

IHRP Final Report
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This summer I spent three months interning with International Bridges to Justice (IBJ) — an international NGO dedicated to enhancing criminal justice and combatting investigative torture in developing countries. My work was done at IBJ’s headquarters in Geneva with the organization’s legal department. I contributed to two of IBJ’s main legal projects – ‘*DefenseWiki*’ and ‘*E-Learning*’. *DefenseWiki* is an online criminal law encyclopedia, modeled on Wikipedia; It provides comprehensive coverage of criminal laws and criminal procedures in countries around the world. The *e-learning* project provides online training courses in criminal law, criminal procedure, and general criminal practice, to defense lawyers in IBJ’s country programs.

My contributions to the *DefenseWiki* and *E-Learning* projects consisted primarily of research into international criminal and human rights law, as well the criminal laws and procedures of various countries, laws relating to torture, the rights of the accused, criminal defenses, evidence, and the rights and obligations of defense lawyers. I also conducted research into more general topics such as forensics and client and witness interviewing skills. I used my findings to create *e-learning* modules and *DefenseWiki* entries for Myanmar, Thailand, and India. The most challenging aspect of this project was condensing large amounts of information into simple and compact training modules designed for defense lawyers - many of whom are not native English speakers. As criminal law and procedure does not vary greatly from country to country, this work quickly became repetitive, and lacking in intellectual rigor. I found, however, that by the end of the project, I had become surprisingly well-versed in the nuances of each country’s criminal justice system. I also gained an understanding and appreciation of the formidable challenges facing defense lawyers in developing countries – and, consequently, the importance of IBJ’s work. Without touching upon the resource and institutional constraints, these (largely informational) challenges include: lack of access to internet; lack of access to hard or soft copies of criminal laws and procedures; lack of training in crucial defense techniques, such as interviewing clients who have been victims of investigative torture; lack of understanding of forensic science; and lack of knowledge of complaint mechanisms and appeal processes.

Due to the informality of IBJ’s work environment, my work was largely independently motivated, and I was also able to work on several projects in other departments – particularly the development department. I wrote a successful grant proposal requesting funds to send Karen Tse, IBJ’s CEO, to begin a new program in Myanmar, and I participated in the writing of two grant proposals – one to the European Commission on Human Rights, and one to USAID. These proposal-writing projects provided a welcome reprieve from the legal projects, and also gave me a more thorough understanding of the logistics of IBJ’s country programs. During my internship, I was also assigned several supplementary tasks, such as writing memos on IBJ’s mission in the Middle East and its history in Asia and Africa, developing IBJ’s welcome package, and creating a research database for legal interns.

The two most significant learning experiences of my internship with IBJ were gaining an understanding of what it means to work in an NGO's headquarters, and understanding the human rights implications of criminal justice. With regards the former, I found that the work is primarily focused on research and writing, and that, consequently, the on-the-ground effects of this work can be hard to perceive. I also found the working environment to be unpredictable, but flexible. When I left IBJ, only three people who had been there on my first day still remained – one intern and two staff members. In the course of just three months, almost the entire intern pool had turned over, and several of the staff had left or been replaced. My projects and hours varied greatly from day to day – some days I worked until 5 p.m., others until 10 p.m., and one day even until 6 a.m. At the same time, the flexibility in the work environment meant that we interns were encouraged to participate in designing our own work plans, as well as in designing IBJ's overall projects. Given that IBJ is located in Geneva, and has observer status with the UN, interns were also encouraged to take advantage of talks and conferences at the UN and other international NGOs. Accordingly, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a Human Rights Council meeting regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

During my internship, I also gained a deeper understanding of the human rights implications of criminal justice. These became particularly apparent to me during the course of writing my research paper – which examined criminal justice in China. Coming to understand the human rights implications of dysfunctional criminal justice systems helped me to better appreciate the nature of my work and the importance of IBJ's mission. Promoting the work of defense lawyers and safeguarding the rights of the accused has a tremendous impact on all citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to life, liberty, security of the person, health, food, rest and leisure, and freedom from cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. This is especially true when it is recognized that criminal injustice has pervasive social consequences, causing and deepening poverty, stunting economic development, spreading disease, and undermining democracy and the rule of law.

I am very grateful to the IHRP for giving me the opportunity to work with IBJ, and contribute to enhancing criminal justice and human rights in developing countries.