

# DEFENDING *Human Rights*

In the red-light district of a South Asian city, brothels line the dimly lit streets for a seemingly unending number of blocks. Behind the brothel doors are scores of women and young girls who often were physically forced into prostitution by acquaintances or family members looking to earn a little money or pay off debts.

No hope exists in that very dark place," says **Victor Boutros**, an associate of the Dallas office of Fish & Richardson, P.C. Last spring, he and four other Texas attorneys — his wife, **Tricia Steele Boutros** of Vinson & Elkins, **Patrick Kelly** and **Elisabeth Rain** of Haynes and Boone, and **Reid Porter** of Walters, Balido and Crain — spent two weeks in South Asia working with the human rights group International Justice Mission ([www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)). The firms offered their full support, granting the lawyers time off for the trip abroad, financial assistance, or pro bono credit toward billable hour requirements.

One of the cases the team took on involved a group of women who sold the virginity of their underage daughters to pimps for a sex party. To help local prosecutors prepare for a hearing, the Texas lawyers reviewed briefs and organized a moot court and trial clinic. Because the South Asian lawyers can apply what they learned to future cases, Boutros asserts, "We hope our training makes a practical, long-term impact."

Following a two-year investigation by IJM and while the Texas lawyers were in South Asia, IJM staff joined with local law enforcement to raid a rice mill and free the workers who had been brutally enslaved. Some of the workers had been beaten, sexually assaulted, or seared with hot iron rods for failing to satisfy the demands of the owner and his wife. To ensure the perpetrators would be held accountable,



Victor Boutros (top row, right) and his colleagues pose with a group of freed slaves in South Asia. Photo courtesy of International Justice Mission.

Boutros and his colleagues helped document evidence that resulted in a magistrate's proclamation granting the workers' release from the illegal bonds. The highlight for Boutros was seeing "48 people smiling on their first day of freedom."

"It was a tremendous joy for our team to get to use some of our skills as lawyers to serve those suffering abuse overseas," he states. The business litigator was inspired to get involved with human rights work after hearing IJM President and CEO Gary Haugen speak at Harvard University seven years ago. "In the past, I had thought the problems were so huge that there was not much anyone could do. But I have seen with my own eyes that these tragic, man-made disasters are utterly preventable."

Boutros, who has made similar trips to Ecuador, India, and South Africa, hopes to return to South Asia next year. Meanwhile, he and his colleagues are developing ways to help stateside such as performing legal research and writing briefs. "It is a privilege to play even a small role in the work of a group whose persistence and commitment transforms lives," he says.

**Les Weisbrod**, a partner in the Dallas office of Morgan & Weisbrod, L.L.P., was elected vice president of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America. He has served as the organization's treasurer and secretary and has been a member of its board of governors since 1998.



**Patricia A. Macias**, presiding judge of the 388th District Court in El Paso, was elected vice president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. A member of the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care, she has served on the bench for 11 years.



State Rep. **Phil King** of Weatherford was recognized as Legislator of the Year by the American Legislative Exchange Council. First elected to the Texas Legislature in 1998, he serves as chair of the Regulated Industries Committee and co-chair of the Electric Utility Restructuring Legislative Oversight Committee.



**Harva Dockery**, a partner in the Dallas office of Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P., received the DiversityFirst Award from the Texas Diversity Council. The award recognizes individual achievement and a demonstrated commitment to diversity. She is a leader in the firm's Women's Initiative Network.

