

Annual Report

2023



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Message from LAW's Founder and Executive Director



*I am very
pleased to
introduce
LAW's
2023
annual
report.*

2023 marked the 10-year anniversary for LAW. In its first decade, LAW has provided legal information to more than 100'000 individuals in conflict contexts and supported more than 4'000 individuals (73% of which are women) with legal representation. The organisation has initiated landmark cases, provided critical interventions, and advocated for the views of our clients at the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – and in other courts and justice mechanisms, including national courts in Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Lebanon. LAW has submitted 2'855 pages of evidence to National and International Courts and tribunals and has provided training to more than 11'120 community members. More than 1'588 justice actors have received training or technical support across a wide range of topics relevant to their work. LAW supported 2'000 survivors in establishing responsive networks. The team now numbers more than 90 lawyers, jurists and support staff.

Once again, thanks to the dedication and passion of our staff, partners, and the support from our board members and donors, but most importantly, the courage and determination of victims and survivors, LAW has continued to make strides towards delivering justice, putting an end to impunity and establishing the legal and policy frameworks that are needed to prevent and redress human rights violations and abuses in conflict and fragile settings.

In 2023, LAW worked, undeterred, with victims and survivors in Bangladesh, Syria, Lebanon, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia. 2023 marked not only the first 10-year anniversary of LAW, but also the year of decisive development and milestones for LAW, including:

- The initiation of operations of a new programme in Ukraine, along with local and international partners, to bring justice to victims of international crimes in the context of the ongoing war with Russia.
- Publishing a groundbreaking multidisciplinary report "Long-Term Physical and Psychosocial Consequences of Genocidal Sexual and Gender-Based Violence the Myanmar Military Committed against the Rohingya in its 2017 'Clearance Operations'". The report is an instrumental contribution towards the analytical evidence that the International Court of Justice has at its disposal for a gendered analysis to determine genocide in the *Gambia v. Myanmar* case.
- Facilitating the direct testimony of seven Rohingya survivors before a Federal Criminal Court in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in charge of a case filed under universal jurisdiction concerning genocide and crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya. The testimony was historic and precedent-setting, as it allowed direct participation of survivors in the proceedings and was critical to building evidence for the case.

- The award to Shanti Mohila of the Raphael Lemkin Champion of Prevention of Genocide by the UN Office of Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) for their work in advocating justice in the spirit of the Genocide Convention.
- Launching the Myanmar programme which focuses on accountability for conflict-related sexual violence crimes in the post-coup context.
- Kicking off the first phase of the Gender Justice Practitioners Hub with activities that included the organisation of two roundtables in Beirut, Lebanon and Bangkok, Thailand, a side event about the initiative during the Assembly of State Parties to the ICC and setting up the Advisory Committee.
- Publishing our policy brief "An Untapped Justice Opportunity for Syria: A State Party Referral to the International Criminal Court", outlining the arguments that make possible a referral to the ICC for the case of Syria.
- As part of our advocacy work, publishing a handbook on the implementation of the Geneva Conventions Act in South Sudan which was shared with stakeholders like the Ministry of Justice, as well as judges and prosecutors in the country.
- In 2023, LAW undertook in-depth research focusing on the obstacles face by humanitarian aid workers working at international and national NGOs, through review of existing literature and reports, conducting roundtables and completing an anonymous online survey.
- Since October 2023, LAW has identified and collated key legal developments and analysis regarding the situation of Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories. These documents are publicly available on LAW's website.
- Increasing LAW's presence in specialized media, with pieces published in *Opinio Juris* and *Just Security*.
- Strengthening LAW's capacity to response to crimes of sexual violence committed against children, particularly boys and LGBTQI+ survivors, through the support of the OAK Foundation.
- Providing more than 20,000 individuals with legal information and representing over 700 persons – including 572 women.

Challenges remain, but our collective efforts, our commitment to serve and empower victims and survivors, and our unique approach, mean that we were able to achieve successes for women, men, children, and LGBTQI+ individuals, no matter how difficult in today's environment.

In all the major conflicts today – from Sudan to Ukraine to Gaza, and many others – we see overstretched humanitarian action trying to alleviate suffering and somehow to compensate for the failure of peacekeeping and mediation. Action that was never designed nor able to fill the greater void left by this failure. International accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and the UN all struggle to keep pace with the global epidemic of violence in conflict areas. And they cannot. Still justice for victims in conflict and survivors remains rare.

It is in this context that LAW has focused on providing comprehensive and onsite support for survivors to access either national or international legal avenues. By providing legal aid to victims and survivors, conducting strategic litigation, assisting national actors with legal technical expertise, and advocating before national and international bodies, LAW places survivors' needs for justice and accountability at the centre of its work.

In LAW's next decade, I hope we will support and participate in an international global network of like-minded legal action groups in all regions, building on the 36 national partners which we work with today.

Thank you to everyone that has contributed to our work and achievements in 2023: LAW's staff and Board, our advisory committee, partners, donors and national and international organisations that make our work stronger, better, and more impactful.

Antonia Mulvey

Founder and Executive Director,
Legal Action Worldwide

Message from LAW's board by Ruth McCoy



We live, again, in a time of war. A time in which – with increasing impunity – men pick up arms to kill, rape, destroy and above all seize power. The litany of crises we're confronted with can appear to be endless: from the mass killing of civilians and destruction of Gaza to the Ukrainian neighbourhoods devastated by Russian rockets; from the peaceful Sudanese cities savaged by armed men to the communities in Ethiopia torn apart by violence; from Afghanistan adrift after years of civil strife where women's rights are still denied, to the atrocities committed against the Rohingya. And we have also seen how international humanitarian law is increasingly being violated without any consequence for the violators, but with the gravest of consequences for civilians.

Rather than wallow in despair, I believe it is incumbent on all of us to do whatever we can to help build a world in which men and women can stand up to the forces of injustice and inequality wherever they exist. And this is the reason why I am so proud to serve as a member of the Board of LAW, an organisation dedicated to improving access to justice and providing legal redress to the most vulnerable in conflict-affected and fragile regions.

2023 marked LAW's 10-year anniversary, providing us with an opportunity to reflect on the organisation's many accomplishments over the past decade. By working directly with victims and survivors of human rights violations, LAW has become a leader in its field and helped to reboot the very principles of respect for the rule of law and humanity in contexts where impunity exists.

From opening a new programme in Ukraine, to groundbreaking reports on the long-term impacts of violence against the Rohingya, and significant steps towards international justice for Syrian victims, LAW has deepened its support and collaboration with thousands of extraordinary individuals while overcoming numerous challenges. This dedication underscores the critical importance of LAW's work and highlights that the commitment and expertise of its staff are at the heart of its success.

I am looking forward to continuing my support for LAW and another decade of impactful work along with its partners, donors and the trust of the victims and survivors that want to achieve justice.

Ruth McCoy

Board Member,

Legal Action Worldwide

Message from a South Sudanese survivor of domestic violence





"In summary, I would say that the father of my children is a man with a bad heart."

When he left for the bush, in 2016, I was free to take my life into my own hands: I registered my children in school, and started a small business, which allowed me to provide for them.

My so-called brother-in-law is another man with a bad heart. He found out I was selling bread, distributing it to schools and shops in nearby neighborhoods and was angry about it.

When the father of my children came back, in 2020, his brother fed him wrong information by telling him I was having an affair with another man.

The day before the incident, I was followed to the shop. The father of my children kicked my bucket and scattered bread all over the street. Customers couldn't find me at the shop and came to my house to look for mandazi and bread. The day after, he collected a gun and ordered all of us, my children and me, to go to the room. My daughter ran in one direction, I took the other. This is when he shot me, hitting my back. The bullet took part of my breast and broke my wrist, but I survived, along with my daughter.

When I took the case to the police, they registered it as grievous hurt and he was released shortly after, on bail, and I was living my life in fear.

It was when I came to the Justice Confidence Center (JCC), that everything changed: the lawyers applied for attempted murder, they showed the gravity of my case, and the father of my children was put again under custody. He is now still serving an 8-year sentence, after he was found guilty of attempted murder.

Without the support of the legal aid clinic, I would not have achieved what I achieved. The lawyers were accessible, they accompanied me, and they gave me good advice.

In Wau, there are many women like me, who suffered and still suffer from episodes of domestic violence, who are not allowed to earn their own money, to stand up for their rights, to protect their children and feel safe in their own home. The women in Wau who have been supported by the JCC say the clinic is a gift from God: four years ago, the father of my children wanted to kill them and me. **"Today, after receiving legal advice, I feel empowered, safe and free."**

The Justice Confidence Centers (JCC) were legal aid clinics, in Juba, Wau and Malakal, established by the South Sudan Law Society (SSLS) and LAW with the support of the European Union. From April 2022 to June 2024, when the project came to an end, the legal aid clinics provided legal information, assistance and/or representation to a total of 231 cases of gender-based violence, advancing access to justice for survivors in South Sudan.

About LAW



Who we are and what we do

Legal Action Worldwide is an independent non-profit association comprised of creative human rights lawyers and jurists, unified in our belief that those who have experienced grave human rights violations, should receive targeted, survivor-centred, gender-competent and trauma-informed support to access the justice they deserve. LAW's team works on the ground in conflict contexts combining national and international expertise with a deep understanding of victim and survivor needs and wishes. This approach provides a unique opportunity to address violence experienced; to bring national, regional and international attention to the situation and to break the cycle of impunity and recurrence. LAW places survivors at the centre of the drive for justice and empowers them in transforming from victim, to survivor to advocate. We work directly with survivors and their communities, building their capacity to meaningfully engage with justice and advocacy processes. Alongside this, we provide technical assistance to strengthen justice institutions to ensure they are equipped to deliver the justice that survivors need, and work with legislators to promote accountability and the rule of law. In collaboration with survivors, their communities and national justice actors, LAW undertakes creative accountability strategies, including strategic litigation at national, regional and international levels. These initiatives are driven by victim and survivor justice priorities, whether this be criminal justice, state accountability, reparations or truth – transformative justice, tailored to the needs of those who need it most.

Our Vision



"All individuals are treated equally:
With respect, dignity and meaningful
access to justice".

Our Mission



"To empower individuals &
communities who have suffered from
human rights violations and abuses
to obtain justice and strengthen
institutions to deliver justice to them".



Where we work



LAW works across four continents:

Africa	Asia	Middle East	Americas	Europe
CAR, Ethiopia, Kenya (regional office), Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan	Bangladesh (regional office), Myanmar, Sri Lanka	Jordan, Lebanon (regional office), Iraq, occupied Palestine, Turkey	Argentina, US	Switzerland (HQ),Ukraine

How we work



Legal aid and empowerment: We empower survivors and their communities to regain agency by providing legal information, assistance and representation to those who have experienced serious human rights violations and abuses, including gender-based violence, in conflict-affected areas.



Strategic litigation: We seek to bring about transformative changes in the law, practice or public awareness by bringing carefully selected cases in domestic, regional and international courts and other justice mechanisms. In doing so, the security and protection of claimants and witnesses is paramount.



Technical Assistance: We provide advice and mentoring to legal, justice and civil society actors, strengthening their ability to protect, assist, and represent victims and survivors. We work with justice institutions and national partners to strengthen their ability to deliver effective, survivor-centred, gender committed justice and to uphold human rights and the rule of law.



Advocacy and Policy: We amplify the voices of survivors and raise awareness and understanding of their issues, experiences, and their fight for justice. We place survivors at the centre of advocacy efforts and increase their capacity to design and implement their own initiatives. All of LAW's work is supported by in-depth research and policy analysis.

What we work on

LAW's key thematic focuses are:

Addressing Discrimination



Discrimination often underlies the human rights violations faced by survivors and victims assisted by LAW. Many clients, including minors, experience discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics. This gender-based discrimination can manifest as sexual and gender-based violence, affecting individuals across the gender spectrum. Discrimination also occurs due to other inherent traits like race, nationality, ethnicity, or disability. These various forms of discrimination frequently intersect compounding challenges for individuals. LAW recognizes that addressing these interconnected issues is crucial in its work to protect human rights and support victims.

Ending Impunity



The lack of accountability for perpetrators of serious human rights violations and international crimes is a central factor in the continuation of these acts. LAW works to ensure that where such conduct occurs, those most responsible are held accountable, be they state actors, military actors, non-state actors, humanitarian actors, other private individuals, or corporate entities.

Securing transformative Justice:



Justice must bring about change for those who need it – victims and survivors must not end up in a situation which is the same or worse than that in which they started. This may require reparations, legislative or policy reform, or significant changes in attitudes. Transformative justice seeks to guarantee of non-recurrence of rights violations and promote truth-telling. It must be locally driven and inclusive, recognising those different communities and different individuals (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ communities, etc) experience conflict and human rights violations in different ways: not only in the types of violations but also in terms of their long-term impact.

Strengthening Access to Justice and the Rule of Law



Working towards the removal of the barriers that prevent victims and survivors from accessing justice. This entails adopting a survivor-centred approach when supporting and working directly with the communities and victims that LAW represents and supporting other actors in adopting a survivor centred approach, strengthening justice institutions to better accommodate survivors and victims, no matter their background or social status, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, race, ethnicity, age or other status.

Approaches and Principles

Holistic and Trauma-informed:

LAW works in coordination with other organisations to build robust referral systems to ensure that survivors and victims receive a holistic set of services, including medical, psychosocial and other essential services. All legal services are trauma-informed.

Gender Proactive:

LAW recognises the different experience of women, men, girls and boys, as well as members of LGBTQI+ communities, affected by human rights violations and abuses. Their concerns and experiences are fundamental in the design, implementation, and approaches of LAW's legal assistance programmes. Additionally, LAW works directly on gender equality and gender justice issues – tackling head-on deeply rooted stereotypes and prejudices which prevent the meaningful participation of these groups in justice, transition or peacebuilding efforts. LAW recognises that without addressing gender discrimination, cycles of violence will continue – within families, communities and even on an international scale.

Intersectional and Feminist:

In addition to being gender proactive, LAW's approach is explicitly feminist. It seeks to dismantle patriarchal structures which perpetuate discrimination and inequality, and which undermine peace and security. Alongside this, LAW acknowledges that multiple identities, (including race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability) may shape individual experiences – we seek to centralise voices which have traditionally been marginalised, address other structural drivers of inequality and foster inclusivity at all levels.

Survivor and Victim-Centred:

Understanding the justice priorities and demands of the victims and survivors with which LAW works takes precedence and informs project design, including objectives, from retributive

justice, through to reparations and non-recurrence. Moreover, where safe and appropriate to do so, LAW will seek to empower survivors and victims by enabling them to lead justice efforts. This approach amplifies survivor voices in their fight for justice and ensures that they play a directing role in advocacy initiatives. Through this process survivors are empowered to act as advocates for themselves, their community, as Champions for Justice.

Locally driven:

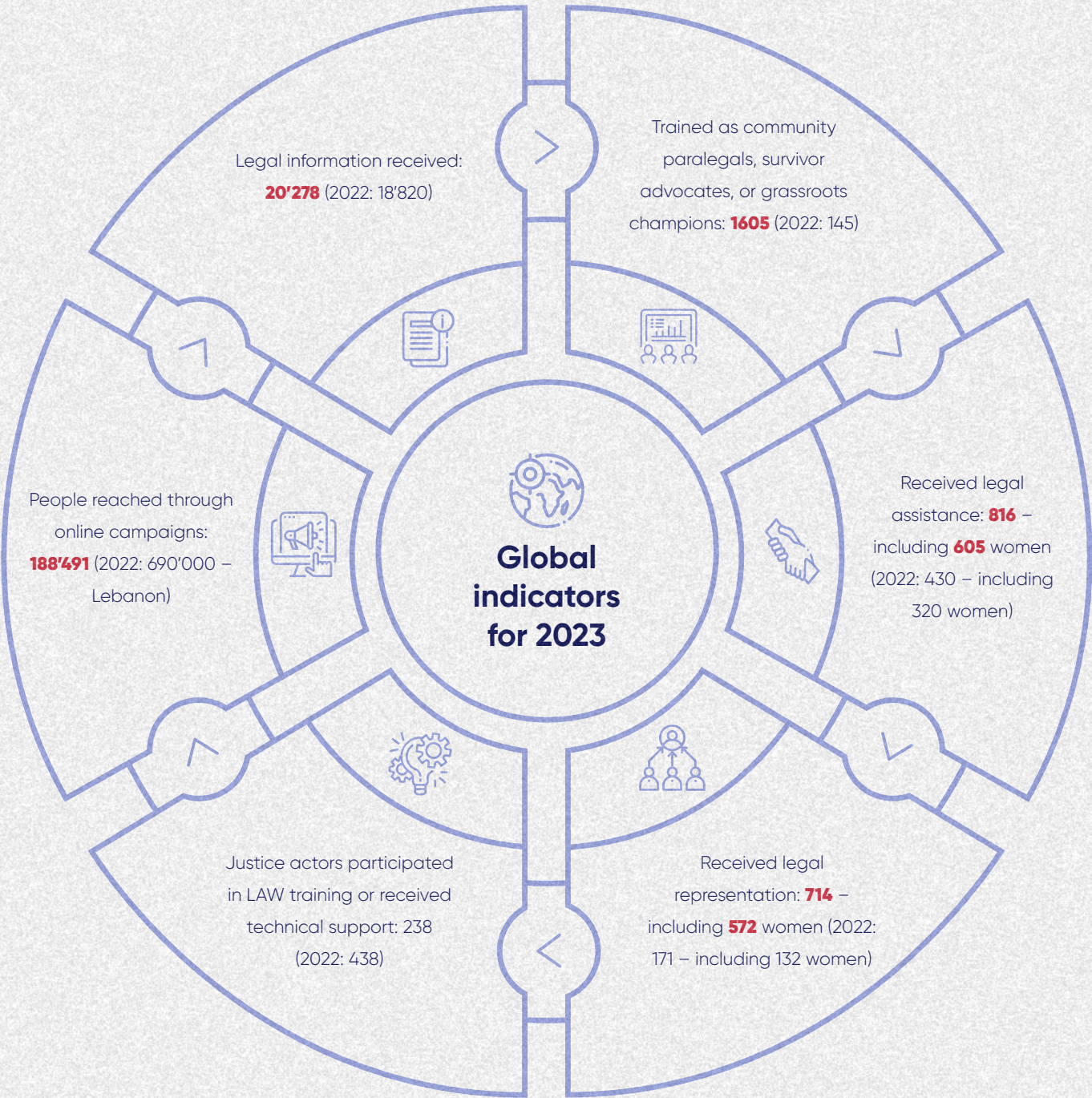
LAW understands that, where possible, justice at home is often more tangible for a larger numbers of beneficiaries. Additionally, the impact of technical assistance to national justice institutions has far more impact on the reestablishment of the Rule of Law and plays a role in guarantees of non-recurrence of mass human rights violations and international crimes.

LAW prioritises working intensively over extensively:

With a long-term presence in the field, LAW forms significant and lasting relationships with survivors and victims. In doing so, these individuals and communities benefit from the ability to ask questions over time and to be continually consulted and updated (victims / survivors) and mentored and advised (justice actors). Equally, LAW benefits from an in-depth knowledge of community desires, needs and interests as they evolve over time, learning from their feedback and providing input into projects.

Collaborative and supportive:

LAW leverages existing expertise and seeks to foster impactful partnerships and networks – both externally and internally. By creating working groups, mentorships, and allowing for flexibility in work arrangements when possible, LAW strives to create an environment that balances the professional and personal lives of all who work for LAW and with LAW.



Country Highlights



Asia



Rohingya Crisis Programme

The year 2023 marked significant progress in Legal Action Worldwide's (LAW) efforts to advocate for justice for Rohingya survivors. As part of a historic moment in the Rohingya community's fight for justice, in May-June 2023, LAW led the mission to support seven Rohingya witnesses including survivors of SGBV provide testimony before a federal criminal court in Argentina which is investigating the role of the Myanmar's civilians and military officials for the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against the Rohingya in Myanmar based on the universal jurisdiction principle. LAW undertook extensive informed consent discussions, risk assessments, diplomatic engagements to secure travel documentation, and accompanied the witnesses in their travel from Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, to Buenos Aires, Argentina and assisted in preparation for their testimony. The witnesses' courage in sharing their experiences marked a significant step forward in the pursuit of justice.

One of the witnesses who participated in the proceedings in Argentina stated afterwards: "I could not believe I could tell an international court about my sufferings. It was difficult for me to speak about the death of my family and their names, but I did it for justice, for my grandchildren, for a future where we can return home with dignity. Who would have thought that we, the Rohingya women, would one day be taking the Myanmar military to the court." Another witness expressed: "I feel really good to be part of the case; I'm a survivor and a witness to what happened to my people in Myanmar. The case is a great opportunity to express how I feel about the torture and violence we faced as a community in Myanmar."

In 2023, the Shanthi Mohila – a Rohingya women-led entity based in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh – was honoured with the Raphael Lemkin Champion of Prevention recognition by the UN Office of Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG). It is a recognition for their work in advocating justice in the spirit of the Genocide Convention. Following the recognition, a member of Shanti Mohila stated: "As members of Shanti Mohila, we have all been on a journey from being victims of violence to becoming survivors. LAW has helped us transform from survivors to advocates and leaders so that we can support other victims of SGBV in our community."

In 2023, LAW also ran an information campaign on the international justice mechanisms available concerning the Rohingya Crisis. LAW produced a handbook which was

distributed to humanitarian workers as well as five animated videos in Bangla and English which were developed for Rohingya in the camps in Bangladesh. The animated videos included information and updates on current cases concerning their community, how they can participate and examples of other cases in various international contexts of genocide. 2023 also saw a number of high-level events as part of continuous advocacy relating to achieving justice for the Rohingya survivors. Notably, Mulvey met with the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary in June, and LAW's Survivor Advocates met with the US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice (United States Department of State), Dr. Beth Van Schaack in February. The Rohingya Survivor Advocates also met Eamon Gilmore, the European Union's Special Representative for Human Rights in July and US Congressmen Rich McCormick and Ed Case in August.

In December, LAW published a pivotal report titled "Every Day, I Remember They Destroyed My Life," which delved into the enduring impact of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by the Myanmar military. This report paves way for a deeper understanding of the interplay between psychosocial impact and atrocity crimes. It stands to contribute towards a gendered analysis in the determination of genocide by the International Court of Justice in The Gambia's case against Myanmar and ultimately pursues accountability on behalf of the SGBV survivors within the Rohingya community.

In Bangladesh, LAW continued to provide legal representation and assistance to over 355 Rohingya refugees currently living in the camps in Cox's Bazar in relation to ongoing international justice proceedings. LAW's network of over 70 Rohingya Survivor Advocates is given ongoing training to provide legal information to survivors about international justice mechanisms related to the Rohingya Crisis. In 2023, they reached a total of 13,595 individuals (8,535 women, 5,060 men) across different camps in Cox's Bazar through their community awareness sessions. One survivor advocate mentioned, following a training session: "The trainings I received from LAW have made me more courageous. I used to feel very uninspired before, but after I became a survivor advocate for LAW, I feel happier and more hopeful. I enjoy doing information sessions with my community. My community members feel uplifted after listening to my information and updates sharing sessions on the ongoing international justice processes. Many of them suffer from depression, stress, and hopelessness, but the fight for justice keeps them motivated."



Myanmar

The Myanmar programme was successfully launched in 2023, to specifically focus on accountability for conflict related sexual violence crimes in the post-coup era. The programme aims to seek justice for the near 2.5 million people displaced and 18.6 million people inside Myanmar affected by the regime's ongoing direct attacks on civilians, including torture and gruesome sexual violence, following the unlawful military coup in February 2021. The programme's current project focuses on empowering LAW's grassroots partners who work with and supports survivors (and their families) to pursue truth, justice, and accountability for conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar.

The programme's inaugural year focused on enhancing documentation processes and capacity building for staff members within LAW's local grassroots partners in order to develop more robust accountability pathways and evidence for inclusion in future legal cases. Throughout the year, LAW provided trainings to partners on international legal documentation practices, best practices for interviewing survivors of sexual violence, and international accountability mechanisms, with a specific focus on available pathways for justice related to crimes in Myanmar. These workshops aim to

support partners' ongoing documentation efforts by highlighting best practices when interviewing and engaging with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and employing survivor-centric, trauma-informed documentation practices. LAW's partners have noted that many on-the-ground documenters are less familiar with gendered crimes, and that enhancing these technical skills is a valuable component to seeking justice for survivors and ensuring future accountability. In providing feedback, one participant noted that the training was "inspiring" and "empowering," and that the knowledge gained will not only enable them to "document such important incidents, but also...to take care of survivors with empathy and respect."

In the programme's second year, LAW aims to further strengthen relationships with grassroots partners and to support the growth and development of support networks for survivors from communities across the country, including enhanced coordination for advocacy initiatives. LAW continues to work closely with local grassroots partners to support initiatives which prioritise survivors' immediate needs, and survivor-centric approaches to justice for crimes perpetrated in Myanmar.



Sri Lanka



In 2023, LAW in Sri Lanka continued the operations of the Gender Justice Legal Network (GJLN), a network of lawyers who support victim-survivors

of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and discrimination to seek redress. The GJLN, funded by LAW, offers legal information, legal representation and other essential services such as referrals to safe houses and accompaniment and support at the law enforcement authorities and other quasi-judicial mechanisms. The GJLN lawyers have established strong relationships with relevant stakeholders to enable them to offer holistic services to victim-survivors.

Giving testimony to how important the work is of LAW's GJLN network, one survivor of domestic violence following a GJLN lawyer successfully handling their divorce settlement said: "For people like me and my kids, the help you give is everything. I can't put it into words. Thank you for ending my long suffering of 20 years. Thank you for every little bit of support you gave me at my worst times. Me and my children will forever be grateful for you and your team."

In 2023, through the GJLN, 150 women and children benefitted from legal representation in courts, as well as 185 school children and community women benefitted from awareness sessions on SGBV including relevant legal information, conducted by GJLN lawyers in rural areas.

In addition to GJLN activities, more than 80 persons including community women and victim-survivors of SGBV received training on dealing with online hate speech and SGBV. More than 75 persons benefitted from skills-building sessions with women Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and SGBV survivors on addressing SGBV through mobilizing women at the community level.

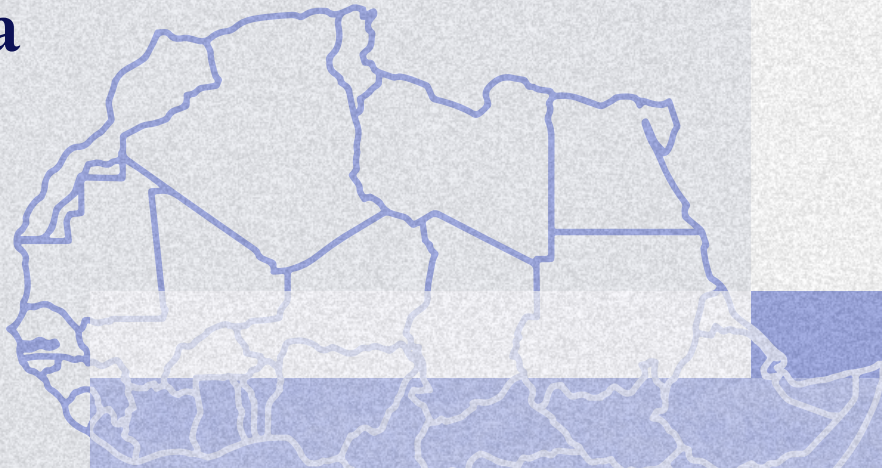
Furthermore, LAW in Sri Lanka provided essential capacity building training to HRDs including members of grassroots women's organizations and survivors of SGBV. This included digital security trainings to 200 HRDs and monitoring and evaluation trainings to more than 100 HRDs.

In the backdrop of alarming increase in SGBV, including in the online arena, targeting women and children as well as the low rates of convictions for perpetrators, LAW's work in Sri Lanka is highly relevant and important.



I was in a forced marriage since 2008 and went through a lot of sexual, psychological and physical violence that brought me unimaginable suffering. At a point when I was scared for my life and did not have the means or methods to escape, the Gender Justice Network Lawyer helped me take charge of my life again. Initially, I was able to get a protection order to safeguard myself. Thereafter, the Lawyer handled my divorce proceedings so that I could legally end the forced marriage. She ensured that I could get maintenance for my differently abled child and myself. The legal representation I received saved my life and gave me another chance. The Network has been a blessing and my Lawyer is a source of support and inspiration to survivors like me." Female SGBV Survivor, Sri Lanka

Africa



A world map with a light blue background. The landmasses are outlined in a darker blue. South Sudan, located in the central-eastern part of Africa, is highlighted in a solid red color. The map shows the outlines of all major continents and countries.

South Sudan

Throughout the year, LAW and its partner organisations have continued to support survivors of sexual violence perpetrated during the conflict in South Sudan and their involvement in advocating for the creation of the three transitional justice mechanisms provided for in the Revitalised Peace Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan signed in 2018. In 2023, 140 survivors in Yei, Bor, Uganda and Juba, participated in legal information sessions led by survivor advocates, LAW, and its partner the Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice (CIGPJ). One survivor advocate shared after the session they attended: "I am so happy with what LAW and CIGPJ are doing... I have learned a lot from this session, and I will continue to give back to the community and the survivors and victims who are not able to attend. It is our responsibility to build this country together and to fight those who have harmed us and seek justice for them".

As part of the Peace Agreement, a Compensation and Reparation Authority, a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing, and a Hybrid Court were to be established to bring justice, accountability and reparations to the numerous victims and survivors of human rights abuses committed during the conflict. In 2023, two bills were drafted and presented to the Ministry of Justice regarding the first two mechanisms, following public consultations with civil society and survivors.

While there have long been barriers impeding the establishment of the Hybrid Court in South Sudan, LAW and its partners have continued working with judges and prosecutors on the implementation of the Geneva Conventions Act 2012 which domesticates the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols. The legislation allows for the domestic investigation, prosecution and adjudication of sexual violence committed during the conflict as a war crime by the High Courts. As part of LAW's the advocacy for the implementation of the Geneva Conventions Act, LAW prepared in 2022 a short handbook on Q&As for the Geneva Conventions Act which in 2023 was widely disseminated to justice actors, civil society, UN agencies and donors.



In parallel to working at the domestic level to support South Sudanese justice actors in their efforts to take ownership of accountability processes, LAW has continued to advocate for a change of policy to allow the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to protect the identity of women in certain cases of well-founded fear of reprisals, within the frame of its individual communication procedure. LAW undertook various meetings with members and staff from UN treaty bodies and the UN petitions section, and hosted a roundtable in October 2023, with the participation of various experts within the UN, organisations working with survivors and donors. The participants discussed protection for victims and witnesses of human rights violations in accountability mechanisms, and treaty bodies were mentioned with regards to identity protection mechanisms.

With regards to access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence and discrimination, LAW has continued to operate, with its partner the South Sudan Law Society, three Justice Confidence Centres in Juba, Wau and Malakal. Seven lawyers and legal officers have provided in 2023 legal information, assistance and representation in 126 cases of rape, domestic violence (including intimate partner violence), forced marriage, arbitrary detention, accusations of adultery, child custody and divorce.

South Sudan Law Society (SSLS) and LAW worked hard to advance court practise and acquire jurisprudence that would create positive precedents for survivors in the legal order of South Sudan. A landmark case is one where the judge issued, following the request of the lawyers, a preliminary ruling asking all parties involved to refrain from any action that would lead to a forced marriage of an 18 y.o. woman who was being threatened to marry someone against her will. The ruling, the first of its kind as per LAW's knowledge, was issued in late 2023 and has been respected by parties involved allowing the survivor to live safe.

The JCCs' work highlighted the importance of legal aid in different ways. First, the work of the lawyers raised awareness of the legal framework within South Sudan which women can access particularly in divorce and child custody cases, rather than solely using customary courts, often biased against women and children. Second, many women detained in South Sudan are victims of arbitrary detention, either because the charges are based on discriminatory provisions such as the section of the penal code criminalising adultery, or because there are no charges. They are also detained because they are considered by their husbands, fathers, or other men to be misbehaving. In these cases, the mere intervention of the JCC lawyers bringing the case forward to the Public Prosecution Attorney was often enough to trigger immediate release or at least the start of proceedings leading to the release of the victim. Third, the work of the JCCs allowed LAW and SSLS to identify gaps in the law and to use creative legal strategies to influence changes.

LAW's work on advancing justice for GBV survivors at domestic level continued in 2023 through the drafting and dissemination of comments to the Anti-GBV bill, still under discussions in South Sudan. With the endorsement of four civil society organizations, LAW highlighted the significant challenges of the bill that make it not fit for purpose and would put at risk, rather than support, the access to justice for survivors. Challenges like limited victim participation and protection, unclear elements of crime, lack of provisions on important crimes, unclear duties of the customary judges are among the ones highlighted. The comments of LAW and civil society were disseminated widely to all actors involved, including UNFPA, the Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Justice, organizations working with survivors and donors.



Ethiopia

In 2023, LAW continued to pursue justice and accountability on behalf of and alongside victims and survivors of the conflict in Tigray and northern Ethiopia. The conflict, which broke out in November 2020, was riddled with allegations of gross human rights violations and abuses, including massacres of civilians, extrajudicial killing, sexual and gender based violence, torture and arbitrary detention, much of which is likely to amount to international crimes. Despite a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed by two of the parties in November 2022, allegations of atrocities continued in Tigray and spread in Amhara, Oromia, and Afar.

Victims and survivors have no confidence in the transitional justice process that has been initiated by the Federal Government and seek independent justice and accountability avenues.

In support of this mission, LAW prioritised the voices of survivors throughout 2023, supporting individuals to participate in workshops and to advocate for their own priorities in Geneva. In September two survivors attended the UN Human Rights Council 54th session, in support of the renewal of the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), which was the last and only remaining independent investigative mechanism. Despite their and LAW's best efforts, including meeting with key member states, the **Human Rights Councils failed to renew the mandate of ICHREE.**

Looking to ensure a light remained fixed on the atrocities committed in the conflict in Tigray and northern Ethiopia, on 20 March 2023, LAW prepared a submission to the UN Committee against Torture (UN CAT) in response to their call for submissions during the session on Ethiopia's periodic report. Our submission contained details of the widespread use of torture by the Ethiopian state against the Tigrayan population. UN CAT requested further input from LAW, and we were one of five organisations invited to brief the Committee in May 2023. During this briefing we were asked to expand in particular on torture in detention, and sexual and gender-based violence amounting to torture. In addition, we provided concrete recommendations for UN CAT to put to Ethiopia, many of which were included in the Committee's concluding observations, published in June 2023.



Alongside this work, LAW represents a group of Tigrayan survivors before the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, in a communication filed against the state of Ethiopia alleging that the Government's conduct during the conflict violated its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. This communication remains the first and only communication against the state of Ethiopia for violations committed in Tigray, predominantly between November 2020 and November 2022. The African Commission was selected as the best forum for this complaint, because it remains the preeminent human rights institution in Africa. LAW, guided by the priorities of the victims that we represent, felt it was important that the first filing highlighted the responsibility of the state of Ethiopia, as the party with primary responsibility in and for the conflict. It was important that the case be filed outside of Ethiopia, due to the lack of trust and confidence that victims have in the domestic system, but it was also important that it be filed in Africa, to support an African led response to the situation. The African Commission allowed both those who participated in the filing and those who did not, to retain ownership over the proceedings. The African Commission is now examining the more than 250 pages of merits and admissibility filed, and has the authority to decide on Ethiopia's responsibility and to order remedies.



Somalia

LAW marked 10 years of working on the ground in Somalia in 2023, since the establishment of LAW's flagship programme in 2013. Since then, our work supporting access to justice within IDP camps in Mogadishu has continued to provide legal information and awareness sessions, legal assistance and representation to vulnerable communities displaced due to conflict and climate.

Providing weekly legal awareness sessions, LAW's team of local paralegals also receives complaints from the IDP community during their visits to the camps and supports survivors to access the formal justice system, by filing cases at police stations. This community-based approach has fostered an atmosphere of trust within the communities that the paralegals work, encouraging victims of gender based violence to seek legal assistance and legal redress, as opposed to informal justice resolutions.

In 2023, LAW reached 3,940 individuals through legal awareness sessions, sharing information on their rights, on gender-based violence, and on legal avenues available to them. Through these sessions, paralegals received 79 reports of violations and abuses from members of the community.

The work of the paralegals was supported by two community groups, throughout 2023:

- Community Champions, known locally as Hiil-Haween ('Helping Women'), are a group of female survivors living in IDP camps who, supported by LAW, provide door-to-door SGBV awareness raising and information to other survivors, leading the initiative at a grass roots level. LAW provides trainings to the group to advance their capacities in different skills, including advocacy, human rights, constitutional rights and the formal justice system.
- The Survivor Support Group, or Iskaashato Haween ('Women's Cooperative'), is a group of sixteen female survivors in four IDP camps. This voluntary group provides a safe space for survivors to talk, providing peer-to-peer support. Paralegals and Hiil-Haween encourage survivors to attend meetings with the Iskaashato-Haween, to discuss their experiences and to counter cultural stigma and the pressures that can be exerted on victims by family and the community.



In addition to the work undertaken through the paralegals, Hiil-Haween, and Iskaashato Haween, LAW also coordinates a groups of civil society organisations focused on improving access to justice for victims and survivors, in particular of gender-based violence. Throughout 2023 LAW held workshops with ten local organisations, where representatives shared the challenges, concerns, and goals of their work, and built concrete strategies for improving their impact.

In 2023, LAW also continued to work alongside Somalia civil society and the Federal Government, in support of key legislation, including Sexual Offenses Legislation and a Female Genital Mutilation bill.

Empowered through Justice: Farhiya's Journey from Hardship to Hope





Farhiya, a mother of two, resides in an IDP camp in Mogadishu. Farhiya was the victims of an abusive marriage in which her husband consistently withheld financial support leading to frequent confrontations that often escalated into violence. During these altercations, Farhiya suffered both emotional and physical abuse. Four years ago, he divorced her, leaving her with two children to care for with no financial support, refusing to provide for their children's needs despite his financial ability to do so.

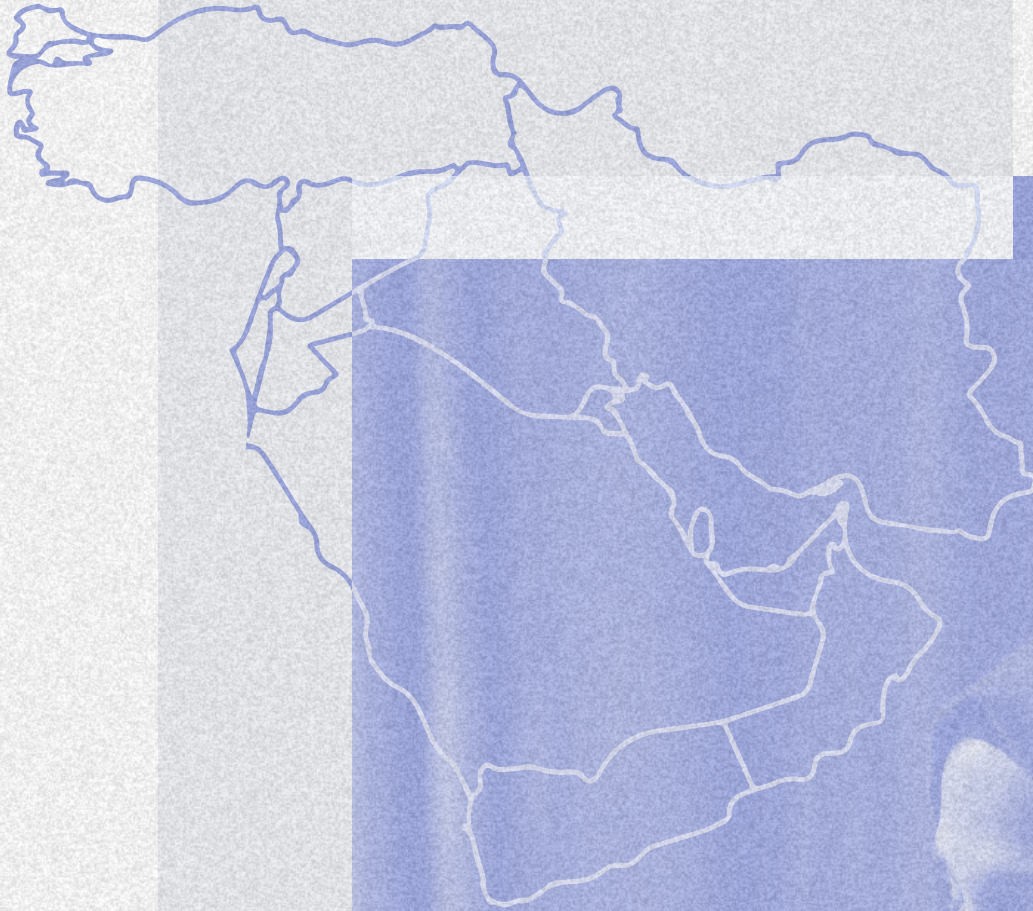
In April 2024, Farhiya attended an awareness session conducted by LAW in her IDP camp, where she shared her predicament with our team of paralegals. She was provided with tailored legal information and assistance enabling her to finally file her case in the district court accompanied and guided by LAW's project lawyer. After a month of legal proceedings, the court ruled in her favor ordering her ex-husband to provide financial support for his children.

Farhiya expressed her thoughts on resolving disputes through formal justice mechanisms stating, "I used to believe that court cases were time-consuming and challenging to navigate, but my experience has changed that perception. It took me no time at all for me to secure my rights" she further urged other survivors to seek help, saying "I encourage survivors like me to come forward and inform LAW's paralegals of their issues. I'm confident that doing so could truly be life-saving for them."

Reflecting on her journey, Farhiya shared her joy and relief: "For four years, I begged him for my dowry and our children's support, but he refused. Now, he is paying what he denied for so long. LAW was my guiding light, helping me seek my rights through the court and standing by me all along until I received justice. Without LAW's assistance, I wouldn't have achieved this much. I feel empowered and relieved, and I want to share this hope with other survivors of abuse and violence in our communities."

Farhiya has now voluntarily joined our team of community champions, individuals identified from within the community we serve. Acting as a community support group, these champions play a crucial role in identifying and referring cases of survivors in need of assistance to paralegals, establishing a vital link between the community and our legal services where people like Farhiya play a leading role.

Middle East





Lebanon

While work towards justice in Lebanon faces many hurdles, including strikes by judges and judicial staff, LAW managed to advance its case on behalf of MH, a migrant domestic worker in Lebanon that was enslaved and abused under the country's flawed and much criticised Kafala system. LAW managed to attend a hearing before the case's investigative judge in December. This was the first hearing on the case since March 2022.

In 2023, LAW also joined a statement from over 300 NGOs, activists, survivors, and families of victims of the Beirut Port explosion. Together, they urged the UN Human Rights Council to take action and adopt a resolution to establish an international, independent, and impartial fact-finding mission into Beirut Port explosion. The explosion killed at least 236 people, injured over 7,000, and rendered 300,000 people homeless in an instant.

An impartial, international investigation into the blast is critical because individuals at the highest levels of the Lebanese government have been implicated, through negligence, reckless conduct, and even intentional conduct, in causing the disaster. Uncovering the truth of the 2020 explosion is crucial to prevent future tragedies and provide redress for the devastation caused.

Building on LAW's groundbreaking report, "They raped us in every possible way, in ways you can't imagine: Gendered Crimes during the Lebanese Civil Wars," which revealed for the first time the systematic use of sexual and gender-based violence in the Lebanese Civil War, LAW called on the Government of Lebanon to make public acknowledgement of the crimes committed during the war, provide services to victims, and hold those responsible accountable. Once the government takes action to support survivors, deeper healing can begin. LAW continues to work towards this goal.

Throughout 2023, LAW continued its direct legal service provision to various at-risk populations across Lebanon. Such services continue to be delivered to victims of domestic abuse, survivors of family violence, migrant domestic workers, stateless persons, and other individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities. During the past year, LAW provided legal assistance to 317 people, legal representation to 62 individuals, and legal information to 1463 beneficiaries. Additionally, seventy community members were also trained to better serve as, survivor advocates and grassroots champions.



Syria

In June, LAW launched an advocacy campaign **urging International Criminal Court States Parties to refer the situation in Jordan-Syria to the Court under Article 14 of the Rome Statute**. The campaign is rooted in a confidential report based on evidence from 39 Syrian survivors of detention, torture, and attacks on civilians who fled Syria to Jordan. The State Party referral request is rooted in the hopes and desires of Syrian survivors who continue to demand justice at the international level for crimes committed against them in their homeland. In December, LAW published a policy brief outlining the state party referral process as an “untapped justice opportunity.”

LAW’s advocacy at the ICC and to its States Parties runs in parallel to the opening of a case brought at the ICJ against the Syrian government by the Netherlands and Canada, which are alleging violations of the Convention Against Torture. The case, which began with initial arguments for preliminary measures in October, is a crucial step towards accountability that LAW’s partners and clients support and applauded. Though the case can only determine State responsibility for treaty violations, it has forged a new path towards international justice for Syrian’s impacted by the country’s decade-long conflict. LAW’s support for the case and demand for survivors’ voices to be centered during its litigation, was outlined in an op-ed published with Just Security in October.

Ahead of the UN General Assembly vote in June on a resolution to establish an independent institution to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing people in Syria, LAW joined over 100 civil society organisations in urging UN Member States to support the resolution. The independent institution, a first of its kind, was entirely imagined and developed by Syrian victims and survivors of enforced disappearance and families of missing persons who have an inalienable right to know the truth about their loved ones.

During 2023, LAW provided legal information to 134 beneficiaries and legal assistance to 71 people impacted by the Syrian Civil War. Furthermore, LAW provided legal representation to 60 individuals. Technical trainings were also provided to 38 Syrian lawyers across the Middle East who work on documentation of atrocity crimes in Syria, Turkey, and Jordan



*“The **Gender Justice Network Lawyers** is a new initiative where LAW has established a network of lawyers and provided them with legal training in Lebanon. We introduced international standards to the trained lawyers, significantly enhancing their awareness of these norms. I was delighted to witness the participants’ genuine interest and enthusiastic engagement, particularly when we explored vital topics such as PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) and safeguarding. The practical component was particularly impactful; presenting real cases of human trafficking allowed the lawyers to directly apply their knowledge during the training sessions.” Ghada Nicholas, Legal Advisor, LAW*

Global Projects – Thinking big, ensuring impact



Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence

Many of the issues addressed by LAW's work go beyond a single country or context. Often, our projects address global issues arising in conflicts around the world.

Since its inception, LAW has promoted gender equality and undertaken countless projects seeking to address gender-based violence.

- **The Gender Justice Practitioners Hub:** This initiative, supported by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) explores the establishment of a Gender Justice Practitioner Hub (GJP Hub) – a centre mandated to support and connect practitioners involved in securing gender justice for core international crimes. Through collaboration, coordination and by leveraging decades of experience at national and international levels, the GJP Hub would provide practical tools and assistance to practitioners to help strengthen efforts in pursuit of gender justice. Over the course of two years, LAW is conducting a series of roundtables and bilateral discussions with experts and practitioners to explore and formulate the mandate and structure of a GJP Hub, and to better understand how it could support grassroots, national, regional and international gender justice efforts.
- In 2023, LAW organised roundtables in Beirut (Lebanon), Bangkok (Thailand) and at the Assembly of State Parties in New York (USA) on the GJP Hub. Feedback about the initiative from these events was overwhelmingly positive. Participants underscored recurring challenges facing practitioners spanning grassroots and international fora, as well as a clear need for coordination and support. In 2024, LAW will facilitate further roundtables in The Hague (at the first International Conference of Prosecutors on Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (organised by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict)), Geneva (Switzerland), Bogota (Colombia) and Nairobi (Kenya). The GJP Hub will also be discussed at the Gender and International Criminal Law Conference taking place in The Hague between 16 and 17 January 2024.

Atrocities Against Aid Workers:

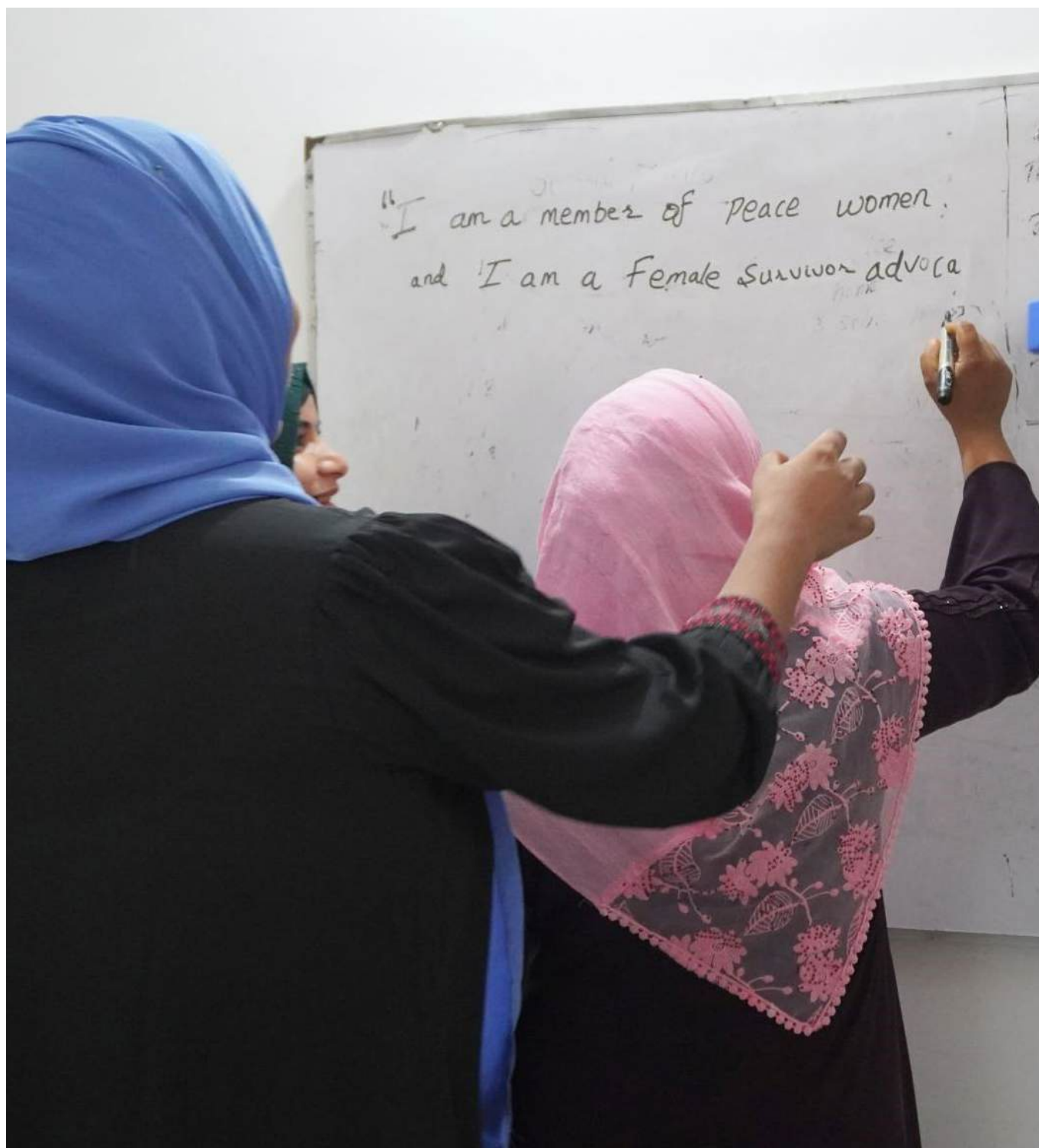
Since 2022, LAW, with the support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has implemented a flagship project to support aid workers and humanitarian organisations to obtain justice for crimes committed against them. LAW works closely with humanitarian organisations, key actors focusing on the security of aid workers, and humanitarian donors, and provides free legal aid to humanitarian aid workers in East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central African Republic and Ukraine. By employing creative legal strategies, such as the filing of two strategic litigation cases on behalf of locally recruited humanitarian personnel under the principle of universal jurisdiction – in 2024 – the project aims to break cycles of impunity, sending a strong message to perpetrators that the attacks will not continue unchallenged. The strategic litigation undertaken is supported by investigations using new technologies, and by targeted advocacy and communication to raise awareness and obtain public support for its objectives of effective structural change.

In January 2024, LAW launched a helpline that can be reached by aid workers at aidworkers@legalactionworldwide.org, or on WhatsApp or Signal at + 41 76 396 28 58.

Complementing this project, LAW joined the Protect Aid Workers initiative launched in January 2024, to support humanitarian NGOs, and in particular national NGOs, to respond to critical incidents that put at risk the life and well-being of humanitarian workers and their immediate families.

Sexual Violence Against Children:

The deterioration in respect for international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law deterioration in respect for humanitarian standards has disproportionately impacted children, from birth through adolescence. International responses to armed conflict must now deal with the reality that children are ten times more likely to become victims of conflict-related sexual violence than they were thirty years ago. LAW, with the support of the Oak Foundation is taking the lead to strengthen the international response to all survivors of sexual violence through targeted and impactful legal support responding to survivors' stated needs and priorities. LAW's inclusive approach will deliver high quality services to some of the most marginalised victims of gender-based violence, by focusing on children, and particularly boys and LGBTQI+ survivors.



Financials

2023 Income (grants & donations)	\$6,054,571
2023 Expenditure (program & operations)	\$6,661,419
Anticipated funds for 2024	\$8,508,172

Thank you

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Germany (Federal Agency for Foreign Affairs)
United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
U.S. Department of State



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