

THE  
CARTER CENTER



# CARTER CENTER NEWS

FALL 2023



Hispaniola Fights  
Disfiguring Disease  
Zimbabwe Elections  
Prove Challenging

WAGING PEACE.  
FIGHTING DISEASE.  
BUILDING HOPE.

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FALL 2023

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## ON THE COVER

**W**ith the progress the Caribbean island of Hispaniola is making against lymphatic filariasis and malaria, these Dominican children from the city of San Juan de la Maguana can look forward to a future free of these diseases. Read more on page 4.



*From the CEO*

## Chadians Proud of Guinea Worm Efforts

I recently returned from a visit to the nation of Chad, the central point of our fight against Guinea worm disease. As you may know, The Carter Center has been working to eradicate this devastating parasitic disease since 1986, when cases around the world numbered almost 3.5 million a year.



*Paige Alexander, Carter Center CEO, was impressed by the people of Chad when she visited the country in August.*

Of the world's 13 human cases of Guinea worm last year, six were found in Chad, as were most of the infections in animals. To eradicate the disease, we must eliminate it in both humans and animals. We are attacking Guinea worm on all fronts, and Chad is home to our largest country office, with 2,100 staff, 14,500 volunteers, 60 four-wheeled vehicles, 500 motorbikes, and a \$22 million-a-year budget.

Meeting people in Chad reminded me of what President Jimmy Carter has always said—that the people we assist are just as intelligent, hardworking, and devoted to their families as we are. I met a single mother around my age who is teaching her children how to filter their water and control their animals to prevent transmission of the disease.

When I was speaking with the Chadian minister of health, he asked me about politics in America. Our conversation reinforced the notion that the Carter Center's peace and health work are closely interconnected. Human rights, access to information, and the exercise of democracy are all tied to public health and prevention of diseases of poverty, including Guinea worm. Government decisions about the environment, the economy, and budgets filter down to affect the health and welfare of real people in remote villages at the end of the road.

Through both our peace and health programs, The Carter Center is firmly committed to elevating human rights, alleviating suffering, and making the world a better place to live. Seeing this all firsthand reinforces the importance of our work and how much we appreciate the support we get from people like you.



*Paige Alexander is the chief executive officer of The Carter Center.*

## Mali Eliminates Trachoma as Public Health Problem

Mali announced in May that it had become the 17th country to receive the World Health Organization's validation of the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem. The Carter Center has worked in the country alongside Helen Keller International and Sightsavers to support the government of Mali in its fight against the bacterial disease.

The Malian program has overcome significant challenges to reach this accomplishment, including vast terrain, disease prevalence, political instability, and conflict. A 1996 survey found trachoma in nearly every region of the country with nearly 10 million people at risk of going blind. Mali has now become the first country with such significant levels of trachoma at program inception to achieve validation status.

"This success has given us confidence to continue investing in neglected tropical diseases to ensure all families can both access and afford the care they need not only to eliminate specific diseases, but also to achieve improved public health in general," said Sadi Moussa, the Carter Center's senior country representative in Mali.

The Carter Center and its partners worked together under funding provided by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

## Climate Change Project Launches in Zambia

Last year, The Carter Center launched its first-ever climate change project in Zambia, working with local residents in four rural communities in Zambia to raise awareness about the causes of climate change and ways to counter its impact.

Each community formed a climate advocacy team, working together with Carter Center staff to develop climate change mitigation strategies designed to meet the needs in their areas.

For example, in Gwembe in southern Zambia, the team shared information with residents on adapting how and where they plant subsistence crops to decrease the chances



*A member of the Climate Advocacy Team in Gwembe, Zambia, shows off some of the 4,500 seedling trees the community is planting to help fight climate change.*

of them being swept away during heavy rainstorms.

Because Zambia loses about 740,000 acres of forest—in part because people in rural areas cut down trees to produce charcoal to sell to feed their families—the team in Gwembe launched a tree-planting campaign. They've set a goal of planting 4,500 seedlings in two years and have already planted more than 3,200.

With climate change increasingly affecting the Carter Center's peace and health efforts, the Center plans to continue to integrate climate change work into its programming.

## Liberia Programs Brought Access to Justice, Information

The Carter Center is wrapping up its peace work in Liberia after 16 years. After such a long history of programming in the country, there are many accomplishments to note.

The Center's Access to Justice Project recorded 5,324 cases resolved by Center-trained traditional leaders; assisted 25,000 clients with legal aid support or victim's assistance; trained over 7,400 traditional leaders,

women, and youth in conflict mediation and consensus building; and closed over 21,000 cases through community justice advisors.

The Carter Center raised public confidence in the formal criminal justice system. It reached 45,945 citizens through direct awareness raising, developed 24 radio messages to inform the public of their rights, and supported 3,713 citizens through referral and accompaniment services.

The Center helped institute the Civilian Complaints Review Board, an oversight mechanism for complaints against law enforcement. The Center raised awareness of the new accountability mechanisms among nearly 1,800 security sector officers and agents and conducted multimedia outreach.

The Center's women and access to information project served more than 2,500 women in five counties. The project raised nearly 1,000 individual champions and helped 60 organizations begin advocating for women's access to information, trained nearly 150 public servants to improve information flows, helped women file 1,800 requests, and helped increase government response rate by 41%.



## Hispaniola Makes Strides Against Disfiguring Disease

It was many years ago, but Mercedes Sola remembers when her illness came on. She was 30 years old and pregnant with her third daughter.

“I was sleeping, and I woke up at about 3 in the morning saying, ‘Mom, I have a high fever, I feel bad.’ I thought I was in labor,” said Sola, who lives in Barahona, Dominican Republic. “I didn’t know what it was.”

She was not in labor. Eventually Sola learned she was experiencing an acute episode of lymphatic filariasis (LF), a parasitic tropical

disease that impairs the body’s lymphatic system. The lymphatic system normally drains fluid from the body’s tissues, but LF causes fluid to accumulate in limbs—most frequently the legs—which can swell to painful, enormous proportions, leaving patients permanently disfigured. The Dominican Republic and Haiti, which together comprise the island of Hispaniola, bear 95% of the lymphatic filariasis burden in the Americas.

The Carter Center’s Hispaniola Initiative works with both countries to eliminate LF

*Mercedes Sola, her leg swollen due to lymphatic filariasis, is evaluated by Luccène Desir (left) and Madsen Beau De Rochars (center) of The Carter Center and Manuel Gonzales of the Dominican Ministry of Health.*

transmission and malaria from the island. The Carter Center assists with health education and mass administration of the drugs albendazole and DEC in endemic areas. These drugs kill the transmissible form of the parasite, thus preventing transmission to other people, but the drugs have limited ability to reverse the effects for those already infected.

The disease is painful in many ways, said Sola, whose legs are severely swollen.

“It has affected me financially,” she related. “And I feel like I’m not the same. I’m embarrassed when I go out and notice people looking at me. It’s not easy for me or my family. I have been ruined by this disease. It brings sadness in the house.”

Sola’s husband, Miguel Antonio Pineda, helps her in important ways, gently washing her legs to prevent secondary infections and applying moisturizing cream daily to keep the skin supple.

“I think you’re very cute,” he told her.

Sola also benefits from the support of other lymphatic filariasis patients who meet regularly in a Carter Center-sponsored support group, a practice that was originally developed for LF patients in neighboring Haiti.

“I feel good about the support they give me,” Sola said. “These are people who have suffered as I have suffered. They treat me well.”

Sola and her peers may be among the last people in the Dominican Republic to endure lymphatic filariasis. Assisted by The Carter Center, the country’s Center for the Control of Vector-borne and Zoonotic Diseases is planning a transmission assessment survey by the end of the year that they believe will show that spread of the disease has been eliminated.

Challenges do remain, however, especially on the Haiti side of the island, where worsening insecurity, political instability, and fuel shortages abound.

Nevertheless, in 2022, the Haitian Ministry of Public Health and Population and its partners conducted mass drug administration for LF in seven of Haiti’s 18 remaining endemic districts. In addition, surveys in three areas where drug treatment was halted because



*Top: Health staff on Hispaniola travel from house to house for testing and surveillance in the quest to eliminate lymphatic filariasis and malaria. Bottom: A malaria test requires a blood sample.*

of good progress indicated that transmission remains interrupted. Furthermore, the ministry was able to halt mass drug administration in five districts and one subdistrict.

“Haitians should be proud. Dominicans should be proud,” said Dr. Luccène Desir, the Carter Center’s country representative for Hispaniola.

This is all encouraging news for people like Mercedes Sola.

“I feel good because Haiti and the Dominican Republic have come together to fight this disease,” she says. “I feel very good that this is fixed.”

## Community Banks on End of Malaria

Maria de los Santos has had enough of malaria.

De los Santos, who operates a tiny community bank in San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, experienced fever, chills, and a less common symptom, severe itching, during a bout with the mosquito-borne illness. She kept the bank open and continued to look after her family despite being sick with a potentially fatal tropical disease.

“I continued with my normal life,” she said with a nonchalance that belied her toughness.

The Carter Center is working to ensure people in the Dominican Republic and Haiti will not have to push through such infections much longer. The Center works with both countries to eliminate malaria and lymphatic filariasis transmission across Hispaniola, the island where Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located. Hispaniola is the only island in the Caribbean where both diseases still exist.

Major progress has been made. In 2022, a total of 14,090 cases of malaria—five fatal—were reported in Haiti and just 336 in the Dominican Republic. That marks an 83% decrease in cases overall since 2010.

The countries must cooperate because the mosquitoes that carry the diseases are everywhere, said Dr. Luccène Desir, the Carter Center’s senior country representative for Hispaniola.

“Mosquitoes don’t need a passport to cross the border,” Desir said. “What we do in one country, we must do in the other to eliminate transmission of the diseases across the entire island.”

Sitting behind the barred window of her little bank, de los Santos said she is looking forward to the end of malaria on Hispaniola, a place she loves and would never consider leaving.

“I am happy that Haitian and Dominican doctors have joined together to eliminate malaria,” she said, “because then neither my family nor I nor my neighbors will ever be sick with it again.”

*Dominican Maria de los Santos, pictured with her children, remembers a tough bout with malaria in the past.*





# Zimbabwe Elections Prove Challenging

*A Zimbabwean woman casts her ballot in August's election.*

Every election observation mission has its challenges. But the Carter Center's observation of Zimbabwe's Aug. 23 election was the most difficult Democracy Program Director David Carroll has experienced in his 30-plus years at the Center.

"We knew going in that the political environment was restrictive, and that the government was not making it easy for observers to do their work," Carroll said. "But it was more challenging than we anticipated. Our invitation to observe and accreditation were delayed. State media published lies about us and issued veiled threats. And the government gave 30 short-term observers visas to enter the country a week or so before the election only for the election authorities to deny them accreditation."

Back in 2017, when President Robert Mugabe's 37-year rule of Zimbabwe came to an end following a coup by members of his own party, the ZANU-Patriotic Front, many hoped democracy would flourish. But after interim President Emmerson Mnangagwa and ZANU-PF won the 2018 election, reform stalled.

In the lead-up to this year's election, authorities redrew voting districts in an unequal way. They failed to share new voter lists with parties and banned more than 300 public gatherings planned by opposition parties or candidates, both of which made it harder for their opponents to engage with voters. And they ignored bias in state-owned media coverage of election issues.

"The political playing field was very unlevel," said Carroll.

Despite this, The Carter Center still chose to observe the election.

"Given that the government of Zimbabwe invited the Center to observe and that the opposition and members of civil society really wanted independent, outside observers to be there, we thought the best thing we could do was be present throughout the process and produce a thorough, objective report," Carroll explained.

One day before the election, when it became clear that the electoral commission was not going to accredit 30 of the Carter Center's short-term observers, the team pivoted. The

unaccredited observers essentially swapped roles with Carter Center staffers who already had accreditation. Staffers headed out to observe voting, counting, and tabulation, while the would-be observers handled the security calls and data collection that staffers usually do.

"We were able to deploy about 60 observers on election day, which was less than our target of 75 or so," Carroll said, "but still enough to have a credible presence and gather good data."

Election day was peaceful, and voting went smoothly in most of the country. But in the capital and a couple of other opposition strongholds, late-arriving ballot papers led to late openings and long lines. Many polling stations opened two or three hours late; a few opened as many as 11 or 12 hours late—likely depressing voter turnout.

Then, on election night, state police raided the situation room of two of the country's main domestic observer groups, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network and the Election Resource Center. Thirty-nine civil society activists were arrested, despite the

## Carter Center Watches Elections in Africa, United States

The Carter Center observed or prepared to observe elections in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia this year and continued to work on improving the political atmosphere in the United States.

### Sierra Leone

A Center mission to observe the June 24 elections in Sierra Leone found reason to question the tabulation process and the announced results of the vote.

Results announced in July for parliamentary, mayoral, and local government elections showed unusual variances from the presidential race results released on June 27. The Center noticed differences in turnout as well as in votes for key parties in many districts, raising questions about how the votes were tabulated.

The Carter Center also expressed concern about reports of intimidation of some election observers and called on all Sierra

Leoneans to ensure that accredited election observers could carry out their responsibilities.

### Liberia

At the invitation of Liberia's National Elections Commission, The Carter Center deployed a three-member international electoral expert team to Monrovia to assess key political, electoral, and legal aspects of the country's Oct. 10 general elections.

The expert mission planned to analyze the broader context of the elections as well as the findings and reports from other observer groups. Due to its limited size and scope, the mission did not plan to assess the conduct of polling or counting or make a comprehensive assessment of the election process.

### Democratic Republic of the Congo

In late September, The Carter Center launched an international election observation mission ahead of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's general elections

scheduled for Dec. 20. The Center has worked in the country since 2006, when it observed the country's presidential and parliamentary elections. It also observed the 2011 national elections and sent an expert team for the 2018 elections.

### United States

In cooperation with a variety of partners, The Carter Center is working to affirm the rule of law and head off threatening and violent behavior in relation to U.S. elections.

All 50 states, 131 candidates, and 78 organizations from across the political spectrum have endorsed the Center's Candidate Principles for Trusted Elections. Signatories pledge to uphold five core doctrines of democratic elections: integrity, nonviolence, security, oversight, and the peaceful transfer of power.

In September, the Center and 12 other presidential foundations issued a joint statement promoting compassion, tolerance, pluralism, and respect for others.

groups' experience and good reputations.

"That kept ZESN and ERC, both accredited to observe the election, from being able to deliver their reports," Carroll said, "and while the detainees are out on bail, they're still facing trial."

Ultimately, Mnangagwa won reelection, and ZANU-PF maintained its majority in parliament.

In its preliminary statement about the election, The Carter Center pointed out positive aspects of the process but also noted flaws and the many ways it did not meet international standards. Other international observation missions, including the European Union and the African Union, delivered similar findings.

And that is where Carroll sees a glimmer of hope.

"You have to take a longer view," he said. "These reports criticizing certain aspects of the election process will shed light on its credibility. And they'll also help Zimbabweans think about where they want their country to be in the future. You have to diagnose the problem in order to address it."



*Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, former chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, led the Carter Center's mission in Zimbabwe and talks to the press about events on election day.*



# Citywide Baby Shower Helps Families Thrive

*A couple learns about family support programs at a citywide event in Washington, D.C. The Carter Center is a partner with the city through its Inform Women, Transform Lives campaign.*

**W**ith a boost from the Carter Center’s Inform Women, Transform Lives project, the city of Washington, D.C., threw a big baby shower in the spring of 2023 to connect moms with agencies that can help make their lives a little easier.

“Your expectations, your reality definitely shift the moment you’re pregnant. It’s like some harsh realities that you come across, and you’re just, like, ‘Oh, I was not prepared,’” said shower visitor Ashlie Hollis. “So, I think that any resources that help are always super important.”

“I didn’t expect D.C. to have such a wide variety of programs,” added visitor Jamil Carter, her baby resting peacefully in a sling against her chest. “It’s exciting to know that there are all kinds of support groups and all types of programs.”

Washington is one of 35 cities worldwide that are part of Inform Women, Transform Lives, which helps cities promote underutilized services that benefit women and their families by using access to information as a bridge.

“Each city is provided funding to reach women with essential information through an integrated and targeted communications plan; the money does not go to the city itself but

to the vendors, creatives, or communications agency they use,” said Laura Neuman, senior advisor at The Carter Center. “Washington is seeking to raise awareness and the number of women using the city’s Help Me Grow DC services. The baby shower was part of their plan to increase information, awareness, and use of the program.”

Natasha Dupee, executive director of the Mayor’s Office on Women’s Policy and Initiatives, said the shower had a great potential for impact.

“Every time that we have an opportunity to connect with a woman, we have the opportunity to shift a single family,” Dupee said.

Maria Barrios, care coordinator with Help Me Grow DC said she enjoyed meeting area families and telling them about the services her program can provide.

Holding her own daughter as she spoke, Barrios recalled her agency helping an overwhelmed mother who desperately needed diapers for her newborn. Help Me Grow connected the woman with a D.C. diaper bank that she hadn’t known about, and she was ecstatic after receiving 84 diapers the same day.

“It really makes me put in perspective how some people just might not have [access

to information and resources], and, especially me having my own daughter, I want to make sure that moms have everything they need, just like I do for her,” Barrios said.

## More Cities Added to Project

In September, The Carter Center selected 12 international cities to participate in the third year of the Inform Women, Transform Lives campaign. They joined 23 others from the previous two years. The new cities are listed below.

- Accra, Ghana
- Baltimore, Maryland
- Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Glasgow, Scotland
- Kathmandu, Nepal
- Lagos, Nigeria
- Mérida, Mexico
- Quezon City, Philippines
- Quito, Ecuador
- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- Santiago, Chile



# Journalist, Teen Explore Mental Health Issues

**M**icah Fink will never forget the day his teenager, Sydney, asked him, “Dad, is it normal for so many kids to be thinking about killing themselves?”

Though he found the question alarming, he didn’t know quite how to respond. He shied away from an in-depth discussion, hoping these thoughts were temporary. Later, he realized that his response shut down what could have been an important conversation. Eventually, he decided to broach the topic further.

That decision ultimately sent him and Sydney down a path that led to a Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism and a podcast called “Conversations with Sydney” that fosters crucial conversations about teen suicide prevention and mental health through intimate discussions with experts, teachers, teens, and parents.

Established in 1996 by former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, the Mental Health Journalism Fellowships provides journalists with tools to help them more effectively and accurately cover mental health, which remains one of the world’s most underreported health concerns.

“I’m grateful to The Carter Center for supporting a mental health fellowship and supporting a nontraditional project,” said Fink. These stories wouldn’t have been told otherwise.”

As Fink and Sydney, who is non-binary, navigated the podcast, they investigated societal factors that might be contributing to the crisis.

“As a society, we’ve been through civil war, global war, fear of nuclear war, economic crisis, racial crisis, racism, terrorism, and all sorts of traumas. Kids have been resilient up until recently. So what’s changed?” Fink asked.

His answer: a decrease in connection and community.

The two spent many episodes discussing these topics, and though they didn’t always come out with concrete answers, each episode is a search for effective solutions.

They discussed how parents can initiate conversations about mental health and suicide with their children, highlighted signs of suicidal ideation, and talked



*Micah Fink received a Rosalynn Carter fellowship, which equips journalists with the tools to accurately report on mental health topics.*

about ways to prevent suicide. They also addressed the issue of self-injury and offered guidance on healthier coping methods.

“We’re hoping people will hear both Sydney’s voice and my voice in an intergenerational conversation about perhaps the most important issues in our lives,” Fink said, “because we have different ways of seeing the world.”

And people across the nation did hear them. Week after week the podcast gained more listeners, and teachers and parents reached out to say they had tuned in and gained valuable insights on how to approach the topic of suicide with their children and students. Many teens were eager to be part of the podcast and share their perspectives. The podcast went on to win two Signal Awards.

At a time when teen suicide rates are on the rise, “Conversations with Sydney” found ways to break the silence on this hard-to-talk-about issue and pave the way for a brighter, healthier future for our youth.

“If we can help one other person who’s struggling, one other family in crisis—if we can encourage people to seek help and perhaps save one life—then the whole project is worthwhile,” said Fink.

*Note: If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.*



*The “Conversations with Sydney” podcast tackles the tough topic of teen suicide. Journalist Micah Fink hosts the series with his teen.*

Susan Marx

## Director: Human Rights Underpins All Center Work

When Susan Marx walked on stage at Carnegie Hall earlier this year, she repressed the urge to burst into song.

Marx was in the spotlight not as the opera singer she'd dreamed of being as a South African teen, but as the director of the Carter Center's Human Rights Program, accepting an award on behalf of President and Mrs. Carter for their work advancing social and racial justice.

That work is what drew Marx to her "dream job" at the Center in May 2022, setting the strategic direction for the Human Rights Program.

"President Carter was the first president to make human rights a central tenet of United States foreign policy," Marx said, "so it's a fairly hefty responsibility to try to embody that in the programs we implement."

It was a book that launched Marx's 20-year career of defending human rights. While in undergrad at University of Southern California, Marx read Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's "A Human Being Died That Night: The South African Story of Forgiveness."

"It was the first book I ever read about the true history of my country," Marx said. "We were raised by government propaganda, and I didn't realize that I grew up in a Black African country until I was in my 20s and living in the U.S. I was so devastated—and so angry."

Marx informed her dean she would major in African studies. There was just one problem: The major didn't exist. So Marx created her own, focusing on human rights in Africa. She went on to take an immersion course in Zulu language and culture and earn a master's degree.

"Then, as you do, I took my master's in African studies and promptly moved to the Middle East and South and Central Asia," Marx said. "I always wanted to go back to South Africa and work in the region where I came from, but I felt I needed to gain global experience."

In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Timor-Leste, she built a foundation of vital knowledge, growing the offices of nongovernmental organizations and helping implement programs focused on human rights, legal aid, women's rights, and more.

Much of her work—including efforts to raise awareness of women's rights and reduce violence against them—targeted the patriarchal roots of inequity.

"When 50% of the population is oppressed—denied rights to education, economic productivity, health—it impacts the entire society," Marx said. "If you look at the statistics, countries who oppress women cannot succeed."

After 15 years, Marx said she felt she'd developed the skills to return to South Africa as a strategic professional—not just a "do-gooder." There, she opened the American Bar Association office and focused on



*Susan Marx is director of the Carter Center's Human Rights Program.*

women's rights and human trafficking, leading a program that helped the African Prosecutors Association reform legal frameworks for prosecuting human traffickers.

Ultimately, she felt pulled toward a role that would allow her to apply her experience to more than one country and one initiative at a time and to continue growing, learning, and leading. In connecting with The Carter Center, she found it.

Now, with her desk facing a portrait of a smiling President Carter, she reflects daily on how she can amplify his legacy.

"Human rights are the foundation of everything that The Carter Center does," Marx said. "This program is the moral voice reminding us why we're doing all of this: It's because of dignity. Everybody has the right to dignity."



*Marx visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August to check progress on the Center's work to help encourage transparency and accountability in the mining industry.*

## Grant Aims to Strengthen Salvadoran Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State is providing a two-year, \$1.3 million grant to build and strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in El Salvador.

The Carter Center will provide media literacy training to mitigate the harm caused by disinformation and misinformation. The training will build participants' skills in evaluating media sources, including recognizing false and misleading information and investigating suspicious claims.

Another aim of the project is to give Salvadoran organizations access to networks that will help them navigate an increasingly restrictive environment. Worldwide since 2015, more than 100 laws have been proposed or enacted that limit the ability of nongovernmental organizations to operate freely. In Latin America and the Caribbean, civic space has been narrowing because of laws passed or under consideration in Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, and, more recently, El Salvador.

To combat this, The Carter Center and its partners will provide a peer network for Salvadoran organizations that stretches beyond the country, connecting them with individuals from countries such as Cambodia, Mexico, Sudan, and Tunisia.

Similarly, the Center and partners will also create a regional network for organizations to share information and provide advice, mentoring, and coaching among peers. The platform will be secure for the protection of participants.

## Belgian-Funded Work in DRC Sheds Light on Corruption

A \$1.3 million grant from Belgium is supporting work to fight corruption and increase transparency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The funding benefits a coalition of 14 groups in the DRC led by The Carter Center, including civil society organizations, citizen movement groups, think tanks, and media outlets.



A grant from Belgium will fund work to fight corruption in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The lucrative mining industry, in particular, has a long history of suspicious transactions.

Natural resources account for 95% of DRC's exports, and the extractive industries sector has a long history of abuse and suspicious transactions. The coalition previously completed a financial analysis showing that the country has lost more than \$2 billion to questionable contracts. The new grant is allowing documentation of further dishonesty in the sector.

In addition, Belgium's support is assisting with raising awareness of and fighting election corruption. Coalition members are analyzing the finances of DRC elections to shed light on irregularities. Results will be shared publicly through reports and press releases. In addition, the Center and coalition members aim to make the existence of corruption a key theme in the December election.



This painting of a bald eagle by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter sold for \$225,000 at the Carter Center's annual auction this summer. Proceeds from the auction benefit the Center's peace and health work.

## Center's Weekend Event Raises \$2.39 Million

The 2023 Carter Center Weekend raised \$2,392,385 in donations and auction sales to support the Center's work for peace and health worldwide. The annual fundraiser, held June 21–25 at the Loews Atlanta Hotel and The Carter Center, included live and silent auctions, as well as a town hall with the Center's senior leadership, presentations by staff, and a variety of events focused on Atlanta history.

"We were thrilled to have so many loyal supporters come to our hometown for Carter Center Weekend for the first time in its 31 years," said CEO Paige Alexander. "Their generosity will help us improve health, protect human rights, advance democracy, and address mental health around the world."

The biggest-ticket item from the live auction was a portfolio of poetry and artwork on the subject of human rights. It featured works by the Dalai Lama, Maya Angelou, Bob Dylan, Yoko Ono, and Tom Wolfe. It sold for \$500,000. A 2013 oil painting of a bald eagle in flight by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter sold for \$225,000.

The 2024 event is set for June 26–30 in San Diego.

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Tonya Wichman is director of the Board of Elections in Defiance County, Ohio.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## Observing Another Country's Election Changed Me

By *Tonya Wichman*

I am an election official in rural Defiance County, Ohio. The way politics are in America right now, my job is very challenging much of the time. Last year, I almost quit. I needed a fresh perspective.

During a professional conference in January 2023, I met Avery Davis-Roberts, a staff member at The Carter Center. I praised the Center's work in mental health and international election observation. In June, I was shocked to learn Davis-Roberts had recommended me to serve as a short-term observer of the upcoming presidential election in Sierra Leone. My first passport arrived on a Monday, and the invitation came two days later. I felt I was being called to this mission.

After four flights and 25 hours, I arrived in Freetown. Looking out my hotel window, I began to sense that this trip would give me the perspective I had been praying for. The ramshackle housing, the children begging for food, people selling whatever they could to make money... it was a bit overwhelming. Still, I could see the joy and pride of people who were doing the best they could.

My observer group was deployed to the Kenema District five hours away. Two of our three vehicles broke down before we got out of Freetown, and the air conditioning failed on the third. Well, I thought, you can whine or you

can appreciate the beautiful view with the windows rolled down. Our accommodations had power and running water, luxuries in Kenema that I take for granted at home.

On the day before the election, we visited the Kenema elections commissioner, who was playing festive music in her office because she was so excited to let people vote. Her excitement restored my hope and faith in what I do: I let people vote! My team in Defiance works hard to ensure free, safe, and secure elections. They practice democracy, and I get to be a part of it.

I can honestly say this mission to West Africa changed my life. I needed a new perspective, and this trip gave me that gift.



Tonya Wichman (right) observes voting in Sierra Leone.