**Final Internship Report**

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In my time at the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) I have been attached to the International Economic Relations Department. The department focuses on how private entities (generally corporations and businesses) relate to international human rights law. The department is regularly engaged in what is called “standard setting”, which involves the promotion of international law norms through publications, litigation and other means. Ideally, domestic and international courts and legislative bodies are influenced by ICJ “standard setting” and incorporate the norms we promote into their policy and judgments.

My input at the ICJ has contributed to the practice of “standard setting”. For the first weeks of my internship, I researched how the UN has interpreted the major human rights instruments as they apply to business entities. The output of this process was a report that guided discussion at an international workshop hosted by the ICJ. The workshop involved members of UN treaty organizations discussing how they could better advise members States on how to regulate corporate actions that violate human rights. There are many unsettled issues in this area of law – for example, whether States should attract liability for not regulating corporate activities, or whether States should regulate domestic corporations working abroad in other States (often called extraterritorial application). By holding workshops such as this, the ICJ promotes corporate and state accountability and seeks to firmly settle contested issues in favor of the victims of human rights abuses. I was also responsible for drafting a report of the workshop that has been circulated amongst other members of the ICJ.

Of particular focus to the ICJ is how domestic legal systems encourage or inhibit victims of corporate human rights abuse to seek remedies. In an effort to scrutinize current state practice on this issue the ICJ has commissioned several country studies conducted by ICJ staff from around the world. I have been involved, as an editor, in the publication of these reports for the Netherlands, China, the Philippines, and India. I was responsible for editing both the content (which involved some research into domestic legal systems) and the form of the pieces (which mainly related to composition, citation and grammatical issues). This exercise gave me a transnational perspective on how business entities are treated under various civil and criminal law systems.

As a culmination of these country studies, the International Economic Relations department is planning a conference of eminent jurists in September. I have been involved in the planning of this conference, which mostly involves administrative tasks. While not fulfilling from a strictly legal perspective, this experience has allowed me to liaise with prominent judges and human rights lawyers from around the world and has given me a taste of project management in the NGO sphere.

In addition to the logistics of the conference, I am currently researching how the relevant treaty organizations and regional human rights courts have handled the topic (the right to a remedy for victims of corporate human rights abuses). This involves research of policy and some jurisprudence on what the “right to a remedy” actually entails. Relevant questions my research will address include: must remedies for corporate abuse of human rights be of a judicial or administrative nature? Can the private sector be relied upon to investigate complaints, or should courts and administrative bodies exclusively occupy that role? Does the right to a remedy imply the right to a fair investigation? The output of this research will be both to guide discussion at the September conference and to scrutinize the Special Rapporteur’s research on the same topic. An important function of the ICJ, shared with most international civil society organizations, is to scrutinize the UN’s agenda and ensure that its recommendations reflect progressive and accurate international law standards. My research was also used to assist a partner organization in submitting an amicus curiae brief in favor of a State involved in international commercial arbitration. The arbitration involved, among several other issues, the question of whether the right to a remedy as a doctrine of international human rights law should compel foreign corporations to submit to the jurisdiction of domestic courts when they have been accused of human rights violations. It was exciting to be involved, even in a minor way, in advocacy work which involved contemporary issues – the legal fallout from the BP oil spill, currently receiving high-profile treatment in the media, is a good example of how issues of international corporate accountability are highly relevant, and still quite contested, in the modern world.

Another advocacy project undertaken by the ICJ which I was peripherally involved in is the litigation regarding corporate complicity in human rights abuses in Sudan. Several amici curiae have used the ICJ’s report on corporate complicity in human rights violations to defend or condemn the actions of an energy corporation in Sudan. I was responsible for summarizing how these amici curiae have interpreted the ICJ report and drafting an internal memo for the ICJ on the topic. This memo was distributed to eminent jurists around the world and helped inform the ICJ’s official response to the use of their report.

Aside from my research and advocacy experience, I had the opportunity to visit the UN Office at Geneva on several occasions. The ICJ is supportive of interns getting exposure to the UN, even if there is no definite output for the institution. I observed a Human Rights Council session where my supervisor made an oral submission relevant to corporate human rights abuse, and I observed the consideration of the third periodic report of Israel before the Human Rights Committee. I took a detailed record of the proceedings and wrote a minor internal report for the Counter-Terrorism branch of the ICJ on Israel’s statements regarding the use of torture and other inhumane acts towards prisoners. Visiting the UN is always an interesting experience and is good exposure to the politics and procedure of the foremost international human rights institution.

My experience at the ICJ provided a good blend of academic learning and professional experience. Through my research and advocacy work I learned a great deal about how international human rights treaties promote private-sector accountability for rights abuses, how States are obliged to regulate private-sector entities to prevent rights abuse, and what remedies the State or offending actor must provide in the event of private-sector rights abuse. I also gained, through my work on the country studies, a transnational perspective on how various legal systems protect human rights against private-sector violation. Through the experience of observing the UN at work, I have learned much about the human rights treaty system, how the various UN organs interact, how member States regard their duties under the treaties, how individuals can make complaints of rights abuse to the treaty bodies, and how NGOs can influence the actions of both States and intergovernmental organizations like the UN. In all, my internship provided a great introduction to the substance and practical application of international human rights law.