Founded by Chinese students and scholars in March 1989, Human Rights In China is an international, Chinese, non-governmental organization with a mission to promote international human rights and advance the institutional protection of those rights in the People’s Republic of China.

Because HRIC’s advocacy is rooted in both Chinese domestic law and international law frameworks, legal analysis of both legal systems is an essential aspect of my work as a legal intern. I was tasked with drafting legal memos that are used in HRIC’s international advocacy efforts, including in-depth briefings by HRIC staff on issues of Chinese and international law with United Nations experts and governments representatives.

Work Assignments

A large part of my work was to provide complex analysis of China’s recently promulgated domestic statutes, and their impact on individual rights (such as freedom of expression and privacy) and civil organizations. Statutes I wrote about include the *Law on Guarding State Secrets, Regulations on the Protection of Commercial Secrets of Central State-Owned Enterprises, State Compensation Law and Relevant Issues Concerning the Administration of Donations in Foreign Exchange by Domestic Institutions*. The legal memos I wrote are eventually transformed to advisory press releases for the international human rights community.

In addition to statutory analysis, I also conduct research and analysis of the legal implications of current affairs. For example, I performed research and analysis on the practice of criminal extradition between Russia, China and Central Asian states in support of HRIC’s work on regional cooperation impacting human rights. In connection with HRIC advocacy on judicial reform in the context of families victimized by China’s 2008 tainted milk scandal, I researched and drafted a comparative analysis of corporate shareholder liability limitations under the laws of both Hong Kong and China. I also drafted a report analyzing UN counter-terrorism mechanisms and their violation of international human rights law.

Challenges

One of the major challenges is the bilingual nature of the work. China’s statutes are not always translated into English, and whenever they are, they are not necessarily the most accurate translations. Therefore, in order to undertake such complex analysis appropriately, I have to read the statutes in Chinese and produce my reports in English. Since I have not used my Chinese skills in a professional work environment before, it has been quite a challenge to read legal documents in Chinese.

Secondly, the work that I do is often dictated by breaking developments of international affairs and I often have to complete my work in fast turnaround times, including research on Hong Kong and China legal systems for impending press interviews with developments of the lawsuit filed in Hong Kong with regards to the tainted milk scandal and Foxconn-related suicides.

Overcoming the Challenges

Although it was challenging, I did not shy away from assignments that provided these challenges. Instead, I volunteered to work on translations of legal documents and statutory text, and reviewed edited final copies of my translations to better comprehend Chinese legal language. With practice, I navigated legal text more easily.

I also took initiative to research about the history of China’s legal system and how the current statutes evolved from previous versions of laws governing that area. This helped me track the development of the laws and better understand the context under which these statutes are drafted. All this is important in appropriately analyzing the impact of individual rights and civil society, and how the impact changed with the new laws.

In order to cope with fast turnaround times, I familiarized myself with the complex web system of the Chinese government so that I know where to look for information when I needed to. I also familiarized myself with our office staff and got to know their respective expertise, so I know who to go to when I need information. Knowing where to look for the answer, or how to find it, was really important for me to complete my tasks in a time constraint environment.

Conclusion

Amongst the many enjoyable things of this internship, there are two valuable experiences for me to take away with.

Firstly, learning about a legal system that is completely different allows me to evaluate the pros and cons of both systems, and better understanding the strengths and shortcomings of the Canadian legal system.

Secondly, working for an NGO gives me a completely different perspective in the work of promoting human rights. I worked at a multi-national agency last summer, where much of the work needs to be navigated through various levels of bureaucracy. It is such a valuable experience to be working on the other side of the table, where efficiency and effectiveness are given high priority.

I am grateful for the International Human Rights Programme for funding my internship and making this experience possible.

For more information about my organization please visit http://hrichina.org/public/index.

The legal memos I wrote fed directly into producing the following press releases:

***HRIC Briefing Note: Tighter Regulation of Foreign Funding Support of Chinese Civil Society Groups***: http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision\_id=174778&item\_id=174774

***Provisional Regulations on the Protection of Commercial Secrets of Central State-Owned Enterprises***: http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/article?revision\_id=174753&item\_id=174752

***China Sharpens Legal Weapons for Information Control***: http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision\_id=174308&item\_id=174305

I also helped with the writing, translating and editing of China Rights Forum, a quarterly bilingual journal. For a copy for the 2010 No. 2 edition, ***“China’s Internet: Staking Digital Ground”***, please visit http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/category?cid=175033.