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This summer, I spent approximately four months working with the IHRP in Toronto. My primary task involved working with PEN Canada, an organization dedicated to promoting freedom of expression worldwide, to draft a report on violence against journalists and impunity in Honduras. I began work on this project on my very first day, when I met with the staff at PEN Canada to get a sense of their vision for the report. Our initial thought was to look at how a country goes from seeing almost no violence against journalists to seeing such a dramatic surge in recent years.

Following this meeting, I began researching conditions in Honduras, examining NGO reports, academic articles and newspaper coverage. I used this research to compile a briefing note which detailed background information that was crucial to developing an understanding of the situation for journalists in Honduras. With this knowledge in hand, we realized that our initial hypothesis needed to be modified. General violence against journalists in Honduras was not new. Rather, it had been a problem for decades. It was the sharp rise in murders which was a more recent phenomenon. Consequently, we shifted our focus and started to analyze Honduras' experiences with transitional justice. For me, this brought home the importance of staying open to new information in order to ensure the most accurate conclusions. With this new angle in mind, I composed a first draft of the report.

While continuing to research and add to the draft, I also began to plan our trip to Honduras. Previous IHRP students had composed a report on the situation for journalists in Mexico, and I had been told how important their visit to Mexico was for understanding and communicating the issues they faced. Along with IHRP Acting Director Carmen Cheung and our partners at PEN Canada and PEN International, I began contacting Honduran journalists, NGO workers, government officials and activists in order to arrange interviews on the ground. One thing I certainly learnt this summer is that working in human rights involves sending out a lot of emails, but not necessarily receiving a lot of responses. I also put together a security memo so that we would be well prepared for any potential risks.

Another key lesson learnt this summer was the value of prep work. I composed "contact backgrounders" for each of the potential interviewees, outlining information about their work, any personal experience they had with violence or threats and potential questions we could ask. I composed a number of "handy summaries" as well, focused on problems specific to community radio stations and different promises which the Honduran government had made to the international community over the years. The value of knowing your material cannot be overstated: the familiarity I gained through researching and drafting the report was invaluable in conducting interviews and assessing responses and new information.

Any disappointment associated with a lack of response during the planning stage was extinguished as a result of the over 20 individuals with whom we were able to meet once we arrived in Honduras. Our "delegation" consisted of myself, IHRP Acting Director Carmen Cheung and PEN International

Researcher for Africa and the Americas Tamsin Mitchell. We spent about a week in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras.

Most of our time in Tegucigalpa was spent conducting interviews with journalists, writers, NGO workers, government officials and activists. Although we had never met Tamsin in person until the trip, we quickly developed interview practices. As our fluent Spanish speaker, Tamsin conducted the interviews. As I can understand Spanish, I took notes in English, which Carmen then read. Between the three of us, we were able to compose additional questions and follow up on the responses given. Almost all of the individuals with whom we spoke were very candid regarding their views of the situation in the country and what needed to be done to make progress. They were incredibly generous with their time and expertise, and it was very much appreciated.

After the trip, we returned home to Toronto where I had just less than two weeks to incorporate everything we had learnt into a final draft of the report. This was a daunting task at first, given the pages and pages of interview notes we had compiled, not to mention the new reports and copies of legislation we had acquired during the trip. I was very grateful for the assistance provided by Carmen and our partners at PEN Canada and PEN International, who helped synthesize the new pieces of information and form an idea of the direction in which the report would head. Once it was done, I handed in the report to be edited and faced the somewhat difficult reality that the project (which had essentially become my “baby” over the summer) was now out of my hands.

Working at the IHRP was a phenomenal experience which allowed me to grow as a law student, as a human rights advocate and as a person. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work in this area. I had the opportunity to improve my research, drafting and interviewing skills. I was able to practice my Spanish on almost a daily basis, through reading reports and articles, sending emails and translating interviews in real time. I learnt about the incredible amount of effort that goes into drafting a piece of advocacy, including the many steps outside of actually writing anything. I was very fortunate to have a supportive supervisor and helpful partners, who provided me with constant feedback which has strengthened my skills and greatly improved the quality of my work. I am truly grateful to have had this opportunity, and I know it will shape the direction of my legal career.