

IHRP Summer Internship Final Report

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Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), Kampala, Uganda

This summer, I interned at the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) in Kampala, Uganda. HRAPF is one of only two NGOs that work on LGBT legal issues and represent LGBT clients in Uganda, a country often referred to in the media as one of the most hostile places in the world to live for gays, lesbians, and trans people. HRAPF does very meaningful and important work for LGBT Ugandans through several projects. It sponsors strategic litigation on LGBT legal issues, organizes training and awareness sessions for the LGBT community, and operates a legal aid clinic for low-income LGBT clients who routinely face discrimination and persecution by the police and the justice system.

During my internship, I was given the opportunity to engage in substantive legal research and writing for strategic litigation cases on LGBT legal issues, including:

1. Drafting a legal memorandum for a strategic litigation case on the registration of an LGBT organization. I also presented this memorandum to clients and participated in follow-up meetings about the feasibility of a legal challenge.
2. Participating in extensive consultations with an Interights lawyer, Sibongile Ndashe, about litigation strategy for two strategic litigation cases on the registration of an LGBT association and the arbitrary pre-trial detention of LGBT people.
3. Preparing research for a potential strategic litigation case on gender recognition
4. Writing a proposal for a research project on the use of Canadian constitutional jurisprudence in Ugandan appellate judgments and how citing comparative constitutional law may be helpful in future strategic litigation cases.

My supervisors at HRAPF encouraged me to become involved in all aspects of the organization, so I was able to attend court hearings, interviews with LGBT clients, and awareness and training sessions held for members of the LGBT community. These

experiences gave me a valuable perspective on the experiences of the LGBT community in Uganda. The opportunity to interact with LGBT clients and community members provided me with real insight into their personal challenges and day-to-day struggles. My internship also introduced me to the objectives and methods of litigation strategy and taught me to see the law's potential to secure basic human rights for LGBT individuals in Uganda. Furthermore, my experience at HRAPF showed me that the reporting by many Western media outlets on the legal situation in Uganda for gays, lesbians, and trans people is often inaccurate and portrays a bleaker vision of the legal context than the one that exists in reality. For instance, the High Court ruled in a recent case that although having sex with men is criminalized under the law, identifying as gay is not a criminal offence. This judgment has led to successful efforts by HRAPF to negotiate with police and prosecutors for the release of LGBT people who are arrested simply for the reason that they look or act like gay men, lesbians or trans people.

My internship at HRAPF was truly inspiring. It was an incredible experience to work alongside lawyers who face considerable personal risk in order to advocate successfully for a very unpopular minority group. I also met members of the LGBT community in Uganda who courageously live openly as gay, lesbian or trans despite experiencing ostracism from their communities and families and the constant risk of violence. I am very grateful to both HRAPF and the IHRP for giving me this wonderful learning opportunity.