

2023 IHRP Fellowship Final Report

Sarah Farb, JD 2025

Media Defence, London, UK

Brief Statement of Experience

My summer at Media Defence was a transformative experience for me as a student and future lawyer. While working here, I had the opportunity to engage in research at the cutting-edge of free speech litigation, work closely with lawyers in the field, and gain ample hands-on exposure to the practicalities of the international legal process as it pertains to defamation and privacy litigation. Getting that experience while living in London was icing on the cake, both personally and professionally. I got to explore the city in my off time and reunite with old friends, but I also loved immersing myself in London's legal history, which links England so tightly with our own country. Overall, my brief time here has clarified my interests in law and oriented me for the years ahead, and I am grateful to both the IHRP and the welcoming community at Media Defence for making it all possible.

Final Report

Thanks to the IHRP, I was able to spend my summer in London, England, where I worked for an outstanding non-profit called Media Defence. Media Defence's mandate is to provide legal help to journalists, organizations, and independent reporters across the globe who are under threat for their reporting. These threats often come from the victims' own governments, the governments of other states, or high-powered corporations eager to suppress unflattering coverage. The accordant help that Media Defence provides takes a variety of forms. On some occasions, the organization opts to litigate cases itself, representing clients in strategic cases before international bodies, or intervening in key cases as amicus curiae, often in collaboration with other non-profits in the sector. At other times, Media Defence takes a support-based approach, providing legal guidance to those domestic lawyers working 'on the ground' to defend embattled journalists and other vulnerable groups whose speech has been

stifled or compromised. Media Defence is deeply committed to safeguarding freedom of expression across the globe, and in the two and a half months that I got to be a part of their team, I learned about the organization's advocacy for individuals in Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond.

I was so eager to reach out to Media Defence when my fellowship application process began, because the organization sits at the intersection of the passions that led me through my undergraduate degree and into law school: free and open journalism, democratic policy, and the way in which the law can be harnessed to safeguard both these ideals. Over my time here, I have loved seeing just how deeply these tenets inform Media Defence's work, animating their advocacy and guiding the selection process for the organization's ever-expanding list of cases. Equally, however, I have appreciated the opportunity to travel beneath those overarching ideals, into the practical realities of global litigation. As an NGO with a staff of lawyers, Media Defence has the freedom to work on cases of the greatest social and public importance, while tackling that work with in-house expertise and efficiency. As their legal intern this summer, I have been able to apply erstwhile research and writing skills to entirely new legal problems, while becoming much more familiar with the practicalities of the legal process. It's this combination of attributes — Media Defence's dual focus on the political and the practical — that has made this summer so fulfilling for me.

When I reflect on the work I did at Media Defence, perhaps the aspect I most appreciate is the way my supervisors strived to learn about my specific interests and assign me tasks that corresponded to those areas. For instance, having long been fascinated by the growing tension between technology and privacy in media, my first major assignment this summer required me to investigate the nature and proliferation of a form of spyware, which various authoritarian regimes are suspected of using to surveil their opponents. Shortly thereafter, I researched the mistreatment of foreign care workers in Europe, supporting Media Defence's potential defence of an individual sued for creating a platform on which care workers share their experiences. Having studied the phenomenon of strategic lawsuits against

public participation (known colloquially as ‘SLAPPs’) in Torts this past year, the opportunity to watch such a case unfold in real-time — and to be part of the team attempting to thwart it — was deeply exciting.

Throughout the summer, I also acted as a general support to the legal team, taking on others’ work whenever capacity was low and wherever I was qualified to do so. Since much of Media Defence’s supplementary work focuses on legal education, including updating the training for domestic litigators around the world, my work often involved preparing presentations about emerging trends in free speech law, or conducting the preliminary research that formed the basis for those presentations. Accordingly, I often found myself harnessing insights from 1L to compile materials on topics like defamation and its defences, or new developments in the law. Relatedly, I got to familiarize myself with adjacent trends, such as the advent of anti-SLAPP procedures in some sub-Saharan African jurisdictions.

Furthermore, in my role as a support for the legal team, I was able to get hands-on experience assisting the group on multiple filings at the European Court of Human Rights. While my responsibilities consisted of clerical tasks (double- and triple-checking documents, confirming chronologies and spellings, making copies, paginating, etc.), being a part of the mechanics of the filing in that way allowed me to truly steep myself in the process, becoming familiar with both the substance of the given case and the process of applying to the Court. Carrying out these tasks made me more confident in my understanding of the law and better acquainted with the international legal process.

My experience with Media Defence has had a profound effect on my anticipated trajectory as a law student and eventual lawyer. Whether I was compiling research memoranda, creating external reading lists, or drafting issue-based presentations, my tasks this summer piqued my interest in defamation in a global — rather than purely domestic — context. This is something I have committed to further exploring in my courses this year, including in Public International Law and Law, Politics and

Democracy, as well as over the January intercession (I am first on the waitlist for Problems in Free Speech Law, so fingers crossed!). The paradox of law school is that one seldom knows which areas of law one is interested in before working in the field, but fulfilling fieldwork itself requires at least a loose understanding of one's interests. I feel like I have managed to circumvent that paradox somewhat by getting such thorough exposure to this area of litigation this summer, and I am thankful for the measure of clarity the experience has afforded me about my potential future in the profession.

Lastly, just as I did in my interim report, I wanted to take a moment here to talk about London. I have absolutely loved my brief stay in this city, and I am so grateful to the IHRP for providing me with the means to live here comfortably. London has been a wonderful place to explore, try new things, and reunite with old friends who have since relocated here. Yet this city is also the epicentre of the Common Law, and as a student coming fresh off of a rigorous 1L year, I have loved seeing so many of the concepts and cases we discussed in class come to life around me. Bermondsey and Kensington are no longer neighbourhoods I vaguely recall from our unit on nuisance law in Torts; they are places where I've gone for a pint or taken a photo. Boots is no longer an abstraction from a half-forgotten Contracts case about the formation of the offer; it's the chain where I buy my allergy meds. There are entire streets here dedicated to a single service or good — be it leather, men's shoes, or tailoring — which explains why we learned in Property that leasing neighbouring properties to two different tailors does not constitute derogation from either one's grant. To be in London is to uncover the roots of our own country's legal history, and after months of intense studying, that has been a deeply rewarding experience.

I cannot overstate my gratitude to the IHRP for investing in my fellowship this summer, and to Media Defence for welcoming me to their team with such warmth and enthusiasm. I have learned so much, both about the law and my own legal interests, and I trust that I will carry these lessons with me for years to come. Below, you'll find a few (not-so-great) photos from a really great summer!



A highly officious picture of me holding my ID badge in Media Defence's Chancery Lane office.



The main entrance of the Law Society of England and Wales, around the corner from my office.



The original location of Daunt Books, a small chain of bookshops in London and one of my favourite places to visit.



The view from one of the many gorgeous ponds at Hampstead Heath.

High tea with friends in Kensington.



Just average London summer weather for you! Rarely did I leave the house without at least one extra layer and/or an umbrella. But when the sun *was* out, we all made the most of it.