# IHRP Summer Report - Avocats Sans Frontiéres

This summer I interned with an organization called Avocats Sans Frontiéres (ASF) in Kampala, Uganda. ASF is an international NGO established in 1992 in Belgium, primarily composed of lawyers and magistrates. In their words, “[t]he role of ASF is to contribute, completely independently, to the establishment of a just, equitable and united society, in which both the law and justice serve those who need them the most.” At the moment ASF has projects in Uganda, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Nepal and Israel/the Palestinian Territories.

In Uganda, ASF has three offices. I was based at the one in Kampala but I also had the opportunity to visit both the Soroti and Katakwi offices. In total, ASF Uganda has over 20 employees, the majority of whom are accredited Ugandan lawyers.

I was involved in a number of exciting activities through my work with ASF. Upon arriving in Kampala in mid-May I was thrown into work immediately. My first week was focused on preparations for a training session ASF, in collaboration with the Uganda Law Society, was holding the following week.The training session was held at a hotel in Kampala from May 24th – 27th and was attended by 25 Ugandan lawyers from a wide range of organizations, both in the public and private sectors. Among them, lawyers representing the Uganda People’s Defence Force, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Uganda Law Society and the War Crimes Division of the High Court were present. The training was focused on successfully litigating cases that involve torture. The two trainers were brought in from the U.K. and Israel and are a part of ASF’s International Legal Network. I took notes throughout the training and assisted the trainers in facilitation of their sessions. It was a very interesting experience from which I gained a lot of knowledge both about the laws surrounding torture in Uganda and internationally and the wide array of challenges that lawyers in Uganda face. In particular, lack of cooperation from opposing counsel and police and prison authorities often makes it incredibly hard to prove a case of torture.

The next day, May 28th, I was fortunate to attend a conference facilitated by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (the CICC) meant to assemble all the NGOs attending the Review Conference the following week in order to create a communiqué detailing NGO interests and suggestions for State Parties that would be given to the Assembly of States Parties (ASP). The communiqué focused on the 4 stocktaking issues of the conference, namely: complementarity; peace and justice; the impact of the Rome Statute on victims and affected communities; and peace and justice. I, along with a colleague from headquarters, took part in the group discussing peace and justice. The day culminated with a plenary on the draft communiqué where all members of the conference had the opportunity to raise any concerns and try to sway the final draft. It was a very exciting process to be a part of. At the end of the conference I had the opportunity to meet, H.E. Ambassador Christian Wenaweser, the President of the ASP.

Over the weekend a number of NGOs organized a football (soccer) game for the victims of the Lord’s Resistance Army, a rebel group that has been active in Uganda in the past. Both the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon and the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni played in the game along with NGO and UN employees, members of the ICC secretariat and the President of the ASP. It was quite the experience. The teams were named Justice and Dignity, Dignity triumphing in the end with a 1-0 victory.

The next week the Review Conference began. ASF was very active throughout the conference and I had the opportunity to attend many of the sessions. These ranged from the stocktaking sessions run by NGOs and the CICC to the main plenary where all the State and non-State parties debated the various issues under review. The first day of the conference I was able to attend a session where both Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon spoke. On the second day of the conference ASF held a breakfast seminar on the topic of complementarity. I also spent a fair amount of time operating ASF’s booth in the People’s Space. The conference was a exhilarating experience and I had the opportunity to meet many interesting people who work in international law and human rights.

From June 28th – 30th I attended a three day training on the topic of “Combating Child Trafficking in Uganda” organized by ASF in collaboration with FIDA-U (The Federation of Female Lawyers, Uganda) in the small town of Katakwi. The training was aimed at educating community leaders on the definition of child trafficking as well as the *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act* that Uganda passed in 2009. 42 community leaders from 31 parishes attended, 30 of whom where then chosen to be a part of ASF’s program in which they will be responsible for mobilizing their communities when ASF’s mobile legal clinics arrive to provide training and free legal advice. The training concluded with the official launch of the Preventing Child Trafficking Programme in Uganda, which was attended by members of civil society, the army, the police, a representative from the Local Counsel and ASF staff from the Kampala, Soroti and Katakwi offices. The training was a unique opportunity to interact with Ugandans from very rural communities and share in their learning process on the topic of child trafficking.

The last three weeks of my internship were focused on developing and implementing a needs based assessment on illegal unlawful and arbitrary detentions in Ugandan prisons. After conducting a desk review of the current national, regional and international laws, ASF was granted permission to enter the prisons in order to interview detainees and look at the registers. Along with 3 of my co-workers, all of whom are a part ASF’s Ugandan lawyer internship programme, I spent the majority of two weeks in Ugandan prisons documenting prisoner information. Specifically, we were interested in discovering how long most detainees are held in prison before their trial begins. The project is on-going and ASF will be publishing the results of over 3,000 prisoner files in the coming year. Spending hours a day in a Ugandan prison, usually in a room that we shared with prison officers and which prisoners walked in and out of all day was an fascinating experience.

Overall, it was a very busy summer full of incredible opportunities. I learned a great deal about all the topics that ASF currently has projects on (torture, child trafficking, illegal and arbitrary detention) as well as about Uganda and Ugandan society. I was invited to a ceremony called an “Introduction” by one of my colleagues which proved to be a full day affair in which I wore traditional Ugandan dress called a *gomesi*. Being in Africa during the World Cup was also been a great experience with the whole continent really rallying behind African teams and thrilled about the games being held in South Africa. I also became a connoisseur of Ugandan food, *matoke* or steamed plantain with *gnut* sauce being one of my new favourite dishes. It was a great summer and I was sad to leave both the organization and the country which is so full of warmth when my internship concluded at the end of July.

To find out more about ASF or get involved in any of their programs, please visit their website at <http://www.asf.be>

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