

The Institute of Human Rights at Emory: An Interdisciplinary Approach to a Global Issue

In April 2005 the Institute of Human Rights at Emory hosts its first major conference, gathering three hundred public health and development professionals from around the world to explore the application of human rights theory in public health policy-making. Titled “Lessons Learned from Rights-Based Approaches to Health,” the conference is being organized in collaboration with the World Health Organization, CARE USA, the human rights offices of The Carter Center, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Doctors for Global Health. Featured speakers include former President Jimmy Carter, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health Paul Hunt.

“We are trying to make the connections between theory and practice,” said the institute’s executive director

Professor of Political Science David R. Davis—founded the institute, which is the first human rights program in the United States that has developed an interdisciplinary educational component for all graduate and professional students.

“Human rights centers and institutes tend to be based within specific schools or units of the university,” said An-Na’im, an internationally recognized expert in Islam and human rights and human rights in cross-cultural perspectives. “But an interdisciplinary approach is in fact required by the nature of the field itself, which is best studied through a combination of health and social sciences, as well as law and the humanities.”

An-Na’im is director of the Religion and Human Rights Project of the Law and Religion Program at Emory Law School and has completed a series of multiyear, international research projects funded by the Ford



Studying trauma among Tibetan refugees: School of Public Health Lecturer Dabney Evans met with students at the Tibetan Children’s Village, Himachal Pradesh, India

eties. An-Na’im is one of a number of core and affiliated faculty at the institute who are conducting research on human rights–related projects.

Dabney Evans is coprincipal investigator for the “Tibet Trauma Study,” which is examining mental health and perceptions of human rights among adolescent Tibetan refugees in India. In 2002 she traveled to Dharamsala, India, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile, to compare rates of



Advocating for social change: Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Law Abdullahi An-Na’im with Fellows from his Islam and Human Rights project during a 2004 conference in Istanbul, Turkey

and lecturer in the Rollins School of Public Health Dabney Evans, “not only how human rights abuses can impact health but also how health policies and programs can positively—and potentially negatively—impact human rights.”

Three years ago, Evans—along with Candler Professor of Law Abdullahi An-Na’im and Associate

Foundation. These projects include studies on women and land rights in Africa and Islamic family law, and an Islam and Human Rights fellowship program, which hosted several scholar-activists from Islamic nations who are advocating for social change. His current project, titled “The Future of Shari’a,” will explore the public role of shari’a (Islamic law) in Islamic soci-



Training health care workers in war-torn areas: Associate Professor of Political Science (top center) David Davis traveled to Sudan with The Carter Center to design and conduct a conflict-resolution skills-training program for health care workers in the center’s Guinea Worm eradication program.

anxiety and depression between refugees who escaped to India and ethnic Tibetans who were born and raised in exile.

David R. Davis, whose research interests include the causes and consequences of conflict, worked with The Carter Center last year to design and conduct a conflict-resolution skills-training program for health care


workers in the Sudan. The pilot project was designed to improve the ability of health care workers in The Carter Center's Guinea Worm Eradication Program to establish transmission-intervention programs. Eighty percent of the world's remaining cases of Guinea Worm—a debilitating parasitic disease—occur in the Sudan, but health care workers often cannot reach afflicted villages due to the ongoing Sudanese civil war.

Other affiliated faculty in the institute include Rick Doner, associate professor of political science; Johan van der Vyver, I. T. Cohen Professor of

International Law and Human Rights; Darla Ura, associate professor of nursing; and Elizabeth Bounds, associate director of the Graduate Division of Religion. By bringing together faculty from across the University, the institute aims to encourage human rights scholarship, to increase awareness about human rights issues, and to develop educational programs, such as the new graduate certificate in human rights open to students in all of Emory's professional schools.

The institute is also home to Atlanta's Asylum Network, which, in collaboration with the Boston-based

nongovernmental organization Physicians for Human Rights, provides pro bono physical and psychological examinations for people seeking asylum in the United States. To date, nearly one hundred physicians and nurses at Emory have been trained to conduct modified, culturally sensitive exams.

"Lessons Learned from Rights-Based Approaches to Health" will take place April 14 to 16, 2005 at the Emory Conference Center. To register online, visit the website of the Institute of Human Rights at <http://human-rights.emory.edu/>. 

Outreach to Africa: Students Propose Economic Development Plans for Mali

When former U.S. President Jimmy Carter—head of The Carter Center and a University Distinguished Professor on the Emory faculty—asked Emory President James Wagner what could be done to help the impoverished African nation of Mali, Emory's Goizueta Business School stepped up to the plate. In fall 2004 it offered a new interdisciplinary course called Economic Development in Africa, in which students from the schools of business, public health, and law, along with undergraduates in Emory College, worked in teams to develop potential economic development programs in Mali, where The Carter



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter addresses students in Goizueta Business School's course on Economic Development in Africa

Center has worked for many years and where a quarter of all children die of malaria before their fifth birthday.

The course included speakers from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Aga Khan Development Network, in addition to other notables such as Mamphela Ramphele—Halle Distinguished Fellow (see page 6) and cochair of the United Nations Global Commission on International Migration—and international banker George Vojta. Vojta is the founder of eStandards Forum, an effort to standardize and make transparent financial practices in countries around the world with the aim of promoting private-

sector investment in developing countries. According to sociology professor and former member of the Dutch parliament Sam Cherribi, who taught the class, Vojta's involvement was invaluable because of his hands-on knowledge of international finance.

In November the students presented their plans to President Carter. The proposals ranged from the manufacture of prepackaged malaria drug kits and cotton craft items (Mali is the largest cotton producer in Africa) to an ecotourism program. Carter offered his personal assistance in making connections for the groups if any decide to make their proposals a reality, including setting up a meeting with the president of Mali, Amadou Toure, a long-time friend of Carter.

In remarks to the students, Carter said that the greatest challenge to the world in this century will be the growing chasm between rich and poor nations. "If you agree with what I've said about the greatest challenge in the world, let me also say that the greatest treasure that the United States has is its system of higher education," he said.

"My dream would be to see Emory University become . . . the worldwide repository of interests and knowledge [about the developing world]. I don't think that there is anything that Emory could do that would be so valuable."

—Deb Hammacher and
Lailee Mendelson



The Carter Center is a lead partner in a worldwide coalition that nearly has eradicated Guinea Worm, a debilitating parasitic disease. Last year, President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, traveled to Mali to call international attention to the need to eradicate the last 1 percent of Guinea Worm remaining in the world.