

**IHRP Fellowship Final Report**  
**United Nations High Commissioner 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. I worked with the Human Rights Liaison Unit (HRLU) which operates within the Division of International Protection (DIP) and falls within the broader Protection Policy & Legal Advice Section.

## **Background**

UNHCR, formally known as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, was established in the aftermath of the second World War with the aim to protect those under its mandate, namely refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless individuals.

Within the DIP, the HRLU leads and coordinates UNHCR's human rights engagement at the global level. It serves as the primary point of contact in Geneva for liaison with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other human rights actors. The HRLU's core objective is to maximize the use of human rights mechanisms and the international legal framework to strengthen the protection of UNHCR's persons of concern. This includes facilitating engagement between human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, UN special procedures, and the Human Rights Council as well as UNHCR's field operations to enhance colleagues' engagement with the mechanisms and their ability to advocate effectively through these channels.

## **Key Tasks and Projects**

### *Drafting Oral Submissions to Treaty Bodies*

One of the first projects I had the opportunity to work on involved reviewing confidential comments and written submissions to UN treaty bodies, specifically those prepared by UNHCR for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) concerning five countries: Mexico, Thailand, Afghanistan, Ireland, and Botswana. My role was to analyze these detailed written submissions and distill them into concise, confidential oral briefings to be delivered by my supervisor during the closed sessions with the Committee. Through this work, I gained exposure to a wide range of legal and policy issues, including the principle of non-refoulement, access to asylum procedures, gender-based violence in displacement contexts, complementary pathways for migration, and the protection challenges facing refugee and

asylum-seeking women. This task deepened my understanding of how international legal standards are applied in diverse regional contexts and sharpened my ability to synthesize complex legal information for advocacy purposes.

### *Coordinating UNHCR's Engagement at the Human Rights Council*

Since the HRLU leads UNHCR's engagement with the Human Rights Council, a central responsibility of mine throughout the month of June was supporting the logistical and thematic coordination of UNHCR's participation in the 59th Human Rights Council Session, held at the Palais des Nations from June 16th to July 8th. Ahead of the session, I developed a schedule highlighting events relevant to UNHCR's mandate and assigned staff accordingly to ensure coverage.

During the session, I attended numerous plenary dialogues and side events, taking detailed notes and reporting on key developments. This not only strengthened my note-taking and multitasking abilities but also deepened my understanding of a broad range of international human rights and legal issues, spanning both thematic and country-specific situations. Following each session, I drafted and reviewed briefing notes to share with colleagues and support their advocacy efforts while keeping teams informed of developments relevant to their work.

### *Ad Hoc Research*

I have also been responsible for conducting legal and human rights research on Zambia and Tanzania in light of emerging protection concerns in both countries, specifically pertaining to cases of refoulement. My work focuses on three key areas, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), UN special procedures, and treaty bodies, to identify strategic opportunities for human rights engagement. The goal is to provide colleagues in the field with actionable insights and tools to strengthen the protection of individuals in need of international protection. In doing so, I am also exploring how various human rights issues intersect, including the heightened risks faced by women migrants and the need for gender-sensitive protection measures tailored to their specific vulnerabilities.

### *Inter-agency Consultations and Meetings With Stakeholders*

As part of my role, I've also had the opportunity to participate in inter-agency consultations and meetings with key stakeholders to strengthen coordination on shared human rights priorities. For instance, I joined a meeting with UN Women to discuss areas of intersection between our mandates, particularly around the protection needs of displaced women and girls. I also took part in a consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, where I provided a briefing on challenges faced by UNHCR's persons of concern, including issues our team identified through legal research and consultations with partner organizations. These engagements aim to ensure that the voices and protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons are meaningfully reflected in broader human rights reporting and advocacy.

### *The Human Rights Due Diligence Project*

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recently developed a general guidance on human rights due diligence (HRDD) for digital technology use to support all United Nations entities to implement and strengthen HRDD policies and processes. In response, UNHCR created the HRDD Project under which an AI-powered digital technology risk assessment tool is being developed with the help of the HRLU. I conducted research on risk assessment tools, looking at previous models that have been successful in different contexts, and helped draft the proposal for the prototype tool. A proof of concept is currently being tested, with a release expected in the coming months.

### *Database of UNHCR Treaty Body Submissions*

During my last month, I developed a centralized database to store all of UNHCR's confidential submissions to UN treaty bodies, also known as "Confidential Comments". The database is designed to allow colleagues to easily filter and search across years, countries, regions and session numbers, thereby streamlining the preparation of future submissions. This facilitates strategic engagement with treaty bodies and ensures that future reports are aligned with UNHCR's position and broader advocacy goals. In doing so, I strengthened my attention to detail and problem-solving skills as I had to solve any technical issues that came up and ensure the database was both practical and user-friendly.

## **Reflections**

My time at UNHCR has been incredibly enriching, eye-opening, and intellectually stimulating. Each day brings exposure to new human rights challenges, offering a deeper understanding of how international legal frameworks can be used to address them as well as where those frameworks fall short. What has stood out most is how interdisciplinary the field of international protection truly is. I've been especially intrigued by the intersection of AI and human rights, an area I hadn't expected to engage with in this context. Having worked at an AI firm in the past and with a strong passion for human rights, it's been rewarding to see how my interests can complement one another. I also had the opportunity to attend the AI for Good Global Summit held in Geneva annually which is a week-long event focused on accelerating the UN Sustainable Development Goals through AI-powered solutions in areas like health, climate, gender equality, and more. The summit was a powerful reminder of AI's potential to drive meaningful change and promote good in the humanitarian sector and the innovative ways it can enhance accessibility.

This internship has also given me the chance to connect with professionals across a range of roles, both within and outside UNHCR, broadening my perspective on the many career paths available in this field. I've discovered opportunities I hadn't previously considered, many of which align closely with my skills and aspirations.

It's an especially critical moment to be working in this space, as we witness the erosion of the rule of law in countries like the U.S., escalating conflicts in the Middle East, and severe funding shortfalls across the UN system. I am looking forward to the future and how this internship will continue shaping my path in international law and human rights.



*UNHCR's Headquarters in Geneva (my office)*



*Attending Human Rights Council plenary sessions representing UNHCR for the 59<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council*



*Participating in UNHCR's Memorial Day ceremony held to remember colleagues who died in field operations*



*Picture with the flags at the Palais des Nations where the Human Rights Council sessions are held*