

Per Kraut – IHRP Final Report
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Bangkok, Thailand

This summer, I spent three months in Bangkok working as an intern at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). ESCAP is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region. Made up of 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members, the region is home to 4.1 billion people, or two-thirds of the world's population. This makes ESCAP the most comprehensive of the United Nations five regional commissions, and the largest United Nations body serving the Asia-Pacific region. There are many divisions and UN agencies based out of ESCAP, but I spent my internship working in the Social Policy and Population Section of the Social Development Division. My internship involved various assignments and tasks related to social development and human rights.

When I first arrived, my division was beginning work on their flagship publication due to be released in early 2017. Our team divided up the topics to be covered in the report, delegating certain sections to be written by the interns. For my contribution to the publication, I researched and prepared a report on the social impacts of economic inequality in Asia and the Pacific. I also helped edit other sections on social protection, environmental degradation, human rights and social inclusion. We had regular divisional meetings throughout the summer to discuss the direction of the publication with our director, and its progress was tracked over the course of my internship.

During the third week of my internship, all tasks were put on hold as ESCAP hosted the 72nd Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. From 15-19 May 2016, I attended the commission session to take notes on the statements made by delegates from member states. Various government officials were present from around the region, and many of them also hosted side events and presentations on issues their countries are presently facing. I represented the Social Development Division at a talk on accelerating financial inclusion in least developed countries hosted by the Government of Bangladesh, and another on building regional tsunami awareness hosted by the Government of Japan. I also participated in a flag procession as part of the opening ceremonies of the commission, along with interns from every division at ESCAP.

After the Commission, my work load shifted as I was assigned to write two separate publications. I worked with an intern from China to co-author a working paper on Chinese pension reforms over the past sixty years. Her role was to collect documents in their original Chinese and provide preliminary synthesis in English, while I was responsible for expanding her initial findings and preparing the final report. This assignment gave me a stronger understanding of social care, and particularly the challenges of providing social services in a country with over one billion citizens.

I also researched and wrote my own paper on the value of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to social development. An HRBA mandates that instead of focusing on infrastructure or economic growth, human rights should be seen as the main pillar and outcome of social development

initiatives. When creating development programming, agencies and policy-makers should identify both rights-holders and duty-bearers in each situation being addressed. The rights-holders are most often a marginalized group, while the duty-bearers are nearly always the state. Agencies and policymakers must then shape strategies that enable rights-holders to claim their rights that are being infringed, while also expanding the capacities of duty-bearers to respect, protect and fulfil those human rights. Development actors should apply an HRBA to all development programming for the normative reason that it is the morally right thing to do, as well as for the legal reason that member states have signed international treaties to realize human rights, and for the pragmatic reason that an HRBA is the most sustainable way to achieve long-term social development. My article on the value of the HRBA to development will hopefully be published as a UN working paper in early 2017 to be distributed to various divisions within ESCAP, as well as to policy-makers from member states.

While the majority of the second half of my internship was spent researching Chinese Pension Reforms and the Human Rights-Base Approach to Development, I did have some smaller tasks that emerged during the course of my remaining time there. The Social Development Division at ESCAP publishes the Asia-Pacific Population Journal (APPJ) twice a year and I served as an assistant editor for the articles submitted to Volume 31 of the journal. Another focus of the Social Policy and Population Section of the Social Development Division at ESCAP is population ageing, and from July 12-13, 2016, we hosted the Regional Expert Forum on Population Ageing. In preparation for this forum, I edited and updated our annual "Ageing at a Glance" report on the rights of older persons to include the most recent policies and legislations. I also devised the guidelines for a group work session the delegates were to carry out at the end of the forum. During the forum itself, I took notes on the lectures of various regional experts and compiled them with the notes of my colleagues to be included in the final report.

In addition to my formal tasks over the course of my internship, I was able to attend a number of lunchtime lectures and meet new people from all over the world. The professional connections I made at the United Nations in Bangkok will no doubt prove beneficial throughout my career. My role allowed me to critically engage with international policy issues and to gain an insider perspective on inter-governmental organizations. On a personal level, I was able to make long-lasting friendships with people from around the globe, immerse myself in a new culture, and travel throughout the region that I had been learning about during my internship. As a result of the generous funding from the International Human Rights Program, I was able to obtain an unparalleled professional experience while also enjoying my time and growing as a person.

My internship at United Nations ESCAP gave me a renewed sense of why I am pursuing a legal career. It was inspiring to be surrounded by such impressive individuals in a diverse setting, all working towards a common goal. The practical knowledge I gained this summer could not have been taught in a classroom so I sincerely thank the IHRP for this incredible opportunity.