

IHRP Final Internship Report

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International Bridges to Justice

From May to the end of July 2014, I completed an internship with International Bridges to Justice (IBJ) in Geneva, Switzerland as a legal intern. My official title as a “Programme Development Associate” meant that the majority of the work I conducted at IBJ was in relation to the organization’s country programs. However, the flexibility of the internship and the nature of being a part of a small non-governmental organization meant that I was able to experience and take on responsibilities for a variety of initiatives and programs.

IBJ is dedicated to ending the use of investigative torture during pre-trial detention in developing countries. Despite the fact that a number of these countries have ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture, little change has occurred in practice where the use of torture is the norm and often the most cost effective means for finding criminal convictions. IBJ has offices in Cambodia, China, India, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe where they are able to implement their country programs and provide support and structure to IBJ Fellows – local lawyers working to fulfill the organization’s goals of improving access to justice and providing competent counsel to the accused at the earliest possible opportunity after arrest.

The projects I worked on throughout my summer were varied. Depending on what the organization is working on, interns typically have to hit the ground running upon entering the IBJ office in Geneva for the first time. The learning curve is steep, but I was immediately welcomed as part of the team; being given the same responsibilities as someone who had been there for months was daunting, but gratifying. I learned about what IBJ does quickly through reading past reports and proposals. I was then tasked with putting their mandate, goals and achievements into my own words in letters to government officials in Switzerland and Myanmar.

For the first part of my internship, my primary task was to pick up where previous interns from the University of Toronto left off – working towards the development of a comprehensive country program in Myanmar. Through the drafting of a grant proposal, I learned exactly what IBJ works on in-country. By working from the top-down – influencing and collaborating with high-level government and law enforcement officials – and the bottom-up – educating the public and legal professionals – IBJ aims to create lasting and sustainable change through legal reform and law enforcement in the countries in which they operate. Primarily, IBJ works to achieve education at all levels, which in turn creates space for competent legal representation, citizen awareness of their rights, procedural and policy reform, and importantly, greater respect for rule of law, law enforcement, and access to justice for ordinary citizens. The country programs provide a concrete solution to the issue of investigative torture by recognizing and addressing the fact that torture occurs due to a number of complex factors within the justice system as a whole.

The second part of my internship consisted primarily of working on a contribution to IBJ's *DefenseWiki*. The *DefenseWiki* runs on the same software of Wikipedia. As part of IBJ's efforts to enhance legal education for the public and legal practitioners, the *DefenseWiki* is an important resource to this end. Lawyers in developing countries do not always have the same ease of access to even basic legal resources, such as penal and procedural codes, that we are used to in Canada. The *DefenseWiki* provides such resources to lawyers in a condensed format and utilizes the knowledge of legal practitioners and professionals, law students, and law professors to continually conduct research and keep the information in the Wiki up-to-date.

The countries in which IBJ has offices take priority for the creation of *DefenseWiki* pages, however, IBJ is active in a number of other countries throughout the world through their JusticeMakers. The JusticeMakers are IBJ fellows who have received funding from the organization so that they can pursue their proposed project aimed at ending investigative torture in their country. Given that IBJ has a JusticeMaker fellow in Mexico City and my personal interest in Latin America, I was given the task of completing the *DefenseWiki* page for Mexico. This task involved a great deal of research, beginning with reading through the Mexican Constitution, the Federal Code of Criminal Procedure (*Código Federal de Procedimientos Penales*), and the Federal Penal Code (*Código Penal Federal*). Additional research was conducted to learn and understand more about the major federal judicial reforms brought into effect in 2008 under President Felipe Calderón, as well as the state of criminal justice and the use of investigative torture in general in Mexico. Finally, this information will be summarized and added to the *DefenseWiki* database after being verified by IBJ's local lawyer, their JusticeMaker in Mexico City.

I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to intern with IBJ. I have learned so much about criminal justice throughout the world, and perhaps most significantly, how an NGO works and particularly how IBJ actively fulfills its mission to end investigative torture in our lifetime. This has been an amazing learning experience and an inspiring introduction to international human rights. I am so thankful to IHRP and IBJ for making all of this possible!