

IHRP Final Internship Report

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I spent my summer internship in Toronto working for the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. Throughout my internship, I worked directly with Renu Mandhane, the executive director of the IHRP. Working closely with one supervisor provided an in depth introduction to advocacy and often felt like working at a small firm.

A significant amount of my work was focused on the issue of immigration detention in Canada. My first task upon starting the internship was to fact-check a 140 page report entitled *We Have No Rights: Arbitrary imprisonment and cruel treatment of migrants with mental health issues in Canada* drafted by two IHRP clinic students. Two weeks were entirely given over to the task, and in the process I learned the content of the report inside-out and understood the how much attention to detail was required in this type of work. Importantly, it helped me to appreciate how much a junior law student can contribute to a file by understanding the material at an extremely detailed level. By putting in this groundwork at the outset of the internship, I was able to make a much more meaningful contribution to the advocacy work that formed the core of my summer experience.

With the report finalized, I was tasked with drafting submissions to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRCtte). These submissions also focused on immigration detention and were largely derived from the IHRP report. The UNHRCtte is a treaty monitoring body established to monitor compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), one of the most important international human rights treaties. The Committee meets three times a year to review state parties' reports on their progress in implementing the ICCPR. Each state party in theory reports every four years, but July 2015 would be the first time that Canada had appeared before the committee in nearly a decade.

I then travelled to Geneva with the Executive Director, and spent five days assisting with formal submissions to the committee, informally meeting with committee members, and coordinating with other Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to bring important human rights issues in Canada to the forefront of the committee's dialogue with the state party. In these types of UN bodies, non-governmental organizations have a crucial role to play in supporting the broad expertise of committee members with specialized local knowledge of the human rights situation in a particular country. Topics raised by Canadian NGOs included missing aboriginal women and girls, aboriginal self-determination & land rights, the government's crackdown on dissent & advocacy, corporate social responsibility, gender equality, national security, refugees & migrants, homelessness, torture complicity, transgender rights, homophobic violence, mental illness, labour rights, solitary confinement, and immigration detention. Having the chance to meet and discuss these issues with representatives from over ten major Canadian NGOs was a particularly eye opening experience.

Alongside these international advocacy efforts, I also had the chance to accompany the executive director to meetings with federal and provincial politicians to discuss immigration detention. There is certainly an art to this type of advocacy work, and sitting in on these meetings was a chance to better understand how to get your issue in the minds of those who can take action on them. When the IHRP report on immigration detention was released in late June, this type of work became increasingly important. Over the course of two days, the Executive Director appeared on virtually every major Canadian television and radio network to discuss the findings of the report. Since there had not been very much high profile advocacy work on immigration detention, the IHRP became the de facto expert on the subject virtually overnight. This exposure to the media was important for me, as later in the summer I myself appeared (briefly) on CTV national news to discuss the report.

Another notable experience was visiting an immigration detainee in a Lindsay, Ontario maximum-security jail. Actually sitting down with a person who had been detained put a human face to a problem I had been working on in very abstract terms and really motivated me throughout the rest of the summer. It was a very unique thing to do as a first year summer student, and is something that will stay with me for a long time.

Alongside this work on immigration detention, I was also involved with an individual complaint to the UNHRCtte. Once an individual has exhausted domestic remedies, he or she may raise their case before the Committee under the optional protocol of the ICCPR (assuming of course, that the state party has ratified the optional protocol). The IHRP had drafted initial submissions on behalf of this individual, and we had just received Canada's reply. Before the Committee released its communication on the matter, the author was invited to make reply submissions. I was tasked with the research and initial drafting of this reply. Through this assignment, I became very well versed on the jurisprudence of the ICCPR and had the chance to strategize on how to best respond to the arguments raised by the Government.

Final Thoughts:

Overall, interning with the IHRP was an incredibly rewarding experience that I would recommend to anyone. Not only did I learn a lot about areas of the law that I was completely unfamiliar with (i.e. administrative and immigration law), but I also discovered what type of legal work I wanted to pursue. The most interesting parts of the entire experience for me were discussions about strategy, related to both litigation and advocacy, that helped me to realize that I was interested in being a litigator. I covered a wide range of topics over the course of the summer, and came out of the internship as a better law student with a wealth of thought provoking summer experiences.