

## Foreign Students Bring Diversity and Experience to American Volunteering

Washington, DC: Students from Ethiopia, India, Nepal, Romania, Saudi Arabia and Syria are among 14 graduates who will serve as Peace Fellows with The Advocacy Project (AP) this summer, making this one of the most diverse cohorts since the fellowship program began in 2003.

This year's Fellows received training at AP in Washington last week, and all but one are enrolled at US universities: Georgetown; Harvard; George Washington; Tufts; New York; Oregon; Minnesota; and Monterey.



2013 Peace Fellows at training in Washington DC (May 23-25).  
[Click here](#) for names and profiles.

Their enthusiasm underscores the universal appeal of volunteering, and shows how foreign students can enrich a US-based fellowship program with their multi-cultural perspective.

In just one example, [Meron Menwyelet](#), from Ethiopia, studied in Jordan and worked at the US State Department before entering a Masters program at Georgetown University. Meron will also bring

experience of running a small business and working in Rwanda to her fellowship this summer with the [Kinawataka Women's Initiatives](#) in Kampala.

AP's goal is to match the skills of young professionals like Meron with the needs of community-based advocates while providing Fellows with a unique working experience. [Rachel Palmer](#), from the University of Michigan, spoke for many past Fellows after working with freed child workers in Nepal in 2012: "This fellowship has been an overwhelmingly positive experience and has shaped my academic focus for next year." [Other testimonials](#) can be found on the AP website.

The main challenge facing Peace Fellows is to produce a long-term impact in a few weeks. Given that their host organizations represent marginalized communities and find it hard to publicize their work, Fellows help to tell their story by providing IT training and producing content in the form of profiles, photos, research, and video footage.

Fellows also help to design long-term programs that will generate funding and eventually trigger social change. The value of this approach is currently on display in the eastern Congo, where AP's partner, SOS Femmes en Danger, [helps women reduce their exposure to war rape](#). The program has been praised by Zainab Hawa Bangura, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, and recently received a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington. It owes much to four Peace Fellows - [Ned Meerdink](#), [Sylvie](#), Walter James and [Charlie Walker](#) - who guided the early effort. All four went on to work full-time in Africa.

This summer's Fellows will tackle equally challenging issues. These include the impact of climate change on persons with disability in Vietnam; abusive child labor in Nepal; the participation of Dalits in Nepal's turbulent politics; tribal women's courts in Western India; the illegal dredging of sand in Bangladesh; recycling of plastic in a Kampala slum; and the provision of accessible toilets for persons with disability in northern Uganda. As with the DRC project, each of these could produce an impact far beyond their immediate beneficiaries.



"Fellow Expectations" video by Sujita Basnet, 2013 Peace Fellow for Backward Society Education (BASE) in Nepal

Four Fellows will help their hosts produce material for [advocacy quilts](#). [Andra Bosneag](#) (Tufts) and [Jasveen Bindra](#) (Georgetown) will work with the [Vikalp](#) group in western India to produce panels in the local Pithora style. [Chris Pinderhughes](#) will work with river gypsies in Bangladesh; and Laura Garcia will explore quilting with relatives of the disappeared in Peru while working with the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (EPAF).

Three Fellows will try to expand the market for the woven products of AP partners, in Bosnia and Morocco. One of the three, [Benan Grams](#) from Syria, will be working with the [Ain Leuh cooperative](#) in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Benan has also been in touch with students from the Walt Whitman High School near Washington, who hope to organize bake sales on behalf of the Ain Leuh weavers.

Two Fellows will work in the Middle East with two long-standing AP partners that are deeply committed to a just and democratic peace - the [Alternative Information Centre](#) in Jerusalem and the [Democracy and Workers Rights Centre](#), in Ramallah.

These assignments will all be challenging and Fellows will no doubt use blogging to relieve the pressure, as others have done before them. AP's website carries an [archive of blogs since 2003](#), and every one is a testament to the satisfaction and strains that come

from volunteering for human rights. Readers are encouraged to comment on this year's offerings.

- Meet the [2013 Peace Fellows](#), follow their adventures and comment on their blogs.