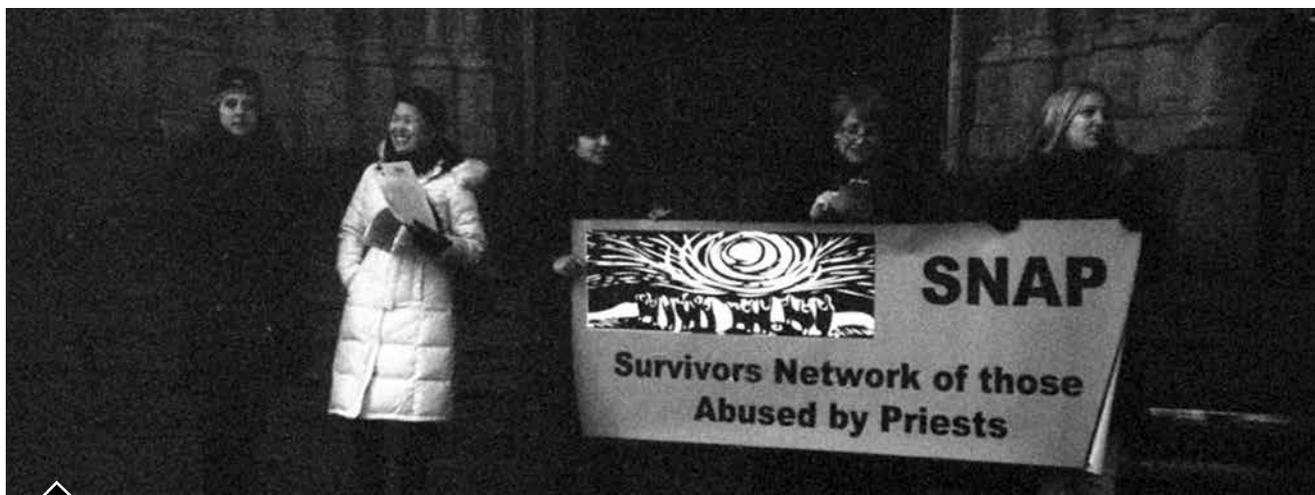


The Center for Constitutional Rights

Internship report by Clarewen O'Hara



Members of CCR protesting on the morning that the Holy See submitted its response to the Committee for the Rights of the Child

Now finally back in temperate Australia, it is incredible to reflect on my amazing time in New York and the interesting projects I got to work on during my internship with the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR).

I had an excellent time living in colourful Brooklyn; eating bagels and watching local bands play. I enjoyed watching the seasons change. When I first arrived, the squirrels were playing in the parks and yellow leaves were still falling. Before I knew it, thick snow covered the city and the sky turned dark at 4.30pm! I enjoyed meeting new people, foreigners and locals alike. New York City is home to such an eclectic range of people; I spent time with Russian actors and veterans of the Iraq War. It was particularly inspiring to meet so many human rights activists. I especially admired the willingness of these activists to actively engage in and with each other's projects.

However, what I enjoyed the most was working at the CCR. The CCR, for those who don't know, is a human rights organisation that employs strategic litigation to advance and protect the rights contained in the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in the 1960s, it has followed social movements, from the civil rights movement to the feminist movement, complimenting activism with litigation aimed at securing advancement through the law. In recent times, it has turned its attention to restrictions on liberty in the post-9-11 regime, including challenging detention and interrogation in Guantanamo Bay.

I worked on three main projects during my internship with CCR. The first case was a complaint to the Committee Against Torture (CAT), on behalf of some detainees in Guantanamo Bay, against Canada for failing to arrest, investigate or prosecute George W. Bush for acts of torture when he visited Canada in October 2011. This complaint was initially made in 2012, but my role was to help draft a response to Canada's submission, which we submitted in mid-December 2013. I found this case to be very interesting due to the politics involved. While Canada is very unlikely to ever arrest Bush, it became very clear to me that this case would not be so contentious if it were dealing with a former head of state of a less powerful country. It was thus very rewarding to try and fight the impunity that comes with global power politics.

The second case that I worked on was a submission to the Committee for the Rights of the Child (CRC) on behalf of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) regarding the Vatican's alleged breaches of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The case focused on the abuse of children in Catholic-run institutions throughout the world and the role of the Vatican in creating a culture that both fostered and inadequately responded to such abuse. During my stay, my team went to Geneva to attend the CRC's review of the Holy See. The outcome was very positive; the CRC sharply criticised the Vatican for putting the Church's reputation before the safety of children and for not acknowledging the extent of the crimes.

The third case I worked on was a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) case regarding the role of the U.S. government in the Gaza Flotilla Raid in 2010, in which Israeli Defence Forces attacked a humanitarian vessel attempting to break the Gaza blockade in international waters. This resulted in nine activists being killed and many more injured. For this project I had to sift through thousands of pages from key U.S. Departments, such as the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State, to determine what the U.S. knew and did in relation to the raid. This focus was in light of the fact that two vessels in the Flotilla were U.S. flagged and one of the activists who was killed was an American citizen. A lot of this work also involved drafting letters to these Departments requesting additional information and drawing their attention to the inadequacy of particular searches. We then tried to turn this information into something meaningful. Part of this involved synthesising it into narrative form so as to provide an account that would be accessible to the public. It also entailed assessing the relevance of this information for the pending International Criminal Court case against Israel for the Flotilla Raid.

I wish to thank both the Castan Centre and the CCR for this incredible opportunity. It helped me to develop my skills in legal research and analysis, as well as to contribute to some very important human rights cases. It was a life-changing experience that I will never forget.