Welcome to another edition of the Section’s diversity newsletter.

In this issue we highlight the work of Dr. Mohammed Habib Ullah who is dedicated to fighting for the rights of the Rohingya people. In his interview, conducted by Deputy Diversity Officer Cassandre Theano, he notes what lawyers can do to help in this effort. In addition, the newsletter brings you snippets of important articles and reports on diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. One such report is “Us Too? – Bullying and Sexual Harassment in the Legal Profession” by the International Bar Association. This comprehensive report reveals that the legal profession has a problem. But all hope isn’t lost – the report and this newsletter propose strategies to address the varied issues affecting diversity and inclusion in our profession.

Once again, we want to hear from you – fellow members – about your experience of diversity and inclusion in our Section. By completing the five-minute I Count survey, you are adding your voice to the mix and letting us know what can be done to improve diversity and inclusion in the ABASIL. As always, my team and I would be happy to hear from you so feel free to reach out.

Adejoké Babington-Ashaye

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ABA International Members,

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Interested in joining the Section’s Diversity Committee? Care about achieving diversity & inclusion in the Section? Have a concern about diversity & inclusion in the Section? Please feel free to reach out to the Diversity Officer, Adejoké Babington-Ashaye or Angela Benson, ABA SIL Director of Membership.
If you missed the Annual ABA SIL meeting in Washington DC, you missed an amazing program, full of informative panels featuring some of the best and brightest of our profession, globally. One of the panels that struck us was “Refugee Narratives: A Discussion of the Current Refugee Crisis from Refugees in their own Words.” This panel provided an inside view of conflicts that are far flung, but need our attention, like the crisis facing the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Here, we interview one of the panelists, Dr. Mohammed Habib Ullah, to discuss his advocacy and the work of the Arakan Rohingya National Organization.

Tell us more about yourself.
I am Rohingya, I grew up in Bangladesh which at the time was called East Pakistan, after my parents were forced to flee from Rakhine State due to my father’s activism. I would later live in Malaysia where I pursued my education and completed my MSc and PhD until moving to Maryland in 2016 to assume the post of country representative for the Arakan Rohingya National Organization. I am the father of 3 children.

And your organization, ARNO, what does it stand for?
The Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) is an umbrella organization merging a number of Rohingya organizations. It is headquartered in the UK. They used to operate in Bangladesh until Bangladesh changed its policies and started to crackdown on Rohingya organizations. I became involved with the organization in 1999 as a student activist. When I moved to Malaysia, I served as the country representative from 2008 to 2016. Since 2016, I have been the US representative upon my move to Maryland. ARNO addresses the political issues to focus on to achieve the right to self-determination for the Rohingya people. It works with the UN, the EU and other partners on education, women empowerment, etc.

What led you to this work?
My father was a pioneer in the anti-government political movement in Burma/Myanmar. He was wanted by the Government and eventually left for exile in Bangladesh. Growing up in his shadow, I always had the motivation to work for my community since birth, because that was the example that was set for me. I have seen with my own eyes three refugee crises, in the 1980s, the 1990s and the most recent one that started in 2012. People moved from Rakhine State to save their lives. In 2018, the Ontario International Report did a survey and found that 3,060 villages were destroyed by the end of 2017, 24,843 Rohingyas died as a result of murder, and another 10,000 were thrown in the fire, bringing the total number of deaths by the end of 2017 to a little under 35,000. Additionally, 40,000 people suffered bullet wounds and 18,498 women were raped, more than half of them being underaged girls (gang) raped. This genocide, as the UN has coined it, is still going on today. Despite being called a genocide, we have not seen the response in Rakhine as we have seen in other places where genocide occurred, so I cannot stay on the sidelines.

What are the most pressing issues facing the Rohingya community today?
Three immediate issues come to mind. Firstly, the safe return to Rakhine, the homeland for Rohingyas with protection, rights and dignity. Villages are destroyed. Houses have been burned and the state uses the area as a special economic zone. The Rohingya do not want to stay in refugee camps indefinitely. There must be pressure on the Burmese government to rehabilitate the original villages and home with proper dignity and safety. Secondly, the root cause of the conflict must be addressed. The citizenship law in 1982 that cancelled the Rohingya’s citizenship must be reversed. The word ‘Rohingya’ was even banned, and we are now referred to as Bengalis. Finally, those who were affected and now live in the refugee camps need to live a normal life as much as possible, especially for those children born out of rape, in terms of their citizenship, their identity and their belonging.

How can the ABA help?
Legal experts are very important in this fight. Lawyers and legal experts can help to get restoration of our full citizenship. As stateless people, life is very difficult for the Rohingyas. I was lucky that I was able to get Bangladesh citizenship which allows me to move about, even though Rohingyas are still socially marginalized in Bangladesh. Lawyers can also use their extensive network to motivate the US government to get more involved on this issue to put pressure on the Burmese government to solve the problems in Rakhine state. For instance, sanctions on arms supplies, military training and trade with those persons who are responsible. Also, the spread of hate speech on social media like Facebook/twitter inflamed tensions and caused violence against the Rohingyas. There are still thousands of pages with hate speech on Facebook - the ABA can help draw attention to this.
I COUNT CAMPAIGN

Attended the Annual SIL meeting in Washington DC? One of the Section’s concrete goals is to reflect diversity in our panels and topics. How did we do? Have any other diversity observations? Comment in the I Count Campaign Survey. We are aiming to get a better understanding of your perceptions of diversity and inclusion within our Section which will help towards the implementation of the 2018 - 2022 Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

TAKE THE SURVEY

SELECTED ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Unusual Suspects: Diversity Problems in Unlikely Places

❖  International Development has a Race Problem
   By: Angela Bruce-Raeburn
   Source: Devex

   Calling out racism — or the racial power dynamics of aid workers in low- and middle-income countries — as a systemic problem of international development has remained a topic that has not honestly been embraced in polite company. From a lack of allies to the negative impact risk-taking could have on their peers, Devex takes a look at some of the barriers and biases facing women of color in landing leadership roles in global development. We are encouraged to talk openly about “diversity and inclusion,” a neat euphemism to encapsulate the belief that all groups are welcome at the table of ideas. And yet if we dig a little deeper, we realize that diversity and inclusion do not speak to the entrenched racialized power imbalances that define those who receive aid and those who deliver aid.

Read More

❖  We need to fix implicit bias in philanthropy. Here’s how.
   By: Brittany Boettcher and Alison Gilbert
   Source: Devex

   To break down those barriers, we in the funding community must engage in uncomfortable conversations. We need to take a critical look at ourselves. If we truly value a culture of philanthropy that is more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, there’s hard work to be done. Far too many good ideas are left unfunded because of bias in the systems that we’ve built. If we look only at the philanthropic sector in the United States, total giving in 2014 was over $60 billion. According to the D5 Coalition’s most recent report, over 90 percent of foundation presidents are white and over 80 percent of foundation staff are white. Meanwhile, only 7 percent of funds go to programs that explicitly serve racial or ethnic minorities. Read More

Practical Advice for Reaching Your Diversity & Inclusion Goals

❖  Driving Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace
   By: Steven Jiang
   Source: Forbes

   While attention to diversity and inclusion in the workplace is certainly not a new idea, the birth of movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo in recent years has driven greater awareness around the inequity that still exists in our world. C-suite executives and HR teams are at the forefront of leading and implementing corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives. Diversity in and outside the workplace allows companies to be more open-minded and have a more complete outlook on their business strategy. One study found that when diverse teams make a business decision, they outperform individual decision makers up to 87% of the time. Read More
Ending Harassment at Work Requires an Intersectional Approach
By: Pooja Jain-Link, Trudy Bourgeois and Julia Taylor Kennedy
Source: Harvard Business Review

If your company approaches the problem of sexual misconduct with one-size-fits-all solutions, chances are high you aren’t protecting some of the most vulnerable members of your workforce. The experiences of women of color—and of men of color—are at risk of being misunderstood and undervalued. In the Center for Talent Innovation’s recent study, “What #MeToo Means for Corporate America,” we uncovered a nuanced, at times surprising, portrait of sexual misconduct. Our research illustrates the varied landscapes professional women and men of different backgrounds face when it comes to sexual misconduct. It reveals the ways race and gender intersect to complicate our standard narrative of motive, and our standard image of a senior male perpetrator and junior female victim. Read More

‘Belongingness’ is important to diversity and inclusion in the workplace
By: Montreces Monelle Ransom
Source: ABA Journal

The concept of belongingness goes beyond diversity and inclusion. Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance; and belongingness is being able to dance like no one is watching. Belongingness is an innate sense of psychological and emotional security that allows people to be their authentic selves and contribute in their own, unique way. Read More

REPORTS

Us Too? – Bullying and Sexual Harassment in the Legal Profession
Source: International Bar Association

The legal profession has a problem. In 2018, the International Bar Association (IBA) and market research company Acritas conducted the largest-ever global survey on bullying and sexual harassment in the legal profession. Nearly 7,000 individuals from 135 countries responded to the survey, from across the spectrum of legal workplaces: law firms, in-house, barristers’ chambers, government and the judiciary. The results provide empirical confirmation that bullying and sexual harassment are rife in the legal profession. Approximately one in two female respondents and one in three male respondents had been bullied in connection with their employment. One in three female respondents had been sexually harassed in a workplace context, as had one in 14 male respondents. This report provides a succinct analysis of that data, to raise awareness about the nature, extent and impact of the problem and inform the development of solutions.

Strategies and Tactics For In-House Legal Departments to Improve Outside Counsel Diversity
Source: General Counsel for Law Firm Diversity and DiversityLab

One of the topics du jour in the legal field is the letter signed by more than 200+ GCs earlier this year, threatening to pull millions in business from law firms if they do not improve their diversity. Most recently, they released a series of tangible steps law firms can take to increase diversity.