

# Working at the Coalface of International Justice

## Careers Seminar: Gideon Boas

By Jess O'Brien

As part of the Castan Centre's Human Rights Career Series, Monash graduate Gideon Boas returned to Clayton to speak about his experiences in international law. Gideon's informative and very entertaining lecture traced his own self-professed "odd" career progression, as well as discussing opportunities and obstacles for Australian lawyers and law students seeking to work in the field of international law. He noted that there is no defined or obvious career path for those seeking to enter this area, but emphasised the opportunities that are available and spoke positively of the experience of working in an international organisation.

Gideon recalled that an early formative influence on him was watching Geoffrey Robertson's "Hypothetical" on the ABC. As a law student, he helped start the Social Justice Action Group, which he says was both a form of procrastination and a way of pursuing his interest in social issues. Gideon began his legal career as a seasonal clerk at Cashman & Partners, a Sydney firm whose social justice advocacy in the media had caught Gideon's attention. He went on to complete Articles at the firm, working on areas including mass tort liability and medical negligence, as well as doing much of the legal work for Greenpeace Australia.

Gideon's jump into International Humanitarian Law (IHL) happened quite haphazardly when a friend saw an ad in *The Australian* for a position as IHL Officer at the Australian Red Cross. The friend subsequently decided the remuneration was insufficient, but neither the low pay nor Gideon's complete ignorance of IHL put him off applying for the position. He researched for the position by studying an A5 brochure about IHL retrieved from the Red Cross' office, was inter-

viewed successfully and given the job. While at the Red Cross, Gideon's work included the campaign to ban landmines, and research for the International Committee of the Red Cross' customary IHL study.

After working with the Red Cross for two years, Gideon applied for another job discovered by the same friend, this time at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Gideon spent eight years working in Chambers at the ICTY. He started as an Associate Legal Officer, and ultimately worked his way up to the level of Senior Legal Officer, which carried with it the perks of UN diplomatic status ("tax free booze"). His work at the Tribunal included such groundbreaking tasks as drafting the murder and wilful killing sections of the Celebici judgment, which was the first time an international tribunal had enumerated the elements of these crimes, and working on the Milosevic trial, the first international criminal trial of a former head of State.

Gideon discussed the opportunities for work at the ICTY and other international criminal tribunals, noting that an internship is one of the best ways for law students and young lawyers to "break in" to these international organisations. He pointed out that because of funding deficiencies, these organisations often rely heavily on unpaid interns and give them the same type of work as full-time employees. Gideon highlighted some of the obstacles for Australians in accessing international institutions, notably cost and distance. He stressed, however, that Australian lawyers are highly regarded by such institutions, partially because of the quality of the Australian legal education, and also because barriers such as cost and distance mean that the Australian lawyers and law students who do end up working at international institutions are usually very dedicated and competent.

Gideon gave some pointers for those applying to work or intern with international organisations. He stated in particular that work experience in the equivalent domestic area would be highly valued, for example someone who had worked in domestic criminal law would have an advantage when applying to the ICTY or another international criminal tribunal. He also noted that legal work experience in general would be beneficial to applicants, even if not directly related to the area, as this demonstrated that applicants had the crucial skill of being able to apply the law. Studying the relevant subjects, particularly at a postgraduate level, was also important. Gideon suggested that studying at a European university would assist applicants if they had the chance, as this would put them close to a large number of international institutions, with the opportunity of visiting and possibly undertaking an internship or seeking short term work, with a view to full time employment.

Gideon encouraged the audience to seek out work or internships in the field of international law. The key, he said, is to pursue your interests and take your opportunities when they come.



Peace Palace, site of the International Court of Justice, the Hague