

Global Youth Connect

Rwanda Program Report

Human Rights Delegation for Young Leaders

June 27 – July 19, 2009

Organized in collaboration with AJPRODHO



Leading up to -- and even during -- the seventh Global Youth Connect human rights delegation for young leaders to Rwanda (June 27 – July 19, 2009), the headlines about Rwanda continued to tell challenging, contrasting stories.¹

“Growing Media Restrictions Cast Doubt on Nation’s Commitment to Free Speech”
Human Rights Watch, New York,
4/27/2009

“Rwanda: Country Signs U.S.\$10 Million MTDF Facility With World Bank” (29 April 2009), The New Times, Rwanda

“Rwanda: Umuseso Editor Goes to Exile” (6/16/2009) Focus Media, Rwanda

“Rwanda: One Laptop Per Child Global Center Opens” (16 June 2009), Focus Media

“Rwanda: Revise Reproductive Health Bill: Compulsory HIV Testing, Sterilization of Disabled Violate Rights” (7/1/2009), HRW

“Starbucks to sell Rwanda Fairtrade coffee in UK” (6/30/09) The Examiner

“Rwanda: End Lifetime Solitary Confinement” (1/29/2009), HRW

“UN lifts arms embargo on Rwanda” (2008-07-12), Mail and Guardian

“Ombudsman’s Report Exposes Misconduct in Gov’t Circles” (23 June 2009) The New Times



On the one hand, descriptions of great progress and internationally-renowned development projects continue to define Rwanda’s reputation in the news. On the other hand, the pressures and accusations continue to mount against the Rwandan government, its policies and actions from some human rights advocates, such as Human Rights Watch, which has an office and researchers based in Kigali, as well as from even Rwanda’s own Ombudsman’s office.

In this context, and after reading such headlines for months, as well as historical accounts of Rwanda, eleven US-based young human rights activists and students arrived in Kigali, Rwanda on June 27th, 2009, as part of the Global Youth Connect Summer 2009 Human Rights Delegation to Rwanda, co-hosted and run by a local partner organization in Rwanda called AJPRODHO.

The goals of the GYC Rwanda delegations are many, including:

- To bring US-based participants into close contact with grassroots organizations and individuals in Rwanda to inspire the US participants to take action to raise awareness to avoid genocide and crimes against humanity in the future, be they in Rwanda or elsewhere
- To build the capacity of young Rwandan leaders and organizations to strengthen human rights in their society and the world

¹ To some extent, it would be appropriate to list also the headlines about the United States and its human rights and development issues, as this is something that is/was addressed in the cross cultural human rights workshop of the Summer 2009 delegation, and all of those delegations prior to it. However, the direction of this delegation, like those prior to it, is more about improving human rights in Rwanda than it is about improving them in the USA, since it takes place on the ground in Rwanda.

Delegation Overview



US Delegation members with Silas and John from AJPRODHO, in front of the AJPRODHO Office

The 2009 delegation was organized and conducted in collaboration with our new local partner organization, AJPRODHO, the Youth Association for Human Rights Promotion and Development, of Kigali

Under the leadership of its Executive Secretary, John Mudakikwa, who is also a lawyer, AJPRODHO originated among a group of students from the National University of Rwanda and currently operates at the national level, with a network of over 500 young people. AJPRODHO supports the rights of young people in Rwanda through Child Protection projects, Gender Based Violence prevention campaigns, legal aid, as well as research and policy papers (most recently on the rights of incarcerated youth). AJPRODHO has proven that it has an approach that the government respects and appreciates. For example, when Kigali City outlawed moto-cycle taxi drivers in 2007, AJPRODHO spearheaded the letter writing campaign to reinstate the taxi drivers, most of whom are youth. In Rwanda, the definition of youth is anyone between the age of 14 and 35.

The 2009 GYC delegation proceeded along similar lines as previous delegations to Rwanda:

- a cross-cultural Human Rights Workshop for Rwandan and US-based youth,
- site visits to important Rwandan organizations, activities, and memorials,
- volunteer fieldwork with local Rwandan organizations whose projects relate to human

rights development and or protection, broadly defined.

Notable differences between this delegation and those preceding it:

- For the first time ever in Rwanda, Global Youth Connect volunteered with a collective of people working to record and defend the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) persons.
- In another departure, we included group fieldwork observations as part of our human rights workshop, enhancing the educational opportunities for the Rwandan participants. Previously, fieldwork had been conducted by the US participants in collaboration with established local NGOs only. This time, the US and Rwandan workshop participants teamed up together with an NGO called CIMS (www.cims-rwanda.org), and conducted field observations together on Land Rights in Rwanda.

Other topics addressed explicitly by the delegation were:

- Status of Human Rights Defenders/Civil Society in Rwanda,
- Reproductive Health/Family Planning/HIV-Prevention,
- Communications/Art for Social Change,
- Volunteerism
- Prisoners Rights
- Rights of Marginalized groups



Orientation day at AJPRODHO

Human Rights Workshop for Young Leaders and Volunteer Fieldwork

As always, after several site visits and orientation activities for both the US and Rwandan participants, we opened the delegation with a human rights workshop which provides both US and Rwandan young leaders with the opportunity to debate, share and learn about human rights education, advocacy, and action in a cross-cultural setting, using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a reference point and inspiration.



John Mudakikwa of AJPRODHO gave a presentation that reminded the participants about what it takes to be an activist and about the sobering reality of international human rights law: charters may be signed at the international level, but the application of those charters, and the realization of those charters at the national level, given particular cultures and legislation, is not guaranteed, and activists must fight for human rights at the grassroots level using the international charters as points of entitlement. Taking this into consideration, the workshop participants discussed the application of various rights at the national levels in Rwanda and the United States. For example, related to freedom of the press/media: Should Rush Limbaugh be silenced given his exclamation that a particular abortion doctor be killed, only a few weeks prior to that doctor actually being killed? Aren't Rush's comments somewhat similar to the calls for death that aired on radios in Rwanda during the Genocide of the Tutsi in 1994? Across the world in Rwanda, should the BBC Kinyarwanda program have been silenced by the Government of Rwanda (GOR) earlier in 2009, or was this, as Human Rights Watch insists, a

violation of human rights to take the controversial program off the air?

Perhaps most importantly, the workshop linked the discussions about human rights with the practical grassroots actions of the several Rwandan organizations that would be receiving assistance from the GYC volunteers in the weeks after the workshop. Each organization sent a focal point to attend the workshop and presented within the workshop about its work in the context of international human rights conventions and declarations.

AJPRODHO – Youth Association for Human Rights Promotion and Development (www.ajprodho.org)— GYC's local partner organization on the delegation was represented at the workshop by Fred MUSIIME, who related AJPRODHO's work to UDHR articles 1, 2, 17. Later in the delegation, Frank worked closely with Edy Yi, Lynnette Miner, Julie Simeone, and Taryn Elledge to make observation visits to AJPRODHO's Child Protection and Incarcerated Youth projects, to do focus groups, interviews, and subsequently create AJPRODHO's first newsletter. For a copy of the newsletter, write to ajprodho_jijukirwa@yahoo.fr.



RAPP—Rwandans Allied for Peace and Progress (rwandansallied@gmail.com), represented by Rose Tuyishime, works for creative solutions for public health and economic empowerment in Rwanda. The UDHR articles grounding RAPP's work are 3, 23, 25, 26. GYC Volunteer MacKenzie Hamilton would later team up with Rose and her HIV Prevention theatre group to perfect an interactive musical theatre play about the sexual

exploitation of restaurant and domestic workers by their employers.

GTUPV – Global Trustees for Unity and Peace Volunteers – represented by Baker Gasatura and William Ndabarasa, nurture a spirit of volunteerism among privileged youth in Rwanda. They related their work to articles 5, 7, 9 of the UDHR, and later in the delegation worked with Taryn Elledge and Ashley Smith to strategically analyze the programs at GTUPV, concluding that GTUPVs unique volunteer program must continue, preferably in partnership with development organizations which have the technical capacity to initiate and follow development projects that the privileged youth can visit and assist. For more info, visit (<http://povertynewsblog.blogspot.com/2008/03/encouraging-youth-to-be-volunteers.html>)

HOCA – Horizon Community Association, documents human rights violations against, fights for the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered individuals and communities in Rwanda, and builds an LGBT support network. Founder and president Naome Ruzindana and her team, which included HOCA focal point Cedy Pierre and GYC Volunteers Valerie Love and Samantha Gavagan, related HOCA's work to numerous UDHR articles 1,2,3,5,7,9,12,16, 27 – underscoring just how important LBGT issues are for human rights. Following the workshop, Valerie and Samantha assisted HOCA with a report about several abuses experienced by HOCA's members, including a hazing at a local bar of two lesbians following a radio announcement which had described them physically and by name, and denounced them publicly.

I was impressed that LGBT rights were discussed in addition to issues such as land reform, education, employment, health, and gender equality. A discussion of issues facing LGBT people was integrated into the workshop and addressed with the same importance as all of the other social issues we discussed, and I really appreciated the fact that I could talk about my girlfriend and be open about my sexual orientation on the program.

-- Valerie Love, US Participant

CIMS – Center for Social Mobilization – (www.cims-rwanda.org) -- with whom we have worked before, mediates land disputes and helps the government to register land equitably in several targeted areas of the country. Represented by Damien Mwarambiri and Zawadi Umuhzo, CIMS focused its relationship to the UDHR on mainly article 17 (right to own land). Each and every participant of the workshop contributed to the work of CIMS by engaging in a special fieldwork project (see below). Following this, two GYC volunteers Chelsea Fairbank and Sarah Jackson spent two weeks working with CIMS, in part drafting a report of the observation visit to Rwaza, and helping with strategic planning.

Example of Workshop Conversation

Participant A: How can you justify promoting gay culture in Rwanda. That would be going against the UDHR article which states that all communities have the right to their own culture. Gay culture is interfering with Rwanda's cultural life and that is against the UDHR.

Participant B: It is important to note that the UDHR does not say that 'nations' but rather 'communities' have a right to their cultural life, and there can be more than one community and more than one culture in a nation.

Participant A: Oh, I didn't see that difference before. Thanks.

Combined US – Rwandan Land Rights Experiential Learning Expedition to Rwaza

As an attempt to provide practical experience to the participants, as well as to take action together to assist grassroots efforts on important human rights issues, **one of the main components of the workshop was a group fieldwork project tackling one pertinent/urgent issue in Rwanda: land rights.** (We decided that we couldn't focus on everything, and that one issue would provide a good example for tackling other issues).

Why Land Rights? Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in the world where, up until a few years ago, few citizens possessed titles

to their land and numerous conflicts arose around land issues. [CIMS](#), a local NGO, has been working on mediating land disputes and helping the government to register land equitably in several targeted areas of the country, beginning in Rwaza Sector, in Musanze District. Rwaza became the focus and location of our combined group fieldwork project.

First, the entire workshop studied the history of and the need for land reform in Rwanda (including the need for land titles, but also the need for family planning and off-farm jobs and training – to reduce pressures on the land). After, we developed focus group discussion questions for members of the Rwaza community as well as the local leaders, and journeyed to Rwaza at the invitation of CIMS and the community members. CIMS had prepared the community effectively for the visit, trying hard to not raise expectations and to relate the visit to its own work, as opposed to some outside force.



When we arrived in Rwaza, we first met the local Sector Level authorities in charge of land issues. Following this informational meeting we split into 4 groups of 6 people each to go to separate neighborhoods to hold the meetings and focus groups with families.

The meetings and focus groups were followed by a meal shared with all community members who

participated, then a group debriefing with community volunteers working with CIMS.

Afterwards, the workshop participants discussed what they had seen and heard and came up with a list of conclusions, questions that have yet to be answered, and recommendations to be shared with stakeholders through CIMS.

The main conclusions of the visit were:

- The communities were generally pleased with the results of land registration. Individuals testified that CIMS had done a good job in helping to explain the 2005 Organic Land Law in order to resolve conflict over land.
- The communities were particularly very appreciative of the opportunities land reform afforded women in the community, whereas women had previously not been able to lay claim to land or inherit land.
- While they were generally enthusiastic about land rights, some people, however, expressed concern that the new agricultural policy of the Rwandan Government encourages Mono-Cropping and that they were forced to grow, for example, only maize – whereas they would like to grow beans in addition to maize. They noted the following troubles related to mono-cropping:
 - Not enough livestock to produce sufficient fertilizer for Mono-Cropping
 - Low-quality seeds (in order for mono-cropping to succeed they will need better quality seeds)
- One focus group mentioned that CIMS is helping people to understand why it is good to use one plot of land for one crop and that the mono-cropping might be something that ultimately succeeds with proper attention and effort.
- Other problems families in Rwaza face which are related to land issues, including:
 - Hunger
 - No market for women to sell handmade baskets (i.e. if they try to get off-farm activities to reduce land pressures, they need better training and access)
 - Size of land plots are too small since there were so many people registering and inheriting land (this is a reason to support mono-cropping, as combining land plots and growing one crop in a cooperative fashion is part of the policy)

Further Study in Musanze

After, we went to Musanze town, which is 20km from Rwaza, where we had been just the day before meeting with the villagers about land reform. Musanze is the main town of the District in which Rwaza is located. The day following the observation visit to Rwaza sector, we were fortunate enough to have two important visits in Musanze that aided our understanding of both the political/governmental factors and consequences of poor land use.



Impogoza Street Kids Center: Supported by the Catholic charity Caritas, not to mention the important volunteer assistance from Italians like our host Alberto, the Impogoza Street Kids Center supports young children who have taken to the streets in towns like Musanze to try to escape the poverty and land-scarcity of the rural villages (like Rwaza), often with the encouragement of their parents, if they still have them. Visiting the center was a keen reminder of the results of a lack of land in Rwanda. The GYC delegation had a chance to hear the voice of one young girl who came specifically from the Rwaza, where her parents encouraged her to leave as there were too many mouths to feed. Following her four months in the street kids center for girls nearby, she will be reintroduced to her family in Rwaza. We also observed a dance presentation from a traditional Rwandan *Intore* troupe comprised mainly of former street children from the center who now use their dancing skills to gain income. The success of the dance troupe is not reason to support throwing children to the streets of course, but it is still reason to celebrate how groups are working to overcome the challenges posed by land-over-population.

Meeting with Mayor KARABAYINGA Celestin of Musanze

of Musanze: US and Rwandan Participants met with Mayor KARABAYINGA Celestin of Musanze district who led a lively and passionate discussion primarily about the District's approach to development, including the Organic Land Law of 2005. The mayor encouraged and responded well to challenging questions based on the workshop participants' ideas from the Rwaza visit. The mayor encouraged the US and Rwandan youth to be optimistic about Rwanda's ability to succeed with large land initiatives and projects (like monocropping) even if people do not always see the immediate benefit. At the same time, the Mayor insisted that local participation in their own community's development is a priority and a reality, citing several examples of schools being built under a communal work program called Ubudehe. The mayor placed a very deep emphasis on the need for all organizations and government entities to be working together (keeping each other informed) in order to succeed. He said that the government has been providing mechanisms through which to do so, such as the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF).

Moment from the Workshop that Strengthened My Commitment to Human Rights, in 5 words or less:

- *The Rwandans' Human Rights Volunteerism*
- *Speaking With Partner During Interviews*
- *Hearing Personal Story New Sister*
- *Human Rights Violations Land Issues*
- *Kids In Neighborhood No School*
- *Joy Of The Street Children*

One of the first things that I will do following the workshop to continue working for Human Rights:

- *Blog about these important issues*
- *Share the list of tips about how to be a good activist*
- *Start a prisoners rights program at school*
- *Teach about my experiences and come back to help*
- *Organize student human rights conferences*

- Sustainable economic empowerment in Rwanda
- Focus, pressure, and action
- Teach people their rights
- Continue to explore
- Take classes in conflict resolution

SITE VISITS:

Genocide Memorials



The 2009 Delegation visited several of the same memorials and organizations previously visited on GYC delegations, including the Kigali Memorial Center and the Catholic Church at Nyamata. For even more, detailed accounts of these memorials, see the previous Program Reports.

The Nyamata Memorial Visit was the most moving experience I've had in my life and reminded me of the reasons I chose to come here. By studying humanity's horrific past, we hope to change humanity's future.

--US Participant, Final Evaluation

Seeing something so tragic inspires me to work now to help people move forward and deal with what has happened.

--US Participant, Final Evaluation



Visit to the Kigali Memorial Centre

by Valerie Love

For our first site visit, we went to the Kigali Memorial Centre, the main genocide museum for Rwanda, which serves as an education center and burial grounds. In the 15 years following the genocide, more than 300,000 victims have been reburied in mass graves at the Centre. 75,000 names of victims are inscribed on the garden walls surrounding the graves. Families continue to bring bones and remains to be buried at the Center and new mass graves are dug to accommodate additional remains. As one mass grave is closed and sealed, a new one will be dug and filled along the hillside.

The exhibits at the Kigali Memorial Centre are powerful and thought-provoking, explaining Rwandan history from colonial times to the present, including the genocide in graphic detail. The museum explains the events leading up to the genocide and describes opportunities where it could have possibly been prevented. Since this history is no longer taught in Rwandan schools, the significance and role of the Kigali Memorial Centre has become even greater, and it is truly a somber and important testament to Rwanda's not so distant past.

Additional rooms hold photographs of victims, glass cases of skulls and bones, and of clothing that the victims were wearing when they were killed, everything from traditional Rwandese fabrics to a Cornell University sweatshirt.

Upstairs, there is an exhibit about a handful of the thousands of children who were killed in the

genocide, in heartbreakng detail. The exhibit starts with a girl of 2 months, and finishes with a 17 year old boy. The photos of the children are enormous and translucent, covering the windows and using sunlight to illuminate them. It's an ingenious use of space and natural light, and the sunshine coming through the photos of smiling children at birthday parties and siblings together in their homes, makes the tragedy of their early loss of life feel even more devastating. Captions give information about the children's favorite foods, best friends, and goals in life. The plaque for a 10 year old boy breaks my heart: His last words, as he was tortured to death, were "UNAMIR will come for us." But neither UNAMIR or anyone else ever did. [UNAMIR was the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda, a tiny peacekeeping operation put in place before the genocide to oversee the Arusha Peace Accords in 1993.]

A final exhibit area in the Centre portrays the history of genocide in the 20th century, starting with the destruction of the Hereros in 1909, and ending with Bosnia and the massacre at Sbrenica in 1995.

Troubling or Encouraging Vocabulary?

Up until this year, the billboards and speeches marking the remembrance of the 1994 Genocide never used the word "Tutsi." This year, all notices and speeches referred to the tragedy as the Genocide of the Tutsi. Just a few years ago, it had been too early to start to use the term 'Tutsi' to specify the Genocide. Perhaps this was because the Rwandan government felt it was too sensitive a subject, and it supports a policy that essentially says "We are all Rwandans", speaking the same language and sharing the same culture. Currently, no one in Rwanda publicly discusses his or her so-called ethnic group. Most people with whom we spoke said that putting the word Tutsi into the description of the 1994 genocide is appropriate and truthful (Tutsi were the group being targeted during the Genocide, even though moderate Hutu also lost their lives at the hands of Genocidaires as well). They also said that it discourages people from saying only "the Rwandan Genocide" which can have a negative effect on Rwanda's image as a nation; they maintained that it does not go against the current policy of national harmony, as it is focused on an event of the past.



National Liberation Day

After our first night in homestays with our workshop brothers and sisters, we convened at the Amahoro (Peace) Stadium on July 4th for the Liberation Day ceremonies, marking the 15th anniversary of the overthrow of the genocidal regime by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which currently makes up the majority of the Rwandan Government. Highlights of the ceremony included speeches by the President of Uganda and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, as well as the daughter of the late Tanzanian president and freedom fighter (), all of whom received honorary medals for their support of Rwandan freedom. Rwandan President Paul Kagame's speech focused on the message "Rwanda's people are its greatest resource," and the ceremony finished with a young girl declaring "dignity is our strength" as the motto for Rwanda moving forward after reaching the 15th year mark since the Genocide. One highlight of the military and police processions (supported by two marching bands) was the all-female contingent of the police, underlining Rwanda's commitment to support gender transformation. The event did not address in any detail the traumatic events of the 1994 Genocide, as this marked the end of three months of mourning, which began with a separate memorial ceremony at the Amahoro stadium on April 7th, the date marking the anniversary of the start of the 100 days of genocide in 1994.



Project Akilah

Project Akilah (www.projectakilah.org) was founded and is presided over by GYC Alumni Elizabeth Dearborn Davis (Rwanda Summer '06). Akilah (which is swahili for Wisdom), focuses on empowering young women who have already had the chance to complete high school but who don't have the resources to attend university, and who could enter the Rwandan workforce with additional training in a vocational skill. Akilah aims to provide these young women with vocational training at a school just south of Nyamata in the district of Bugesera, near the border with Burundi. After receiving a donation of land and a run-down, but promising school from the Rwandan Government, Elizabeth teamed-up with Architects without Borders, Engineers without Borders, as well as a network of local youth including GYC workshop alumni Muhire Enock (Rwanda Summer '06) to make the dream a reality. Speaking to the current GYC delegation from a sunny nook in a local Nyamata restaurant, Elizabeth said that the main challenge she faces is the task of raising money in the USA and other places where Rwanda is only known as a place "where people kill one another." However, she insisted that despite all of the challenges she has faced setting up Akilah and convincing people that people are not killing each other in Rwanda now and will not in the future, she would have it no other way. She is incredibly inspired by what is happening in Rwanda, and how receptive and collaborative the Rwandan government has been with her wish to become involved in the progress here, especially for young women.

Elizabeth was a bright light in this difficult, often overwhelming, environment.

US Participant, Final Evaluation



Community of Potters Health and Development Project, Bwiza, Gasabo District www.pygmysurvival.org www.cofferwanda.com

by US Participant, Julie Simeone

One of the most influential events of the delegation for me personally was the visit to one of Rwanda's communities of pygmies. Much of the literature on Rwanda, especially that generated after 1994, is framed in the context of two ethnic groups: the Hutus and the Tutsis. As many scholars will agree, this type of population polarization is not historically atypical. However, upon arriving in Kigali, we very quickly learned that Rwanda cannot be so neatly divided into such categories. Formerly known as the Batwa, but officially referred to as the Community of Potters since 2007 due to Rwanda's official policies regarding ethnic designations, the pygmies we visited provided a startling example of a community that has been politically forgotten and historically marginalized.

To reach this particular village, we drove about two miles into a primarily rural area and parked the van before hiking approximately a half-mile into a wooden area. This particular indigenous population had been brought to the Kigali area to serve as traditional dancers for the Habyalimana regime. They were settled in this remote, inaccessible village on the side of a hill, on land that is as unfertile as it is sloping and rocky. Others joined them due to different factors. "Originally hunter-gatherers in the forests of Rwanda, in 1998 they were driven from the Nyungwe Forest by the creation of a national park, and from the Parc des Volcans by the creation of a sanctuary for the mountain gorillas." In their current location, the pygmies have very little access to water, limited

access to nutritional food alternatives and virtually no access to emergency healthcare within a 1.5 mile radius. In fact, the day we arrived a mother lost her child in birth, partially because she was forced to deliver the baby in a banana grove as opposed to performing the impossible task of hiking almost two miles to the local clinic.



Dr. Carl (center) with Eddy (right) from HDI giving us a briefing in Bwiza, which lies on the inhospitable hillside pictured on previous page.

Due to these grave circumstances, our interactions with the individuals in this community were appropriately limited; however, we were provided with the opportunity to speak with a doctor working with the Community of Potters to improve their health and general welfare. Dr. Carl, the man with whom we spoke, brought to light some of harsh realities faced by the families that belong to the pygmies, including an infant mortality rate of around 50% (400 times higher than the infant mortality rate in the United States). To combat some of these devastating problems, The Health Development Initiative (HDI), as we were informed, has been working with these communities in the areas of economic development and strategic health intervention, in addition to providing vitamin and dietary supplements, with the assistance of volunteers from the University of Washington.

While the agenda of HDI is promising, much work remains if the pygmies are going to someday see the political, economic and cultural rights every human being should be afforded. Visiting the village was a difficult experience, and not one that can easily be translated into text. However, I can say that to have avoided this village

while in Rwanda, as the government and history have done, would have been extremely regretful.

Seriously a life changing experience for me

-- US Participant, Final Evaluation,
Commenting on the visit to Bwiza

Other Site Visits

Other site visits during the delegation included places we've visited previously on other delegations to Rwanda.

AMAJWI y'UBUZIMA (Voices of Health Project, from RAPP). Formerly known as Rwandans and Americans in Partnership (visited Summer 2006 and 2007 by GYC Delegations), RAPP is currently creating four community based theatre clubs to present musical, interactive soap operas in a series over the course of three years in a total of twelve communities. The clubs are called Amajwi y'Ubuzima (Voices of Health) and the topics to be addressed include: HIV Prevention, Family Planning, promotion of condoms as viable methods for both HIV Prevention and Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Stigma and Discrimination, and other community health issues as divulged by a baseline survey. The GYC delegation had a chance to see the first episode presented in the village of Kabuga, where the episode, focused on the benefits of family planning, finished with a woman wondering if her husband will accept to use a condom to help her avoid getting pregnant with another child, and with an audience member calling out to her "if you need help getting your husband to listen you can introduce him to the people at the health center who can talk to him." In ten days, according to the MC, the audience should return to the same place to see how the husband reacts.

Cross-Cutting Subject: Family Planning

Family planning (including reproductive rights) was an overlapping subject during the delegation. Both RAPP and CIMS were working hard alongside the Government to make family planning (if not abortion) a priority. With child mortality at alarming rates among the "potters" Dr. Carl said it would be illogical to ask the "potters" to practice family planning. It is an indication of just how far behind the COP is from the rest of the country.

United States Agency for International Development -- USAID: Having already met with us in Winter and Summer 2008 (see previous program reports), the Democracy and Governance department of USAID, represented by officer Guillaume Bucyana, updated us on the current situation related to the funding the Rwandan Government is receiving from the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) via USAID. Over the past year, Rwanda began receiving a "threshold" grant of \$24.7million from the MCC, indicating that Rwanda has achieved a threshold of good governance that is worthy of increased funding, provided that Rwanda continues to improve. The MCC grants underscore one of the most commonly observed ideas in Rwanda during these delegations: necessary and hopeful compromise. Even if the Rwandan Government is failing in certain ways (in the eyes of the MCC, they are failing in some of the key "Ruling Justly" indicators like civil and political rights), the US Government and other international partners are willing to support the Rwandan government with increased funding since they do see great improvement in many areas, and they will continue to do so, as long as Rwanda steps-up its efforts to improve in the areas where it is failing. Mr. Bucyana also indicated that USAID has a five year urban youth development project underway, in addition to the various projects already discussed in our previous delegations. For more info, visit http://www.usaid.gov/rw/our_work/programs/dg.html

Uyisenga N' Manzi (www.uyisenganmanzi.org)
The GYC delegation was honored to be invited back to visit the Niboye Peace Village, which is a village of child-headed households supported by Uyisenga n' Manzi. We didn't have much time to meet with the youth of the village, but the time that we shared together was valuable, in the form of an intense and open discussion about a variety of subjects: US perceptions of Rwanda (the youth wanted to know what the delegates had been hearing about Rwanda in the media), the improvements that have been seen in the village and in Rwanda in general in recent years from the perspective of the Niboye youth, the responsibility of the US youth to raise awareness back home so that atrocities like the genocide that left so many of the Niboye youth orphaned should never happen again anywhere on earth. When asked what are the main challenges that you face in the village today,

the youth replied (a) need for affirmative action for orphans of the genocide, and (b) more income generating projects.

The English language has been declared the only official second language of instruction and business in Rwanda (beating out the more common French language). Some people we spoke to fear that the country risks alienating many of its intellectuals who may not be able to join the Anglophone society fast enough to become earners and contributors. On numerous occasions throughout the delegation, we tried to use the discussion sessions to engage Rwandan youth about this subject. For the most part, the youth seem pleased with this development. At our meeting with the youth leaders of the Peace Village of Uyisenga N' Manzi, despite their inability to communicate with us effectively in English (some of them spoke quite well in French), they were very pleased that the country had chosen English as the official language.

In order to gain even more insights, the delegation sought to visit with other organizations and institutions working specifically on human rights as a discipline in Rwanda.

League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights in Rwanda (LIPRODHOR)
With reporting contributions from Julie Simeone

Easily one of the most outspoken local critics of the Rwandan Government and its policies and laws, LIPRODHOR is organized with several offices countrywide with 96 volunteers/animators, researchers and lawyers who raise awareness about rights and their violations, and who try to create a network for seeking assistance and justice. Their mission includes prisoner's rights, monitoring of elections, and the monitoring of genocide trials at Gacacas.

In 2004, the government accused LIPRODHOR of having a genocide ideology, and in response, LIPRODHOR created a commission to figure out why the government was accusing them of genocide ideology and determined that some members of the NGO were mixing politics with activism. These members were dismissed and LIPRODHOR was re-opened.

In addition to following Gacaca courts, which LIPRODHOR considers to be fraught with corruption and poor legal standards, LIPRODHOR has serious concerns about the Ingando youth solidarity camps.

“When you defend the rights of others, you are protecting yourself.”

-- *Gertrude Nyampinga, Executive Secretary, LIPRODHOR*



Samantha Gavagan, AJPRODHO's John Mudakikwa, and LIPRODHOR's Gertrude Nyampinga, in front of the UDHR poster, French version

The National Human Rights Commission

Following our meeting with LIPRODHOR, we had the good fortune to meet with the National Human Rights Commission, as represented by one of its seven commissioners, Hope Tumukunde. The NHRC is a body officially independent of the Rwandan Government, and with the power to investigate virtually anyone and any situation in the country. The NHRC is meant to investigate human rights violations (it has a hotline and post office box where it can officially receive reports: P.O. Box 269, Kigali, Rwanda) and to review policies and bills before they become law so as to comment on whether they conform to international human rights standards. Ms. Tumukunde mentioned many of the areas where the commission believes Rwanda has a good human rights record such as “security, due process, outlawing the death penalty, gender equality, anti-discrimination, ratified most international legal frameworks/charters, universal health coverage, freedom of the press, land and property reform, education through 9th grade for free, trying to build shelters to aid orphans.” When asked if she had heard about accusations that the

Rwandan government was wiretapping and the controversial Reproductive Health law that was being debated at the time in the Senate, the commissioner said she didn’t know anything about them, but that she would follow-up. In response to the accusation we had heard from some people that the NHRC is not acting independently and that it is difficult for human rights organizations like LIPRODHOR to express themselves freely, the commissioner insisted that the NHRC is independent, but said that there is a need for organizations to avoid being “antagonistic” and to seek a proper way of communication in order to get the ear of the government.

INTERESTING COINCIDENCE: LGBT Approach

Interestingly, during the contrasting visits to LIPRODHOR and the NHRC, we found some commonality in the approach to LGBT issues. When asked if they had ever been approached about discrimination against members of the LGBT community in Rwanda, the NHRC said “we have never received any complaints about such matters, but we are ready to hear them and support the victims if they bring their cases before us.” LIPRODHOR said that it had already met with members of the LGBT community, organized as HOCA, in the LIPRODHOR offices, and that LIPRODHOR had made it clear to them that their cause is no less relevant than other human rights issues. LIPRODHOR said that there had been no follow-up from HOCA or anyone else in the LGBT community, but that it was glad GYC was now connecting them to the issue again.

GACACA Observation:

Along with several of the Rwandan participants from the human rights workshop, the group had the opportunity to visit a gacaca in the Nyakabanda Cell in Nyamirambo. This gacaca must have been one of the only ones taking place on this day, as there were at least three groups of foreign observers there, but this did not impede our ability to glean much of the process, and, perhaps, add a sense of accountability to the trial.

The trial was an appeal from a man already found guilty of organizing killings in the sector. Fellow prisoners were there who urged the court to uphold the conviction, along with members of the

community, who began the session in a very quiet state, eventually engaging more and more to show their collective displeasure that this man continued to deny.

Homestays:

As part of the workshop, the international delegates spent several nights in the homes of the families of the workshop participants.

- *After I told him that I liked vegetables, it was so lovely that Cedy had packed his refrigerator with cabbages when we arrived.*
- *It was very difficult to see the domestic workers.*



**Veronique and Phiona (Rwandan GYC Alums)
Preparing for the Alumni meeting**

Alumni Network Meeting:

As with last year, this summer's delegation finished with an alumni sharing and networking meeting with numerous Rwandan participants, some of whom had first attended a GYC event in Rwanda in January 2006.

The Rwandan Alumni committee collected alumni updates and the current US and Rwandan participants shared with the alumni what they had accomplished during the current delegation.

The alumni event showed that even years after participating, many Rwandans still appreciate not only the opportunity to network with one another, but to return to an open space for discussion of issues that test the boundaries of the status quo. The conversation included testimonials as well as discussions about current events, such as the Ombudsman's corruption report. The question was posed, "If you were a playwright, are there any kinds of subjects that you should not be using as the basis of your plays in Rwanda or the USA today?" In response to this, the participants concluded that there were virtually no subjects that were completely off limits in the USA, but that there were many subjects that would be disliked in Rwanda by the government, and that many plays could be shut down for even implying, loosely, a criticism of a government entity, or the justice department, or the police, both of whom were criticized in the Ombudsman's report for being corrupt.

Evaluating Continuity and Looking forward to the Next Delegation:

While each delegation is an evolving entity and could take any shape or form, based on who applies to be a candidate and what skills and knowledge they bring to the table, potential areas of focus for the next delegation could be:

- Stepping-up the use of **artistic talents** of delegates, and using these for youth mobilization. We were reminded about the previous artistic endeavors of previous delegations by playing the Liberation Song created by AJ and Pascy, at the start of this year's alumni event. The same can be said for the modern dance work that Rebecca Davis initiated with the AMAHORO street kids, and the theatre for education techniques seen during previous workshops.
- Make **Freedom of the Press** a main topic of discussion again as it is so obviously important to Rwanda's social and political landscape at this point in time (see the headlines at the start of this report).

I remember that when the moto-cycle taxi drivers were outlawed in 2007, I used my radio show as a platform for denouncing this measure. Before my hour-long show was over, two policemen were ready for me at the door and I left the station in hand-cuffs, sent to prison for a few days.

--Global Youth Connect Alumni, testifying at the Alumni Meeting Summer 2009

We at AJPRODHO used a different approach, letter writing and policy lobbying. We think that this is even more effective than using a play in Rwanda sometimes, especially for addressing very sensitive political and civil liberties issues.

--John Mudakikwa, AJPRODHO, at the Alumni Meeting

- Revisit the issue of promoting **LGBT rights**. It is currently being reported to GYC that in the coming months the parliament may, indeed, pass a law making same-sex sexuality illegal in Rwanda, despite the efforts of AJPRODHO/GYC and Human Rights Watch, working with grassroots efforts like HOCA, to advocate to explicitly protect as opposed to negate their rights.

Was the delegation a success?

On numerous levels, the delegation to Rwanda was just as, if not more, successful than previous delegations.

The cross cultural and youthful nature of the delegations continues to create space (provide permission) for open and inquisitive discussions about human rights in ways that might not happen otherwise. This occurs both during the workshop, site visits, as well as the volunteer fieldwork. Due to this factor, the GYC delegations to Rwanda have become catalysts for change, at both the individual and organizational level.

AJPRODHO benefited a lot [from the delegation], for example we now have a better understanding of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgendered people through [the] connection with HOCA. Today, we are having a core group consultation led by AJPRODHO to have an article criminalizing LGBTs in Rwanda dropped. We are working with HOCA and a network of other Human Rights organizations, and we are going to lobby parliament.

-- Executive Secretary of AJPRODHO, John Mudakikwa

The delegation has a transformative effect on the participants:

My participation in the delegation has validated my focus as a change agent for children's rights in sub-saharan Africa, to help mobilize and empower the children to be active in the change they wish to see and develop for a bright future.

--US Participant, Final Evaluation

Thank you for introducing me to this concept of land disputes and mediation. It is a key idea that had never been aware of, and the Ombudsman's office must know about. I look forward to working with CIMS on this issue further.

-- Rwandan workshop participant, working with the Ombudsman's office

US Participants

Taryn Elledge is pursuing her undergraduate degree in International Studies and African Studies at the Jackson School at the University of Washington. In her spare time, she volunteers as a tutor for refugee children at the East African Community Services Center in Seattle, and in the past has tutored children while living in Italy. Participating in the delegation she hopes will bring her a better understanding of development and the struggle for human rights in Africa. Following graduation, she plans to utilize her studies, passions, and international experience to gain a position with the Peace Corps and/or join a non-governmental organization that focuses on least developed countries and international human rights, specifically those of women and children.

As a senior at Columbia University, **Chelsea Fairbank** is majoring in social anthropology concentrating in human rights. One of her greatest interests in her personal life is volunteering, which she has done both within and outside the US. She served in Americorps before college focusing on environmental conservation and education for at-risk youth. Outside the US, she has traveled extensively in South America where she volunteered in a prison in Peru and with indigenous communities in Ecuador, and currently teaches a South American fitness art, Capoeira, to middle school children. She hopes that her experience on the delegation will help her better understand how human rights are applied in a realistic setting including what and how obstacles to equality are overcome. Her goals in life include pursuing a masters/law degree focusing on indigenous peoples' rights through legal representation and advocacy. Wherever she finds herself, she knows she will continue focusing on volunteerism and service to disadvantaged communities.

What did you learn about Human Rights:

- Their creation does not confirm their implementation.
- Even human rights activists don't defend all human rights
- The interconnectedness of human rights issues

Currently a senior at George Mason University, **Samantha Gavagan** is majoring in Integrative Studies with a concentration in African Studies. She has traveled previously to Africa, studying community development in Stellenbosch, South Africa. While there, she helped run an after-school program for seventh graders and is still a strong advocate for children's rights. On the delegation, she hopes to engage with community members and action groups in Rwanda to better understand the issues of poverty from a more diverse perspective. Following the delegation and graduation, she plans to pursue her Master's Degree in Peace Operations followed by a field position with a community based non-governmental organization in sub-Saharan Africa. She is applying for the Peace Corps as well and hopes that wherever she ends up, she will be able to address the issues of conflict prevention, forgiveness, reconciliation, and poverty.

Ramsey Hamide graduated from the University of Washington and has a strong background in business and technology. He went to Rwanda to learn about the healing process following conflict and how these lessons can be applied around the world. His current employment involves developing city specific commerce websites that will and already do provide employment for women in impoverished countries around the world and has cultivated his interest in women's rights and empowerment.

Presently, **MacKenzie Hamilton** is waiting to begin college and is researching where her studies will take her. However, she has not let that stop her from already being active in the struggle for human rights. She is the president of STAND that worked to raise money for civilian protection in Darfur and Eastern Burma. She also has a love for children and wants to teach both children and adults about human rights and how to take action. She wants to attend college to study musical theater performance and someday join the Peace Corps. She knows that she has a lot to learn, but is excited about the prospects for the future.

Sarah Jackson hopes to begin graduate school in the fall to study International Affairs and Conflict Resolution. She graduated from the University of Richmond in May of 2008 with a degree in International Studies. Having a background in French and the Francophone world, she has developed a great interest in African history and

ethnic conflict. She studied in France and volunteered in Morocco and hopes that her time in Rwanda will bring her a deeper understanding about the reconciliation process as well as the efforts undertaken to rebuild the country following war. Her goals are to finish her graduate degree and work for a non-profit organization such as Human Rights Watch or the International Crisis Group, especially on such topics as the responsibility to protect or disarmament, demobilization or reintegration.

Valerie Love spends her time as Curator for Human Rights Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut where she works with human rights organizations and activists to manage their records and ensure the preservation and accessibility of their work to promote peace and human rights. She has an undergraduate degree from Smith College and a Masters in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin. Among other travels and efforts to promote human rights, in 2003, she visited South Africa and helped establish a library at a primary school. She also substituted for teachers who were unable to teach due to illness. She hopes that by participating in the delegation, she can contribute to the promotion of the idea that there are young leaders in the US dedicated to human rights and equality. In the future, she plans to return to school for a second Masters degree and do fieldwork for an NGO documenting abuses firsthand in the efforts to expose and find a solution to the problems of injustice.

As a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, **Lynnette Miner** has been privileged to travel extensively including to Geneva to study at the United Nations, to Korea as a student, and has served as a legal assistant at the ACLU Capital Punishment Project. She is most interested in cross-cultural communications and experiences as she is from a multicultural background herself. She is excited about working with other young leaders and learning how women's issues are dealt with in the Rwandan society as compared to other societies that must face the same struggles in other cultural contexts. While not having a specific goal for her future, Lynnette hopes to continue to further social justice wherever she is. Options include law school, or a Masters in International Relations, or the Peace Corps. She hopes this delegation will help her decide which path to follow.

Julie Simeone began her efforts to promote human rights after she became a *Guardian Ad Litem* with the New York City Housing Court. She entered Columbia University to pursue her Masters in Human Rights, focusing on oil rights and post-conflict resolution. She is also working as a research assistant to one of her professors and was nominated to serve on the Liberal Studies Masters Board of Advisors in 2008. She believes that only by studying past conflicts and the events that preceded them can future conflict be prevented, and is, thus, very excited by the learning opportunity that Rwanda presents. Upon completion of her Masters degree, she hopes to pursue a law degree in international law and possibly gain employment with the Center for Constitutional Rights or another organization that promotes human rights through the justice system.

Currently, **Ashley Smith** works with Girls for a Change, a national non-profit that empowers teen girls to lead and implement social change. She attended California College of the Arts where she also worked for social change through the Center for Art and Public Life that uses the art to address issues of social justice and community development. Upon graduation, she received her BFA in Sculpture, which she used collaboratively with another artist to create public performance pieces to spark social commentary. Having witnessed some personal issues of pain and tragedy, she looks forward to connecting with the individuals she meets in Rwanda to explore the issues of forgiveness and compassion. In the future, she hopes to live and travel overseas and work in a way that allows her to serve others, though she has not yet decided what that might be.

What did you learn about Rwanda:

- The vital role that civil society plays in the rebuilding and development of the country and its citizens.
- I learned that Rwanda is much more than a place where a genocide took place; I've learned that there are more than just Hutus and Tutsis living within its borders; I've learned that the government is working hard to improve the lives of its citizens, but that some of the mechanisms they are employing might not be ideal.

Yi Yin (pictured below) is a native of China studying international relations and psychology at Brown University. Her experience in the US has deepened her understanding of human rights as in China the topic was not discussed. While at Brown, she has become aware of her responsibility to advocate for democracy and human rights not only in her country, but also around the world. She looks forward to the delegation as a chance to meet with her peers who are interested in the same goals. She hopes to use her education to become a social or clinical psychologist, especially in post-trauma situations and somehow continue to use her interest in international relations and human rights to promote change in her own country.



Rwandan Participants and Staff:

RUTABINGWA Silas (pictured above, right): Silas was the AJPRODHO Special Program Assistant on the delegation, ensuring that we were able to accomplish our jam-packed activities, and often translating superbly for the group. Silas is a cashier at the King Faisal Hospital in Kigali.

KIREZI Alice is a student at the school of finance and banking and has experience volunteering for the Clinton Foundation in Rwanda.

NATUKUNDA Priscilla is a student at the School of Finance and Banking (SFB).

MAHORO Charlotte recently graduated from high school in Kigali.

BIRARO Pascaline is a Student at the National University of Rwanda

NSABIMANA Hovaire is a Medical Student at the National University of Rwanda and a member of the MEDSAR, Medical Students Association of Rwanda.

BEZA Kevin is working in the Ombudsman's office, which investigates charges of corruption in Rwanda.

GISANURA Innocent comes from the AGAHOZO SHALOM Youth Village

MUSIME Fred is a student at the Kigali Institute of Education and a member of AJPRODHO. He also served as the focal point for the volunteers working with AJPRODHO

Tuyishime Rose is a theatre and peer education youth trainer working with RAPP

Celestin 'Cedy' Ndikumana was HOCA's representative at the workshop

William Ndabarasa is a student at the School of Finance and Banking and was the focal point for volunteers working with GTUPV

Zawadi UMUHOZA is a student at the national university of Rwanda and the focal point for volunteers working with CIMS.

HABIMANA Jean Aime is a student at SFB and a member of Orphans of Rwanda, a merit based support network.

NSHIMIYIMANA Gilbert is a student, Kigali independent University



Bus Ride to Musanze

MUDAKIKWA John, AJPRODHO Executive Director is a graduate of the National University of Butare with a degree in Law. With AJPRODHO, he has been Chair of the Steering Committee of the Legal Aid Forum, and published numerous policy papers, most recently on incarcerated children's rights. Most recently he helped organize a coalition of civil society organizations in support of the Rwandan LGBT community.

GYC STAFF:

Jesse Hawkes, GYC Rwanda Program Director

Jesse is a social activist, professional actor, theatre director, author, and youth development worker who has been living and working in Kigali, Rwanda for nearly six years. In addition to serving as GYC's Program Director for Rwanda since January 2007, Jesse founded and now serves on the board of directors of Rwandans Allied for Peace and Progress (RAPP) (www.rapsida.blogspot.com). Jesse's work at RAPP has included developing and managing a creative, engaging HIV prevention program for over sixty Rwandan high schools and communities, utilizing a combination of innovative theatre methods, peer education, and outreach activities. He has also written episodes of *Ishuti Solange*, a popular radio drama series on HIV/AIDS and other public health concerns, as well as films about HIV Prevention in the Rwandan military for Population Services International (PSI-Rwanda). In collaboration with the Rwandan Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport and Mashirika Performing Arts, Jesse performed at the 10th memorial service of the 1994 genocide at Amahoro Stadium, Kigali. He also directed the short films, *Sinigurisha* (now seen on Rwanda TV) and *Ingabire*. As a founding member, assistant program director and chair of the Board of Directors for Centers for Social Responsibility, Jesse led outreach campaigns to schools for the *Rwanda By Invitation* program, chaired the Sister Schools program where he led secondary school students on a trip to Rwanda, and designed and delivered presentations on Rwandan history and culture to local high schools in Vermont. He also served as a visiting artist at the Community Arts Project in Cape Town, South Africa where he directed, wrote and facilitated a community development theatre project in collaboration with the South African government,

township youth and South African artists. As an educational consultant for Parents, Teachers and Students for Social Responsibility, an organization implementing educational programs and projects designed to empower young people with the knowledge and attitudes needed to become proactive citizens for social justice, he led a group of high school youth from the US on a visit to Haiti. Jesse graduated *cum laude* from Harvard University in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in history.