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NGO Update

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NGO UPDATE

To foster communication between human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an "NGO Update." This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organizations, please see the instructions provided at the end of the column.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM (WSF)

www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

The Fifth World Social Forum (WSF) took place from January 26 to 31, 2005, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The WSF is a large annual gathering of people involved with social movements, networks, NGOs, and other civil society organizations. WSF provides the space for an international democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, and interlinking of organizations and people from around the world. The WSF was first organized in 2001 and is designed to encourage the development of alternatives to the economic and social policies supported by institutions like the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank. The WSF is held every year as a counterbalance to the World Economic Forum, which is a network of over 1,000 large corporations and 200 smaller businesses, whose members meet once a year in Davos, Switzerland.

Over 150,000 participants from 135 countries attended over 2,500 events associated with this year's Forum. Groups as diverse as the landless workers movement in Brazil; gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgendered activists from throughout South America; Korean trade unionists; members of the South African feminist movement; and Greenpeace attended. This year's WSF produced the Porto Alegre Manifesto, which is comprised of 12 proposals for how to build another possible world. Seven of the recommendations concern the economy and include proposals on canceling the public debt owed by countries of the developing

South, enhancing food sovereignty and security through small-scale agriculture, and prohibiting patents on knowledge and living organisms. The remaining five recommendations concern the democratization of international organizations.

MADRE

www.madre.org

MADRE is a women's human rights organization based in New York City that works in partnership with women's community-based groups in conflict areas worldwide. MADRE was founded in 1983 after a group of women activists, poets, teachers, artists, and health professionals traveled to Nicaragua to witness the impact of the Contra War. This group of women returned to the United States with a mandate from the women of Nicaragua: to bring the stories of Nicaraguan women and children to the attention of the U.S. public and mobilize people to demand a change in U.S. government policy. Since then, MADRE has worked with groups in Nicaragua, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Rwanda, Kenya, Sudan, Palestine, Iraq, the Balkans, Lebanon, and Afghanistan.

MADRE's work is divided into four main areas: (1) direct humanitarian aid; (2) support for community development programs and leadership training; (3) human rights advocacy; and (4) public education in the United States about the impact of U.S. foreign policy on women and families abroad. MADRE also helps strengthen the application and relevance of international laws on the community level and facilitates the involvement of community-based women's organizations in international fora. MADRE addresses issues such as armed conflict and forced displacement, economic justice and community development, food security and sustainable development, indigenous peoples' rights and resources, women's health and reproductive rights, and youth leadership development.

In January 2005, MADRE sent a representative to the World Social Forum (WSF). MADRE, along with members of the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice, helped organize events at the WSF. One such event, the Feminist Dialogue, was a two-day meeting that aimed to strengthen ties among

various social movements and women's organizations to promote women's human rights alternatives to the current economic and social policies promoted at the World Economic Forum.

FEDERATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS KENYA (FIDA KENYA)

www.fidakenya.org

The Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA Kenya) is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization for women lawyers and law students in Kenya. FIDA Kenya was founded in 1985 after the third UN Conference on Women, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. FIDA Kenya recognizes that although women in Kenya play a vital role in Kenyan society, they face major obstacles that prevent them from fully enjoying their rights and privileges. In response, FIDA Kenya (1) provides legal services to women; (2) creates awareness of legal rights and educates women on how to claim these rights through self-representation in court; (3) researches, monitors, and reports women's rights violations; (4) lobbies and advocates for reform of laws and policies that discriminate against women; and (5) undertakes transformative public interest litigation.

As part of its efforts to reform Kenyan law, FIDA Kenya has been involved in reviewing and reforming the Kenyan Constitution. Since 1997, FIDA Kenya has provided leadership for the Kenyan women's rights movement in the constitutional reform process. FIDA Kenya has published reports on women's rights and successfully advocated for an amendment to the constitution outlawing discrimination on the basis of sex. FIDA Kenya continues to lead a national campaign for further constitutional reform for women's rights.

CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT (CEDHA)

www.cedha.org.ar/en/

The Center for Human Rights and the Environment (CEDHA), based in Córdoba, Argentina, is a public interest organization that promotes access to justice and local and global compliance with environmental and human rights laws. CEDHA works with civil society

organizations, governments, and academic institutions to raise awareness, increase capacity, and provide resources to address the interconnection between the environment and human rights at the local and international levels.

CEDHA provides free legal services and brings public interest cases in national, regional, and international tribunals. CEDHA also educates judges and attorneys in Argentina and across Latin America and publishes research and other materials. CEDHA is the founder and coordinator of Latin America's first Environment and Human Rights Legal Clinic. The Legal Clinic is directed and coordinated by CEDHA staff with the assistance of independent attorneys and operates in conjunction with the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba. In addition, CEDHA helps coordinate the Argentine Environmental Defenders Network.

CEDHA works on a variety of issues such

as the right to water, public participation and access to information, corporate social liability and accountability, and international financial institutions. CEDHA recently launched its International Financial Institutions Initiative. Through this new initiative, CEDHA encourages international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, to comply with human rights and environmental law in their projects and policies. CEDHA advocates for more effective justice mechanisms for victims or potential victims of activities of international financial institutions. CEDHA works to increase the transparency of international financial institutions, pushes for broader access to information, and promotes public participation in policy development and decision-making. Toward this end, CEDHA researches and reports on the human rights and environmental impact of the international financial institutions' projects and also works to build the capacity of other civil

society organizations that can help advocate for compliance.

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of "NGO Update." If your organization has an event or situation it would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu, and include "NGO Update" in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations.

HRB

Lauren Bartlett, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers NGOs for the Human Rights Brief.

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