

# The Zimbabwe Connection

**Arnold Tsunga**, 2006-2007 International Humphrey Fellow from Zimbabwe, made an amazing set of connections during his time at the University of Minnesota, some of which he literally brought back to Zimbabwe with him. The Humphrey Fellowship Program is sponsored by the US Department of State and administered by the Institute of International Education, along with partnering host universities.



Arnold holds a bachelor's degree in law and a master's degree in business administration. He is the executive director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) and oversees organizational objectives focused on access to justice. He is also the executive secretary for the Law Society of Zimbabwe, which works to advise and assist lawyers, government officials, and the public on issues of law and justice. Additionally, Arnold serves as the coordinator of the Southern African Development Community Lawyers Association Human Rights Committee. He has been awarded the 2006 Human Rights Watch Award and the 2006 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

In addition to networking extensively with the Twin Cities human rights and legal communities, Arnold forged close ties to law students at the University of Minnesota, both American and foreign. Through his prominent positions in both Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and the Law Society of Zimbabwe, he was able to arrange placements in these organizations for three law students — **Eissa Villaseñor**, **Jared Shepherd**, and **Sonia Gill** — who had successfully applied for the Upper Midwest Human Rights Fellowship Program. They assisted ZLHR and the Law Society of Zimbabwe in numerous ways, including casework, research, and community advocacy. This brilliant example of collaboration and partnership paves the way for future Upper Midwest Fellows to do human rights work in Zimbabwe, as well as sets an excellent example for other Humphrey-Upper Midwest Fellow collaborations.



**Eissa Villaseñor's** Fellowship consisted primarily of conducting legal research and writing on the topics of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Among her accomplishments during her Fellowship were drafting a legal memorandum on the compatibility of insult laws with the right to freedom of expression and Zimbabwe's constitution, and revising a program proposal regarding internally displaced persons and returned migrants.



*Arnold Tsunga, with a colleague from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights*

"In the fall of 2006, I met Arnold Tsunga...It was through Arnold that two other classmates and I were able to set up an internship with Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. While the primary purpose of the internship was to assist the organization with legal research and writing as it related to its current advocacy and litigation efforts, the internship also offered the opportunity to visit a country experiencing an economic crisis and suffering from severe political and human rights violations."

- Eissa Villaseñor, U of MN Law Student

**Sonia Gill** worked as a researcher for Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and the Law Society of Zimbabwe. Ms. Gill researched Zimbabwean domestic laws related to human rights, as well as the country's various human rights treaty obligations and its compliance with international human rights norms. She is presently using this information to draft a complaint to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and the Southern African Development Community regarding Zimbabwean election law and the government of Zimbabwe's compliance with Rule of Law standards.

"My coworkers and colleagues at ZLHR were amazing and inspiring. Considering the circumstances under which my colleagues were working and the risks inherent in undertaking human rights work in a country like Zimbabwe, their passion and motivation was truly uplifting. Their defiance in the face of extraordinary political and economic circumstances was very inspiring. Perhaps more than that, though, I valued their friendship and companionship...Their companionship was invaluable to me."

- Sonia Gill, U of MN Law Student

During his Fellowship, **Jared Shepherd** assisted ZLHR in various aspects of its programming, including public interest and civil rights litigation, research, memo and brief drafting on Zimbabwe's compliance with international human rights norms, community outreach and training on human rights, and client interviews.



Above: Arnold Tsunga, and his parents, with Jared Shepherd  
Left: Eissa, Jared, and Sonia back at the Human Rights Center  
Below: Eissa, Sonia, and Jared, presenting their work as part of the Human Rights Speaker Series



"My placement with ZLHR's HIV/AIDS and Humanitarian Law Project allowed me to contribute to their future litigation efforts by completing some much needed research...I hoped that a paper on access to life-saving anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for people living with HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe could serve as a framework for ZLHR's future litigation efforts."

- Jared Shepherd, U of MN Law Student

Eissa, Jared, and Sonia presented at the University of Minnesota Law School on their Fellowship experiences on October 25, 2007 to over 60 law students, staff, faculty, and interested community members. The event served not only to highlight the accomplishments of their individual Fellowships, but also to draw additional attention to the dire human rights situation in Zimbabwe and Arnold and ZLHR's continuing struggle.

This wonderful example of a Humphrey Fellow establishing concrete partnerships with students at his host institution serves to remind us that human rights truly are a global phenomenon and that working for their promotion and protection is truly a global undertaking.

