

## 2025 IHRP Fellowship Final Report

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This summer, I completed an In-House Research Fellowship with the International Human Rights Program in Toronto. I worked with Sandra Wisner, Nabila Khan, James Yap, and the three other In-House fellows, contributing to a variety of IHRP's new and ongoing projects.

I was interested in working for the IHRP because I came to law school with a broad interest in international law, and wanted to discover a more specific interest within the field. My position as an In-House Fellow allowed me to try different types of legal work, ranging from report writing to legal document drafting, all within the field of international law. I was able to gain experience in all three of the IHRP's fields of focus, corporate accountability, Indigenous rights, and climate justice, and I discovered that corporate accountability for human rights violations was an issue that interested me.

The first project that I had the opportunity to work on was new for the IHRP. Along with the other In-House Fellows, we researched and reported on US prison labour and its implications on Canadian supply chains. I had not previously worked in any area related to incarcerated workers' rights, so researching the international and domestic laws regarding the topic was fascinating. My main deliverable for this report was writing the section on international law relating to forced and prison labour. While it may seem simple to find laws on a certain topic, because of the US' domestic laws, their ratification status of international laws on forced and prison labour generally has reservations, making it difficult to decipher and apply. For further research for this project, we travelled to Alabama to meet with advocates, lawyers, formerly incarcerated workers, and professors to learn more about the history and modern manifestations of prison labour.



*Fellows: Iryn McMechan, Julia Alvi, Alysha Mohamed, and Lola Bigioni and Staff: Nabila Khan and James Yap outside of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama*

Birmingham, Alabama was an important location during the Civil Rights Movement, where leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Fred Shuttlesworth organized and protested against racial discrimination and segregation. It was very powerful to see the history of the Civil Rights Movement memorialized throughout the city.



*Statue of Martin Luther King Jr. in Birmingham, Alabama*

While the celebration of human rights advancements can be seen throughout the city, so can locations of historical human rights violations. The roots of Alabama's use of prison labour go back to times of slavery and convict leasing. For example, the Sloss Furnace, a large retired iron mill is one of the largest attractions in the city, but also a site where incarcerated workers were leased to private companies and forced to work for the profit of the company and the state.



*Sloss Furnace in Birmingham, Alabama*

The research trip to Birmingham, Alabama was extremely informative for our report and was definitely something I did not imagine I would have the opportunity to experience during my summer.

I also worked on research and document drafting for litigation surrounding human rights violations committed by a Canadian company internationally, which was a highlight of the summer. Working on document drafting requires drastically different skills from academic or report writing. While I was nervous about the challenge at first, I gained valuable experience that not many law students have the opportunity to encounter in their 1L summer. This project also required me to work with lawyers and students at different organizations, which provided a chance to meet professionals who share a passion for human rights.

Another project I worked on involved assisting in the advocacy efforts to call for the decommissioning of an aging oil pipeline that is causing environmental damage to the traditional lands and waters of various Indigenous communities. My work involved preparing and editing documents for advocacy efforts. This project was particularly interesting because of the intersection of different areas and bodies of law. Since the advocacy concerns communities on both the Canadian and American sides of the border, the research examined both jurisdictions and the different approaches each jurisdiction has to Indigenous law and environmental law.

My experience as one of the In-House Summer Fellows at the IHRP has been incredibly valuable, both professionally and personally. While my work has developed my legal research and writing skills in a professional environment, the Fellowship has also allowed me to grow by discovering new interests, meeting inspiring people, and travelling for thought-provoking

research. There are few jobs early-on in the legal industry where students can gain useful professional experience while also feeling like they are contributing to meaningful and novel work, but IHRP truly offers a combination of both.

Statement for website:

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