



Forum Gives Voice to Human Rights Defenders

Human rights activists and scholars from 28 countries gathered at The Carter Center in mid-October to listen and learn from each other during the 12th Human Rights Defenders Forum.

This year's theme was "Building Solidarity Toward Equality for All," and session topics included global protection for activists, challenges for women defenders and peacemakers, and the importance of mutually supporting civil, economic, political, and social rights.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter attended the forum's final day, offering wisdom and support.

Today, he said, "We face tremendous opposition to truth and to justice and to democracy and freedom and human rights." It would be easy to give in to despair. But, he told the human rights defenders, "I'm very proud of the work that's been done here."

Participants valued their time together.

"This work can be under-appreciated and challenging, as evident by the stories you hear about the people who paid the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives and freedom," said Bashir Y. Mundi, a native of Nigeria and the director of the Development Initiative of West Africa. "Events like this are special because it makes us appreciate other agents and agencies that are doing good work around the world."

Rustic Airstrips Allow Access to Amazon Communities

For health workers fighting river blindness in Venezuela, reaching remote communities in the Amazon Rainforest is becoming a little bit easier. Fourteen old and overgrown jungle airstrips have been rehabilitated to allow small planes to land carrying much-needed medical supplies and personnel.

The Carter Center has been working in Latin America for more than 20 years, in partnership with endemic countries, to eliminate river blindness, a parasitic disease.

In these roadless areas, health workers previously could only get to the 366 scattered villages of Venezuela's indigenous Yanomami people by journeys on boat or foot that could take days and weeks. "We need to reach several of the most remote populations in the world," said Oscar Noya Alarcón, who works on Venezuela's national river blindness team.

These rustic airstrips, typically just a cleared area of cut grasses or dirt, have allowed program staff to reach more people more quickly to provide river blindness

treatments with the medication Mectizan (donated by Merck & Co., Inc.). To halt transmission of the disease, each person in an



One bright morning in mid-June, a U.N. convoy rolls through the



needle to numb Ado's eyelid with xylocaine. After the numbing agent took effect, Nassirou, wearing surgical scrubs and a magnifying loupe, used a curved needle and thread to attach the eyelid to a spoon-like device that he used to invert the eyelid. As a colleague held a flashlight to augment the fading afternoon sunlight, Nassirou carefully made an incision along the inside of the scarred eyelid, allowing him to rotate the lashes back to their proper position.

Nassirou dabbed at the incision with sterile gauze and sutured it closed. The entire procedure took 18 minutes.

After moving the drape, Nassirou per-



Adam Weiss has pulled thousands of Guinea worms from the legs, arms, and feet of Ghanaians and Ethiopians. But a few stand out. He remembers one small boy in northern Ghana with a worm emerging from his scrotum. Weiss drove 15 minutes every morning at 6:30 a.m. to slowly, carefully extract his young patient's worm, little by little, for two weeks.

"I remember this overwhelming feeling of pressure," Weiss said. "I didn't want to ruin his life." Because, Weiss said, in Ghana it is important for men to become fathers, a wrong move by Weiss might break the emerging Guinea worm—sometimes 2 to 3 feet long—and cause irreversible damage in this sensitive area of the boy's body.

Weiss, who was named director of the Carter Center's Guinea Worm Eradication Program a little more than a year ago, brings to the position both experience in the field and at the Center's headquarters in Atlanta. With eight years living in Ghana and Ethiopia in many Guinea worm program roles, Weiss is uniquely positioned to she C 0.125chll enge sf t0.5 (e,adicatiog)0.5 (suinea)T.5 (warm p0.5 (sdiseae,)0.6 (a)n)]TJETEMC Špan Źang (en-US)MCID 9016BDC BT0.

