

RITU SHARMA
CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, WOMEN THRIVE WORLDWIDE
SHORT BIO

In 1998, Ritu Sharma co-founded Women Thrive Worldwide with Elise Fiber Smith. Under Ritu's leadership, Women Thrive Worldwide has put the concerns of the poorest women and girls at the center of all U.S. international assistance. An adept coalition builder, political strategist, communicator and motivational speaker, Ritu is a leading voice on international women's issues and U.S. foreign policy.

Ritu has been quoted in many media outlets including: MSNBC, The Washington Post, National Public Radio, The New York Daily News, The Boston Globe, The Baltimore Sun, Fox News's Strategy Room and Washington News. She is also a regular contributor to the Huffington Post and World Pulse.

An acclaimed speaker, Ritu was chosen to deliver an opening keynote at the 2004 Hilton Humanitarian Prize Symposium along with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mohammed Yunis. She also highlighted Thrive's role in pushing the U.S. to integrate women at the 2008 White House Summit on Global Development hosted by President George Bush.

Ritu is the author of *An Introduction to Advocacy: A Training Guide*, which has been translated into six languages and is a primary reference for advocates around the globe.

Ritu's advocacy has been instrumental in the State Department's 2010 decision to make gender a priority across U.S. international assistance and foreign policy. She was also a driving force behind the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA). Introduced in February 2010, this bi-partisan, comprehensive legislation addressed violence against women and girls worldwide and came very close to being passed in the 111th Congress. Women Thrive Worldwide, together with Amnesty International USA and the Family Violence Prevention Fund, developed the bill in consultation with more than 150 groups in the United States and abroad.

With Ritu at the helm, Women Thrive Worldwide has received numerous awards from prestigious agencies, including: Charity Navigator, Catalogue of Philanthropy, Working Mother Magazine, Independent Charities of America and the Web Marketing Association. In May 2010, Ritu's lifelong dedication to women's issues was honored by Lifetime television as part of its series, *Lifetime Celebrates Remarkable Women*.

In addition to leading Women Thrive Worldwide, Ritu is a co-convener and principal of the Women, Faith and Development Alliance and the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. She serves on the board of the U.S. Global Leadership Center (USGLC), the Pax World Women's Advisory Council, and the Advisory Council of Men and Women as Allies.

A first generation American of East Indian heritage, Ritu's family left behind generations of struggle in Punjab, India to build a new life in the United States. Her familial experiences prompted her to dedicate her life to helping women around the world.

At age 17, she left her home in Arizona and traveled to Wales to attend the United World College of the Atlantic, an international school started by HRH Prince of Wales. She returned to the United States to study at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. After graduating with a BSFS in international economics, Ritu went on to receive a Masters of Public Health from the Johns Hopkins University.

Her leadership skills were present early. In 1995, at age 26, she led a coalition of more than 100 organizations to influence the United Nations Summit on Social Development. Ritu also served on the official United States delegation to the Summit and later on the U.S. delegation to the United Nations General Assembly Session on Women, also known as "Beijing Plus Five."