



Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Speak Truth to Power Monologues

Table of Contents

Name	Country	Human Rights Issue
Iris Yasmin Barrios	Guatemala	Indigenous Rights
Nancy Dorsinville	Haiti	Right To Healthcare
Saul Martinez	El Salvador	Immigrant Rights
Unnamed Person	Nigeria	Right To Education And Safety
Adilur Rahman Khan	Bangladesh	Freedom From Torture
Thulani Maskeo	Swaziland	Freedom Of Speech
Greg Asbed	USA	Farmworker Rights
Mohammed Ahmed	Darfur	Peace Building
Malika Saada Saar	USA	Trafficking
Jessica Lenahan	USA	Right to Safety
Kailash Satyarthi	India	Children's Rights
Malala Yousafzai	Pakistan	Right to Education
Frank Mugisha	Uganda	LGBTQ+ Rights
Wangari Maathai	Kenya	Environmental Rights & Women's Rights
Gabor Gombos	Hungary	Rights of the Disabled
Stephen Bradberry	USA	Standard of Living
Jamie Nabozny	USA	Bullying
Marian Wright Edelman	USA	Children's Rights & Poverty
Hafez Abu Seada	Egypt	Freedom of Speech & Political Rights
Fauziya Kassinja	Togo	Female Genital Mutilation
Digna Ochoa	Mexico	Human Rights
Abubacar Sultan	Mozambique	Children's Rights
Loune Viaud	Haiti	Right to Healthcare & Potable Water
Muhammad Yunus	Bangladesh	Poverty & Right to Credit
Aminatou Haidar	Western Sahara	Non-Violence
Delphine Djirebe	Chad	Violence Against Women
Librada Paz	Mexico	Farmworker Rights
Abel Barrera Hernandez	Mexico	Indigenous Rights
Van Jones	USA	Police Brutality

IRIS YASSMIN BARRIOS, Guatemala, Indigenous Rights

My name is Judge Iris Yassmin Barrios. In the early 1980s Guatemala, was ruled by General Rios Montt, who targeted the Mayan Ixil people. Under his brutal regime, the army burned more than 400 indigenous communities to the ground, thousands of women and girls, massacred tens of thousands of Indians and conscripted thousands more into Community Patrols, forcing them to kill their own people.

No nation had ever brought genocide charges against its own head of state until Guatemala. I presided over the trial of General Rios Montt and in May 2013, I sentenced him to 80 years in prison.

Shortly after my ruling, allies of the old regime struck back against me and my colleagues. The Constitutional Court invalidated the sentence, and Guatemala's bar association suspended me from practicing law for a year. But I am standing my ground. People ask how I continue. I am a lawyer. I believe in justice. So it's easy.

Speak Truth Power!

NANCY DORSINVILLE, Haiti, Right To Healthcare

My name is Nancy Dorsinville. When the earthquake struck, we went as fast as we could to the Port au Prince Central Hospital. We performed surgeries without anesthesia. We were able to save many lives with our bare hands. People survived, but they suffered. There was so much death and destruction. Still, Haiti is a place of hope, where those who were spared believed God must have had a special purpose for their survival. We are rebuilding our country.

Speak Truth to Power!

SAUL MARTINEZ, El Salvador, Immigrant Rights

My name is Saul Martinez. I am 15 years old. Last year, I was riding my bicycle in El Salvador when three members of a gang said if they saw me there again, they would kill me. All I was doing was delivering tamales. I do not want to go back to my country, because I do not want to die.

I crossed the border from Mexico into the United States in April. I was immediately caught by U.S. Immigration and placed in a big room with 200 other children. The room was very cold—we called it “the icebox.” There were no beds, and not enough food. Sometimes officials handcuffed the children and left them outside, where they could not huddle together for warmth.

My six days in the ice box were the worst of my life. Please do not mistreat children the way your government has mistreated me. And do not deport children like me, because it is possible you would send them to violence and to their deaths.

Speak Truth to Power!

UNNAMED PERSON FROM NIGERIA, Right To Education And Safety

I am 18 years old. I had just taken my West Africa School Certificate exams along with the other girls in Chibok, Nigeria.

Just before midnight we heard a dozen men on motorcycles. Two men told us not to worry, and that we should not run. They said they were policemen and that they had come to save us from what was happening inside the town. We did not know that they were from Boko Haram. The rest of the men came and started shouting 'Allahu Akbar.' At that moment, we realized they were not policemen. We were told to be quiet. One of them told us that the horrible things we heard happening elsewhere would now happen to us. We all started crying, and they told us to shut up.

The men put as many of us as they could fit into one truck. I hung onto a tree branch and jumped down when the truck drove off. I sprained my ankle but I escaped. Now I'm helping other girls.

Speak Truth to Power!

ADILUR RAHMAN KHAN, Bangladesh, Freedom from Torture

My name is Adilur Rahman Khan. For 20 years, my colleagues and I have advocated for human rights and social justice in Bangladesh. We campaign tirelessly against torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. For our activities, we have been followed, monitored, harassed and threatened by law enforcement agencies, and we are on the verge of closing down. Still, we are fearless in the pursuit of human rights. Our spirit and determination are unstoppable. We will never cease.

Speak Truth to Power!

THULANI MASEKO, Swaziland, Freedom of Speech

My name is Thulani Maseko. I am a human rights lawyer in Swaziland. In March, I was arrested in my office and charged with contempt of court because of an article I published critical of my nation's judiciary, which is rarely impartial.

I have been sentenced to two years in prison. I am currently appealing. When I appeared before the court, I said:

“Nothing this court can do will shake me from my commitment to simple truth and simple justice, because I am willing to pay the severest penalty, even if it means spending more days, or even more years in jail. Penalties do not deter men and women when their conscience is aroused. It is well with my soul. I accept the penalty with a clean and a clear conscience that I did no wrong.”

Speak Truth To Power!

GREG ASBED, USA, Farmworkers' Rights

From coerced labor, to sexual exploitation, to criminally low wages, conditions for farmworkers are deplorable almost everywhere fruits and vegetables are grown. One farm boss boasted that killing a farmworker would be just like killing a dog. Supermarket chains have the buying power to improve conditions, but most of them aren't doing a thing to help.

How do we know so much about these grocery stores? Because we're taking them on. I'm Greg Asbed. Lucas Benitez and I co-founded the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, which has led the successful fight to provide America's tomato pickers with the pay and dignity they deserve.

Since our Fair Food Program was implemented across 90% of Florida's tomato industry in 2011, it has eliminated or greatly reduced abuses, added over \$14 million to farm payrolls, and earned the praise of human rights experts from the White House to the United Nations.

Speak Truth to Power!

MOHAMMED AHMED, Darfur, Peace Building

I am Dr. Mohammed Ahmed.

I traveled a long way from my village in the fertile and beautiful area of Jabal Mara to become a doctor. Thousands of my fellow Darfuris continue to live in internally displaced camps. They cannot return home because of the fear of violence. The camps are not a home; they are small tents, tattered by years of wear. We are calling out for peace. We wish to move forward, to heal and rebuild, but we continue to be targeted. In Darfur, my role is not just that of a doctor, but someone who must work to protect the community, uphold human rights and work towards peace.

Speak Truth to Power!

MALIKA SAADA SAAR, USA, Trafficking

I'm Malika Saada Saar, and I run the Human Rights Project for Girls. When a girl is born in a brothel in Bangkok, if she's lucky, she'll be rescued by an NGO, receive medical care, and be called a victim of trafficking. But here in the United States, that same 15-year-old girl is more likely to be turned over to the police. She will be handcuffed, detained, arraigned, prosecuted for soliciting sex, and labeled as a prostitute.

But there is no such thing as a child prostitute. There are only victims of systemic rape. We are going to put an end to it.

Speak Truth to Power!

JESSICA LENAHAN, USA, Right to Safety

My name is Jessica Lenahan. I'm from Castle Rock, Colorado.

Twelve years ago, my estranged husband kidnapped our daughters — Rebecca, Katheryn and Leslie — from our front yard. Panicked, I repeatedly called the Castle Rock police for help. It quickly became clear that the restraining order against my husband was worthless. The police told me that I “shouldn't worry,” and that I should “give it a few hours.” Meanwhile, the police responded to a fire-lane violation, looked for a lost dog, and took a long dinner break.

Over the next 10 hours, the police refused to try to find my daughters. Hours later, my husband drove up to the police station and opened fire. He was killed in the shootout, and the bodies of my girls were found in the back of his truck. I sued the town of Castle Rock for failing to enforce the restraining order and took my case to the U.S. Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court ruled my constitutional rights had not been violated by the failure to enforce the restraining order.

I felt utterly abandoned, but I wasn't done fighting. Along with attorneys from Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and the ACLU, I filed a petition before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, arguing that the failure of the police and the courts to provide justice constituted a violation of international human rights law. On Aug. 17, 2014, the commission issued a landmark decision that found the U.S. had violated my human rights and those of my three children.

Despite everything I've lost, I still have hope that our government will use this ruling as an opportunity to make things right, to provide the protection and accountability that will prevent a tragedy like the one I suffered from occurring again.

Speak Truth to Power!

KAILASH SATYARTHI, India, Children's Rights

My name is Kailash Satyarthi. When I was a little boy, there was a man and his son who ran a shoeshine stand outside of my school. I couldn't understand why the boy, who was about my age, wasn't in school like me.

One day, when I was six years old, there was a very heavy rain. When I was coming back to school from lunch, I saw the man beating his son, who was crying for help. I rushed to them and asked the father, "What is wrong with you? Why are you beating your son?"

He gestured to the soggy shoes on the ground and said, "Don't you see that all these shoes are destroyed? I presumed that there would be rain, so I gave my son a plastic sheet to cover our customers' shoes—but instead, he covered himself." The shoes are ruined. Who will bear the cost? I was angry, and I started crying. I said, "Don't you think that his head and his body are much more precious than these shoes?"

The father had no answer; suddenly, he grabbed his son and started weeping. At that moment, I realized that if you speak with conviction and tell the truth, things can change. That was the beginning.

Today, we work in thousands of villages in India and over 140 countries around the world. Child labor is not an isolated problem. Globalized markets, transnational corporations, consumer demand for cheap goods, all these cumulatively create and perpetuate child labor globally. We have emancipated over 80,000 children from slavery, but we can't do it all. That is why it is critical that we build a worldwide movement. We must globalize compassion.

Speak Truth to Power!

MALALA YOUSAFZAI, Pakistan, Right to Education

My name is Malala Yousafzai. In January, 2009, when I was in 7th grade, I started blogging for the BBC about a Taliban edict in Pakistan's Swat Valley that banned girls like me from going to school. I wanted to scream, shout, and tell the whole world what we were going through. But it was not possible. The Taliban would have killed me, my father, my whole family. So I chose to write with a different name. And it worked. My valley has been freed.

Still, I paid a price. On October 9th, 2012, the Taliban shot me on the left side of my forehead as I rode the bus home from school. They shot my friends, too. They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. Suddenly, the few of us calling for justice in Pakistan were joined by thousands of voices around the world.

The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and crush our ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear, and hopelessness died. My courage is as strong as ever. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same.

Speak Truth to Power!

FRANK MUGISHA, Uganda, LGBTQ+ Rights

My name is Frank Mugisha [Moo-ghee-sha]. I'm from Uganda.

I was six or seven years old when I realized I was attracted to people of my own sex. I thought I was alone. My classmates were expelled just for rumors of being gay. Then their fathers threatened to kill them or their families threw them out of the house. My fear increased.

I decided that I would never tell anyone. So I tried to fit in and be like my colleagues. I tried to change myself. I prayed to God. It wasn't working. At 14, I told someone, because I couldn't keep it in anymore.

The moment you come out and say you are gay in Uganda, the attacks begin. Friends and family reject you. Employers throw you out of your job. You never know who is going to harass you, bully you, assault you in the streets, or arrest you, and then torture you. The family of a lesbian will ask an uncle to rape the girl and teach her to be a woman. Many friends and colleagues have been murdered.

I can't go out casually. I can't just go shopping. I don't know if it is safe to use public transportation. Before I leave my house I have to calculate – will I be safe? Yet, I must. Because just appearing on television in Uganda and speaking out helps many people accept themselves. They know they are not alone in the world. They know there is a voice out there for them.

That is where I get my courage: knowing that every day of my life, every minute of my life, I make a very small difference, but that small difference has a huge impact on so many different people.

Speak Truth to Power!

WANGARI MAATHAI, Kenya, Environmental Rights & Women's Rights

My name is Wangari Maathai.

Many women in Kenya did not have firewood. They needed fruits to cure malnutrition in their children and clean drinking water, but the pesticides and herbicides used on farms to grow cash crops polluted the water. We encouraged them to plant trees. We would go and collect seeds from the trees, come back and plant them the way women did with other seeds. Here is the method: take a pot, put in the soil and put in the seeds. Put the pot in an elevated position so that the chickens and the goats don't come and eat the seedlings. We planted more than twenty million trees in Kenya alone. And the Greenbelt Movement has started programs in about twenty countries. This has not made us popular with the leaders. They attack us, attack me. But fortunately, my skin is thick like an elephant's.

Speak Truth to Power!

GABOR GOMBOS, Hungary, Rights of the Disabled

My Name is Gabor Gombos.

I am from Hungary. I am schizophrenic. If I don't take these pills every day, I start hearing voices. I spent seven years in asylums. My mother was also schizophrenic, and when they forced her to take medicines against her will, they killed her. When they tried the same medicines on me, I escaped, and founded an organization of survivors of insane asylums.

If I told you I, am like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, you would laugh. But I am telling you, the struggle for people with mental disabilities, our struggle, is no less a fight for human rights than that of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King.

Speak Truth to Power!

STEPHEN BRADBERRY, USA, Standard of Living

My name is Stephen Bradberry. I am a community organizer. Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was a majority African American, working class city. After the flood, an influential business leader emerged from a meeting with the Mayor and announced that “New Orleans needs to change demographically and economically” or he and other wealthy families would be pulling their money out.

A plan emerged to take one of the first places in America that an African American could buy a home and turn it into a golf course. Survivors were still fighting through a web of reluctant insurance companies and Kafkaesque federal programs. Developers were ready to level the neighborhood before ever asking the residents, “What do you want”?

Displaced families in Houston told us “My house will not be bulldozed”. Senior citizens evacuated to Baton Rouge said “I have a right to return to the only place I’ve ever called home.” So we began organizing to bring them back. The RFK Center amplified our voice, making sure displaced survivors cut out of the process would be heard in the media and in Washington. And suddenly, things started to turn around. The seizure law and the Golf course plan were overturned. The recovery of New Orleans is far from complete, but it was a victory.

Speak Truth To Power!

JAMIE NABOZNY, USA, Bullying

When I was in seventh grade, Kids were calling me 'fag' and 'queer'. I told the guidance counselor who directed me to the principal of the school. And the principal said 'I'll take care of it', but nothing changed.

One day I was in a bathroom with my brother and some kids actually ended up pushing us into the stalls and punching us. And I thought, "Okay, now that it's turned violent the principal has to do something." But she said to me, "Jaime, if you're going to be so openly gay, these kinds of things are going to happen to you." I attempted to kill myself.

Partially through my eighth grade year I was in science class, and two boys started groping me and grabbing me and pushed me to the ground and pretended like they were raping me in front of the entire class. I ran to the principal's office, expecting, surely, she's going to do something now, it's a sexual thing. And she just looked at me and shook her head and said, "Jaime, if you don't have an appointment than I don't have anything to say to you."

In high school, they beat me so badly I had to be taken to the hospital; I had to have emergency abdominal surgery for internal bruising and bleeding. I knew I wasn't ever going to be safe at school.

Then I met this crazy lesbian lawyer and we won. And school administrators now have a personal responsibility to protect students from harassment and if they do not they can be individually be sued, like a doctor for malpractice. I've always said I don't care why people do the right thing; they just need to do the right thing.

Speak Truth To Power!

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, USA, Children's Rights & Poverty

My name is Marian Wright Edelman.

One thing I remember about working with Dr. Martin Luther King is how he looked scared. I remember him saying how terrified he was of the police dogs in the back of the car when he was being taken out to rural Georgia after he was arrested. He used to say: "you can be scared but you shouldn't let it paralyze you. You don't have to see the whole stairway to take the first step. If you can't run, walk, if you can't walk, crawl, if you can't crawl, just keep moving." Just keep moving, just keep moving.

Speak Truth To Power!

HAFEZ ABU SEADA, Egypt, Freedom of Speech & Political Rights

My name is Hafez Abu Seada.

These scars across my face are from when they pushed me through a window. They asked me who was responsible for managing everything here at the Egyptian Human Rights Organization. I told them it was me. I wrote the report, I read it, I reviewed it, and I decided to publish it in a newspaper. This is our job, to point the finger at government errors. If we don't do this, who will?

Speak Truth To Power!

FAUZIYA KASSINDJA, Togo, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't marry that man. I was seventeen and he was forty-five and already had three wives. But my aunt said, "I know you don't love him now, but once you get kakiya, you will learn to love him. Tomorrow will be the day of kakiya." But with the help of my sister I escaped from Togo, I managed to make my way to the United States with a false passport. I told the immigration officer at Newark Airport that I wanted asylum. And I told her everything. Well, not everything because it is so embarrassing. I didn't mention kakiya to her because I knew she probably wouldn't understand. Whether I got asylum or not was up to the judge, she said, so you will go to prison. They put me in chains. In the detention center in New Jersey, I met Cecelia Jeffrey, another prisoner. She treated me like a daughter. When I'd go to bed, she would come and tuck me in. I was so sick, and they gave me no medicine and I thought, "If I am going to die, why don't I go back?" And Cecelia said: "Are you crazy, Fauziya? Do you know what you're going back for? Do you know?" The next day Cecelia was in the shower and asked me to come and she was standing in there and she opened her legs apart and said, "Look. Is this what you want to go back to?" I didn't know what I was seeing. "Do you know what this is?" I didn't know. It didn't look anything like female genitalia. Nothing. It was just like a really plain thing like the palm of my hand. And the only thing you could see was a scar, like the stitch. And just a little hole. That's it, no lips, nothing. Kakiya. I said, "You live with this?" And she said, "All my life. I cry all the time when I see it. I cry inside. I feel weak, I feel defeated all the time." And I looked at her and saw the strongest woman on earth. Outside you can't really tell that she's suffering. She's the most loving person I've ever met. She made me stay. She made me stay and win my case.

Speak Truth to Power!

DIGNA OCHOA, Mexico, Human Rights

If we don't do this, who will?

My name is Digna Ochoa. I am a nun and a lawyer. My father was a union leader in Veracruz, Mexico. In the sugar factory where he worked, he was involved in the struggles for running water, roads, and securing land certificates. Then he was “disappeared” and tortured—the charges against him, fabricated. And then I myself was “disappeared” and held incommunicado for eight days by the police. Now I felt in the flesh what my father had felt, what other people had suffered. I've always felt anger at the suffering of others. If an act of injustice doesn't provoke anger in me, it could be seen as indifference, passivity. . . . One time we filed a habeas corpus on behalf of a man who had been “disappeared” for twenty days. The authorities denied having him in custody and then denied us access to the state hospital where we knew he was being held. During a change in shifts, I slipped in. I got to the door of his room, took a deep breath, opened the door violently and yelled at the federal judicial police officers inside. I told them they had to leave immediately because I was the person's lawyer and needed to speak with him. They didn't know how to react, so they left. I had two minutes, but it was enough to get him to sign a piece of paper proving he was in the hospital. Then the police came back. Fierce. They didn't expect me to assume an attack position—the only position in karate I know from movies, I suppose. Of course, I don't really know karate, but they thought I was going to attack. Trembling inside, I said that if they laid a hand on me they'd see what would happen. And they drew back, saying, “You're threatening us.” And I said, “Take it any way you want.”

Speak Truth to Power!

ABUBACAR SULTAN, Mozambique, Children's Rights

My name is Abubacar Sultan.

When the war started in Mozambique, I decided to do something about the child soldiers. One particular seven year old boy changed my life. He was completely withdrawn from the world. He would be calm one day and cry continuously the next. Finally, he started speaking. He said he was living with his family when a group of rebel soldiers woke him up at night, beat him and forced him to set fire to the hut where his parents were living. And when his family tried to escape from the hut, they were shot in front of him and then cut into pieces. I will never forget his feelings, because he allowed me to kind of go inside him. Most of these kids were on the front, so that's where we went, into the war zones every day. On several occasions, we were almost shot down. But I didn't stop. Part of the explanation lies in religion (I'm a practicing Muslim). Yet there are many people like myself who never considered doing what I did. It must be something deeper, something inside, perhaps a kind of gift.

Speak Truth to Power!

LOUNE VIAUD, Haiti, Right to Healthcare & Potable Water

My name is Loune Viaud.

I have seen a lot of death since the earthquake, but we were suffering long before January 12th. When the RFK Delegation visited our hospital in rural Haiti in 2003, 15-year-old Isaac was dying. He had traveled eight hours on a rocky, unpaved road from his home to receive medical care. By the time he arrived, microbes had bored holes through his small intestine and caused severe peritonitis. Isaac contracted typhoid because he did not have access to clean water.

He was an “IDB kid”, one of thousands, a victim of the non-disbursement of long needed pre-approved loans from the Inter-American Development Bank. He died a few days later. These loans would have provided money for health centers, rural roads, and potable water, programs that might have saved Isaac and hundreds of thousands like him. I asked the RFK Center to help release the loans and turn on the water.

The RFK Center filed a Freedom of Information Act request, and uncovered secret emails from the Bush administration to the head of the IDB.

One of them read:

“At this point disbursements could normally begin... however, we do not believe that these loans can or should be treated in a routine manner and strongly urge you not to authorize any disbursement at this time.”

The RFK Center advocated at Congress, cajoled the State Department, and threatened legal actions against the IDB. Together, we uncovered the evidence, restored transparency, held the perpetrators accountable and helped turn on the water.

Speak Truth to Power!

MUHAMMAD YUNUS, Bangladesh, Poverty & Right to Credit

My name is Muhammad Yunus. I started the Grameen program to provide access to credit for the poor. The professionals say development involves multi-million dollar loans for enormous infrastructure projects. But I work with real people in the real world. The night before a woman is going to get her thirty-five dollars from the bank, she will be tossing and turning to decide whether she is really going to be able to repay the loan. And then she holds the money and she will tremble and tears will roll down her cheeks and she won't believe we would trust her with such a large amount of money. Thirty five dollars! And she struggles to pay that first installment and the second installment and she goes on for fifty weeks in sequence and every time she is braver. And when she finished her last one, she wants to celebrate. It's not just a monetary transaction that has been completed. She felt she was nobody and she really did not exist. Now she can almost stand up and challenge the whole world, shouting, "I can do it, I can make it on my own."

Speak Truth to Power!

AMINATOU HAIDAR, Western Sahara, Non-Violence

My Name is Aminatou Haidar [Am-een-a-too] [Hy-dar]. I am from Western Sahara. In 1975, Morocco invaded our country. Over 100,000 of my people have subsisted in refugee camps in Southern Algeria for the past 37 years. The rest of us survive in heroic resistance against the Moroccan military occupation.

In my city, there are police and army vehicles on almost every block. Secret police follow us day and night. We are never safe

One day, when I was about 20, along with 70 other non-violent demonstrators, the Moroccan police disappeared me. They tortured me, tied me to a wooden plank with my head down, slapped and kicked me again and again. They kept me blindfolded for four years. I was in solitary confinement most of the time. When they finally released me, I was like a ghost, the living dead, a young woman back from a kind of hell that bears no name.

On November 1, 2012, I reported human rights abuses to the UN representative in Moroccan occupied Western Sahara. The police followed me home, dragged me from my car into the street and beat me. They tried to stab me with a knife but miraculously I escaped.

I do what I do for the dignity of my people and my children, for those who are lost and cannot be found, for those who endure immeasurable sacrifices in defending their rights.

I will keep this non-violent struggle and I will keep speaking up for those who cannot.

Speak Truth to Power!

DELPHINE DJIREBE, Chad, Violence Against Women

Walking home from visiting her family,

a young girl is stopped on the road by a police officer.

He tells her she is being detained.

He gives no reason.

And then....

a heinous rape.

Every day in my homeland of Chad, violence against women goes unpunished. Women grow up not knowing they have rights, and they often abandon all hope of a better life. In all of Chad, there are only eight female attorneys, and I am one of them.

As a child, I would walk barefoot to fetch water, just as many girls do today.

But thanks to the support of a nun working in my village, I was able to attend school and become an attorney. I learned that I did not have to accept injustice.

Together with the RFK Center, I founded Chad's first Public Interest Law Center so women in Chad will never be forced to abandon their rights.

Women who could not imagine refusing their husband's polygamy,

obtaining a divorce, demanding child support or placing charges for domestic violence now have hope.

With our help, women are standing up to say, "I was blind, but now my eyes are open.

I am ready to stand up for my community. I can protect myself and my sisters."

Anyone can become a human rights defender.

You simply have to decide that you are willing to stand up for your family,

your community, and the people of your country and work for a better future.

Speak Truth to Power!

LIBRADA PAZ, Mexico, Farmworkers' Rights

My name is Librada Paz. I am of the indigenous Mixtec (Mizz-teck) people from Oaxaca (Oh-ha-kah), Mexico.

When I was 15 years old, I made the difficult decision to leave my home and make the long journey north, to study engineering.

Instead, I found myself picking fruits and vegetables. I had to work at the pace of an adult, long hours in the sun, arduous work without rest, my back in pain from being bent over ten hours a day, the risk of getting sick or having an accident and losing my job.

New York farmworkers have no right to a day off per week, no right to over-time pay, no right to collective bargaining or to form a union, and child labor is still legal. We are working to pass a law to end this discrimination.

Si se puede. Si se puede! Si se Puede;

Speak Truth To Power!

ABEL BARRERA HERNANDEZ, Mexico, Indigenous Rights

When I was growing up in Mexico I noticed a strict line between Mexicans who spoke Spanish and those who spoke native languages. This division was very painful for me, even as a young boy. I belonged to the Spanish speakers, but many of my closest friends came from indigenous communities. I was made to feel that it was wrong to interact with these people. Even though our country professes Christian values, we do not treat our indigenous brothers and sisters with respect. Or humanity. We do not live our Christian values. This created great feelings of guilt for me.

Of course, there are many people who do not see the contradiction of demanding dignity and respect for themselves while denying dignity and respect to others. The indigenous people were perceived as living in a dark, negative world. They prayed in caves in the mountains. They spoke to the clouds. They lived apart because of the mistreatment they experienced. My community thought they were demons. But I wanted to understand their way of life. Through my search for understanding I discovered that these people were full of peace and love. I did not understand how I could help change their situation, but I knew that I had to work to resolve this injustice. That is what got me started on this path.

The indigenous people of Mexico descend from the original Mesoamerican civilizations that populated my country long before the Spanish arrived. They have been persecuted for more than five centuries yet they continue to preserve their identity with pride. They have been condemned to obscurity that results in the deaths of young men and women denied access to medical care, deaths at the hands of corrupt police and military, deaths on the road migrating to the United States in search of opportunity. Deaths caused by a government unwilling to protect basic human rights. I cannot sit back while my country tramples these abandoned peoples.

In 1994, in a small hotel room, a group of us resolved to become an instrument to serve indigenous peoples. The organization we founded that night, Tlachinollan, began documenting the abuse, the suffering, the torture and arbitrary detentions of indigenous peoples. We recorded the massacres, the disappearances, the rapes and extra-judicial executions. We recorded the violations of the right to education, healthcare, housing and food. This caused us much grief. We started receiving death threats. But the rural people gave us the strength to continue our work. The rural people nourished our spirits with caring and a profound sense of

brotherhood. But the threats continued. 107 human rights defenders working with us have received death threats. We still live in fear. We had to close one of our offices and some of our partners had to move to the United States to stay alive. Discrimination is a powerful force.

The violence in Mexico has left our entire society defenseless against illegal acts perpetrated by both organized crime and the State. The war on drugs is fought in the name of the law, but we know that the authorities are the first to violate the law. Until the drug war attacks the roots of the problem and the complicity between the narco-traffickers and political power we cannot support it. The consequences of military deployment throughout the state of Guerrero, where I work, has brought more rape and torture. Two indigenous Me'phaa women, Ines and Valentina, ages 16 and 25, were raped and tortured by members of the Mexican military. To this day Ines and Valentina, along with their families, receive death threats for raising their voices. The Inter American Court of Human Rights ordered the civil authorities to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of these atrocities. Since then more tragedies have occurred. They killed Lorenzo Fernandez. They disappeared and executed Raul Lucas and Manuel Ponce. They imprisoned Raul Hernandez. This is Mexico's hidden face. Our work touches a very sensitive nerve of a very corrupt system. Questioning the behavior of the authorities isn't normally done.

We don't know if we will be able to accomplish all of the new challenges and tasks before us. Our first priority is to ensure that the sentences are upheld in the Inter American Court of Human Rights. To make sure there are advances in the investigations for human rights defenders. This is our priority. We will continue to work hard on the ground, locally with the people, to be around them, to accompany them in their struggles. We will share their sufferings, sadness and frustrations. We will let them know that they must declare to any authority, "I have rights and you can speak to my attorney." And, yes, we are their attorneys. Even if we don't know how to defend them, we are determined to turn this phrase "human rights" into reality. As a civic organization, we also have to build alliances and solidarity, and find opportunities to engage with other communities, who are struggling in other places, and have an impact on their own governments, and internationally.

We have been learning slowly that international solidarity is strategic. We live in a globalized world, and we cannot remain isolated. We also understand that local struggles are global struggles. What happens here has repercussions elsewhere,

and in that sense we have to be in solidarity. We must continue lobbying authorities to respect our work.

The struggles of Mexico's indigenous communities have touched us in a deep way. Amidst a vast ocean of aggression there is the light of human rights. When indigenous people arrive at our offices, it is a challenge we take seriously because we are the last resort for them. We must end the aggression. We must end five centuries of persecution. These people have placed their trust in us. We must deliver. We must reach the top of the mountain with them.

Speak Truth to Power!

VAN JONES, USA, Police Brutality

Few and far between.

We have seen that light many times.

Our organization exposes human rights violations, particularly police brutality, here in the United States. Children who come home with a broken arm or a broken jaw or their teeth shattered. Or a child that has been held in jail for four or five days with no charges. Faces of kids sprayed with pepper spray – a resin that sticks to your skin and it burns and it continues to burn until it's washed off. I mean, this stuff doesn't make our world any safer. It doesn't make law enforcement's job any easier. And Police Watch is trying to stop it.

Speak Truth to Power!