

From New York to Geneva to Hong Kong

The Castan Centre Global Internship Program Kicks Off

By Katie Mitchell and Marius Smith

In 2005, the Castan Centre launched its Global Internship Program, placing four outstanding Monash Law students with some of the world's leading human rights institutions in Europe, Asia and North America. The interns set off at the conclusion of the academic year to a wide range of assignments and while some have now returned, others remain on the job and their regular web diary entries can be found on the Castan Centre website (see below).

Although the centre has supported interns throughout its 6 year existence, it considered the establishment of a strong internship program to be an important part of its commitment to improve human rights education and discourse. In particular, the program provides the next generation of human rights leaders with cutting edge practical experience and allows interns to gain new cultural perspectives while working on important global human rights issues.

The four students chosen for the 2005 program had shown a strong and continuing interest in the area of human rights and had already made a remarkable contribution to their local communities. For each of them, their experiences as



'It has been interesting and challenging to navigate the jurisprudence behind [the Alien Tort Claims Act]. It has also been really exciting because it allows such a tangible application of international law and human rights law, evidence by the fact that around one hundred suits have been filed under the Statute since 1980.'

Linda Gyorki's Weblog (Linda in Washington)

interns have been as different as their destinations.

Jessie Taylor has just returned from the momentous final meeting of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The Commission, which is the UN's most important human rights body, has now been dismantled and replaced by a new Human Rights Council, which will meet for the first time later this year. The new Council is designed to exclude countries which are systematic human rights violators but, since completing her internship, Jessie has concluded that engagement with these states would have been a far better model than exclusion.

Jessie will head to London in September to commence a Masters of Law in International Development, meaning that she will take a break from her community activism and advocacy, which has seen her escort more than 130 visitors to Maribyrnong detention centre over a three-year period and establish the local response arm of the Oaktree Foundation.

While Jessie has been dealing with global human rights issues, Shahaan Murray has been focusing on grassroots matters in India and Sri Lanka as part of her internship at the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong. The Commission is a strong advocate of human rights in the Asian region and undertakes research, investigates individual complaints of abuse and lobbies for international law reform. As part of her work, Shahaan will be visiting India and she is also contributing to current negotiations on the Asian Charter on the Rule of Law.

Shahaan has an outstanding academic history of human rights study in both her law and arts degrees. She has traveled extensively through India and has a strong interest in Indian



..People have asked me how I'm going to reconcile my convictions and beliefs while taking a part in representing my country in defending its Human Rights record. The solution to dealing with this will be multi faceted...putting aside my preconceived ideas, talking to people and framing Australia's situation in a global context.

Jessie Taylor's Weblog (Jessie at the CHR with fellow interns Stuart Brady and Aedan Whyat)

history, politics and development. In 2005 Shahaan was the sole Australian student delegate selected for the 3rd Annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conference in India. Shahaan's first-hand experience of the relationship between research and practice is an example of the invaluable perspective that an internship can provide for students as they witness their academic knowledge in action, giving new depth to what they have learnt, strengthening their skills and providing them with an insight as to what is possible in their own future practice.

Finally, Sophia Kagan and Linda Gyorki traveled to New York to work with Human Rights First which was, until 2003, known as the Lawyers' Committee for Human rights. It was established in 1978 and has been a long term advocate of human rights issues, and especially of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. The organization has broadened its areas of focus over the decades and is now a forceful advocate on a wide range of human rights matters.

Linda recently returned from New York having worked under the supervision of Gabor Rona, the International Legal Director of Human Rights First (Linda's story in her own words is on the following page). Linda has researched the legality of detaining asylum seekers and refugees and drafted the organisation's submission to the UN regarding the Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism.

Prior to the internship, Linda's community work had focused mainly on Indigenous issues. In 2005 she participated in an internship in Cape York, working with Noel Pearson on projects in isolated Aboriginal communities and she also volunteers at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

Having commenced her internship after Linda, Sophia Kagan remains at Human Rights First where she is working primarily on human rights issues for Russia. In particular she is conducting research and helping to prepare the organisa-

tion's advocacy strategy for Russia, where human rights are increasingly imperiled. She has also conducted research on Cambodia, Indonesia and Singapore.

In the past, Sophia's passion for human rights has taken her on a self-funded trip to Africa, where she taught English to refugees in Ghana and devised and implemented an HIV/AIDS awareness program in Kenya. Sophia has also volunteered with a number of human rights and community groups in Australia.

During their time in New York, Linda and Sophia also attended many of the human rights lectures, book launches and other events which take place there on a daily basis, furthering their knowledge of, and passion for, human rights.

As reflected in the commentary of the interns themselves, this program is a vital part of the life and mandate of the Castan Centre. By identifying the most talented and passionate students and assisting them to become part of the next generation of human rights activists, leaders and advocates, the centre is committed to building a solid foundation for the development of a vibrant, diverse and sustainable human rights culture in Australia and beyond.

Global Interns receive contributions to their travel costs from the Monash Law Student Travel Fund. For more information on the Global Internship Program, and to read our interns' weblogs, please click the "internships" link on the Castan Centre website.



*Most of my work on Indonesia has involved doing research on the possibility of extra-territorial litigation against individuals thought to be responsible for the murder of prominent human rights activist Munir. Munir died on a plane en route to the Netherlands where he was going to study humanitarian law. A subsequent autopsy revealed four times the lethal level of arsenic in his system, pointing to a clear case of murder. **Sophia Kagan's Weblog (Sophia takes a ride on the Staten Island Ferry, New York)***

*The AHRC is very victim orientated...and is more of the view that it is necessary to understand the individual circumstances of the victims to identify systemic problems and develop adequate solutions. After all human rights is the protection of the rights of the individual and academic research is only useful in so far as one can provide practical solutions for those individuals and create widespread change. I will probably be going to India to do some hands on work...to collect information on victim and localized problems." **Shahaan Murray's Weblog (Shahaan shares lunch with Justice DK Basu, retired judge of the Calcutta High Court and well-known Human Rights activist.)***