

**IHRP Fellowship Final Report**  
**United Nations High Commission for Refugees – Geneva, Switzerland**

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## **Introduction**

For my IHRP fellowship, I completed a 3-month internship at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, Switzerland. With a background in international development and having had some work and volunteer experiences in immigration and refugee affairs, this opportunity seemed like the perfect way to blend my evolving legal toolkit and my passion for humanitarianism and dignified development.

## **Overview of the UNHCR and the Human Rights Liaison Unit**

The UNHCR is the UN Refugee Agency, formally known as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and works for the international protection of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people. The Division of International Protection (DIP) works to provide guidance on legal and policy issues and strengthen the protection environment for UNHCR's persons of concern by developing and encouraging appropriate implementation of international law and standards for individuals forcibly displaced. In practice, DIP provides clarification on legal and practical issues to field offices, empowering colleagues to appropriately advocate for human rights standards and principles for forcibly displaced persons taking into account national, local, and international legal frameworks.

The Human Rights Liaison Unit (HRLU) is a relatively small unit within DIP that lies at the intersection between human rights law and UNHCR's persons of concern. It is located within the broader Protection Policy & Legal Advice Section. The HRLU's work entails liaising between international human rights mechanisms (i.e. human rights treaties and treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council) and UNHCR's field operations with the goal of operationalizing the developments in international human rights law in country contexts and allowing colleagues to better engage with and feed into the developments in these human rights mechanisms.

## **Key Tasks and Projects**

Over the course of my internship, given the small size of the unit and the small number of interns, I was able to contribute meaningfully to much of HRLU's work.

### *Engaging with Human Rights Mechanisms*

One of the first tasks I was able to work on was various engagements with written submissions to treaty bodies or feedback reports on human rights bodies' relevance to field colleagues. With a number of countries having recently been reviewed in the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review process, I was in charge of cross-referencing UNHCR's submissions to the body, the Working Group report and Member States' ultimate recommendations to the State under review, as well as pressing human rights issues in the country context in drafting a feedback report for our field colleagues on the relevance of and opportunities arising from the UPR process. Similarly, I drafted treaty body reports based on the Concluding Observations of various treaty bodies and their relevance to the work of our field colleagues on UNHCR's persons of concern. Lastly, I reviewed confidential comments from our

country teams that were submitted to various treaty bodies for its consideration in making reports or decisions, specifically relating to international protection issues.

I had the opportunity to sit in on treaty body sessions including the Human Rights Committee, the group of independent experts responsible for monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I prepared a briefing note for colleagues of the countries reviewed on issues of concern to UNHCR, analyzing key advancements and challenges for international protection issues in the States being reviewed.

#### *Engaging with stakeholders on human rights issues for UNHCR's persons of concern*

I was able to support in roundtable discussions of inter-agency collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as participate in closed consultations with women and refugee-led non-profit organizations on specific issues related to international protection, including a whole-of-route approach to providing adequate services to refugees and asylum seekers beyond country of origin or asylum. Furthermore, I've had the opportunity to be involved with the recently formed Platform of Independent Experts on Refugee Rights' (PIERR) agenda-setting consultations. Since UNHCR is the Co-Secretariat of the Platform, which consists of the Special Rapporteur on Migrants, the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in persons, and Rapporteurs from regional human rights commissions, I was involved in coordinating their first in-person meetings held in Geneva in June. In this regard, I assisted with logistical tasks, preparation of meeting materials, and dissemination of notes and key deliverables post-consultations.

#### *Ad Hoc Research and Internal Engagement*

During my internship, I was also able to work on some specific ad hoc research on Afghanistan's status at the UNGA and the HRC, researching what accountability measures exist for the Taliban, recognized as *de facto* authorities, helping field colleagues to better understand the ways in which they can leverage the work of international human rights mechanisms. I also had the chance to work on some creative project plans for disseminating our high-level human rights engagement guidance to our communities of practice across UNHCR's 100+ country offices, working on the most effective and efficient ways that field colleagues can operationalize and meaningfully engage with human rights mechanisms in their everyday lines of work.

#### *Human Rights Council Planning*

A key task of mine throughout my internship, lasting over a month, was the logistical and thematic coordination of UNHCR's engagement at the 56th session of the Human Rights Council, which took place at the Palais de Nations in Geneva from 18 June to 12 July. Prior to the session starting, I reached out to the relevant colleagues at headquarters and in our field offices to gauge our thematic and regional priorities and explore the potential for making interventions or organizing side events. During the four-week session, I was responsible for

attending and notetaking for the various plenary dialogues and side events, as well as recruiting other colleagues to note take and attend for certain sessions of interest to their teams. I was also responsible for creating and managing an online and in-person bulletin of events of interest for colleagues at headquarters, serving as the UNHCR focal point for opportunities to intervene at Council sessions.

After the completion of the session, I drafted, reviewed and disseminated briefing notes on the events pertaining to topics on Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Ukraine and Crimea, racism, migrants and trafficking in persons, among other pertinent topics. In completing these notes, I paid attention to the topics of concern and priority for our regional bureaus and country teams based on their input and previous submissions to human rights mechanisms, presenting timely and topical briefing notes which were utilized by colleagues in their on-the-ground work.

#### *Human Rights Country Profiles*

In support of HRLU's work to better enable colleagues in the field to utilize and contribute to the work of human rights mechanisms at the international level, I had the opportunity to complete and contribute to the unit's template for country-specific human rights profiles, which collate the State's human rights record and engagement and progress concerning the core international human rights instruments. I was able to work on profiles particularly for Afghanistan and Egypt, to support colleagues' strategic planning and engagement in their field contexts. This entailed database research and analysis of relevant Concluding Observations from several treaty bodies on issues of pertinence to UNHCR.

#### *Drafting Guidance for Colleagues on Key International Human Rights Instruments*

The final substantive task I was able to work on during the course of my internship was the development of a guidance note for UNHCR colleagues on the International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers, including a breakdown of its Articles and associated General Comments, highlighting key opportunities for colleagues and others stakeholders in country and regional contexts.

This task involved research on the Articles of the Convention, academic papers, and country submissions to the Committee to better understand how the Committee has interpreted the Convention's Articles and the protection it affords to forcibly displaced people. This task presented a particularly unique opportunity for critical analysis as much of the work I completed was to understand the relevance of this Convention to displacement and statelessness, despite the fact that migrants and migrant workers do not directly fall within UNHCR's mandate. The final product was a draft of the guidance note which will be made available to UNHCR colleagues globally in due course.

### **Other Notable Highlights**

During my time as an intern in DIP, I was able to attend informal chats with both the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and Ms. Elizabeth Tan, the Director of our Division. As an intern in the course of my studies and interested in pursuing a career in the field of international law and humanitarian work, I found both of these interactions extremely enriching and wonderful opportunities to hear about the main challenges and areas for development that exist within the work, as well as to receive guidance on how to best prepare for the sometimes arduous environment involved in working in such a sector. I am very grateful to have had these opportunities and these conversations will surely be a highlight I won't soon forget.

### **Reflections**

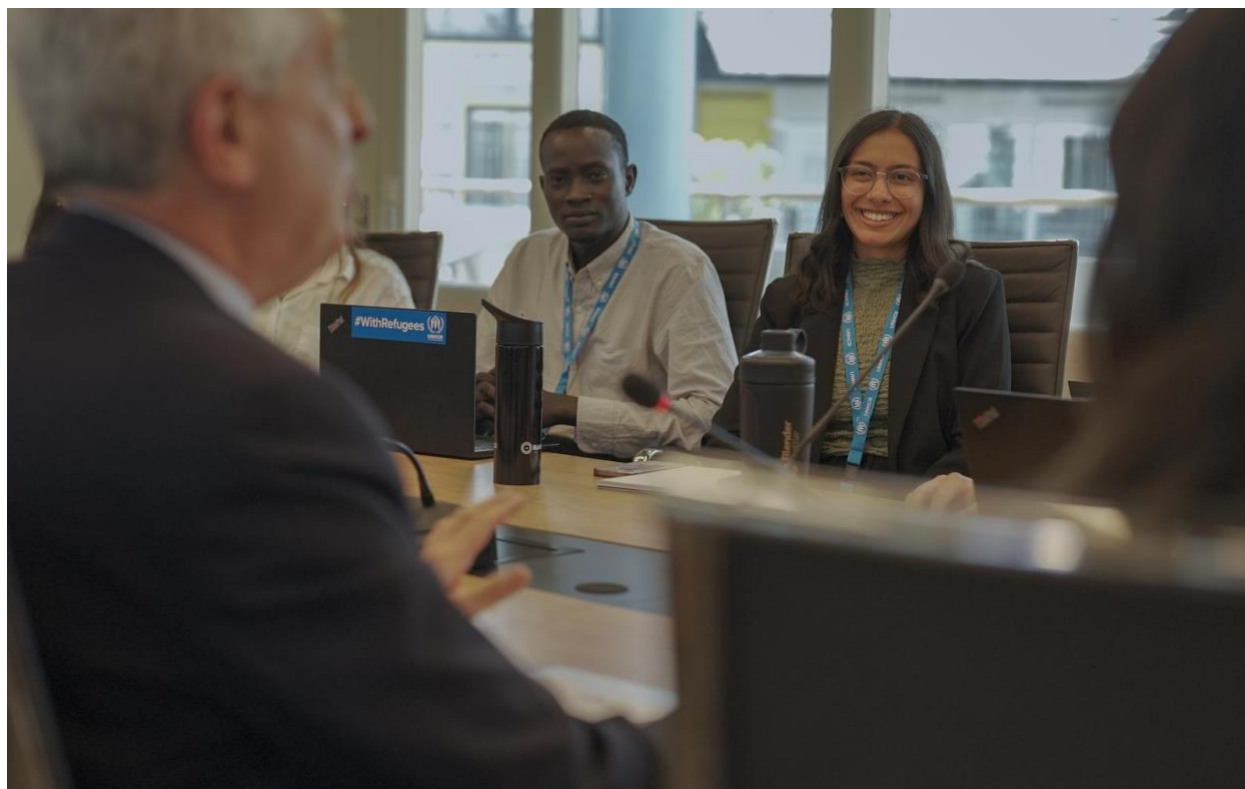
Throughout my internship at UNHCR, I have been able to work on a number of diverse projects and portfolios, and have found the work to be enriching, eye-opening, and rewarding. I have gained familiarity with the human rights mechanisms and been able to see through case-specific work that where national mechanisms fail, international legal frameworks and regional mechanisms can be leveraged as advocacy tools to create better protection environments for forcibly displaced persons. Being directly engaged in this work has been incredibly inspiring amid a time where intensifying global crises have put on display the shortcomings of our international, non-binding legal architecture.

The Division of International Protection is placed at the intersection of international law, refugee law, humanitarian law, and the humanitarian-peace-development nexus. Through this experience, I've also become more familiar with realm of international protection, becoming more aware of the protection issues displaced persons face and the myriad of legal factors at play in ensuring that refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs and stateless people have access to their international protection needs in accordance with international legal principles, including non-refoulement. What has been fascinating is to observe the nexus between this precarity and other factors of vulnerability that impact individuals' access to justice. Gaining exposure to this line of work has already opened my eyes to many career possibilities that weren't previously on my radar.

My time as an IHRP fellow at UNHCR in Geneva was an extremely positive, enriching, and enlightening experience, and I look forward to continuing to add to my skillset in this area and be involved in international protection work as I continue my legal studies. I would like to express my gratitude to the IHRP team for making this experience possible.



*Attending Human Rights Council plenary sessions representing UNHCR for the 56<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council.*



*Intern exchange with Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, at the UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva.*



*Headquarters interns with Mr. Filippo Grandi.*