

IHRP FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Robert Chiu, Summer 2017 Fellow

United Nations – International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (UN-ICTY)

Office of the Registrar

<http://www.icty.org/>



The ICTY office building

After 1L, the generous funding of the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) allowed me to pursue an internship with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. The United Nations established the ICTY as an *ad hoc* court in 1993 to prosecute war crimes perpetrated during the then-ongoing Yugoslav Wars, the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II. With the tribunal slated to close in December of 2017, I got to experience part of the final phase of this mandate firsthand.

As a Legal Intern in the Immediate Office of the Registrar (IOR), my work dealt with a number of unique legal and judicial concerns. The ICTY is not a national court, so it falls upon the IOR—and the Registry more broadly—to take on duties generally assumed by ministries within a domestic system (i.e. the Department of Justice in Canada). Among other responsibilities, the Registry governs the detention of indictees, the operation of trials, and the ICTY's overall diplomatic function. This leaves the Registry deeply tapped into the tribunal's "brand"; it spearheads the ICTY's relationships with both its member states and the public at large.

Though many of my projects were confidential, they generally involved researching and drafting memoranda on matters of diplomatic and jurisprudential importance. This included the formulation of official responses by the ICTY to claims, requests, and motions made by world governments. I also had the opportunity to engage with complex internal litigation arising from staff disputes and other claims brought against the ICTY. Most notably, I drafted submissions to the United Nations Dispute Tribunal (UNDT) in Geneva, where my work addressed claims that had been filed against the ICTY. Fresh out of 1L, it felt daunting to take the first stab at such important documents. But the work was as rewarding as it was challenging, and it improved my legal writing immensely.

My legal research also served to brief the ICTY's Registrar, John Hocking, on relevant matters for conferences and diplomatic dialogues he attended over the summer. This often involved extensive review of witness and victim testimony, which was perhaps the hardest part of the job. I came into this role knowing I would be dealing with difficult subject matter. I didn't, however, expect to encounter details as grotesque and evocative as those buried in the ICTY's archives. The emotional distance you place between yourself and your work can quickly dissipate when you're confronted with someone's firsthand account on the loss of their innocence or the deaths of their children. Going through this material proved deeply, deeply sobering—yet important. It contextualized the legacy of the ICTY within a larger human story, and it reaffirmed for me the importance of the institution's mission.

The diplomatic nature of the IOR's duties proved just as interesting as the work itself. In law school, we often review cases without fully considering their political ramifications. "Policy" concerns are ones we relegate to a single question on an exam. But serving the public-facing arm of an international body like the ICTY made these assessments a

subject of both necessity and intrigue. Moreover, the continuous discourse held between the Registry and the various Balkan states had implications that extended beyond each individual jurisdiction. This led me to reconsider many of the conceptions I held about international law, which I've come to understand as a much more palpable force than I did previously.

In North American law schools, there's something of an unspoken understanding that "international law" is inaccessible. We talk of it in nebulous terms and frequently dismiss the field as lacking in professional opportunities. Law itself is framed as jurisdictional, after all; we treat our learned expertise as limited to physical spaces. This feels less true in the European Union and at a body like the ICTY, where many law students see the subject less like an abstract ideal and more like a messy reality. Among those who grew up in the EU—where day-to-day socioeconomic realities are shaped by the interactions between its constituents' various legal systems—there is a much stronger interest in the aims and mechanisms of international law. This made itself clear not only in the diplomatic content of my work, but in the perspectives of my European colleagues.

That brings me, of course, to the people I met this summer. First, there were the other interns. The ICTY's intake of law students was large, diverse, and immensely collegial. The countries represented by our cohort this summer ran the gamut from Thailand to Russia to Burundi. I thought this made for a great intercultural exchange; I regularly came out of casual conversations feeling I'd learned something new about another country or culture. The opportunity to install myself in such a unique and vibrant constellation of people—especially at such a formative age—is something I'll be forever thankful for.

Second, there were my supervisors within the IOR itself. My team proved just as diverse as the intern class, coming from various walks of life and all around the world. They provided a wellspring of good humour and meaningful mentorship. There was a real sense of community here—we regularly discussed travel, celebrated birthdays, and marked staff departures (including my own) with wine, cake, and presents.

Outside of work, The Hague was a charming, beautiful city to live in. It was also a short train ride away from Amsterdam along with other major Dutch cities, and a great gateway into the rest of Europe. I used my holidays this summer to make brief trips to Belgium, France, Ireland, and Germany, where I met up with other IHRP fellows along the way.

In all, my fellowship has been a defining aspect of my law school experience. I could rave about my summer for far longer than three pages—but I would be remiss if I didn't convey the extent of my gratitude for the team that made this possible. I am endlessly thankful for the work of the IHRP office, and I sincerely believe they are among the best assets available at this law school. We are beyond lucky to have them. I would encourage any future students interested in human rights to seek opportunities with the program; doors like this seldom open for us without help.