

2014 Global Intern report: Human Rights First

By Ruvini Leitan

As I'm sure most global interns feel, my time at Human Rights First has flown by incredibly quickly. It's hard to believe it has been three months, but at the same time I have been involved in so much interesting work, met a so many dedicated and inspiring individuals and become a part of a human rights organisation that really does make a difference.

My core work assisting with intake interviews for asylum seekers has been confronting, challenging and rewarding. The three hour interviews chart clients' lives, delving into their experiences of torture, death and displacement, all in the space of an initial meeting. Taking that information and then researching the situations in their home countries to support their claims has enriched my understanding of their personal experiences and given me more general insight into these countries. I had to become something of an expert in the enforcement of China's one-child policy, the conflict in southern Yemen and gang violence in Central America, just to name a few!

This intake process feeds into a system of pro-bono representation for asylum seekers pioneered by Human Rights First. Given their limited capacity to see these cases through the US immigration court system, Human Rights First instead trains, encourages and supports lawyers from a range of commercial and other law firms to take on asylum cases. Managing the initial intake process and providing ongoing support to these lawyers ensures that the program builds capacity and interest in refugee law and uses the expertise of the Human Rights First legal team as effectively as possible.

My three months at Human Rights First has also exposed me to a range of other refugee support work. The organisation's advocacy efforts focus on domestic policy and processes in the United States, taking a targeted approach to identify concrete problems and strategies to push for change. During my time in New York the advocacy team was looking at refugee treatment and abuse at the US-Mexico border. Working with US Customs and Border Protection authorities, they were able to visit detention centres and shed light on the crowded, chaotic conditions in which individuals are given 'credible fear' interviews to ensure that those facing persecution are not returned to their home countries. These interviews are being done in open areas with no privacy for vulnerable individuals as they discuss their fears of persecution, and are even done by telephone rather than

in person, compounding language and communication barriers.

The team's main focus was on developing a blueprint document for government officials and politicians, to spell out specific problems regarding the policy and processes at the border and what actions these stakeholders need to take to address the issues, which can be found [here](#). I learned a great deal from observing and assisting the team with the research on this project, working through asylum cases that Human Rights First had taken on to support their findings at the border as well as seeing how firsthand accounts were translated into tangible advocacy goals and outcomes.

In addition to the direct knowledge and experience I gained from my time at Human Rights First, this internship also inevitably pushed me to compare and contrast the US asylum system with our own policies and procedures in Australia. While Human Rights First encounters significant policy challenges like the danger of refugees being subject to expedited removal at the border rather than being given the chance to express their fears of persecution and the ongoing problem of the one-year filing deadline which bars applications for asylum if they are lodged over a year after arrival in the US, I was also constantly reminded of Australia's shocking track record in this area. My supervising lawyers and others in the office were baffled by the notion that we detain children for longer than the few weeks they face in the US, that we send asylum seekers to remote tropical islands for years on end and that the current policy is based on a promise that no refugee arriving on a boat will ever be resettled in Australia. Explaining the political climate which has led to these extreme measures enhanced my own understanding of the issues and fuelled my own desire to return and work to demand more of Australia in this area.

In conclusion, my time at Human Rights First has been invaluable. I am incredibly grateful to Human Rights First and the Castan Centre and its supporters for the opportunity to learn, expand my experience and understanding and fuel my passion to continue working in refugee protection and human rights. The financial support in particular ensures that such opportunities are equitable, mitigating the challenges of supporting yourself whilst volunteering and especially assisting young human rights advocates from less affluent backgrounds to succeed.

2014 Global Intern report: IWRAW-AP

By Sally Harris

Having been home for two months now, I am starting to realize how much I truly learned during my internship at IWRAW-AP. This semester I'm studying several international law based subjects and it has been incredible to sit in class and hear lecturers discuss topics such as the United Nations and think 'wow I've been there and seen this in action!'

The goal of IWRAW-AP is to achieve full human rights for women, particularly those in the Global South. The main tool that IWRAW-AP uses to do this is the CEDAW convention. CEDAW is used because it allows women to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the convention domestically and utilize it to advance their interests. Women also get the chance to sit before an international committee and demand change from their governments.

The staff at IWRAW-AP are passionate about the work they do advocating for women's rights and from day one of my internship they were more than happy to take the time to share their knowledge with me. Though I had some knowledge of women's rights before I left Australia, the depth of knowledge the staff provided me with was second to none. I was lucky enough to be provided with a full history of the struggle for women's rights by Shanti Dairam, a former CEDAW committee member and Executive Director of IWRAW-AP. She explained that even though the struggle for women's rights is at different stages throughout the world, CEDAW can still be used by every woman to demand change. For instance, for some countries at the CEDAW session I attended reproductive rights meant access to legal abortions. For other countries it was as fundamental as having access to a trained midwife for births. That women in both of these situations can advocate for change using article 12 of the convention shows just how powerful this international instrument really is.

My time at the United Nations Office in Geneva was also a real learning experience. Certainly some aspects of the state reviews were frustrating- the slow pace and the flat out lies told by some states are just some examples. However on the whole I found the experience to be a positive way to create change for women around the world. The women's rights activists who attended our training and had the chance to speak directly to the CEDAW committee were very happy with the experience. They believed the system gave them a chance to be heard and have attention drawn to their issues. It also provided these activists with clear direction for the future as states often make promises at the sessions.

On a personal level, getting to hang out at the United Nations for three weeks was just awesome. I was lucky enough to have dinner with CEDAW committee members, chat with the OHCHR staff who wrote the recent report on human rights abuses in North Korea, and meet inspiring people from across the globe. Being able to see international human rights law in action is not an experience many law students have access to. For this reason I am so grateful to IWRAW-AP for allowing interns to be involved in the process, not only as a spectator, but as a member of their team. I'd like to also thank the Castan Centre for organizing the internships, running essential pre-internship training, and also providing funding.



Six questions for:
Creative Director of "Have You Got That Right?"

Robert Ford

How did you become involved with the Castan Centre?

My close friend Steven Castan asked me if I would be able to help with a video project the Castan Centre was starting. My previous partner Natalie Bugalski was and is involved in Human Rights and from that, I was introduced to the idea of how important they are in the world. I had a meeting with Marius Smith and Sarah Joseph and thought these were people who I'd really like to work with.

What do you do when you are not engrossed in the "Have you got that right" video project?

Ha, I don't feel engrossed by the project at all. It feels like it's an extension of my film making abilities. I own a business called Kilby Park Tree Farm, it's a quality grower of trees and shrubs for the landscaping industry with a retail outlet called the Tree Shop in Burwood Rd Hawthorn. Kilby has two sites, one is ten acres in Kew the other is 30 acres in Olinda. It is an amazing business, beautiful in every sense.

What are you hoping people will take away after watching the videos?

My aim is simply to entertain and inform. I think human rights are basically the rules we need to apply to society, to be good to one another. No matter who you are, where you live or what you do. I hope people take away information that is factually correct, easy to discuss and easy to understand.

What interests you about human rights and which area of human rights are you most passionate about?

I think all the human rights are interesting, but I have one that is very interesting to me. Anyone who knows me would laugh, #24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The right to play. I'm a big fan of doing things that are fun and having a good time. It's very important to me to be able to have time to play, it's the release from the pressures of life.

What are your plans for season two of "Have you got that right?"

Season two will be very exciting. I'm planning to continue the hybrid of entertainment and information. We are going to present short films that are similar to The Daily Show with John Stewart and Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. Very informed analysis of a particular question relating to human rights with a comic edge thrown in to give it pace.

What is your dream project?

I'm now a certified Unmanned Aerial Vehicle pilot, so being sent to an exotic location and being asked to film amazing shots would be a dream job for me. There is going to be some drone footage coming up in the next season so look out for it.