

2020

annual report

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A Message from LAW's Executive Director

In 2020, across the globe, people suffered from curfews and restrictions, however it is important to remember that people were not affected uniformly. Lockdowns served as a catalyst for human rights violations and abuses, in particular, increases in domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Simultaneously, lockdowns restricted legal aid providers access to victims and survivors. LAW's programmes worked tirelessly to circumvent these issues, and while it was undoubtedly a challenging year, there were many successes that brought the victims and survivors that we work with, closer to justice.

Some highlights include the filing of a ground-breaking criminal case in Lebanon, on behalf of a Migrant Domestic Worker, and the submission of a general allegation and communication to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on behalf of 18 Syrian families. The Bangladesh team filed a first of its kind case with the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission on behalf of the widow of one of the victims of the notorious Inn Din Massacre.

In Sri Lanka, LAW established the first Gender Justice Legal Network in the country. The South Sudan programme refiled a case with the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on behalf

of 30 South Sudanese women and girl survivors of conflict related sexual violence, together with a request to the Committee for the protection of the survivors' identity. In Somalia, the team sustained advocacy efforts for the adoption of the Sexual Offences Bill, highlighting the shocking regression threatened by the Sexual Intercourse Bill which was tabled this year.

I am so proud of the LAW team, and the innovative and varied ways that they have supported beneficiaries in their pursuit of justice. Looking forward to 2021, we hope to expand our operations into Iraq and Jordan, and will continue to find creative ways to deliver justice to those who need it.

I want to thank everyone that has contributed to our work in 2020; LAW staff and Board, our advisory committee, partners and donors, without whom none of our work would be possible.

Antonia Mulvey

Founder and Executive Director of Legal Action Worldwide



LAW at a Glance



30,385

Number of people who
received legal information



2,363

Number of people who
received legal assistance



2,538

Number of people who receive
legal representation



14

Number of countries
LAW works in



16,093

Number of people reached
through social media



77

Number of LAW staff



45

Number of media
articles featuring LAW



1,353

Number of community members
trained to become community
paralegals, survivor advocates or
grassroots champions



671

Number of justice actors
who received training, capacity-
building or technical
assistance



Vision and Approach

Legal Action Worldwide is an independent, non-profit organisation comprised of human rights lawyers and jurists working in fragile and conflict affected areas in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. LAW works to bring justice to individuals and communities that have experienced human rights violations and abuses, with a particular focus on the following:



Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence

LAW recognises that gender inequality is a root cause of many human rights violations and abuses. LAW advocates for the voices of women to be heard and maintains that women must be included in significant and meaningful roles throughout peace-building efforts if long lasting peace is to be achieved. Closely linked, sexual violence is not a stand-alone problem which can be solved in isolation. A fully integrated approach is required which both addresses deeply rooted gender inequalities and works to empower and recognise the distinct experience of women, men and LGBTQI communities.



Accountability and Rule of Law

LAW works with state institutions to increase accountability and to build internal and international pressure for independent and impartial investigations into violations and abuses. Through this work, LAW aims to reduce the climate of impunity for serious criminal offences and contribute towards rule of law, increased access to justice, peace and security.



Transformative Justice

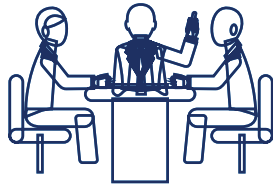
Transitional justice, or as we prefer to call it, Transformative Justice, refers to a process that countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression undertake in order to address extensive human rights violations, too widespread and serious to be dealt with through the ordinary justice system. LAW recognises that transformative justice must be locally driven, and that all sections of society must be meaningfully involved. LAW takes a participatory and gender-sensitive approach in its provision of technical assistance to local legal institutions and organisations and fosters the participation of women, the young, and minority and survivor communities at all levels of the process.



Natural Resource Exploitation

Conflict often has the effect of breaking down traditional systems governing the ownership of land and use of natural resources and post-conflict governments have historically struggled to provide their citizens with security of tenure. Marginalised groups such as women and displaced people are disproportionately affected by this trend. LAW works with governments through various dispute resolution mechanisms to improve the ability of marginalised people to know and exercise their rights relating to land.

How LAW Works



Legal Empowerment and Legal Aid

LAW provides legal information, assistance and representation to individuals and communities to facilitate their access to justice and thereby empowering them to assert their legal rights.



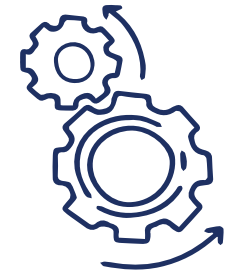
Advocacy

LAW conducts strategic advocacy with decision makers and supports national champions to promote human rights and the rule of law.



Strategic Litigation

LAW uses strategic litigation as a method for precipitating significant changes in the law, practice or public awareness by taking carefully selected cases. LAW utilises domestic, transnational and international justice and human rights mechanisms for this purpose.



Technical Assistance

LAW works with justice institutions, law faculties and national partners to strengthen their ability to deliver survivor-centred and effective justice and uphold human rights and the Rule of Law.



Global



Gender and Covid-19

While the Covid-19 virus posed a threat to all, the crisis caused by Covid-19 in 2020 affected women and girls disproportionately and differently to men. Traditional social norms mean that women and girls have been the most disadvantaged by the effects of the pandemic. As caregivers, they were exposed to health risks, and unpaid workloads increased significantly. This, in turn, increased the mental burden and psychological pressures on women, while reducing the time available for their education, their own health and their social, economic and political participation.

The health crisis and resulting lockdowns led to a severe economic crisis, which also disproportionately impacted women and female-headed households. Already economically disadvantaged and over-represented in service sector occupations, they were hit by the economic downturn. In addition, spending on women's rights and on sexual

and reproductive health was not considered a priority and was reduced in some countries in order to reallocate resources to the fight against Covid-19.

The Covid-19 crisis led to an increase in gender-based violence. Restrictions on movement and lockdowns confined victims of domestic violence with their aggressors. The economic crisis, the suspension of local services and the limitation of social interaction forced women, often responsible for water or food provision, to travel longer distances alone, exposing them to violence.

The closure of schools contributed to the isolation of girls and young women who were more exposed to domestic violence and sexual violence. 2020 saw an increase in child, early and forced pregnancies, making it difficult for girls to return to school.

also limited the capacity for action of public and non-governmental aid actors.

The Covid-19 crisis will continue to affect populations in the coming years and will likely have long-lasting effects on the most vulnerable populations in contexts of crisis. Therefore, sustained international efforts will be needed to prevent a continued deterioration of human rights and to gender-based discrimination and violence.

How did LAW respond?

LAW witnessed these dramatic developments. In Lebanon, sexual and gender-based violence increased and **calls to the LAW helpline for victims of domestic violence soared: between April and September 2020, the number of calls received rose by 1,425%.**

This increase in violence coincided with the isolation of victims due to reduced access to support services (medical, psycho-social, legal), and justice. While the crisis caused increased need for support to vulnerable populations, it is



Remote Legal Aid Provision in the year of Lockdown

2020 was an extremely challenging year for most, and LAW, like many organisations, grappled with how to continue providing crucial legal support to those who need it. 2020 saw states worldwide implementing restrictions on movement and a global increase in gender-based violence. In order to circumvent these challenges and ensure that gender-based violence survivors could access legal aid, LAW teamed up with Norwegian Church Aid, to develop a

guidance document for providing legal aid services **Five Key Guidelines for Providing Remote Legal Aid to GBV Survivors (The Guidelines)**. The guidelines are intended to assist legal aid providers in continuing to provide fundamental and life-saving services in the difficult circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, or similar emergency situations.

What did LAW do?

On 12 August 2020, LAW and NCA hosted a webinar for legal aid providers looking in detail at The Guidelines. The webinar saw LAW's own legal aid providers present the Guidelines to over 60 participants, reflecting on their own experience of working in lockdown, and how they have overcome the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speakers discussed fundamental aspects of legal aid provision that have been affected by lockdowns worldwide, including how to contact your client and how their safety may be implicated by the lockdown, how to conduct remote rapid assessments

by phone, how to obtain documentation required to provide legal aid when you can't meet your client, and the importance of having strong referral systems in place to ensure holistic support is available to clients whose situation may have deteriorated considerably during the global pandemic. We intend to continue developing the Guidelines and hope that they will be used widely by providers working in restricted contexts, whether due to the pandemic or other emergencies.

20 years of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Security Council Resolution 1325

2020 marked the 20-year anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the first of ten resolutions to date which make up the Women Peace and Security Agenda. The Agenda aims to highlight the crucial role of women in achieving successful and lasting peace in conflict and post conflict contexts, and promotes the equal participation of women in negotiations.

In recognition of the anniversary, LAW released a policy brief on Resolution 1325 at 20: Past challenges and Future Possibilities of Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The brief includes an overview of the significance of the Resolution. In assessing the Agenda's achievements over the past 20 years, the policy brief takes a critical lens, providing a snapshot of barriers which have impeded successful WPS implementation. The brief concludes with four key considerations for WPS implementation going forward, so that the Agenda can effectively contribute towards creating sustainable peace, justice and security for all women across the globe.

On December 9, 2020, LAW hosted a webinar on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. The event brought together women leaders at the forefront of WPS implementation in Lebanon, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. Three panellists spoke at the event: Ghida Anani, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Public Health in the Lebanese University and founder and Director of ABAAD MENA; Jackline Nasiwa, Director of the

Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice in South Sudan; and Ramaaya Salgado, Programme Officer and Country Focal Point for UN Women Sri Lanka. The event was chaired by Lucy Geddes, the head of LAW Sri Lanka. Antonia Mulvey, LAW's Executive Director, gave opening remarks.

The participants discussed the implementation of the Agenda in Lebanon, South Sudan and Sri Lanka, including efforts to develop National Action Plans and challenges to implementation in these different national and regional contexts, as well as future directions. They also discussed global challenges, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted a decrease in funding for WPS implementation across many contexts. The second half of the event was dedicated to a lively question and answer session in which the panellists fielded questions on topics such as cross-border coordination of WPS efforts, the utility of using dedicated government agencies for WPS implementation, and opportunities WPS implementation at the grassroots level.





Middle East

Lebanon

In Lebanon LAW provides legal information, assistance and representation to Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians and migrant domestic workers. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, as seen globally, compounded and exacerbated existing suffering for a population that has faced a spiralling economic decline since 2019. On top of this, a devastating explosion on 4 August 2020 left the country in political turmoil.



2020 Key Facts:



4,005

Received legal
information



1,846

Received legal
assistance



122

Received legal
representation



7,941

Engaged with
Social Media
Campaigns



112

Received training,
capacity-building
or technical
assistance

4 August Beirut Explosion

On 4 August 2020, a massive explosion tore through the heart of Beirut. The centre of the explosion was the busy Beirut port, where approximately 2000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate had been stored in a hangar since 2013. The explosive material ignited, producing the largest non-nuclear explosion in history. More than 200 people lost their lives as a result, with 7,000 people injured. 77,000 apartments were damaged by the blast, displacing more than 300,000 people. At least three children between the ages of two and 15 lost their lives.

How did LAW respond?

LAW supports a group of more than 1000 victims and survivors of the explosion, who are assisted by Nada Abdelsater of ASAS Law, in their pursuit of truth and justice. The group includes the parents of the three children who were killed in the explosion.

- On 16 November, LAW released a report on behalf of the victims' group (The Report), compiling all publicly available facts alongside 9 victim statements, and 5 key requests. The report, which was shared with key individuals at the UN and member states, highlights a catalogue of errors in the 7 years prior to the explosion.
- The Report details the **5 key requests of victims**, which includes an independent and impartial fact-finding mission, leveraging global expertise, to establish the facts and circumstances, including the root causes of, the 4 August 2020 Beirut explosion with a view to establishing state and individual responsibility and supporting justice for victims.

Supporting Migrant Domestic Workers

LAW Lebanon continued its work in support of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon in 2020. The notorious kafala (sponsorship) system, which regulates the flow of cheap foreign labour into Lebanese households and renders migrant domestic workers' residency status contingent on their employment relationship, ensure that migrant domestic workers remain some of the most vulnerable people in Lebanon. The pandemic and the explosion saw further decline in employment for the Lebanese population. In many cases, families were unable to support domestic staff and reports of migrant domestic workers being left on the street or outside embassies circulated widely.

Meet Meseret: LAW file a ground-breaking criminal case on behalf of Ethiopian migrant domestic worker in Lebanon

On 8 October 2020, LAW filed a ground-breaking criminal case on behalf of LAW client, Meseret Hailu. The case argued that the conditions and treatment Meseret was subjected to while a domestic worker in Lebanon constituted crimes of slavery, slave trading, trafficking in persons, forced labour, deprivation of liberty, national, racial and gender discrimination and torture.

Meseret is a 38 year old female, born in Ethiopia, where she currently resides with her mother, brothers and sister. Meseret lived in Lebanon between March 2011 and September 2019, when she worked for her kafeel or sponsor. Meseret's contract, and her arrival in Lebanon, were facilitated by two brokers, one in Lebanon and one in Ethiopia. Both the kafeel and the recruitment agency are defendants in this case.

Meseret was only paid for 13 months of the 8.5 years that she worked. She worked from 6.30am – 10pm every day, and did not have a day off for the entirety of her time there. Meseret's kafeel locked the door whenever she left the apartment and the only time Meseret left the building was when her kafeel took her to clean the clinic where the kafeel worked. Here, again, Meseret was locked in. Other than to clean the clinic, Meseret only left her employers apartment three times in 8.5 years.

Meseret was subjected to physical and verbal abuse, denied food and medical attention, was prevented from speaking to her family and from returning to Ethiopia. She was finally released when a photo of her was circulated in Beirut and a journalist contacted her kafeel asking about Meseret.



Photo Credits: UN Women/Brady Black

“

*I was so happy to leave
Lebanon and go back to my
country because of LAW's help”*
- Meseret

Find out more with LAW's Frequently Asked Questions
Read LAW's Policy Brief on Migrant Domestic Workers [here](#).

Defending the rights of female migrant domestic workers in Lebanon

Key facts from LAW's criminal filing on slavery and slave trading - October 2020

1.



LAW has filed a case in Beirut, Lebanon on behalf of Meseret, an Ethiopian migrant domestic worker (MDW).

There are 250,000 - 300,000 MDWs from Africa & Asia who work in private households. The vast majority are women. They work under the 'kafala system.' Their employer is known as a 'kafeel.'

2.



LAW has requested the first ever criminal investigation on behalf of Meseret against her former kafeel and the person who recruited her from Ethiopia.

3.



Serious crimes to be investigated include enslavement, slave trading, trafficking in persons, gender and racial discrimination.

4.



The Kafala system = MDWs excluded from Lebanese Labour Law (Article 7) + Residence dependent on contract with single kafeel+ State organs reinforce the power of the kafeel, increasing risk of systemic exploitation & abuse.

5.



Meseret worked 15 hrs/day, 8 Years and 7 Months.

More than 50% of MDWs are forced to work more than 10 hrs/day.

6.



Meseret was not paid for 7 Years & 6 Months.

40% of kafeels do not pay their MDW each month.

7.



Meseret was held captive in her kafeel's apartment and not allowed to leave.

22.5% of kafeels admit to locking their MDW in the house.

8.



The kafeel did not allow Meseret to quit or return to Ethiopia.

MDWs require the consent of their kafeel to change their contract.

9.



Meseret was beaten and emotionally abused by her kafeel.

2 MDWs die/week in Lebanon. Sexual, physical & emotional abuse is widespread.

10.

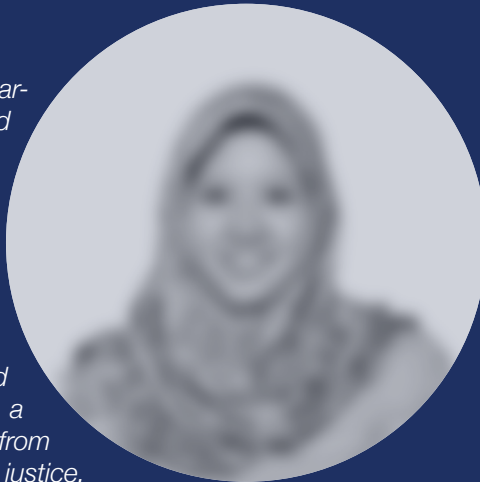
LAW calls for an end to the abusive Kafala system in Lebanon and throughout the region.

What Our Beneficiaries Say

“

I got married when I was 14, to a 50-year-old man. My husband physically abused me every day. Last year, I got divorced but I was denied seeing my three-year-old child, and my divorce was not registered. I contacted LA through Facebook and right afterwards I was called up by a lawyer who succeeded in registering my divorce within one month. That's not all; I was also granted the custody of my child and received a monthly alimony from his father. I learnt from LA that there is always a way to access justice, even in the worst of situations.”

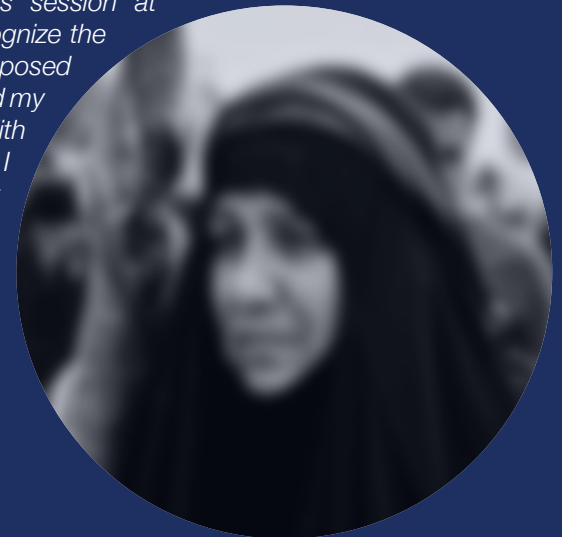
~
Sakina, * 18 years old.



“

I was subjected to physical and emotional abuse every day. At first, I thought that it was a normal thing for our society and that my husband has the right to treat me the way he wants. After attending a legal awareness session at LA's office, I was able to recognize the dangerous situation I was exposed to on a daily basis at home and my legal right to file a lawsuit. With the support of LA's lawyers, I finally got a protection order and a divorce. I can now feel safe at home and in my environment and legally protected from any abuser.

~
Leyla, * 35 years old.”



“

Eventually, following my call on LA's hotline, I got my divorce registered. It was frustrating to feel deprived from your right and still be registered on the name of someone who caused you massive harm instead of having your freedom and right to be recognized officially by your own name.”

~
Adela, * 27 years old.



**Pseudonyms have been used.*

The Syria Crisis

LAW began working on the Syria crisis in 2019. The programme empowers some of the most marginalised survivor communities across five countries: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, linking them into a regional justice network, and providing them with the tools they need to make use of relevant justice mechanisms, to deliver their justice messaging directly to the most significant actors working on the Syria crisis.



2020 Key Facts:



142

Received legal
information



80

Received legal
assistance



69

Received legal
representation



11,800

Engaged with
Social Media
Campaigns and
378 shares



47

Justice actors
trained

The Missing and Detained in Syria

Since the outbreak of hostilities in Syria ten years ago, it is estimated that between 100,000-148,000 people have gone missing. Reports suggest that many of those who have gone missing are victims of enforced disappearances perpetrated by all parties to the conflict. The Syrian regime has been one of the most ruthless perpetrators, using enforced disappearances to break the will of the opposition and to terrorise the communities who support it. For thousands of families who have watched their loved ones taken away by military and intelligence personnel, the thought of what happened to them once they entered the regime's sinister detention system is an open wound.

How has LAW responded?

On 29 January 2021, LAW submitted a general allegation and communication to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on behalf of 18 Syrian families. The 290-page submission responded to two key priorities articulated by Syrian families of disappeared persons: to establish the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones, and create an official record of disappearances. LAW also highlighted the impact of the practice of enforced disappearances on an entire generation of Syrian children. With the fate of missing and detained persons a key issue weighing on the peace process in Syria, and few political avenues available to those who arguably have the largest stake in the country's future, LAW considered it of fundamental importance to document the experiences of young people and children. The devastating emotional, psychological, and social consequences do not account for the full extent of the suffering caused to the victim's family. The forcible disappearance of a family member also places Syrian children at risk of related and compounding violations and abuses, including child marriage and child labour.

LAW Syria and Freedom Jasmine co-host “Memory, Justice and Healing: Hearing from the Families of the Missing and Detained” Gaziantep, Turkey

On 10-11 September 2020 LAW and Syrian survivors' association Freedom Jasmine co-hosted the survivor-centred platform “Memory, Justice and Healing: Hearing from the Families of the Missing and Detained” in Gaziantep, Turkey. The event marked the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearance 2020.

30 Syrian families from Turkey and North-West Syria participated in a series of closed sessions to discuss the way their life has changed since the disappearance of their loved ones and their hopes for the future.

The families had the opportunity to hear from Rwandan organisation Avega Agahozo, founded in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide by widows and their dependents to overcome the poverty and trauma they faced. The cross-regional exchange with widows from Avega's 40-000 strong membership highlighted the importance of building a justice movement from the bottom up.

The platform was also an opportunity for families to deliver their messaging directly to some of the key actors working on enforced disappearances and detention in the Syria context. 18 representatives from international organisations and civil society joined the event remotely, with some of them addressing the families directly and fielding questions from the room.

Michelle Jarvis, Deputy Head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM), briefed the families on the importance of making full use of the mandate given to the mechanism to collect and preserve evidence and ensure that it is ready for use by prosecutorial authorities. Ms. Jarvis explained the IIIM's approach to documenting evidence relating to detention in Syria, and its commitment to sharing information that could help clarify the fate or whereabouts of the missing.



The families had the opportunity to hear from Rwandan organisation Avega Agahozo, founded in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide by widows and their dependents to overcome the poverty and trauma they faced."



The platform was also an opportunity for families to deliver their messaging directly to some of the key actors working on enforced disappearances and detention in the Syria context."

What Our Partners and Beneficiaries Say

“

I cannot tell you how important it is to continue to hear these stories to keep the issues present in people's minds.”

~

Michelle Jarvis, Deputy Head of the IIIM

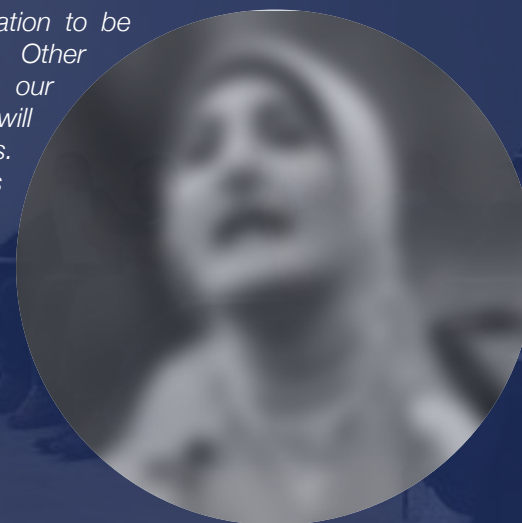


“

We are not the first population to be victims of such crimes. Other countries will not solve our problems. Organisations will not solve our problems for us. This is our problem, this is our cause.”

~

*Asma**



“

We thank everyone who was involved. You allowed us to say anything. You did not get angry – you encouraged us and gave us hope that someone is listening to us.”

~

*Zariah**



**Pseudonyms have been used.*



South Asia



Sri Lanka

In 2020 LAW continued to work with justice institutions to strengthen legal aid provision in the country, in particular to victims and survivors of gendered crimes, and the provision of legal information, assistance and representation to victims and survivors of gendered crimes. As Sri Lanka continues attempts to recover from 30 years of civil war, political and ethnic divides remain deep. In 2020 the Rajapaksa family retained control of the country, with Maithripala Rajapaksa as President, and Mahinda Rajapaksa, former President, as Prime Minister. The Sri Lankan state imposed a severe curfew, which, while ensuring low infection and mortality rates, took a considerable toll on the rights of its population. As of 29 June 2020, the total number of individuals arrested for breaching the curfew was 72,284, with little access to legal protections.



2020 Key Facts:



142

Received legal information



49

SGBV survivors provided with legal assistance (between Oct 2020 and Jan 2021)



26

SGBV survivors provided with legal representation (between Oct 2020 and Jan 2021)



100%

of legal aid provided for SGBV cases



1,002

Community members trained



91

Justice actors trained

The first Gender Justice Legal Network (GJLN) in Sri Lanka

A huge milestone was reached on 7 October 2020, when LAW Sri Lanka launched the first Gender Justice Legal Network. The Network connects victims of sexual and gender-based violence with lawyers who assist them to access justice and advocate on their behalf in interactions with the justice system. As well as direct assistance to victims, the Network promotes the use of victim-sensitive practices in Sri Lankan courts, and builds the capacity of the domestic legal system to address widespread sexual violence.



Beneficiaries of the GJLN

“

A mother of two children contacted LAW when her husband began threatening her and her children. The husband had previously attempted to sexually abuse the woman's 13-year-old daughter. A domestic violence case was initiated in the magistrate's court, and an initial protection order preventing the accused from visiting the mother and children was secured.

“

A thirteen-year-old girl who was sexually assaulted by four men, one of whom raped her. The girl was at risk of further violence in the home, so LAW successfully petitioned for a protection order and placed the child in her sister's home. LAW has also approached the National Authority for The Protection of Victims and Witnesses of Crimes to ensure that the child and her family are adequately protected.

The network was launched with an online event chaired by LAW Executive Director, Antonia Mulvey, and featuring two speakers guest speakers, Prashanthi Mahindaratne and Serena Gates, with extensive experience of legal reform and the prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes.

Working with the Attorney General's Department

LAW continued its working relationship with the Department of the Attorney General in Colombo. In previous years, LAW has facilitated trainings for state prosecutors on the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes, and successfully lobbied for victim impact statements to be admissible in Sri Lankan courts.

In August 2020, LAW Sri Lanka hosted its third three-day training retreat in Bentota, Sri Lanka, for 22 lawyers from the Attorney Generals Department Child Protection Unit. The training retreat brought together Chief Prosecutor of New South Wales Lloyd Babb SC, HH Judge Connell of UK Crown Courts, UK barrister Serena Gates, former Supreme Court Justice Shiranee Tilakawardane, Deputy Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris, Deputy Solicitor General Thusitha Mudalige, Senior Deputy Solicitor General and Head of the Child Protection Unit Chethiya Goonasekera, Judicial Medical Officer Dr Sriyantha Amararatne, and leading clinical psychologist Professor Piyanjali de Zoysa.

Participants were introduced to prosecution policies and procedures for victims of sexual abuse from an Australian perspective and judicial perspectives on the treatment of child victim/witness testimony in UK courts. The training also covered common mistakes in drafting indictments, tips on stress management and vicarious trauma, evidence and credibility assessments in the UK, an overview of a judicial medical officer's process: medical impact and evidence, an overview of international human rights of the child and of child victim testimony in Sri Lankan courts.

Feedback included the following:



The training was very useful and we gathered a lot of knowledge."



This was a really great experience."

The training was excellent. A big thank you to the team for providing such a helpful and interesting event."

The training was very useful and we gathered a lot of knowledge."

Bangladesh

LAW's programme provides support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The programme provides legal information, assistance and representation for violations and abuses occurring in Myanmar, and seeks to support the collective healing of the community by empowering their engagement in the multiple interlinked international justice processes being pursued globally. 2020 proved to be a monumental year for the Rohingya community both for those in Myanmar, and for the approximate 700,000 Rohingya refugees living in the world's largest refugee camp, Kutupalong, in Bangladesh. The majority of refugees in Bangladesh were forced to flee Myanmar after decades of persecution culminated in 2017 'clearance operations,' carried out by the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, in Rakhine State.



2020 Key Facts:



6,000

Received legal information



138

Received legal assistance



50

Number of community members trained to become community paralegals, survivor advocates or grassroots champions



567

Received legal representation



Victims, to Survivors, to Advocates

Sexual violence was a hall mark of the 2017 'clearance operations,' and many refugees in Kutupalong camp now live with the trauma of that violence. LAW work with the community to alleviate the cultural stigma and feelings of shame that prevent victims from accessing the legal, medical and psycho-social support that they need to manage their trauma. LAW has trained a network of survivor advocates, including 'Shanti Mohila' (or 'Peace Women') a group of more than 400 Rohingya women and girl survivors, and a since 2019 a group of Male Survivor Advocates, who provide information and referrals to other victims and survivors in the camp.

Antonia Mulvey contributed an article to the Opinio Juris Symposium: The impact and implications of international law: Myanmar and the Rohingya, to mark the three year anniversary of the 'clearance operations' in Rakhine State.*



LAW has trained a network of survivor advocates, including 'Shanti Mohila' (or 'Peace Women') a group of more than 400 Rohingya women and girl survivors."

* Victims, Survivors, Advocates – The Multiple Justice Journeys of the Rohingya, retrieved from <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/08/26/rohingya-symposium-victims-survivors-advocates-the-multiple-justice-journeys-of-the-rohingya/>

10 December 2020, Human Rights Day: Rohingya widow supported by LAW files first complaint in Myanmar seeking \$2 million from the Government

In a first of its kind case, Setara Begum, a 23-year-old Rohingya widow, who fled Myanmar during the 2017 'clearance operations' requested US\$2 million in compensation from the Government of Myanmar for its gross failure to meaningfully address the 'Inn Din massacre' in which her husband was killed by the Tatmadaw. The complaint, filed at the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission by LAW and international law firm McDermott Will & Emery UK LLP, is the first ever complaint before the Commission lodged by a Rohingya.

Seven Tatmadaw soldiers were convicted and sentenced to prison in relation to the Inn Din massacre, however, they were released after serving less than one year of their sentence.

The complaint built upon the work of two Reuters journalists who were imprisoned in Myanmar while conducting an investigation that unearthed the facts of the Inn Din massacre. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were given 7 year prison sentences under Myanmar's Official Secrets Act for their investigation and were released on 8 May 2019 after more than 500 days in prison following the intervention of human rights lawyer Amal Clooney. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo spent longer in prison than the Tatmadaw soldiers convicted for the massacre itself.

“

[m]y husband was killed and Myanmar has let those soldiers who did that go free. I am seeking justice for my husband and for all Rohingya, who have faced many similar issues.'




International justice: The Rohingya case

The International Court of Justice

In 2019, the Gambia lodged a complaint with the International Court of Justice against Myanmar for alleged breaches of its obligations under the Genocide Convention. On 23 January 2020, the Court upheld the Gambia's request for provisional measures, ordering Myanmar to take measures to protect the remaining Rohingya population in Myanmar, and to prevent the destruction of evidence relevant to the case before the Court. The ruling was a hugely important step, primarily in protection of the estimated 600,000 Rohingya that remain in Rakhine state, but also as the first concrete step in international recognition of the crimes committed against the Rohingya.

The ruling, shown on screens in LAW's office in Kutupalong camp, was watched by more than 50 Rohingya refugees, who cheered as the decision was read out.



International Criminal Court

On 4 August 2020, LAW and two other groups representing Rohingya victims of the 2017 'clearance operations' in Myanmar, requested that the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court order a 'Registry assessment of potential venues for the holding of proceedings in a State other than the host State [the Netherlands] within reasonable physical proximity of the affected population,' in the context of the situation of Bangladesh/Myanmar. The driving intention of this request was to have hearings take place in Bangladesh, or somewhere closer to the Rohingya, thereby making it easier for them to participate in potential proceedings.

On 17 August, the Office of the Prosecutor responded - arguing against having hearings outside the Netherlands at this stage. Nevertheless, on 20 August,

the Pre-Trial Chamber ordered the Registry to prepare a report looking at the feasibility of the victims' request. On 21 September, the Registry submitted its report setting out the steps it would need to take to accommodate some part of the proceedings taking place in Bangladesh in different scenarios - in its conclusion, the registry stated: 'The Registry stands ready to accommodate any of the proposed scenarios even if the operational aspects - in terms of time and resources - for some of them may be more challenging than for others.'

On 26 October, the Chamber issued its decision dismissing the request made by LAW and others. However, the Chamber noted: "On the merits, the Chamber... recognises the importance of bringing justice closer to the location of the alleged crimes as well as to the victims and witnesses." (Para 25) Further, while acknowledging that it is still too early in the process to order that hearings take place in Bangladesh, the Chamber held that it will "keep the possibility of conducting certain procedural steps in situ under review."

“The driving intention of this request was to have hearings take place in Bangladesh, or somewhere closer to the Rohingya.”



Africa

South Sudan

LAW's South Sudan programme works to facilitate access to justice for victims and survivors of gender-based violence and to end impunity for perpetrators of crimes, particularly those associated to the conflict. In its March 2020 report to the Human Rights Council, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan renewed its concern that *“Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, continued to be widespread and pervasive, characterised by a recognisable pattern of terror and subjugation used as a tactic of war.”* Despite the successful negotiation of the ‘Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan,’ sexual violence continues.



2020 Key Facts:



324

Received legal
information



143

Received legal
assistance



42

Community members
trained to become
community paralegals,
survivor advocates or
grassroots champions



62

Justice actors who
receive training,
capacity-building or
technical assistance

The Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

In December 2018, LAW lodged the first ever case against the Government of South Sudan on behalf of 30 South Sudanese women and girl survivors of conflict related sexual violence, for the rape, mass rape and sexual slavery of the survivors by members of the South Sudan army and the Presidential Guard – known as the Tiger Battalion. The case, lodged with the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee), which did not name the survivors in order to protect them from the very real threat of reprisals, was rejected by the Committee on claims that a case could not be lodged anonymously.

On 25 November 2020, LAW resubmitted the communication to the Committee on behalf of the 30 South Sudanese survivors, together with a request to the Committee for the protection of the survivors' identity. The communication reiterated its arguments that South Sudan had breached numerous articles of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and requested that the identities of the victims not be disclosed to South Sudan, to protect them from stigma and retaliation.

Look out for LAW's policy brief on the need for the Protection of Identities, to be released later this year.



The communication reiterated its arguments that South Sudan had breached numerous articles of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)."



The International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

On 19 June 2020, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, LAW hosted a Webinar on “Overcoming the Legacies of Sexual Violence in Conflict and Gender-based Violence in South Sudan”. The webinar was attended by 30 participants, from USAID, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Officer of the High Commissioner for Human Rights amongst others.

LAW’s Head of Africa, Stella Ndirangu, mediated the discussions between leading South Sudanese and Ugandan Human Rights lawyers and activists. The panellists shared their insights, experiences, best practices and ideas on how to tackle violence against women and girls in South Sudan.

Discussion during the webinar highlighted the need for women to be involved in political, legislative and judicial processes, to ensure on one hand that their needs and concerns are taken into account, and on the other that they are aware of their rights and can rise as survivor advocates to address stigma at the community level. The panellists and participants also identified a dire need for accountability in South Sudan not only for Conflict Related Sexual Violence in times of conflict, but also to address root causes of gender-based violence in times of peace, including the powerful harmful customary practices. Passing legislations and creating a specialised Gender Based Violence Court in South Sudan are good first steps, but political will, funding and awareness raising are key to ensure they are actually implemented and allow survivors of crimes to report them and effectively seek justice.



LAW's Somalia programme works to facilitate access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence, focusing primarily on six internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Mogadishu and Kismayo. The programme provides direct legal information, assistance and representation in camps through an independent complaints mechanism, and civilian oversight board. Direct legal aid is complimented by LAW's wider policy strategy, which supports policy change to provide robust legal protections for women, girls and survivors of gender-based violence. Managed from the regional headquarters in Nairobi, in 2020, LAW opened its first office in Mogadishu, where the programme is now coordinated from.

Independent Complaints Mechanism and Civilian Oversight Board

With a focus on the most vulnerable in society - women and children in IDP camps – the primary goal of the access to justice project is to increase reporting, effective investigations, and successful prosecutions of gender-based violence cases. The project was built upon work that commenced in 2017, when LAW and its partner Witness Somalia established the first ever community-based Independent Complaint Mechanism (ICM) in Mogadishu in 2017, and in Kismayo in 2018. The ICM, comprised of six male and ten female paralegals, receives complaints of gender-based violence from survivors, and working with the Civilian Oversight Board (COB), function is to oversee cases reported to the police ensuring they are investigated and prosecuted effectively and ethically, walk survivors through the formal legal system from reporting through to investigation, prosecution and adjudication. The COB is comprised of comprised of elders, lawyers, and prosecutors.

Independent Complaints Mechanism and Civilian Oversight Board statistics:



2020 Key Facts:



2,362

Received legal information



99

Received legal assistance



58

Received legal representation



124

Community members trained to become community paralegals, survivor advocates or grassroots champions



339

Justice actors who receive training, capacity-building or technical assistance

1,423
complaints
documented;



All
316
complaints were
investigated;

316
of those GBV
complaints were
reported to the
police station;



192
investigated complaints
were prosecuted,
resulting in a prison
sentence and/or fine

Sexual Intercourse Bill/Sexual Offences Bill: A Comparative Analysis

LAW has been at the forefront of advocating for the adoption of a comprehensive sexual offences law to address the gaps in the legislative framework that perpetuate impunity for sexual offences. In 2015, LAW provided technical support to the Ministry for Women and Human Rights Development in consultations and subsequent drafting of the Sexual Offences Bill (2016), and continues to engage stakeholders and the Ministry to address the current impasse on the adoption of the Bill by Parliament. On 8 August 2020 a new Sexual Intercourse Bill, also known as the Penetration Bill, was tabled for consideration before the Parliament of Somalia. After progress made with the adoption of the Sexual Offences Bill by the Council of Ministers in May 2018, the content of the proposed Sexual Intercourse Bill represents a deeply concerning regression for the rights of women, girls and victims of sexual violence.

Following the tabling of the Sexual Intercourse Bill, LAW prepared a comparative analysis setting out the key issues, concerns and implications of the proposed Sexual Intercourse Bill, including three recommendations, as follows:

1. Call upon Parliament to immediately withdraw the proposed Sexual Intercourse Bill and table the Sexual Offences Bill for approval.
2. Advocate about the harmful and prejudicial impact the Sexual Intercourse Bill will have on the rights of women, girls, men and boys in Somalia.
3. Share these messages and support the petition calling for the withdrawal of the Sexual Intercourse Bill, which can be found [here](#).

[Read the full analysis here](#)

On 15 September 2020 LAW hosted an online workshop on the Sexual Offences Bill and the Sexual Intercourse Bill, with the objective of starting an informed debate around the Sexual Intercourse Bill, and ensuring that all stakeholders have accurate information about its contents and how it differs from the Sexual Offences Bill. The panel discussed the timeline of the Sexual Offences Bill and its merits, including the definition of roles and offences, and inclusion of provisions on aggravating factors, legal aid, protections for survivors, admissible evidence, compensation and guidelines on sentencing.

Policy Brief: Transforming the Legacy of Somalia's Conflict

On 20 July 2020, LAW released “Transforming the Legacy of Somalia’s Conflict to Ensure Long-Term Stabilisation” a policy brief providing an analysis on how past and ongoing efforts to re-build Somalia can be scaled up to effectively implement a ‘transitional justice approach,’ ultimately bringing about a deeper and lasting peace for Somalia. The brief contains four key recommendations highlighting opportunities to strengthen Somalia’s social fabric and to embed this change into ongoing and future state-building processes. In doing so, Somalia can break past and current cycles of violence and address deep-rooted inequalities. You can read the policy brief [here](#).



Picture credits: National Geographic



Uganda

LAW's ground breaking CEDAW complaint, lodged on behalf of 30 women and girls for the brutal sexual violence, slavery, torture and gang rape perpetrated by the Army of South Sudan, has already had an impact well beyond the filing of the complaint. The survivors, now displaced in Uganda, have formed an advocacy and support group that meets regularly, and their unofficial leader, Joycelyn Ayer (pseudonym), has become an outspoken defender of human rights. Through the pursuit of justice, they have found healing, and through their community they have obtained empowerment.



Mali

LAW remains committed to targeting female genital mutilation and bringing an end to the cruel and inhumane practice. In 2016, UNICEF estimated that at least 200 million girls and women had undergone FGM in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Mali has a particularly high rate of FGM, where it is estimated that 91.4% of women have undergone the procedure. Consequences include severe pain, excessive bleeding, genital tissue swelling, wound healing problems, infections, urinary problems, increased risk of childbirth complications, HIV, psychological problems including PTSD, anxiety disorders and depression, and death.



LAW's body of work on FGM includes a groundbreaking research project and report on redefining FGM as a crime of torture and in some circumstances, a crime against humanity.

Misconceptions fuelling the procedure revolve around ideas that female sexual organs are unclean, female sexuality needs to be controlled and that FGM preserves virginity for marriage. Yet, lifelong implications on survivors' physical and mental health ensure that control of women and their bodies extends far beyond the procedure itself.

LAW's body of work on FGM includes a groundbreaking research project and report on redefining FGM as a crime of torture and in some circumstances, a crime against humanity. This year, LAW conducted a mission to Mali to engage with survivors of FGM, local legal aid and psychosocial and medical practitioners who work to support the recovery of survivors. One person that LAW spoke to is a father whose daughter was subjected to FGM against his will. She died as a result of the procedure.

LAW is working on a project with its local partner to provide survivors of FGM with a referral system for medical and psychosocial treatment, and legal information regarding FGM.



LAW Advocacy: Highlights

In 2020, LAW hosted and/or participated in 21 panels, roundtables and workshops.

1. Migrant domestic workers and domestic violence in Lebanon:

In January 2020, Legal Action Lebanon organised a roundtable in Beirut, in which 13 jurists discussed violence and human rights violations in the domestic sphere. Participants addressed the issue of human trafficking, slavery of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and strategies to combat it. Participants discussed domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, and the existing laws and policies in Lebanon.

2. Meeting between Professor Payam Akhavan and Rohingya survivor advocates:

In March 2020, Professor Payam Akhavan, ICJ Counsel to Gambia and ICC Counsel to Bangladesh, visited LAW's centre and exchanged with Rohingya survivor advocates on the ICJ case Gambia vs. Myanmar.

3. Launch of the Gender Justice Legal Network:

On 7 October 2020, LAW Sri Lanka hosted the online launch event of the Gender Justice Legal Network,

chaired by Antonia Mulvey. Two speakers, Prashanthi Mahindaratne and Serena Gates, discussed legal reform and the prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes.

4. Bilateral meeting between LAW and the Minister of women:

On 9 November 2020, LAW in Somalia met with the Minister of Women to develop cooperation on legislative processes to improve legislation on sexual and gender-based violence in the country. LAW addressed challenges and concerns raised by the 'Sexual Intercourse Bill' and discussed collaboration with the

Ministry on advocacy efforts for the 'Sexual Offences bill'.

5. Rohingya Case in ICJ:

The Road to Accountability and Justice: In July 2020, LAW Executive director, Antonia Mulvey, participated in the IOC Resilient Youth Leadership Summit. Speaking about human rights violations and atrocity crimes perpetrated against Rohingya, the panel discussed the routes and challenges in accessing international justice.



LAW Finances 2020

3,400,000

Total Income
in 2020

3,300,000

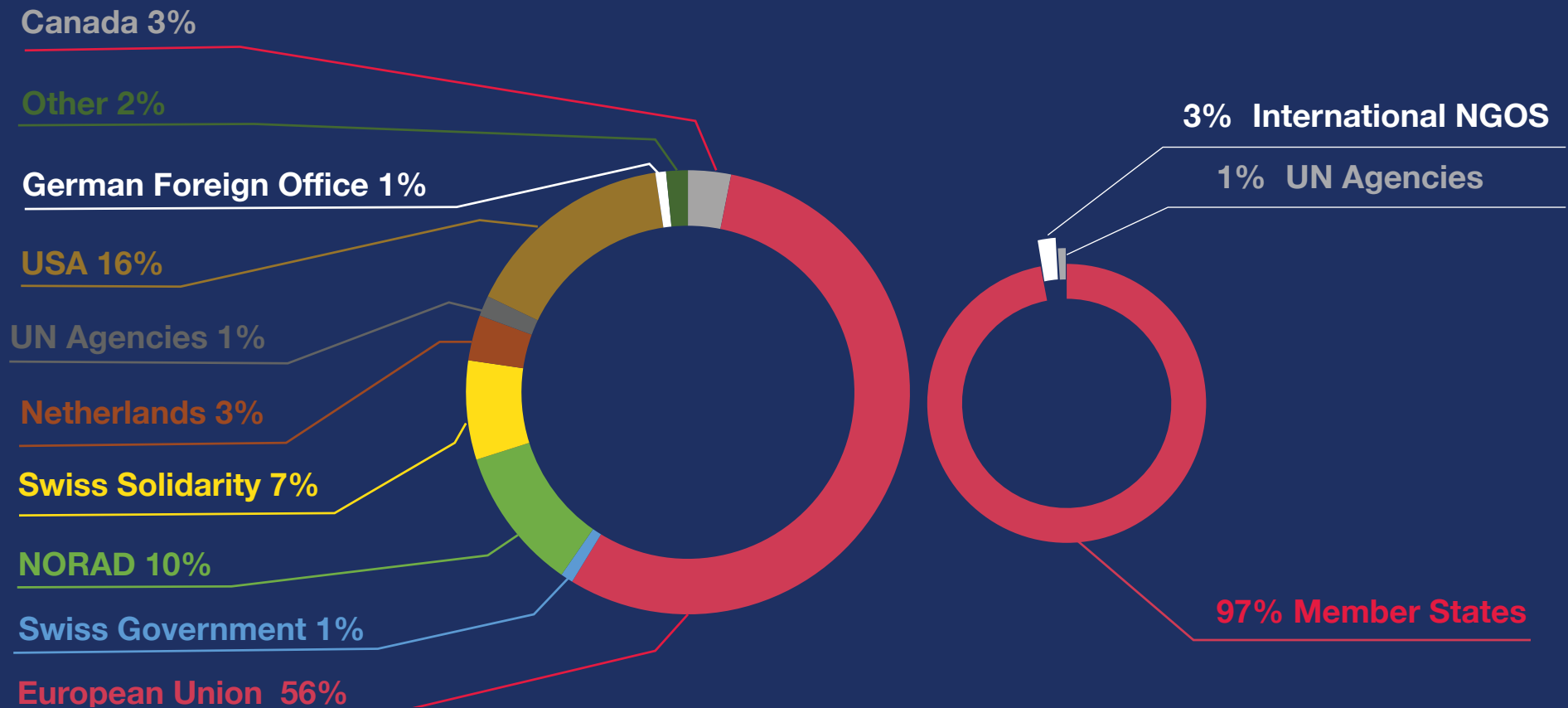
Total Expenditure
in 2020

964,000

Increase
since 2019

3,400,000

LAW anticipated
funding for 2021



Support for LAW

LAW recognises that without our partners and donors we could not reach the individuals and communities that we support. We want to extend a sincere thank you to those organisations that make our work possible.

In 2020, LAW's partners included: Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) UK, ABAAD, Witness Somalia, HINNA Organisation, Northern Frontier Youth League, South Sudan Law Society, Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation, Federation of Women Lawyers of South Sudan, Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance, Assistance Mission for Africa, Harvard University, University of Toronto, International Organisation for Migration, National Peace Council, Centre for Equality and Justice, Hashtag Generation, Women and Media Collective, Anti-Racism Movement, HELEM, Justice Rapid Response, CARE International, Committee of Missing and kidnapped persons in Lebanon, Justice Without Borders, the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL), EuroMed Feminist Initiative, Al Haq, Diakonia and Allen and Overy.

LAW also extends a sincere thank you to: United Kingdom FCDO, Canada, Germany, The Kingdom of the Netherlands, Amnesty International, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Women, The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), US AID, The UN Voluntary Fund for Torture Victims, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, United Nations Peace Building Fund, Swiss Solidarité, Open Society Initiative, Legal Agenda, Women's Refugee Council and the European Union.





LAW Governance

LAW was founded in Switzerland, Geneva, where it is registered as a not-for-profit organisation. LAW is registered in the United Kingdom as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, and in the Netherlands as a Dutch Stichting. LAW has registered offices in Sri Lanka and Kenya and is in the process of registration in Bangladesh. LAW has joint headquarters in the UK and in Switzerland.

LAW's Swiss committee, UK Board and Dutch Board are comprised of senior international lawyers, with wide-ranging experience.

LAW is supported by an Advisory Council comprised of experts in a number of fields, whose advice, LAW draws upon as needed. LAW's Swiss Committee, UK Board, Dutch Board and Advisory Council are profiled below. LAW's Executive Director oversees the operation of LAW globally, and is supported by LAW's senior management team; including LAW's Regional Heads of Office, located in the regions in which LAW operates.

LAW wishes to sincerely thank our Swiss Committee and UK Board Members for their oversight and management of the organisation; to members of LAW's Advisory Council for their programmatic input, and to Dennis McNamara, Senior Legal Advisor to the Executive Director.





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