



**INTERNATIONAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
PROGRAM**

# **Annual Report 2024**



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# Table of Contents



ABOUT US	<b>3</b>
MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING DIRECTOR	<b>5</b>
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE PROGRAM	<b>10</b>
CLINIC	<b>11</b>
SUMMER FELLOWSHIPS	<b>19</b>
WORKING GROUPS	<b>23</b>
RIGHTS REVIEW	<b>29</b>
EVENTS	<b>30</b>
OUR TEAM	<b>38</b>
MEDIA AND PUBLICITY	<b>40</b>





# About Us

Established in 1987, the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law serves as a centre for international human rights work, through which experienced lawyers, Faculty, and law students engage in meaningful social change.

We seek to hold Canada and Canadian actors accountable for harms across the globe, while training the next generation of human rights lawyers. Our students get immersed in the field through our Clinic, summer fellowships, student-led working groups, an independent publication, and numerous educational events. Founded 37 years ago by Professor Emerita Rebecca Cook, our Program continues to scale its impact with the ongoing support of generous donors.



## ***TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS***

Our International Human Rights Clinic course, the first of its kind in Canada and the cornerstone of the IHRP, is a specialized law practice of the University of Toronto, Faculty of Law. We partner with other universities, organizations, firms, and local communities to promote international human rights before Canadian courts, regional and UN treaty bodies, and foreign courts and international tribunals, while providing supervised clinical legal education to law students.

# Our Vision

Drawing upon our unique position within Canada, our work aims to foster and promote Canada's adherence to its own international human rights commitments both domestically and across the globe.



# Our Mission

1

Train the next generation of lawyers in Canada to promote and protect IHR through litigation, advocacy, activism, research, and education.

2

Ensure accountability of Canada's harms across the globe and those of third parties which it is meant to regulate.

3

Pursue meaningful change in the areas of: corporate accountability, climate justice, and Indigenous rights.

# Message from our Acting Director

After a truly monumental year of expanding the reach of international human rights work, both in Canada and beyond, I reflect with great pride on the IHRP's tremendous impact in 2024.

As the Acting Director, I am honoured to continue the excellent work started by my colleague and friend, Sandra Wisner, in relaunching the IHRP in 2023. I have the pleasure of engaging with our passionate students and dedicated project partners to address critical issues shaping our world today.

This report shines a spotlight on the incredible accomplishments of our students through Clinic projects, events, student-led initiatives, and meaningful collaborations with universities and civil society organizations. On pages 7-9, you'll find a map and timeline that offer a glimpse into the breadth and depth of our work over the past year.

Witnessing the transformative impact of our work on both our students and the broader field throughout just one year, fills me with deep gratitude. Our generous donors and community of supporters are the driving force behind this success. Through their unwavering commitment of time and resources, they have empowered our students to engage in powerful human rights advocacy in 2024.

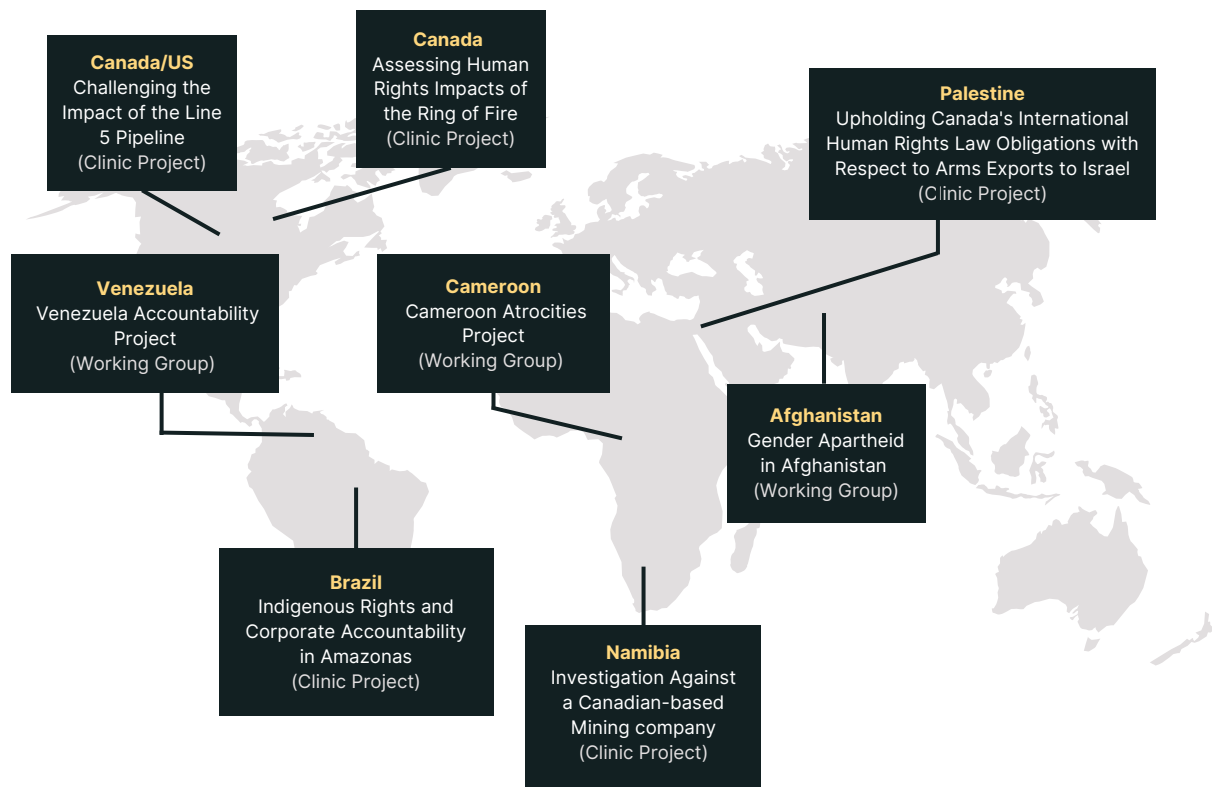
As we further our work in holding Canada and its actors accountable in the year ahead, I welcome your ongoing partnership and support in this important work.

**James Yap**

Acting Director  
International Human Rights Program  
University of Toronto Faculty of Law







# Mapping Projects

Our projects extend far beyond Canadian soil to reach communities we affect across the globe. Our Clinic is committed to taking on initiatives that are directly linked to Canada—projects focused on holding our nation accountable to international human rights law for its actions, as well as those of private entities it is responsible for regulating, both domestically and internationally.

The above map captures a snapshot of where we are making a difference, though it does not fully capture the breadth of our work. Some projects remain in development to be announced at a future date, while others are part of broader research initiatives with far-reaching implications in Canada and globally.

# TIMELINE 2024

## January 22

### Event on Law of Genocide

We hosted the world's leading scholar on the law of genocide, Middlesex University's **Professor William A. Schabas** - an alumnus of the University of Toronto.

## March 5

### Court Challenge on arms exports to Israel

A **legal challenge was launched against the Canadian government to stop arms exports to Israel**. The IHRP is providing support through legal research and advocacy.

## March 28

### Presentation on Gender Apartheid

Our **students presented to Canada's Special Representative for Afghanistan, David Sproule**, on Canada's role in enabling the situation in Afghanistan.

## April 9

### Press Conference on Canadian oil and gas exploration and human rights in Namibia

We announced the filing of our **CORE Complaint against Reconnaissance Energy Africa Ltd.**, a Calgary-based oil and gas company.

## April 15-26

United Nations (UN) Advocacy on Indigenous rights in New York

Clinic students and staff successfully advocated in a statement calling **on U.S. and Canadian governments to decommission Line 5** - an oil and gas pipeline that poses grave threats to Indigenous communities - at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

## September 6

Event - Empowering Communities

Panel on Nigerian communities organizing to resist forced evictions, and a trailer screening of ***The Legend of the Vagabond Queen of Lagos.***

## September 10

UN Advocacy - Women's Rights in Gaza

Over 40 organizations joined us in **urging the United Nations to hold Canada accountable** for enabling violations of women's rights in Gaza.

## September 17

Event - Alumni Mixer

We held our inaugural Alumni Mixer, gathering past **directors and graduates from 1989 to 2024 to reflect on three decades of impact.**



## September 17

Book Launch - Petra Molnar

Event featured a discussion of: "***The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence***," by Petra Molnar, IHRP alumna.

## October 14

UN Advocacy - Geneva, Switzerland

Clinic student, **Aysha Khan**, presented before the **UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women** on the role of Canadian arms exports to Israel in violations of women's rights in Gaza.

## November 11 & 25

Events - Indigenous Rights

Joined by **Professor John Borrows**, **Professor James Hopkins**, and **Kate Kempton**, to discuss legal advocacy for Indigenous rights and decolonization.

## December 3

IACHR - Request for Thematic Hearing

We submitted a request for a thematic hearing addressing the **human rights implications of arms exports** from Canada and the United States to Israel.

# Research Associate Program

Our donor-supported Research Associate Program is crucial to the IHRP's objectives. It expands our capacity to launch impactful new projects, while enhancing the value we deliver to students in terms of mentorship and training.

Nabila Khan is an accomplished Canadian lawyer with a wealth of experience in research, advocacy, and litigation across a wide range of human rights issues. She has quickly become a source of inspiration for our students and an integral component of the IHRP team.

From delivering workshops and trainings, to providing individual coaching and guidance, Nabila helps students develop critical skills in research, writing, and investigation. Through her leadership in this area she also enhances the IHRP's capacity for community impact, spearheading the IHRP's work on several projects. This includes our Clinic project on the impact of mining in Northern Ontario's Ring of Fire on Indigenous communities (see page 17), our working group on Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan (see page 26) and our Clinic project on Canadian oil and gas exploration and human rights in Namibia (see page 12).

Nabila's support has empowered our students to push the boundaries of their learning, and left a lasting impact on their professional growth.



Nabila Khan, Research Associate  
International Human Rights Program (IHRP)

*One of the most valuable aspects of my experience with the IHRP Clinic was the mentorship I received from Research Associate Nabila Khan. Her guidance was instrumental in refining my technical skills, including trauma-informed interviewing, drafting complex legal arguments, and conducting in-depth research... The opportunity to work closely with an experienced lawyer was a defining highlight of my time at the clinic and has played a significant role in shaping my success as an associate at a global law firm.*

- Erica Fox, IHRP Clinic Student 2023-2024

# Clinic

This year, our Clinic students tackled some of the most urgent human rights challenges affecting the global community, undertaking projects aimed at addressing the role of Canada and Canadian corporations in human rights harms.

In 2024, we focused on five core projects:

- Upholding Canada's International Human Rights Law Obligations with Respect to Arms Exports;
- Challenging the Impact of the Line 5 Transnational Pipeline
- Investigation and Complaint Against a Canadian-based Oil and Gas Company;
- Assessing the Human Rights Impacts of Mining Development on First Nations in Ontario; and
- Indigenous Rights and Corporate Accountability in Amazonas, Brazil.

From UN advocacy in Geneva to visiting rural Indigenous communities, our students' work crossed borders and drew international acclaim. They applied interdisciplinary advocacy strategies to engage in written and oral advocacy, litigation, research and investigation.

This year we had a total of 18 Clinic students, with some enrolled in the spring Clinic Practicum, and others in the fall Clinic Course. Our Clinic students often share how their Clinic course experience is the highlight of their time in law school.

Thanks to philanthropic support that fully funds our Research Associate Program, we significantly expanded the scope of our projects this year. Our Research Associate, Nabila Khan, advances our work, while inspiring and mentoring the next generation of human rights lawyers.

*The IHRP Clinic has been without a doubt the highlight of my time in law school. By working on real and urgent human rights issues, students learn to develop legal advocacy strategies that address human rights abuses in a variety of forums, while navigating the realities of a rapidly changing global context. I am so honoured to be working closely with this talented and dedicated group of lawyers and students, many of whom I hope will remain good friends long into my legal career.*

- Cassandra Griffin, IHRP Clinic Student 2024-2025



# Investigation Against Calgary-based Mining Company

Alongside a Namibian civil society consortium, Saving Okavango's Unique Life (SOUL), the IHRP announced the filing of a complaint with the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE | OCRE) against Reconnaissance Energy Africa Ltd. (ReconAfrica) on April 9, 2024 (Complaint). This Complaint alleges that the operations of ReconAfrica, a Calgary-based oil and gas company engaged in exploratory drilling in Namibia, led to serious human rights abuses that devastated local Indigenous communities and their land.



L-R: Nabila Khan and James Yap (IHRP Staff); and Pamela Alvarez and Erica Fox (Clinic Students)  
Photo Credit: Georgina Alonso

The CORE reviews complaints about possible human rights abuses by Canadian companies operating abroad, including ones operating in the oil and gas sector. Our Complaint follows evidence of alleged human rights abuses gathered by IHRP Clinic students, Pamela Alvarez and Erica Fox, and our Research Associate, Nabila Khan, during their fact-finding mission in Namibia in November 2023. Our students worked with SOUL, a local community alliance dedicated to challenging the company's oil and gas exploration and drilling in their river basin, to assist affected individuals and communities. Learn more by reading our [Press Release](#), [CORE Complaint](#), or watch the [Press Conference](#).



*Preparing this complaint was the most rewarding and challenging experience of my time in law school and an unrivalled opportunity to learn from highly skilled human rights lawyers.*

- Erica Fox, IHRP Clinic Student 2023-2024



# Challenging the Impact of a Transnational Pipeline - Line 5



L-R from top photo: Arielle Nikita Layono, Hannah West, Nabila Khan, President Whitney Gravelle, James Yap, Tamara Morgenthau; Lauren George, Monica Gill, Nabila Khan, James Yap, Tamara Morgenthau, Ariella Nikita Layono; Nabila Khan, James Yap, Hon. Bob Rae, Monica Gill, Lauren George, Ariella Nikita Layono.

Our Clinic students collaborated with representatives from 51 Tribal and First Nations to support their efforts in challenging the operation of Line 5 - a transnational oil pipeline owned and operated by Enbridge Inc. Line 5 transports crude oil and gas originating from Canada through Anishinaabe territories located in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario. Each passing minute that Line 5 remains operational extends the likelihood of catastrophic oil spills that would devastate Indigenous lands.

In April, our Clinic students and staff went to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held at the UN headquarters in New York with our community partner, Bay Mills Indian Community, to campaign against Canada's continued support of Line 5. Students met with Indigenous leaders (including Whitney Gravelle, President of Bay Mills Indian Community) and UN officials, while observing the UN system in action.

The Honourable Bob Rae (LLB 1977), Canadian Ambassador to the UN and an alumnus of U of T's Faculty of Law, also hosted the IHRP delegation at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN in New York, sharing rich insights with students and reflecting on how to navigate a career in international human rights.

Continued on the next page...

*I can honestly say that the IHRP Clinic was one of the best experiences of my law school career... I was fortunate to be able to work on a submission to an international body from start to finish. This included traveling to the client community to better understand the filing and build trust with the community as well as travelling to the UNPFII to see the broader advocacy strategy the client community was pursuing in action.*

- Hannah West, IHRP Clinic Student 2023-2024

On April 11, our staff joined various Canadian civil society groups, including Indigenous leaders, academics and other NGOs, to meet with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo. The Special Rapporteur was briefed on the egregious lack of access to water and sanitation Indigenous Peoples still face in Canada today. Our Acting Director, James Yap, also raised the issue of the significant risk of harm caused by the ongoing operation of the Line 5 oil pipeline on the Great Lakes, which affects Anishinaabe communities across Ontario, Wisconsin and Michigan.

Following advocacy efforts by the IHRP, together with the [Center for International Environmental Law](#) (CIEL), EarthRights International and Bay Mills Indian Community, both UN Special Rapporteur Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo and the UNPFII joined a growing chorus of calls by UN experts and bodies for Canada to decommission the Line 5 pipeline or suspend it until the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of affected Indigenous Peoples—as required under international law—is secured.

[Read more in CIEL's Press Release.](#)

James Yap (second from right) and Other Civil Society Advocates Meeting with Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo (centre right)  
Amnesty International Canada, Toronto Office - April 11, 2024



# Upholding Canada's International Human Rights Law Obligations with Respect to Arms Exports

Our Clinic students are undertaking legal research to support a [court challenge](#), (launched March 2024) aimed at ensuring that Canada adheres to its international human rights law obligations, as well as its domestic legal commitments, by halting arms exports to Israel. While Canada stopped issuing permits to export arms to Israel directly, Canadian arms continued to be routed to Israel through the U.S., which supplies 70% of Israel's arms imports, as such transfers do not require a permit.

To complement domestic legal efforts, our students are collaborating with the [Global Human Rights Clinic](#) at the University of Chicago Law School. Together, we are engaging in a coordinated international legal advocacy strategy, with advocacy at the UN and other international organizations complementing domestic legal strategies.

In September, we submitted a [report](#) (endorsed by nearly 50 civil society organizations) to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). The report catalogued the role of Canadian arms exports to Israel in facilitating serious violations of women's rights to maternal and reproductive healthcare in Gaza, where targeted attacks on healthcare facilities and workers, as well as severe restrictions on aid, have created a humanitarian crisis for over 50,000 expectant mothers.

Our report highlights Canada's consistent shortcomings in meeting its international human rights obligations concerning the extraterritorial impacts of Canadian business, including under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Continued on the next page...



## **SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2024:**

**March 5** - [Legal proceedings](#) against Canadian government launched

**September 10** - [Report to UN CEDAW Committee](#) submitted with 40+ endorsements

**October 14** - [Oral submissions](#) before UN CEDAW Committee in Geneva

**October 30** - [UN CEDAW Committee releases findings](#) echoing our submissions

**November 9** - Report to the UN OHCHR on Canada's arms exports regime

**December 3** - Request for a Thematic Hearing submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights



Clinic Travel to Geneva with IHRP Staff (James Yap and Nabila Khan) and Students (Aysha Khan and Cassandra Griffin) – October 2024



Aysha Khan at the UN building in Geneva

In October, we attended the 89th Session of the CEDAW Committee in Geneva, where our Clinic student, Aysha Khan (JD 2025), presented at the UN for her first time. Aysha shared how “collaborating with like-minded, brilliant advocates working on similar issues was profoundly impactful” expressing that she:

*“especially appreciated working alongside experienced human rights lawyers to gain valuable insights on how to leverage international mechanisms to drive domestic change with significant foreign policy implications. Seeing the nexus between domestic and international law with respect to human rights has been a novel experience that has been deeply rewarding and eye-opening.”*

Our students also met with staff at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and with Shelagh Day at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN in Geneva to present our work on the impact that armed conflict has on women’s rights to maternal and reproductive healthcare.

Our Clinic’s latest advocacy victory came weeks later when the CEDAW Committee released its [Concluding Observations](#) following its 10th periodic review of Canada. In its findings, the CEDAW Committee echoed our concerns about Canada’s “direct or indirect arms transfers... to third countries, including Israel, for use in conflict zones where they may facilitate violations of women’s and girls’ human rights as well as of international humanitarian law, notably in Gaza”. Read more in our [Press Release](#).

Before the end of 2024, we submitted a report to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Canada’s arms exports regime, as well as a request for a thematic hearing to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) a regional human rights body. Further advocacy initiatives to address the human rights implications of Canadian arms exports to Israel are planned for 2025.



# Examining Human Rights Impacts of Mining Development in the Ring of Fire

The Ring of Fire is a region that covers about 5,000 square kilometers in Northern Ontario and potentially contains so-called critical minerals, such as chromite, copper, cobalt, platinum and nickel minerals. These minerals can be used for low and zero-emission vehicles. Described by politicians as Canada’s “next oil sands”, the region is approximately 500km northeast of Thunder Bay in the heart of Treaty 9 territory.

Our Clinic students are working with the Anishnawbe Business Professionals Association (ABPA) to assess the human rights impacts of mining operations in the Ring of Fire on First Nations communities in Northern Ontario. In partnership with the Investor Protection Clinic (IPC) at our Faculty of Law, students are researching government and company engagement with affected

First Nations communities in Treaty 9 territory. Through open source research and discussions with affected community members, Clinic students are examining the impact of mining-related development on Indigenous rights under international law, including the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), while considering the challenges of just transition.

## What’s Next?

Under the leadership of our Research Associate, Nabila Khan, our Clinic students will be conducting interviews with affected First Nations communities in Northern Ontario and working with the ABPA and U of T’s Investor Protection Clinic (IPC) to draft a report on their findings.

Please stay tuned.



IHRP Clinic Students and Staff at Chiefs of Ontario Assembly  
Thunder Bay, Ontario - November 19, 2024  
L-R: Sara Maqsood, Nabila Khan and Betel Woldu

# Indigenous Rights and Corporate Accountability in the Brazilian Amazon

Our Clinic students are collaborating with the Human Rights and Atrocity Prevention Clinic at Cardozo Law School and experts at the Lincoln Alexander School of Law to investigate the environmental and human rights effects of Canadian mining in the Brazilian Amazon. They are developing a multi-pronged strategy to promote corporate accountability for harms, engaging regional and international human rights organizations.

A Flooded Amazon River - Brazilian Amazon; Photo by [Nareeta Martin](#) on Unsplash



## What's Next?

In 2025, Clinic students will be travelling to the Brazilian Amazon under the leadership of our Research Associate, Nabila Khan, and Acting Director, James Yap, to conduct interviews with affected communities. Please stay tuned.

# Summer Fellowships

Seven students participated in the IHRP's fellowship program for summer 2024, made possible by our generous supporters. These summer fellows either worked in-house at the IHRP or set up their own external fellowships at a host organization, allowing them to engage in meaningful international human rights work at home or abroad. From contributing to the work of a UN agency to helping launch a newly established organization, our students engage in important capacity building and knowledge-exchange initiatives both within Canada and abroad. These invaluable and hands-on experiences can include research, litigation, advocacy, and activism, often at the grassroots level.

## 2024 Student-initiated Fellows

- Julia Ford (JD 2026)
- Yasmin Rajwani (JD/MGA 2027)
- Kabir Singh Dhillon (JD 2026)
- Emma Tang (JD 2025)

## 2024 IHRP In-house Fellows

- Rebecca Dragusin (JD/MGA 2027)
- Jaerin Kim (JD 2027)
- Ostara McDonald (JD 2025)

Prof. David Schneiderman discussing the human rights implications of international investment law, as part of a weekly Fireside Chat series for summer in-house fellows - July 16, 2024



## **OVER 36 YEARS IN THE FIELD**

Since 1988, IHRP has facilitated over 500 fellowships for U of T Law students, providing them the opportunity to spend their summer working on international human rights law issues domestically and around the world.

Our fellowships are only made possible through our donors, who directly support our students. Learn more about the impact of their generosity below.



# Summer Fellows Spotlight

## (Student-initiated)



### Julia Ford

JD 2026

**Host Organization:**

Canada-U.S. Border Rights Clinic

Newly established virtual legal clinic providing pro bono services to people seeking safety at the Canada-U.S. land border.

*"Filling a significant gap in migrant justice, I was part of a small but mighty team of four working to support migrants seeking protection at the border. I got to see the clinic evolve from an idea I was excited to hear about during my interview in May, to a legal service which launched in July, and then supported 84 migrants by the time I finished my placement in August!"*

- Julia Ford, IHRP Fellow 2024

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### Yasmin Rajwani

JD/MGA 2027

**Host Organization:**

United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UN Agency working for the international protection of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people.

*"In my work, I had the opportunity to be exposed to various facets of international human rights and humanitarian law as well as refugee law in action, directly engaging with several core human rights mechanisms. I gained valuable legal research and analytical skills and reaffirmed my interest in working in the international protection space, all while enjoying beautiful Switzerland."*

- Yasmin Rajwani, IHRP Fellow 2024

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# Summer Fellows Spotlight

## (Student-initiated)



(Kabir Singh Dhillon far right)

### Kabir Singh Dhillon

JD 2026

**Host Organization:**

*Migrant Workers Centre*

Non-profit organization advancing migrant workers' rights through legal education, advice and full representation in legal matters.

*"[I] learned directly from workers, advocates, organizers, and lawyers, which opened my eyes to the challenges and complexities of seeking justice for migrant workers. I come away from this summer in awe of the resilience and love that migrant workers and those supporting them on the ground embody every day. This is humbling and serves as great motivation for my future academic and professional career."*

**- Kabir Singh Dhillon, IHRP Fellow 2024**

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### Emma Tang

JD 2025

**Host Organization:**

*ALPHA Education*

A non-profit organization that promotes the study, research, and remembrance of the history of World War II in Asia.

*"I contributed to advancing the mission to foster awareness and a critical understanding of the often overlooked World War II history in Asia. This work is vital for furthering the values of justice, peace, and reconciliation, both for survivors of the past and for those shaping historical narratives today and in the future. This experience has deepened my commitment to advocacy and education in international human rights."*

**- Emma Tang, IHRP Fellow 2024**

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# Summer Fellows Spotlight

## (IHRP In-house )

### Jaerin Kim

JD 2026

### Rebecca Dragusin

JD/MGA 2027

### Ostara McDonald

JD 2025



End of Summer Thank You Lunch for IHRP In-house Fellows - August 16, 2024

L-R: Jaerin Kim, Rebecca Dragusin, and Ostara McDonald (IHRP Fellows), with Nabila Khan and James Yap (IHRP Staff)

*“Throughout my fellowship, I was given the opportunity to work on meaningful projects in the domain of international human rights law while engaging in substantive research of both public international law and domestic Canadian law. Aside from the work itself, I also engaged in conversations with various faculty members and forged meaningful relationships with the IHRP staff, student fellows, and partner organizations. Spending my 1L summer at the IHRP as an in-house fellow gave me the much-needed clarity and direction in my legal career...which I am deeply grateful for.”*

**- Jaerin Kim, IHRP In-house Fellow 2024**

# Working Groups

Our student-led Working Groups enhance knowledge exchange between students, academics, civil society and the private sector on current, emerging, or contentious international human rights issues. This ranges from conducting open-source research to updating important human rights databases, under the guidance of our dedicated project partners.

This year, students led a total of 7 working groups, 6 of which are continuing in 2025.



## WHRR

### Women's Human Rights Resources

Partner: [Bora Laskin Library](#)

Leaders: Cathleen Ma and Julia Colombo

## VAP

### Venezuela Accountability Project

Partner: [Global Accountability Network](#)

Leaders: Jason Quinn and Adrian Piecyk

## CAP

### Cameroon Atrocities Project

Partner: [University of Toronto; Rotman](#)

Leaders: Parker Hopkins and Allison Zhao

## GAA

### Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan

Partner: [Ghizal Haress](#)

Leaders: Manreet Brar and Cassie Heward

## IA:CO

### Israeli Apartheid: Canada's Obligation

Partner: [Community Justice Collective](#)

Leaders: Aysha Khan

## EHRA

### Equipping Human Rights Advocates

Partner: [Human Rights Action Group](#)

Leaders: Jared Sloan and Emma Tang

## MLAC

### Migrant Workers' Legal Advocacy in Canada

Partner: [Migrant Workers Centre of BC](#)

Leaders: Kabir Singh Dhillon, Yasmin Rajwani, and Julia Ford



# Women's Human Rights Resources (WHRR)

Created in 1995, the WHRR database is housed in the [Bora Laskin Law Library](#) and is used by academics and human rights defenders across the globe to access annotations for key UN documents and leading scholarly articles on a range of topics relating to women's rights. This year, our students covered resources on corporate accountability, Indigenous rights and climate justice in this context. Maintained by our students for nearly 30 years now, the WHRR database receives thousands of hits per month from around the globe.

Credit: Creative Commons



# Venezuela Accountability Project (VAP)



Credit: Creative Commons

In partnership with the [Global Accountability Network \(GAN\)](#), our students gathered evidence that can help form the basis of prosecutions of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela. Students learned how to engage in open-source investigations and research, and to collect, compile, and analyze evidence that can be used to support cases before competent international, regional, or domestic tribunals.



# Cameroon Atrocities Project (CAP)

In 2024, our students continued to contribute to the [Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities](#), which seeks to securely store and verify digital evidence of war crimes and human rights abuses perpetrated during the ongoing Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon. Since its creation in 2019, the Database has recorded over 800 incidents, securely storing over 2000 pieces of digital evidence. Our students use open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods to verify photo and video evidence submitted to the Database. They then compile their findings into a report, which may be used as evidence in future legal proceedings.

Incidents investigated by the Database and its researchers are forming part of efforts for justice, both domestically in Cameroon and internationally.

CAP student volunteers get to work alongside rights-advocacy organizations such as the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa ([2021 Press Release](#)), Berkeley's Human Rights Center Investigations Lab at the University of California, Bellingcat ([2021 article](#)), Human Rights Watch ([2022 article](#)), and Amnesty International. For additional media reports see: [Forbes](#) (2020), [Radio France Internationale \(RFI, 2020\)](#), [Deutsche Welle \(DW, 2019\)](#).

Our students were instrumental in four out of eight verification reports of human rights abuses released on International Day of Peace on September 21, 2023. See the media coverage including [Meme Mefo Info's article](#) and [this BBC recording](#).

*Participating in an IHRP working group provided me with the opportunity to learn about the different ways perpetrators of human rights abuses can be held accountable for their actions, especially where legal recourse is unavailable. At the same time, I was able to meaningfully contribute to those efforts and make a difference, all while developing skills that are very applicable to the legal profession.*

- Julia Cappellacci, CAP Co-leader 2022-2024



# Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan (GAA)

This project is producing research on the situation of gender apartheid in Afghanistan, highlighting both the role of Canada and the international community in enabling the Taliban's human rights abuses. Students are also exploring the role that Canada should play in addressing the situation in line with international human rights commitments.

Working with Visiting Scholar Ghizal Haress (Afghanistan's first presidential Ombudsperson), and the support of our Research Associate Nabila Khan, our students used their research to prepare a report providing policy recommendations to Canada, which they presented to Canada's Special Representative to Afghanistan, David Sproule, on March 28, 2024.

GAA Presenters L-R: Nicholas Slawnych, Annie Chang, Jaerin Kim, Yasmin Rajwani, Cassie Heward, and Manreet Brar



## What's Next?

On September 25, 2024, Canada, alongside Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands, announced its plans to hold the Taliban accountable for systemic violations against women under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This sets into motion a formal process that could lead to a hearing before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in March 2025.

In light of this recent development, our students are building on the foundation of their report to focus on the ICJ proceedings under CEDAW. They also plan to conduct interviews and compile case studies of women's rights violations in Afghanistan—to amplify the voices of the affected women in the report.

Stay tuned for further updates in 2025!

# Israeli Apartheid: Canada's Obligations (IA:CO)

Convened in fall 2024, IA:CO students are examining the obligations of Canadian institutions in light of the recent International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion (ICJ Opinion). The ICJ Opinion found Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian Territory unlawful and found its legislation and measures to be in violation of the international law prohibiting racial segregation and apartheid under Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Importantly, the ICJ further ruled that third states have an obligation to avoid acts that may support or maintain these violations.

Accordingly, the IA:CO working group will focus on the implications of the ICJ Opinion (in conjunction with other international legal instruments such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which set out the international human rights responsibilities of economic actors) for publicly funded Canadian universities. It will also examine the University of Toronto's ties with Israeli institutions and assess whether they cohere with both the spirit and substance of international legal instruments and the ICJ Opinion.

Students' research will be structured to provide the basis for a research report, while offering students the opportunity to engage with international human rights law and Canada's obligations through a critical lens, as well as develop unique research skills through open-source investigations.

On October 28, IA:CO hosted *A Seismic Change: On the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Israel's Illegal Presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, featuring a talk by Dr. Ardi Imseis. Dr. Imseis discussed his participation in the landmark ICJ Opinion. This event welcomed over 100 guests who learned about how lawyers and activists can use the ICJ Opinion in seeking to end the unlawful occupation of Palestinian territories.

Dr. Imseis Presenting at IA:CO Event - October 28, 2024



**IA:CO Event - A Seismic Change**  
October 28, 2024

Co-sponsors and supporters:  
Arab Canadian Lawyers Association  
University of Toronto Law Union  
Law Union of Ontario  
Hearing Palestine

# Migrant Workers' Legal Advocacy in Canada (MLAC)

MLAC students are building a toolkit that will serve as a public-facing resource for lawyers and legal advocates representing migrant workers before courts, tribunals, and government decision-makers. This toolkit will summarize Canada's obligations under international law and what arguments can be advanced domestically with respect to migrant workers' rights.

Student leaders who founded this group identified this resource gap during their respective 2024 IHRP summer fellowship placements.

By [John Salvino](#) on Unsplash



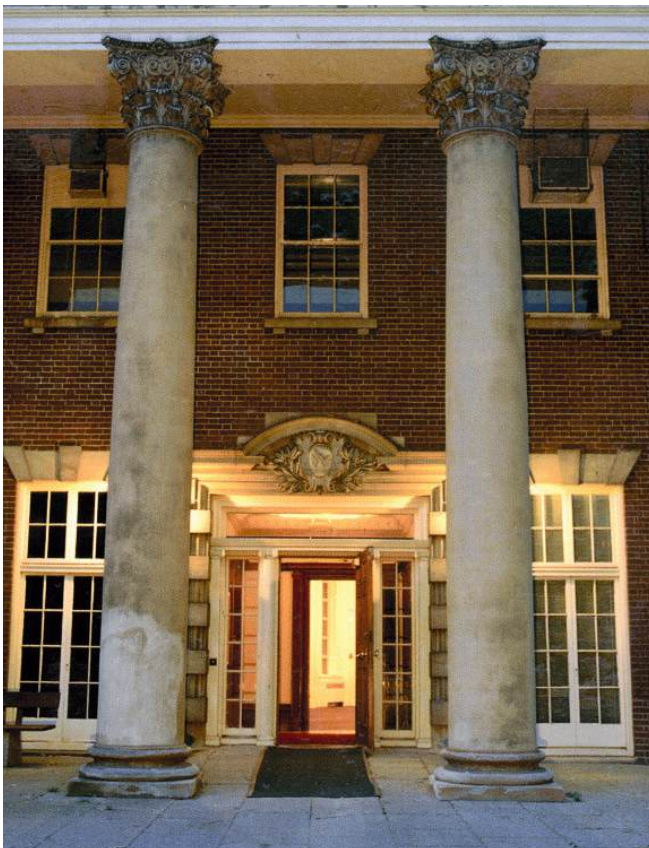
# Equipping Human Rights Advocates (EHRA)

Commencing fall 2024, EHRA students are supporting [Human Rights Action Group's](#) (HRAG) work in preparing materials on international human rights mechanisms that can be utilized to train and act as a resource to human rights advocates who may not be lawyers. The goal of the training is to empower human rights defenders and activists to leverage international and domestic tools with minimal need for legal assistance. It is a key knowledge-exchange and capacity building initiative.

Through this project, our law students, many of whom are in their first year of study, are gaining analytical and legal research skills, while getting the rare opportunity to delve into international human rights law, international criminal law, and international mechanisms, with an additional focus on Canadian government responsibility.



# Rights Review



Rights Review is our independent student-led publication. All articles are produced by our U of T law student community.

We publish articles online on [our website](#), and in print and online in the law school's student newspaper, [Ultra Vires](#). The views expressed in each published article are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rights Review Editorial Board or IHRP.

This year, our students contributed to three issues:

- [Volume 17 Issue 4 \(January\)](#).
- [Volume 17 Issue 5 \(February\)](#).
- [Volume 18 Issue 1 \(October\)](#).

These publications feature pieces on Palestinian human rights, the war in Ukraine, updates on our Working Group projects, reflections from our summer fellows and more.

## **2024-2025 Rights Review Editorial Board**

**Co-Editors-in-Chief:** Jason Quinn (3L), Daniel Pope (3L)

**Senior Editors:** Christopher Wilkes (3L), Mina Alam (3L)

**Junior Editors:** Fateh Hayer (3L), Sakina Chaudhary (1L)

# Events

This year, we had over 18 events, including the student-led Working Group presentations (featuring guests David Sproule and Dr. Ardi Imseis) and collaborations with partners such as Massey College, Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS), Amnesty International, and the Health Law, Policy and Ethics Seminar Series led by Faculty of Law Professor Trudo Lemmens, Scholl Chair in Health Law and Policy.

From thought-provoking panel discussions to an inaugural gathering of IHRP alumni, it was a year filled with meaningful engagement with our students, faculty, and wider IHRP community. See below for a summary of events and key highlights from this year.



## 2024 EVENTS RECAP

### January

- [Conversation on the Law of Genocide with William A. Schabas](#)
- IHRP Welcome Lunch with James Yap

### February

- Workshop on Gathering Evidence of Atrocities Remotely with TJ Adhietty

### March

- IHRP at LAWS International Law Conference
- [GAA Presentation to David Sproule](#)
- [Silenced Voices: Gender Persecution and Women's Rights](#)

### April

- IHRP Meets with UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Water and Sanitation, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo
- IHRP Working Groups - End of Year Lunch

### September

- [Empowering Urban Poor Communities in Nigeria and Beyond](#)
- [Toward International Principles on Gender Persecution](#)
- [Book Launch of "The Walls Have Eyes..." by Petra Molnar](#)
- IHRP Alumni Mixer

### October

- IHRP Working Groups Welcome Lunch
- Workshop on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights with Yousuf Aftab
- [A Seismic Change with Dr. Ardi Imseis](#)

### November

- [Litigating Indigenous Rights with Professor James Hopkins](#)
- [Health Law, Policy & Ethics Seminar Series with James Yap](#)
- [Decolonization as Reality with Kate Kempton](#)

# IHRP WORKING GROUPS LUNCHEAS

At the start of the year, students welcomed our new Acting Director, James Yap, and learned more about his career journey. At the end of the spring term, we celebrated the accomplishments of our Working Groups over the 2023-2024 academic year. In the fall, we welcomed our newest cohort of IHRP Working Group students—over 70 JD and graduate students from U of T Law!





# IHRP Engagements with LAWS

## (Law in Action Within Schools)



R-L: Stephanie Nilausen (Program Manager, LAWS), Foti Vito, Ariella Nikita Layono, Emily Hean and Samantha Misner

In the spring, IHRP Clinic students, past fellows, and working group members shared their stories and international experiences with grade 12 students through an engaging Jeopardy-style panel, followed by a compelling keynote address from IHRP Acting Director, James Yap. James took the audience behind the scenes of the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark decision in *Nevsun Resources Ltd. v. Araya*. As counsel for the plaintiffs, James described the process of developing the case over nearly a decade, from gathering witness evidence at refugee camps in various countries to ultimately appearing before the Supreme Court of Canada, with the plaintiffs watching in person. The decision set a ground-breaking precedent for holding multinational companies accountable in Canada.

James also shared personal stories and legal insights—inspiring students to follow their passions and strive for the best possible version of what they can accomplish. For those considering law school, James encouraged them “to think about the limits of what can be possible with the law with just a little bit of creativity, vision, and determination.”



Photo Credit: Andy Nguyen

In the summer, our Research Associate, Nabila Khan, delivered two sessions for the LAWS Youth Summer Program (YSP), on NGOs and corporate social responsibility and on international law.



# Collaborations with Massey College

March 8th marks International Women's Day, and in 2024, IHRP co-sponsored and participated in a conference hosted by Massey College: **Silenced Voices: Gender Persecution and Women's Rights conference**. This conference was co-chaired by our friends Ghizal Haress (Massey College Senior Resident) and Payam Akhavan (Massey College Chair in Human Rights).

The conference focused on the persistent systemic gender discrimination in Afghanistan and Iran, and showcased the voices of women leaders, academics, government representatives, and legal practitioners dedicated to advocating for women's rights and equality. Notably, the conference also provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions about the potential of utilizing international human rights legal mechanisms to enhance accountability for gender persecution and apartheid.

[Watch the recordings of all sessions.](#)



James Yap (IHRP Acting Director, right) moderating "Panel Discussion IV: International Response and Solidarity."

On September 10th, IHRP also co-sponsored and participated in Massey College's event: **Toward International Principles on Gender Persecution: Advancing Human Rights and Accountability**.

Esteemed panelists explored the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds, with a particular focus on violations in Afghanistan and Iran. They delved into the historical context, the use of an "all tools" approach and the importance of including affected women in the conversation.

Karima Bennoune, Professor of Law at the University of Michigan, critically highlighted that "those that say they have feminist foreign policies cannot go along with approaches in which, for example... we've seen recently the United Nations... willing to hold a summit with the Taliban without Afghan women in the room and without Afghan women's rights even being on the agenda."

[Watch the event recording.](#)



Cassie Heward (IHRP GAA Leader, JD/MGA 2027) posing a question to Karima Bennoune regarding Canada's obligations.

# Book Launch of *The Walls have Eyes...* by Petra Molnar

On September 17th, we hosted a book launch for *The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* by Petra Molnar (JD 2016), lawyer, anthropologist, and IHRP alumna. Petra shared insights from her years of research, discussing the ways in which technology is being deployed by governments on the world's most vulnerable with little regulation. She was introduced by U of T Law Dean Jutta Brunnée and joined by Professor Audrey Macklin as discussant, in a room of law students, staff and community members.

Visit Petra's [website](#) to read more about her latest publication, her work experiences and the inspiration behind it all.





# IHRP Alumni Mixer

This fall, we hosted our very first IHRP alumni mixer! Graduates from as early as 1989 to as recent as 2024 gathered to celebrate and reflect on three decades of impact.

We were thrilled to have notable IHRP alumni join us, including Diane Goodman, the former Deputy Director of the Europe Bureau at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Her internship with us nearly 35 years ago paved the way for her enduring career in the field. We also celebrated the launch of *The Walls Have Eyes* by Petra Molnar (IHRP alumna and former Acting Director), which includes compelling coverage of the harms caused at the intersection of technology and migration—a career focus inspired by her time at the IHRP.

Also spotted in the photos are former IHRP Faculty Advisory Committee Chair Audrey Macklin and our dedicated Alumni Network Committee leaders Morgan Sim and Louis Century.





R-L: Adrian Di Giovanni (IDRC), Megan Chapman (JEI), Sam Okechukwu and Bisola Akinmuyiwa (Media4Change)

## Empowering Urban Poor Communities in Nigeria and Beyond



R-L: Bisola Akinmuyiwa, Monika Hanna and Sam Okechukwu

September 7, 2024 - We collaborated with Megan Chapman, a human rights lawyer and co-founder of Justice and Empowerment Initiatives (JEI), and Adrian Di Giovanni, Team Leader of Democratic and Inclusive Governance at International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to deliver an engaging panel discussion on the rights of residents in informal settlements and the empowering work that JEI is doing in Lagos Nigeria.

The event also featured Media4Change members Sam Okechukwu and Bisola Akinmuyiwa, who co-wrote the script for *The Legend of the Vagabond Queen of Lagos*. The film made its debut at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) this year.

U of T alumnus Adrian Di Giovanni (JD 2002) shared comments about IDRC's work on grassroots justice and legal empowerment initiatives in Nigeria and beyond.



# Conversations with U of T Grad and Leading Scholars and Practitioners



R-L: Monika Hanna, Nabila Khan, Professor Schabas and James Yap

## January 22: Conversation on the Law of Genocide with Professor William A. Schabas

We were honoured to host the world's leading scholar on the law of genocide, Middlesex University Professor William A. Schabas (BA 1972, MA 1973), a graduate of the University of Toronto. Professor Schabas shared his analysis of, and insights into, the *South Africa v. Israel* case at the International Court of Justice. The event filled the room with students, academics, legal practitioners, alumni, and other community members drawn by this rare opportunity.



R-L: Professor Borrows and Professor Hopkins

## November 11: Litigating Indigenous Rights: The Río Yaqui of Mexico and International Law

Professor James Hopkins, Associate Clinical Professor in the Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program at the University of Arizona, and U of T Law alumnus, discussed his work in the landmark Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) case of *Tribu Yaqui v. Mexico* (Caso #13.001) and the implications of international law. U of T Law Professor John Borrows, The Loveland Chair in Indigenous Law, joined us as discussant.



Center: Kate Kempton

## November 25: Decolonization as Reality: A discussion on the strategic litigation against Ontario's colonial mining laws in the Ring of Fire

Senior Counsel at Woodward and Company Kate Kempton, also a graduate of the Faculty (JD 1998), discussed the pursuit of decolonization in Canada. She shared about her upcoming landmark case, which she frames as a direct challenge to colonialism in Canada, specifically the purported takeover by a newly established government of all governance authority over what happens to, in and on the land.

# Our Team

Our team brings together lawyers with a broad range of domestic and international human rights experience. Our Acting Director, James Yap, specializes in the application of international human rights law in domestic courts, a valuable asset to our Program’s work this year. In the summer, we also welcomed three U of T Law students as our in-house fellows, each bringing unique interests, skills, and experiences that supported our Clinic work.

Staff



**Sandra Wisner**  
Director  
(on leave)



**James Yap**  
Acting  
Director



**Nabila Khan**  
Research  
Associate



**Monika Hanna**  
Program  
Coordinator

Summer Students



**Ostara McDonald**  
IHRP In-house  
Summer Fellow



**Rebecca Dragusin**  
IHRP In-house  
Summer Fellow



**Jaerin Kim**  
IHRP In-house  
Summer Fellow

# Our Advisors



**Rebecca Cook**

Founder, IHRP  
1987



**Galit Sarfaty**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee - Chair



**Kerry Rittich**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee



**Trudo Lemmens**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee



**Anna Su**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee



**Gerald Chan**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee



**John Borrows**

Faculty Advisory  
Committee



**Louis Century**

IHRP Alumni  
Committee



**Morgan Sim**

IHRP Alumni  
Committee



# Media and Publicity

From domestic legal proceedings to UN advocacy, our efforts to hold Canada accountable for human rights abuses are featured across various platforms. Below are a few highlights. Be sure to check out our social media pages for more updates.

Early 2024, we held a Press Conference to announce our Complaint to the Canadian Ombudsperson on Responsible Enterprise against Canadian oil and gas company ReconAfrica, for human rights abuses in Namibia (watch the [recording](#) and read the [article by Calgary Herald](#), which quotes one of our Clinic students).

In the fall, a UN Report echoed our call for Canada to shut down the Line 5 Pipeline (see [CIEL's Press Release](#)).

[TVO Today](#) covered our UN advocacy work in the fall, which highlights the war's impact on Palestinian women in Gaza.

In December, James Yap addressed Canada's [Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade](#), testifying on the human rights impacts of Canadian companies operating in Africa—and what Canada can do about it. See more on this and other media coverage of our work in the links below.

## IN THE NEWS

- [CLAIHR - Press Release – Lawsuit Filed Against Canadian Government to Stop Arms Exports to Israel](#)
- [Calgary Herald - Article - Lawyers allege Calgary-based oil and gas company committed human rights abuses in Namibia](#)
- [CPAC - Press Conference - Alleged Human Rights Abuses in Namibia by Canadian Company](#)
- [Collectif de Québec pour la paix - Conférence - Génocide à Gaza ? Entre droit international et droit canadien](#)
- [CÉRIUM - Conférence - Protéger les droits humains en 2024: situations, cadres et stratégies](#)
- [CIEL - Press Release - New UN Report Adds to Chorus of Calls for Canada to Shut Down Line 5 Oil Pipeline](#)
- [TVO Today - Article - Human-rights experts speak out on the suffering of women and girls in Gaza](#)
- [Senate of Canada - Meeting - AEFA Standing Committee Foreign Affairs and International Trade](#)
- [SRHM - Article - How arms exports can contribute to human rights violations of women living in Gaza: Examining states' extraterritorial obligations under CEDAW](#)

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IHRP ANNUAL REPORT 2024

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM



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