to embark on this new journey to contribute to strengthening the Nigeria Health System for Adolescents and Youths working with The Special Adviser to The President on Health. I look forward to making a positive impact.”

◀ **2022–23 Advocate Ana Belique** of Reconoci in the Dominican Republic participated in a number of public events on the need for reparative justice for Afro-descendant communities across the Americas. She participated on a panel called “The Cost of Freedom,” which was organized by the Haitian Student Association at Columbia University. The event was held as part of a broader initiative commemorating the bicentennial of the indemnity France imposed on Haiti following its independence—a payment extracted as compensation for the losses claimed by former French slaveholders. She said: “As a Dominican of Haitian descent, I contributed to the panel by sharing personal and political reflections on my relationship with Haiti, and on how the global perception of the country might shift if its history were understood through the lens of extorted debt rather than deficit. I also addressed how the question of restitution intersects with the lived struggles of Dominicans of Haitian descent, particularly those affected by denationalization.” The panel, moderated by the renowned author Edwidge Danticat, also featured Ericq Pierre, Haiti’s representative to the United Nations, and Columbia PhD student Natasha Robert. During the Fourth United Nations Forum on People of African Descent, she engaged in several side events focused on reparatory justice and restitution. At a panel at New York University called “The Time for Action Is Now,” she spoke about the urgent need to frame migration and human rights within the broader reparations discourse. She emphasized the importance of expanding the reparations framework beyond historical enslavement to also include the present-day injustices faced by Black migrants—especially Haitians—across the Americas. Finally, in collaboration with the Malunga Network, she co-organized a panel titled “What Restorative Justice Are We Talking About? Towards the Construction of Paths of Equity.” Sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the event created space for deeper reflection on the diverse realities of Afro-descendant communities across the Americas and the global call for reparations. The panel featured activists and scholars from Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and the United States. Ana focused her contributions on the experience of Dominicans of Haitian descent and their demand for the restitution of Dominican nationality as a concrete form of reparative justice. She underscored how structural realities—such as the statelessness of children born to Haitian migrants—are manifestations of a colonial legacy of anti-Black racism that persists within modern nation-states.





## KEN ABBOTT

2017 HRAP

### The Tale

The Human Rights Advocates Program (HRAP) was indeed one of a kind. Coming from a small organization at the ends of Kenya, I was leading the work of narrative change and LGBTIQ+ acceptance and inclusion within a localized context, utilizing the trainings and resources I had access to from Kenya. It was very important work for the LGBTI and Sex Worker communities. I knew I owed more to my communities, and pushed myself to help the struggle in a more strategic way.

I learnt about HRAP from my colleagues in Kenya who were senior in the sector and who brought back so much inspiration and growth after their successful completion of HRAP. As overwhelmed as I was at the time, I was determined to be part of the next cohort. At that time, Kenya was debating further criminalizing homosexuality, and my organization was in the lead in pushing back viciously, with me as part of the face of the front.

After completing the application, I was accepted on a partial scholarship—and given the compelling nature of the program, I managed to convince both my immediate community and some donors, who decided to divert some of the program funds to contribute to my living expenses.

The classes were very informative, and we (the advocates) had the privilege of speaking and learning with others in the lectures, creating a sense of equals. The other students sought some of us post the classes to learn more about our work. I still speak and engage with a good number, albeit sporadically. Each week, we had to take two to three classes, including the assignments and group discussions

as we were treated as visiting scholars at Columbia University. We had access to all the amenities including the university's learning management system for classes.

I took classes in; gender justice, fundraising for non-profits at the Mailman School of Public Health and in reproductive health and rights. Occasionally I would join my colleagues back home by Zoom when I learnt of an interesting topic at any of their classes.

There were special workshops that were co-curated by the program, and of all I loved the workshops at Human Rights Watch in part because the offices were very close to the Empire State building which gave me a good view of the city and re-affirmed the hope that the city held especially given that New York also hosted the UN offices and the Secretariat. In September during the UN General Assembly we had access to key conversations including high-level conversations by the Counsel for Global Equality, which offered me as a first-time in such a space a practical model to connect lessons to reality. The other, was the workshop with StoryCorps and what stories mean for human rights narrative change work. During that time, we participated in more than 10 workshops of varying lengths through HRAP.

The trip to Washington, DC, was another momentous experience. We had very informative session with the World Bank Inspection Panel, where we discussed human rights accountability and protections by the bank, met with several donors and CSOs including the National Endowment for Democracy and Human Rights Campaign among others.



We were accommodated at International House, a historic building that housed over 700 international students. The leadership organized a range of activities, including a visit by the former President of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, where I had the privilege to interact with her and share more about my work first hand. By sheer luck, I didn't get a ticket in time, and the waiting list landed me a spot right next to her—a story for another day.



Ken with the 2017 HRAP cohort.

### The Impact

I have been to many programs, but by far, HRAP was a big stride in my career journey. Upon my return and with the connections I made, I supported the development of a human rights training manual, and a mentorship program at my organization. The network members and leadership benefitted from the program immensely, each in their own way made a mark in the society, leading LGBTI or other human rights non-profits; two have secured permanent placement with UN agencies, and some others within the Kenyan civil society.

Two years after graduating from the program, I was hired by The Eastern African Sexual and Health and Rights Fund, UHAI EASHRI; and with the knowledge and skills harnessed from the program, I immensely contributed to the funding structure and the refining of needs, helping to create impact across the region. Concepts of intersectionality and decolonization, are concepts that are currently prevalent, but for me I first interacted and studied these concepts at a gender justice class at the school of law, and applied them to work—still do.

After five years working at a regional organization, I moved to a global organization, MPact Global Action. Some of the work is very close to my heart such as supporting the global campaign to end systemic issues within public health, and leading strategic lobbying at the United Nations, in the forward looking, future shaping UN reflection and strategy work. Both engagements have, and continue to improve LGBTI and Key Populations groups with technical support, financial resources and hand-holding that have emboldened the fight for human rights and resilience, and that I believe will ensure that ideological and cultural ostracized communities are not erased, no matter the attempts.

**“I have been to many programs, but by far, HRAP was a big stride in my career journey.”**



ABOVE Ken with Michael Miiro and Star Rugori, 2017 HRAP.



LEFT Ken with Lenny Emson of the 2017 cohort and Adrian Coman of Arcus.



# SAMUEL MATSIKURE

2016 HRAP

## Bridging Activism and Philanthropy: A Decade of Advancing Human Rights

My participation in the Human Rights Advocates Program at Columbia University in 2016 played a significant role in shaping my career as a human rights activist. As the Program Manager for Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) from 2016 to 2023, I dedicated those years to advocating for LGBTI rights in Zimbabwe, a country where such activism faces considerable challenges. My experience at Columbia University provided me with valuable insights, global connections, and advocacy strategies that I applied to my work in HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual health rights, and policy development for marginalized communities nationally, regionally, and globally. My continued efforts in advocating for human rights, peace, and development reflect the lasting impact of my time in the program.

Since 2016, I have continued to make significant contributions to LGBTI rights and public health advocacy in Zimbabwe and across Africa. The vast experience I gained over the years and the various tools I was exposed to at HRAP challenged me to take on a transformative and impactful leadership role. Through this experience of personal growth, I have transcended and transitioned into the field of philanthropy as a Project Lead for Aidsfonds Netherlands, supporting the vulnerable and the most marginalized communities with resources to end HIV and AIDS in Africa. My focus and interest remain in human rights for LGBTI people, key populations, and the most vulnerable. Aidsfonds is known for its expertise in HIV and AIDS philanthropy, as an advocate, involved funder, and fundraiser. I am a social changemaker and continue to grow as a transformative leader.



ABOVE Samuel with Betty Lee Odur and Mulshi Muwonge of the 2016 HRAP.



LEFT Several advocates from the 2016 cohort travelled to the Medical Campus regularly for meetings and classes.



“Since 2016, I have continued to make significant contributions to LGBTI rights and public health advocacy in Zimbabwe and across Africa. The vast experience I gained over the years and the various tools I was exposed to at HRAP challenged me to take on a transformative and impactful leadership role.”



Samuel visited SAGE in NYC.

*Your donation will make it possible for more human rights advocates to attend HRAP.*







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