

CONNECTING THE EAST AND THE WEST

QISMAT

A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

CHRISTOPH KARLO

DESTINY

LIONS CLUB
KENNEDY LEGACY
MANIFESTATION
BENCI BROTHERS

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black Prada jacket with a diamond brooch, is speaking at a blue podium. The podium features a white banner with the text "ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS". The background is a blue screen with a pattern of white lines.

**ROBERT F.
KENNEDY
HUMAN
RIGHTS**

PRESIDENT OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS
KERRY KENNEDY

“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HERO
AND A VICTIM IS ACTIVISM WITH
A LOVING HEART”

Kerry Kennedy continues in her father Robert F. Kennedy’s footsteps, carrying on the Kennedy legacy and paving her own path in the field of human rights.

By Marina S. Haq

Kerry Kennedy, daughter of American politician Robert F. Kennedy, is a lawyer, author and human rights activist. Embracing her father’s legacy, she has been serving as president of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights since 1988, promoting and protecting human rights. She is the founder of the global education initiative Speak Truth To Power and the author of the books *Speak Truth To Power* and *Being Catholic Now*. Inspired by her family, she carries on the Kennedy legacy to ensure justice and contribute to a more compassionate world. Kerry Kennedy reflects on her family’s enduring legacy, delving into her role in supporting human rights and her contributions to the mission of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights.

Kerry Kennedy, how was it growing up in a world-known political family that was always in the spotlight?

I had an extraordinarily happy childhood. I had ten brothers and sisters, so there were plenty of playmates. My father was Attorney General at the height of the civil rights movement, and our house was filled with civil rights activists, farm worker organizers, American Indian leaders and anti-poverty advocates. They not only sat in meetings with my father; they also joined us at the dinner table and played football with us on the lawn. My parents melded work life with home life, so

there was a great sense of engaging in a higher purpose, along with a sense of hope and fun.

Did this contribute to you taking on human rights as an adult?

Yes, the principles of human rights were instilled in me at a very young age. When I learned to tie my shoes, the simple act of putting on the left shoe first meant that I intentionally tied the right shoelaces first, as I did not want there to be favoritism. I thought the social justice leaders were the most interesting and hopeful people I knew, and I wanted to be like them.

Who is your biggest inspiration?

My biggest inspiration is the community of human rights defenders with whom I work every day. They face the constant risk of imprisonment, torture and death while advocating for basic human rights which many of us are fortunate enough to take for granted. Although their names may not be well known, they operate on the cutting edge of social change, serving as the Martin Luther Kings and Mahatma Gandhis in their respective countries.

How do you and your family carry on your father’s legacy?

My family is very supportive of the work I do, which



ROBERT F.
KENNEDY
HUMAN
RIGHTS

SWITZERLAND

Photo Courtesy of Raphael Hünerfain

aligns with my father's values and vision. This is what I have wanted to do my whole life. My daughter and nephew are on the board of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. Many of the next generation serve on the RFK Leadership Council. They attend our events, donate time and treasure, and are a constant source of moral support.

Your book *Speak Truth To Power* features stories of 51 human rights activists. Another of your books, *Being Catholic Now*, explores faith. How does faith intersect with human rights activism?

Among the 51 human rights activists in *Speak Truth To Power*, 46 had experienced imprisonment, with most enduring torture. The majority had been educated by Jesuits, which I didn't realize until most of the interviews were complete. In all major religions, the path to God involves one's work and relationship with others. Advocating for peace and justice implies a belief in inherent human dignity. This perspective aligns with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Is there a book that had a profound impact on your life?

I like to read autobiographies of human rights defenders. One recent book I find deeply meaningful is *The Healing Path* by James Finley.

What is the mission of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights?

Everything we do is informed by Robert F. Kennedy's vision of a just and peaceful world. Today, worldwide, we have four major programs. First, we sue governments that violate human rights, particularly in what is called "civic space" – the freedom to criticize the government without fear of persecution. This involves cases in which journalists, opposition political figures, human rights defenders and marginalized groups are targeted for asserting their rights. Secondly, we engage the investment community to prioritize the "S" in ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance issues) when considering risk in risk-adjusted returns. Third, we promote human rights education at schools with our Speak Truth To Power program. The affiliates, such as Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Switzerland, focus solely on this aspect. And, we laud the heroes through our awards programs.

What is your vision for RFK Human Rights Switzerland?

We hope to implement the Speak Truth To Power human rights education program in every school in the country, changing the trajectory of the next generation.



Kerry Kennedy and her father Robert F. Kennedy

How does the human rights education program *Speak Truth To Power* align with the recognition and support of individuals who speak out against human rights violations?

At *Speak Truth to Power*, we train the next generation of human rights defenders by teaching students to know their rights, to have the skill sets needed to express themselves and to act in a manner that is effective and recognizes every person's dignity, and to learn the basics of community organizing, so they can bring people together around a common cause. To achieve this, we highlight inspirational figures such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Tutu and Swiss human rights defenders who have successfully instigated change, serving as examples for others to follow.

What advice do you have for people who face criticism for standing up for their beliefs?

This can be very painful, especially if it risks losing friends. So, I'd start with acknowledging the sadness and loss. And, I'd also say bravo, for doing something so courageous. And, try to find allies who will stand with you.

How important is it to involve the youth in human rights activism?

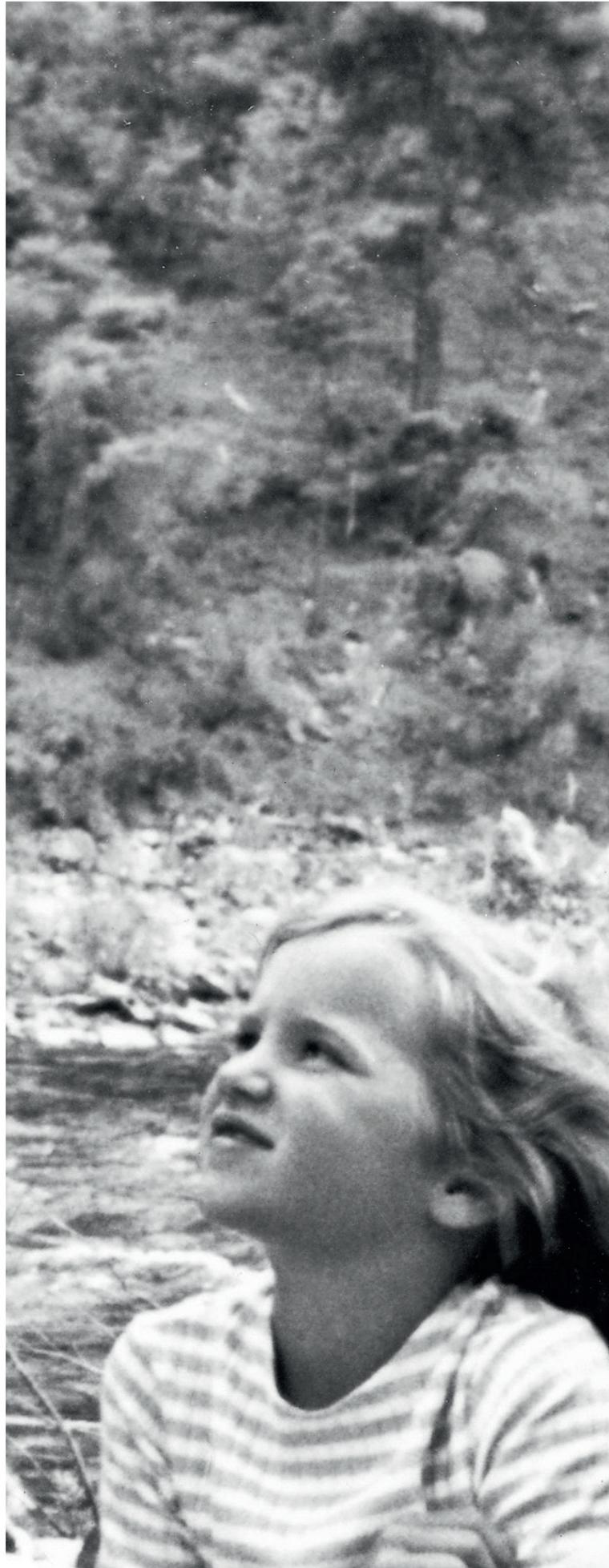
Our hope for the future rests in the next generation. The more they can learn to treat one another with dignity and learn the skill sets to advance positive change, the better off our world will be.

Could you share some of the most significant accomplishments of your organization?

In the last 18 months, along with our partner organizations, we won the first case in the history of Latin America holding a government accountable for



Photo Courtesy of Harry Benson



killing an LGBTQ activist. We won the first case in the African Court for Human Rights holding a government accountable for persecuting nonviolent protesters, and we won the freedom of our client, Paul Rusesabagina, the hero of Hotel Rwanda, who was sentenced to life in prison because he criticized his government.

What progress have you seen since RFK Human Rights was created in 1968?

When I began my work in human rights in the early 1980s, nearly all of Latin America was governed by right-wing military dictatorships. Today, not a single one remains. Communism dominated Eastern Europe. Today, there is no communist government left. South Africa was at the height of Apartheid, and now it boasts a series of democratically elected governments chosen by the majority of its people. And women's rights were not on the international agenda. These transformative changes did not occur because governments, major corporations, or powerful armies desired them. Rather, they materialized because small groups of determined individuals embraced the dream of freedom, turning it into reality. They rallied others, and this gathering force, driven by human rights, proved to be the most potent force in the world.

What is the biggest lesson you learned from your father, Robert F. Kennedy?

He said, "One person can make a difference, and each of us should try."

What life advice would you like to share with our readers?

The difference between a hero and a victim is activism with a loving heart.

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