

Teresa MacLean – Final Internship Report 2012

This past summer I had the pleasure of working at Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD). ACPD is an organization based in Ottawa that advocates for sexual and reproductive rights at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC). I sought out an internship at ACPD because of my interest in both health rights and women's rights.

When I started my summer at ACPD, I was not very well versed in international law or how organizations actually advocate for issues at the UN. My internship exposed me to the workings of various UN bodies, including the Special Procedures and the treaty monitoring bodies. I was able to research and write about a variety of areas surrounding sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe and timely abortion services, access to contraception, family planning, youth rights, sexual orientation and gender identity rights, and the criminalization of HIV transmission. I created advocacy tools and drafted an advocacy report that will be used to promote the inclusion of sexual and reproductive rights in future international development agendas.

Sexual and reproductive rights and access to health services are essential for people, particularly women, to fully realize their human rights. Improving access to such services will not only provide immediate health benefits by reducing mother and child mortality, and sexually transmitted infections, but it will also empower women and couples to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children. This will improve standards of living, slow population growth and promote the full and active participation of women in economic, social and political life.

This is a very interesting and critical time in international law because the outcome documents of major world conferences, including the International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) Programme of Action (PoA), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are nearing their final reviews in 2014 and 2015. The international community will then be turning its attention to a new development agenda, which will likely be premised on sustainability. ACPD is working to ensure that States are held accountable for the obligations they made for sexual and reproductive health at these conferences. My report identifies the obligations undertaken by States and the gains made internationally at the UN HRC and by the treaty bodies, as well as highlighting the gaps that remain. It is my hope that this report will allow readers to see the importance of sexual and reproductive rights and will play a part in ensuring the continued political will for their realization.

I also had the opportunity to expand my knowledge of women's health issues by attending various events this summer. The AIDS Committee of Ottawa's Voices for Women's health forum discussed matters relating to sexuality and health and identified challenges facing women who are HIV positive. The Global Governance for Health event hosted by Carleton University and the Royal Norwegian Embassy brought together various speakers to discuss ways to improve global governance to achieve better

worldwide health. I also attended the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada's International Women's Health Symposium, which focused on the main causes of death for women in developing countries and identified effective interventions that could be implemented to reduce female mortality and improve women's health. A highlight of my summer was assisting ACPD host the Canadian premiere of Not Yet Rain, a documentary that demonstrates the importance of access to safe and legal abortion services, viewed through the eyes of Ethiopian Women. We had incredible speakers attend, including Saba Kidanemariam, the Country Director of Ipas Ethiopia, who discussed how Ethiopia was able to achieve legal reform in the area of abortion.

ACPD also engages in parliamentary advocacy and another highlight of my summer was visiting Parliament Hill. I had a meeting with Olivia Chow, where I was able to discuss the work that we do at ACPD. I was also able to meet Niki Ashton, the NDP Status of Women critic, the Hon. Dr. Hedy Fry, and attend a heated Question Period at the House of Commons.

Overall, I am very appreciative of the opportunity to spend my summer at ACPD as a joint IHRP-SLS intern. It was an incredibly rewarding experience that I feel truly immersed me in international human rights law.