



The Power of Recognition



NICOLA POTVIN GO CREA

Inter Pares staff, supporters and allies gathered to recognize and celebrate Clinic 554 and the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives in April 2019.

Practicing Recognition

In April, Inter Pares recognized the amazing health work of Clinic 554 by presenting them with the Peter Gillespie Social Justice Award. The award honours the contributions of small and often unrecognized Canadian social justice organizations. Clinic 554 is skilled in feminist, trauma-informed and anti-racist practice, and offers care in Fredericton, New Brunswick to underserved sectors of the population, including the LGBTQ community. While accepting the

award, Dr. Adrian Edgar spoke passionately: “We are working alone to address the needs of many of New Brunswick’s most marginalized communities. As a result, we spend most of our time feeling isolated. Having our struggles witnessed... with a social justice award of this caliber is more uplifting than we can say.”

The Peter Gillespie Social Justice Award goes beyond a prize and a ceremony. It provides a platform to speak out [PAGE 4 ▶](#)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

MAE TAO CLINIC: THIRTY YEARS OF BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

BEARING WITNESS IN BANGLADESH

Mae Tao Clinic: Thirty years of building healthy communities



COURTESY OF MAE TAO CLINIC

Dr. Cynthia Maung is recognized worldwide for her unflagging efforts to promote healthy communities.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC). From its humble beginnings in a simple wooden house near the Thai-Burma border, the MTC is now a well-established teaching hospital with nearly 100,000 patient consultations in 2018. The clinic's momentous anniversary was celebrated and applauded at home in Mae Sot, Thailand and around the world.

Dr. Cynthia Maung is recognized worldwide for her unflagging efforts to promote healthy communities. She and a group of students founded MTC in 1989, having fled a military crackdown on democracy activists in Burma. Upon reaching Thailand, she was alarmed by how many of her fellow refugees were suffering from conflict injuries or preventable illnesses. She was moved to take action.

Today the clinic's impact is felt far beyond its walls. The clinic is building the medical workforce in Burma, particularly those serving in conflict-affected Ethnic communities. 210 health workers received training in 2018. MTC is also a hub for health policy development, bringing together health workers and community leaders to envision and plan for a healthcare system in Burma, once there is peace and democracy.

In 1999, Inter Pares successfully nominated Dr. Cynthia for the John Humphrey Freedom Award, the first in a long list of international

awards celebrating MTC. The international recognition that accompanies these awards has contributed immensely to the clinic's success. Whether in seeking international funds, attracting volunteer doctors from around the world, or negotiating with state authorities, having international recognition has undeniably increased MTC's leverage.

While Dr. Cynthia is often the focus of this recognition, she takes every opportunity to open doors for others. When invited to high-level meetings she almost always invites half a dozen community leaders to join her, particularly seeking youth. She shares: "This is really crucial for young people, to feel they can be the change in their community."

Inter Pares was one of the first international organizations to fund MTC and today the clinic is supported by funders from around the world. Inter Pares has long recognized MTC as exceptional, and on its 30th anniversary, it is heartening to share this recognition with a growing international community. ☺



COURTESY OF MAE TAO CLINIC

Dr. Cynthia Maung and a group of students founded the Mae Tao Clinic in 1989 in Thailand, having fled a military crackdown on democracy activists in Burma.

Bearing Witness in Bangladesh

BY ASHLEY ARMSTRONG, COMMUNICATIONS CO-DIRECTOR

We're on a rooftop near Chandina, Bangladesh, sitting cross-legged on a woven mat. A gentle breeze reaches us from the rice fields. A kind woman offers us fresh coconut water to drink, and I'm relieved – Ottawa doesn't get this hot. I'm facing a woman many years my senior, Achia, who lives in the community surrounding us. She is a member of a landless group supported by Nijera Kori, one of Inter Pares' long-standing counterparts.

Since the 1980s, Nijera Kori has mobilized landless people in small groups to demand their rights. They now support over 200,000 group members across the country.

We've just finished a discussion with Achia's landless group about violence against women, and have come up to the rooftop for a more private conversation about life in her village as a woman.

When Achia speaks, her eyes water. She firmly taps my knee, letting her hand rest there. She shares how, over the last thirty years, the landless group has given her strength through what has been a difficult life. She speaks with urgency; she is someone who wants to be heard.

In my communications career, I have had the opportunity to bear witness to many people's struggles for justice. I have seen how being present and truly listening to someone plays an immensely powerful role in recognizing them and their struggle. Intimate moments, like sharing coconut water and conversation with a stranger in rural Bangladesh, build human connections. These connections let us be, and feel, seen.

I take very seriously that women like Achia have entrusted me to share their story so that others may know who they are, how they live, and how they resist. So that one woman, living a world away, comes into focus.

At Inter Pares, our role isn't only to support struggles abroad – but also to bring those struggles back home, to share them with you,



S. M. MAHFUZUL ISLAM RAHAT

◀ Achia Begum created one of the first landless groups in her community, supported by Nijera Kori, in the mid-1980s.

In early 2019, Communications Co-Director Ashley Armstrong (second from left) traveled with Asia Program Manager David Bruer (third from left) to Bangladesh to meet with landless group members supported by long-term Inter Pares counterpart Nijera Kori.



S. M. MAHFUZUL ISLAM RAHAT

with our allies and supporters across the country. We also share these struggles with our government, so that informed policy decisions will support groups like Nijera Kori.

Sitting on that rooftop, I'm moved to silence by Achia and her community's struggle to stand up for the rights of women and landless people in Bangladesh. When we finish speaking, Achia clasps her hands, wrinkled with sun and age, and thanks me for listening. Upon my return to Ottawa, I break that silence. I put pen to paper, and begin to write. ☺

Visit www.interpares.ca/voices to learn more about Achia and the work of Nijera Kori in Bangladesh.

Our role isn't only to support struggles abroad – but also to bring those struggles back home, to share them with you.

Practicing Recognition

From page 1

Our counterparts strive to make the world better, fairer, more just. At Inter Pares, we see our role as expressing solidarity with their struggles.

and raise issues. It instils pride and motivates people to continue doing what is difficult but what is right. As recipient of the award, Clinic 554 also had the opportunity, facilitated by Inter Pares, to meet with the office of the federal Minister of Health and voice concern about the lack of access to safe abortion in their province. Inter Pares collaborated with their campaign to improve access to safe abortion services in community-based clinics across New Brunswick and, during our Activist Fair in April 2019, provided them space to fundraise. In response, they said: “It is this recognition that fuels the fire when it is lowest.”*

We practice recognition in other ways, too. In a world where many funders change partners with every new project, counterparts tell us they value the long-term support of Inter Pares that allows them time to address the root causes of deeply entrenched inequalities. Our long-standing commitment is recognition of the importance of their work. They tell us that they value being seen as more than the “project” of Inter Pares – as being equals. We also facilitate opportunities for our counterparts to speak for themselves to Canadians. Last year we supported our Filipino counterpart, the Likhaan Center for Women's Health, to meet with groups in



Lina Bacalando and Joy Salgado from the Likhaan Center for Women's Health came to British Columbia to share how they promote sexual and reproductive health in the Philippines.

British Columbia and share their outreach and education work with marginalized communities on sexual and reproductive health. The Canadian groups expressed their admiration for this work. For Likhaan, hearing this from their peers was recognition and affirmation of their efforts.

Often Inter Pares forgoes public recognition to better highlight the work of counterparts. This results, sometimes, in people not being so familiar with us, but instead knowing about the groups we support or the coalitions that we play important roles in. It is a conscious choice on our part, to better recognize the amazing groups we work with as equals in our joint struggles for social justice.

Our counterparts strive to make the world better, fairer, more just. At Inter Pares, we see our role as expressing solidarity with their struggles. Not to speak for them. Not to take credit for what they do and accomplish. We recognize, and we celebrate together. 

* We are dismayed to note that just before this article went to print, Clinic 554 announced their impending closure due to financial uncertainty. For more information and to get involved, visit www.interpares.ca/clinic554.

INTER PARES

221 Laurier Avenue East, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6P1 Canada

Tel: 613-563-4801 • Toll free: 1-866-563-4801 • Fax: 613-594-4704 • info@interpares.ca • www.interpares.ca

With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequalities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

ISSN 0715-4267 • Charitable registration number (BN) 11897 1100 RR000 1
Financial support for the *Bulletin* is provided by Global Affairs Canada.

