



SUCCESS STORY

Giving Victims Access to Justice

Because of security concerns and laws restricting photography in Darfur, no photographs are available for this Success Story.

“The lawyers’ network has become very famous amongst internally displaced people...and voluntary legal assistance for these people has become very common among lawyers.”

— West Darfur Imam

January 2008 – Since the current crisis in Darfur began almost five years ago, millions of civilians have been displaced from their homes and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives. Human rights violations – including rape and sexual abuse of women and girls – have been used as weapons of war by all parties to the conflict. Because of poverty, cultural restraints, and lack of confidence in the legal system, most of these crimes go unreported, and when they are reported, the perpetrators are rarely held accountable.

To address this injustice, USAID/OTI provided funding to enable the region’s human rights lawyers to take the cases of internally displaced people (IDPs) and other affected civilians pro bono. USAID/OTI helped Darfurian lawyers confer on human rights law with more experienced lawyers in Khartoum. The program also opened up a vast array of international resources on basic human rights by providing the attorneys with Internet capabilities.

With USAID/OTI’s help, human rights lawyers in western Darfur, where access to justice is most limited, have formed networks and established a center near the major IDP camps around Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. The lawyers have provided guidance to victims and assisted them in courageously pressing charges, even against members of the government, the military, and the police.

In 2007, with support from USAID/OTI, Darfur human rights lawyers took on 21 cases. The courts are currently addressing 11 of these cases, and 7 of the prosecutions have already secured justice and/or compensation for the injured parties. In 2006, the network provided legal assistance to 18 victims, most of whom were female survivors of violence.

Striving for justice can be a dangerous endeavor in Darfur; lawyers often endure harassment and even arrest. Word of their successes, however, is spreading through the camps. The lawyers admit they are now “famous,” and more victims are bravely approaching them, recounting their experiences, and asking if their cases can be addressed. The lawyers’ networks are now regularly offering pro bono assistance to Darfur’s most vulnerable populations. And with USAID/OTI’s help, the people of western Darfur are experiencing first-hand the benefits of using the legal system to seek accountability and obtain justice.