

Final Report: Interning at the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health

Amy Tang | August 30, 2012

Whatever you are looking for, you can find in India. And in the 14 weeks that I spent interning with Anand Grover, the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health, in New Delhi, I found myself engaging in substantive legal work in an environment surrounded by passionate and committed lawyers, and having an incredible summer.

As the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Grover aims to promote the right to health framework and raise awareness of the right to health as a fundamental human right. The breadth of his mandate meant that I had the opportunity to work on a diverse range of matters, from the effect of conflict on the right to health of marginalized communities to state obligations in providing non-discriminatory access to medicines. During my internship, I gained a deeper understanding of the principles invoked in Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. I drafted Urgent Appeals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Russia and Brazil after receiving complaints from individuals or non-government organizations concerning right to health violations by the Government. I researched and assisted in drafting a thematic report alongside dedicated and supportive lawyers in the UNSR team. The report examined right to health concerns arising in conflict situations and highlighted the obligations of states to ensure the right to health of populations, especially vulnerable groups, during and after conflict.



Outside of my UNSR work, I also assisted in editing and writing a chapter of a handbook, commissioned by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, on HIV/AIDS laws in India. The handbook is designed to help counsellors gain familiarity to domestic and international laws and ethical guidelines that impact people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS (e.g. consent, confidentiality, criminalization). From this experience, I came to understand the Indian legal framework and its complexities.

Being the Special Rapporteur is only one of many things that Mr. Grover is involved in. In 1981, Mr. Grover his wife, Ms. Indira Jaising established “Lawyer’s Collective“, a not-for-profit, public interest legal clinic which focuses on issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS, women’s rights, and access to medicines. Lawyer’s Collective has been an advocate for many vulnerable groups in India, an important voice in advancing public interest litigation, and a driving force behind the recent Supreme Court judgment which dismissed an appeal by a pharmaceutical giant in its patent application and allowed generic companies to

continue to produce low-cost medicines. With the Delhi office of Lawyer's Collective as the backdrop to my internship, I am privileged to have had the opportunity to interact with many other passionate lawyers



and law students. During my time there, the Women's Rights Initiative organized a staff training on the recent amendments made to sexual assault laws and court procedures in India. While the brutal December 16th gang rape led to public outrage and attention from international media outlets, many incidents of sexual violence in India are either unreported or go under the radar

even if reported. The training provided an open space for dialogue and debate amongst the presenters, staff, and interns. It was interesting to learn about issues of police accountability and forensic evidence collection, and understand the necessary requirements to ensuring that the legislation on domestic and sexual violence is effective.

In addition to directing the operations of Lawyer's Collective, Mr. Grover also runs a private litigation practice. In my last week as an intern, I was able to join Mr. Grover and Mihir Samson, a lawyer in the HIV/AIDS team Lawyer's Collective, at the Supreme Court and watch Mr. Grover make arguments in an application for leave to appeal. The environment in and outside the courtrooms resembled the ordered chaos surrounding the streets of Delhi, with just as much energy, excitement, and buzz.

My time at the UNSR was truly rewarding and engaging, and I am immensely grateful to the IHRP and the Special Rapporteur and his team for providing me with this invaluable experience.

