



January 2026

NEWS

ICWA awards 2026-2028 fellowships

China, Lebanon and the Philippines

We're delighted to announce the appointment of three outstanding new fellows who will begin next year. Mahli Knutson will go to China, Diana Kruzman to Lebanon and Sabrina Ochoa, the Philippines.

Mahli Knutson | China | 2026-2028

Mahli will examine changes in Chinese family life and their impact on the concept of childhood and public systems including orphanage care. A graduate of Middlebury College with a master's degree from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Mahli was most recently a foreign affairs officer at the State Department, an executive board member for China's Children International and Fulbright fellow in Taiwan.



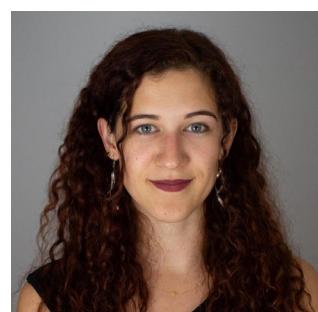
Diana Kruzman | Lebanon and the Middle East | 2026-2028

Diana will investigate how communities in Lebanon and the wider Middle East are adapting at the grassroots level during a time of intense upheaval in the region. A New York University graduate and recent Fulbright research fellow in Kyrgyzstan, Diana is an independent journalist who reports about climate change, foreign affairs and human rights.



Sabrina Ochoa | Philippines and The Hague | 2026-2028

Sabrina is a lawyer specializing in international law and human rights. Based in the Philippines with travel to The Hague, she will investigate the impact of the International Criminal Court's prosecution of crimes against humanity committed during the Philippines' "war on drugs." A Harvard Law School graduate with a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Sabrina has worked for NGOs in South Africa, Japan and Latin America.



Announcing the Rydell-Frisa Disarmament Fellowship

We're delighted to announce the launching of the Rydell-Frisa Disarmament Fellowship for 2026-2028, which will examine the state of global nuclear disarmament education. It will begin with research at the United Nations before immersion in a country or region abroad. We'll start accepting applications next year and are very grateful to **Randy Rydell** and **Beth Frisa** for making the fellowship possible.

Centenary

ICWAns descend on Washington, DC in record numbers



More than 40 alumni gathered in Washington last month for a fabulous weekend of reuniting, plotting the institute's future and celebrating fellows' remarkable achievements over the past 100 years.

Special thanks to alumni who traveled from abroad: Adam Smith Albion in Istanbul, Erik Guyot in Taipei, Deanna Donovan in Porto, Emily Schultheis in Berlin, Mary Rusinow and Bacete Bwogo in London, Steven Tagle in Zurich, Eve Fairbanks in Cape Town, and Julie Barlow and Jean-Benoit Nadeau in Montreal. And to those from the West Coast, including Bryn Barnard, Roger Reynolds, Cris Duscheck, Peter Keller, Stephen Maly, Dasa Obereigner, Paula Williams and Jamie Workman.

Photos, videos and happenings from the entire weekend here:

<https://www.icwa.org/icwa-centenary-reunion/>



Centenary dinner

Celebrating 100 years of fellowships



Our centenary dinner filled the Cosmos Club ballroom to bursting. Keynote speaker **Serge Schmemann** of *The New York Times* delivered a masterful talk about the need for good, trusted journalism, followed by trustee **Andrew Weil**, who spoke by video, Czech Deputy Chief of Mission **Jan Havranek**, the Rydell-Frisa Fellowship's **Randy Rydell**, Executive Director **Gregory Feifer**, and trustees **Susan Brind Morrow** and **Cris Duscheck**—photos and video here: <https://www.icwa.org/icwa-centenary-dinner/>



Bacete Bwogo sings about South Sudan

Trustee and former fellow Bacete Bwogo kicked off the dinner with a centenary hootenanny together with South Sudanese performers—a must-see video here:

<https://www.icwa.org/south-sudanese-music-performance/>



Alumni discussions

The world we want to live in

Earlier in the day, distinguished alumni took part in a day of discussions about advancing democracy, a sustainable environment, equitability and culture before a large crowd at the House of Sweden in Georgetown. The four wide-ranging and engrossing panel talks were co-hosted with the Embassy of Sweden. Video here:

<https://www.icwa.org/icwa-centenary-alumni-discussions/>





Roger Reynolds etudes transfix at centenary

Former fellow Roger Reynolds (Japan, 1966-71) lectured a delighted audience about the tradition of piano etudes, together with New York Philharmonic Orchestra pianist Eric Huebner, who performed a virtuoso recital of etudes composed by Roger. It was spectacular! Video here:

<https://www.icwa.org/roger-reynolds-music/>



Edric Huang report at Human Rights Campaign

LGBTQ+ rights in Taiwan



LGBTQ+ rights and people are well supported in Taiwan but their challenges remain complex, returning fellow **Edric Huang** said in his fellowship report in Washington on November 13 at the Human Rights Campaign, which co-hosted the event. Following his talk, Edric joined the Council for Global Equality's **Mark Bromley** and **Ying Xin** of the Harvard Kennedy School's Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights for a discussion. ICWA Trustee **Fabrice Houdart** moderated. Video here: <https://www.icwa.org/lgbtq-rights-fellowship-report/>

FELLOWS

Rowland Robinson



In Brazil, a homeless center offers sanctuary with mixed results

Andrew Weil Fellow **Rowland Robinson** spent time at a state-run assistance center for the unhoused population of some 10,000 people in northern Brazil's Fortaleza, the country's fourth-largest city. The center offers basic health care, legal assistance and other services. However, activists told him such programs are making little progress resolving the root problem—the lack of accessible housing.



Guns, scrubs and sunshine

Armed criminal gangs are “an everyday reality” creating major obstacles for accessing health care among Brazil’s poor, Roland writes in an earlier dispatch from the northern city Fortaleza. He accompanied a squad of elite military police on a raid into gang territory and spoke with activists about gangs’ webs of corruption, kickbacks and drugs trafficking.

Brett Simpson

The Norwegian paradox

Peter Martin Fellow Brett Simpson traveled to Norway’s far-northern municipality of Kvalsund (population about 1,000), where Indigenous Sami herders and environmental activists are protesting the construction of a copper mine. Oslo and Brussels see the project as a crucial part of Europe’s energy security plans, furthering efforts to shift to renewable energy and a greener economy. But critics call it an example of “green colonialism.” “If it pollutes and kills an important coastal ecosystem, how can we say it’s a climate project?” an activist told her.



[Read more dispatches on our website.](#)

ICWA@100

As the institute marks its first 100 years, we’re looking back at the writing and achievements of our fellows over the last century.

Casey Kelso (South Africa, 1991-1994)



Botswana experience

As Casey and his wife Bobbie Jo prepared to move to Namibia in 1992, he sent a final report about his time in Botswana. In this excerpt from the capital Gaborone, he recalls advice from the government’s chief press officer about how to go about asking questions, admitting that good advice isn’t always heeded.

Doak Barnett (China, 1947-1952)



Communist siege of Beijing

Following World War II, civil war erupted in China between Communist revolutionaries and the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang. Communist leader Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Doak reports from inside Beijing about witnessing the seige of the city. Its fall prompted the United States to suspend diplomatic ties.

Kim Conroy (Mexico, Central America, 1981-1983)

When democracy doesn't work

Kim sent this dispatch in 1983 from a small rural community in southwest Honduras she had got to know before her fellowship. The village leaders tell her they've become disenchanted with their new democracy, which they blame for a torturous ordeal opening their first health clinic a year after the end of military rule.



Richard Balzer (United States, 1972-1975)



Affirmative actions

Dick spent five months as a worker-observer in a Western Electric factory in Massachusetts. In this 1974 dispatch, he tries to understand his coworkers' perceptions of the company's affirmative action policy. Beyond apparent prejudices, he discovers sympathies between white and non-white workers. The experience led to his book *Clockwork: Life In and Outside an American Factory*.

COMPASS



Warsaw rain, 2024, by Jennifer Katzka

[Matthew Stevenson](#) observes the scars of Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia.

[Stephen Maly](#) considers whether there might be a creative way to ensure peace after the Gaza war.

[John Freedman](#) writes about how "Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings" expand the power of theater.

[Alison Langley](#) reports about Europeans who want their leaders to stand up to Trump.

[Joel Millman](#) talks to residents of an African colony growing in Nebraska.

[Dmitry Kharitonov](#) reviews *Passcode to the Third Floor: An Insider's Account of Life Among North Korea's Political Elite*, by Thae Yong-ho.

[Andrei Kordochkin](#) explains the Kremlin's use of spirituality to forward its agenda.

[Katherine Roth Kono](#) writes about Japan's slow but steady progress toward female equality.

[Steven Tagle](#) visits a remote Greek village where a restaurant celebrates traditional cuisine.

[Suren Avanesyan](#) considers how people defend their ideals in the face of adversity.

ALUMNI



Centenary reunion, November 15, Cosmos Club, Washington, DC

Pramila Jayapal (India, 1995-1996) joined Fintan O'Toole for “The State of the Left with US Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal,” a webinar hosted by [The New York Review of Books](#), December 8, 2025

“[Arki Busson Is Building Hollywood in New Jersey](#),” by **Andrew Rice** (Uganda, 2002-2004), New York Magazine, December 2, 2025

Neri Zilber (Israel, 2011-2013) hosts [Israel Policy Pod](#), a weekly podcast of the Israel Policy Forum

“[Video: Echoes of Katrina — 2 decades of struggle and strength](#),” by **Tyrone Turner** (Brazil, 1998-2000), “The Picture Show,” National Public Radio, August 28, 2025

Jeffrey Race (Southeast Asia, 1973-1976) has posted for download from his [website](#) almost all his professional work, including links to his 28 ICWA dispatches. He’s also recently commented on current events: “[The Denarius and the Dollar](#)” in the *Financial Times*; “[The Inflation Ruination to Come](#)” and “[Trump’s plan to demolish the US economy](#)” in the *Asia Times*; and “[Current Changes in America in Historical Context](#),” a three-minute presentation to the Harvard College class of 1965 60th reunion.

Please send your news to icwa@icwa.org.

SOCIAL MEDIA



Rowland Robinson visited a Brazilian harm reduction welcome center in the Maré favela of northern Rio, near a recent police mega-operation that killed 132 people, to investigate how the war between armed gangs and the police affect ordinary residents and those living on the street. He learned that even during smaller raids—which can happen as often as three times a month in this favela alone—schools, health clinics and transportation services often shut down, disrupting daily life and spreading fear.

We also invite you to follow us on **Bluesky**, **Instagram**, **Facebook**, **LinkedIn** and **Threads** for updates from our fellows in the field, analysis and commentary on global developments, alumni news, upcoming events and more. Please tag ICWA in any of your relevant posts and share any feedback or ideas!



ABOUT ICWA

The Institute of Current World Affairs has sent outstanding young professionals abroad for more than 97 years to acquire deep understanding of global societies. Institute fellows have become some of America's leading experts on international cultures and affairs, thanks to the unique fellowships first designed by our founders Charles R. Crane and Walter Rogers. We continue their tradition with your [support](#).

Join the [ICWA Legacy Circle](#) by making a planned gift commitment to sustain our mission for another 100 years.

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