

Internship at the Australian Permanent Mission to the UN, Geneva

By Laura Ann Wilson

From January to March 2015, I worked as the Indigenous Intern at the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN), Geneva, Switzerland. The internship opportunity came at a fundamental time in my life. I applied for the internship during the final year of my Master of Laws (Juris Doctor) at Monash University and while I was working in the Victoria Public Service. It was a pivotal point in my professional career, as I was preparing to embark on a new career path into the legal profession.

Having read the internship description, I was immediately attracted to the position for five key reasons. First, it would allow me to represent Monash University at an international level. Second, it was an Indigenous identified position, which would allow me to engage with Indigenous issues at an international level. Third, it would allow me the opportunity to work with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) staff at the Australian Permanent Mission to the UN, Geneva. Fourth, it would allow me to further develop my knowledge and experience in human rights law at an international level. Finally, it would allow me to develop new knowledge and networks that I could share with my home community. The internship made a profound impact on me professionally and personally. It provided me with the kind of challenge that I had been craving.

The Australian Mission to the UN in Geneva is one of five posts (including New York, Vienna, Rome and Nairobi) that represent Australia's interests in the UN. Its purpose is to promote Australia's interests in the UN through international diplomacy. The internship period falls within the Universal Periodic Review and Human Rights Council periods. The intern's role is to support the Australian Permanent Mission to Geneva staff during this time. Typical duties include taking minutes at meetings and preparing summary reports which inform cables to Canberra. You have the opportunity to work with the Australian Permanent Mission's Human Rights Advisors, Legal Officers, Secretary, Deputy Ambassador and Ambassador.

A typical day includes attending high level meetings at the Australian Permanent Mission and the UN Office, Geneva. Interns gain an insight into various UN Mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Review and Human Rights Council. I had the opportunity to attend various conferences and functions including the Universal Periodic Review, Human Rights Council, Committee on the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the International Day of Zero Tolerance on Female Genital Mutilation, the 18th International Meeting of Mine Action National Programme Directors and UN Advisers, and the 8th Annual Summit for Human Rights. I was also privy to a number of high level meetings and negotiations.

You are fully integrated into the working life of the Australian Permanent Mission to Geneva and are a valuable staff member. The staff support you to develop new knowledge and skills and provide challenging and rewarding learning opportunities with the ability to work autonomously.

During the period of my internship, two Aboriginal DFAT staff were posted to the Geneva Office. It was amazing to work closely with these staff members and I was continually impressed by their



Laura (on right) with fellow Permanent Mission Interns on National Dress Day at the Human Rights Council

professionalism and talent. I greatly appreciated their mentoring and support during my internship period.

Living and working in Geneva is an amazing experience. Geneva is the beating heart of human rights. Given its geographical proximity, Geneva provides a fantastic base to travel to other parts of Europe: local bus will take you to France, a short plane flight will take you to London, a short train ride will take you to Germany. I used the opportunity to travel to Belgium, France and Luxembourg on weekends. I was also fortunate to organise a visit to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg through a supportive former law school teacher.

The Castan Centre Global Internship program provided me with a truly rewarding personal and professional opportunity. It allowed me to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of various UN mechanisms and Australia's role as an Observer State in the Human Rights Council. It further strengthened my passion and commitment to human rights. It reinforced my desire to embark on a legal career and to undertake future study in international relations and human rights law. The internship experience has given me greater confidence in myself and has inspired me to work towards a truly international career.

I am deeply grateful for having had the opportunity to undertake this internship and I express my deepest gratitude to Monash University, the Australian Permanent Mission, and the donors who supported the internship. I strongly encourage ATSI Monash University students to apply.

Information about the 2016 Global internship program can be found on our [website](#).