

Forum Gives Voice to Human Rights Defenders

uman 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

or 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



ne 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-





unisians went to the polls three times in just four weeks this fall to elect a new president and parliament.

They chose Kaïs Saïed, a retired con stitutional law professor withmo political experience, as their new president and selected a diverse group of political parties and independents to represent them in parliament.

"The results reflect Tunisians' frustra tion with the slow pace of reform since the 2011 revolution that launched the Arab Spring," said Sarah Johnson, an associate director in the Carter Center's Democracy Program. "The continued decline in the economy, the rising cost of living, and the inability of established political parties to enact reforms spurred many voters to opt for political outsiders who they hope will achieve the goals of the revolution."

The Carter Center deployed a team of more than 90 observers for each of the elections. The core team arrived in May, followed by 16 long-term observers in July. Three international figures shared del egation leadership duties: Salam Fayyad, a former Palestinian prime minister; Tana de Zulueta, a former member of the Italian parliament; and Karen AbuZayd, a senior U.N. official and a commissioner on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

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The timing of his detention, combined with parliament's attempt in June to pass a law that would have effectively barred him from running, led many to believe it was politically motivated.

"The charges against Karoui date back to 2016, but he wasn't detained until August 2019," said Carroll. "That timing raised legitimate concerns about the equitable treatment of candidates, which is required by Tunisianlaw. While he advanced to the second round, he was not released until four days befoe the runoff. In the final poll, he won just 27 percent of the vote."

The Carter Center has had a pres-

and maintains a field office in Tunis that carries out various democracy-strengthening projects, often partnering with local organizations.

"Tunisia has made significant progress in the last eight years," said Johnson. "Yes, thee ae problems—real problems—and the people have a right to feel frustrated with the pace of change. It will take time to build a strong democracy, but the trajectory is promising."

dam 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.

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"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 head-quarters 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 ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (quinea) T.5 (warm of the C 0.125chll ange of to 5 (e. adjecting) 0.5 (e.

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