

The Right to Health

Internship report by Tessa Daws

In 2011 I had the great fortune to be selected by the Castan Centre to intern at the office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health. In December last year, I set off to Delhi, India, to spend three months working with the Special Rapporteur, Mr Anand Grover, and his team.

Once I had settled into my new accommodation (a room rented from a family in the local area) and made a quick trip to the Taj Mahal, I began my internship. Mr Grover and his two assistants had just returned from a country mission to Viet Nam. In a press statement at the end of the mission, Mr Grover had made some comments about the mandatory detention of drug users in 'treatment' facilities, which received considerable media attention. It was certainly exciting to be starting my internship in the midst of this controversy; although, as I was soon to learn, Mr Grover is certainly not one to shy away from confronting the difficult issues.

Over the next three months I assisted the office in a number of ways. I conducted research for reports and presentations; I drafted a number of communications; and I assisted in the research, drafting and editing of reports that will ultimately be submitted to the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations. I was extremely lucky that I was able to work with such a great team that provided me with this experience. Mr Grover's two assistants, Mihir Mankand and Brian Citro, were great mentors and provided me with guidance and support throughout my time at the office. As a result, my skills as a legal researcher and writer certainly improved over the course of my internship.

The most valuable thing that I have taken away from my experience is an increased awareness of human rights issues. Throughout my internship I became very familiar with Mr Grover's work. Mr Grover is a strong advocate for the decriminalisation of drug use, same-sex sexual relations and abortion; his work in this area has achieved real change, particularly in his native country of India, to improve the realisation of the right to health. Working with someone with such drive and passion to improve health outcomes and the realisation of human rights was inspiring. Mihir and Brian were just as passionate about their work. It was an enlightening experience to come into work each day and discuss any number of issues relating to the right to health, and also human rights issues more generally.

Further, the team shares an office with a collective of human rights lawyers founded by Mr Grover and his wife. These lawyers do invaluable work, particularly regarding access to HIV/AIDS medications, rights of those affected by HIV/AIDS and also a number of women's issues, including domestic violence. For three months I was surrounded by very committed and passionate lawyers who were dedicated to improving the lives of others through human rights law. To have spent three months in such an environment was truly inspiring.



Tessa Daws

Completing the internship against the backdrop of the chaos of Delhi was also fantastic. India is an incredibly interesting country, with such a rich history and very friendly and generous people. During my stay I tried my best to immerse myself in the culture. One of the women from the family that I was renting my room from really took me under her wing, and every day I would go with her to the local Sikh Gurdwara. Often we would participate in langar, the community meal prepared and served by volunteers, which was always amazing. During my stay in Delhi I also gained a small insight into some of the challenges the country faces. Having lived all my life very comfortably in Australia, it was quite devastating to see the extreme poverty that so many Indians experience. It certainly highlighted to me how much more must be done to improve the lives of the disadvantaged, and how important the work of human rights lawyers is in achieving this.

Overall my internship was a great success. I cannot thank the Castan Centre and the Special Rapporteur and his team enough for providing me with this invaluable experience. I only hope that my future career path will involve work that is as important and rewarding as that of the Special Rapporteur.