



McGill Centre for Human
Rights and Legal Pluralism

Centre sur les droits de la personne
et le pluralisme juridique de McGill

International Human Rights Internships Program

2012 Report



McGill



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Melissa Austen, Ateneo Human Rights Center <i>Manila, Philippines</i>	4
Edward Bécharard-Torres, CONGEH <i>Yaoundé, Cameroon</i>	4
Roger Bill, Disability Rights International <i>Mexico City, Mexico</i>	5
Will Colish, Human Rights Watch <i>New York, United States</i>	5
Chris Durrant, Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik Legal Services <i>Nunavut, Canada</i>	6
Anne-Claire Gayet, Inter-American Court of Human Rights <i>San José, Costa Rica</i>	7
Miatta Gorvie, League Action for Persons with Disabilities <i>Kampala, Uganda</i>	7
Celina Kilgallen-Asencio, Truth and Reconciliation Commission <i>Winnipeg, Canada</i>	8
Molly Joeck, Refugee Law Project <i>Kampala, Uganad</i>	8
Jihyun Rosel Kim, HIV/AIDS Legal Network <i>Toronto, Canada</i>	9
Jeanne Mageau-Taylor, EQUITAS <i>Montreal, Canada</i>	10
Shantha Priya Morley, Equality Effect <i>Nairobi, Kenya</i>	10
Éloïse Ouellet-Décoste, LICADHO <i>Phnom Penh, Cambodia</i>	11

International Human Rights Internships Program

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Introduction

McGill University's Faculty of Law enjoys a rich tradition of human rights education and involvement. In 1992, the Faculty established a number of partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions in the global South, Canada and the United States. In 2000, the internship program became a fully credited course with formal requirements, thus allowing students to earn six credits toward the completion of the McGill B.C.L./LL.B Program. The International Human Rights Internships Program is administered by the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism.

The International Human Rights Internship Program carefully selects law students for placements as interns with NGOs and tribunals for a period of 12 weeks, giving students an opportunity to experience and contribute to the work of human rights organizations in Canada and beyond. Partner organizations provide students with practical work experience in human rights investigation, monitoring, and reporting.

Upon their return to McGill, students are required to submit an internship report describing their work and experiences. Student also must write an academic research essay supervised by a professor, on a theme linked to their summer internship.

Around the world with the student interns

The experiences of the thirteen students who were selected to participate during the summer of 2012 clearly demonstrate the broad range of opportunities that this program offers. Each student reported a rich and educational experience. Here's what they had to say.

Intern: Melissa Austen

Location: Manila, Philippines

Placement: **Ateneo Human Rights Center**

Research Paper: *The Unfinished Philippine Juvenile Justice Puzzle: the Missing Normative Piece to Restorative Youth Justice Legislation*

**Recipient of the Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik bursary*

Melissa found her experience overall positive and diverse. The Ateneo Human Rights Centre (AHRC) is a non-governmental organization located within the law faculty of Ateneo de Manila University. The AHRC focuses on research and advocacy in the areas of Children's Rights, Indigenous peoples' Rights, Women and Migrant Workers' Rights and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations human rights mechanism.

Through her work at the Women's Desk and the Children's Rights Desk, Melissa had the opportunity to develop a grassroots training program to address local access to justice challenges and to write an advisory paper for the Philippine Senate on why youth restorative justice programs should be maintained. These tasks allowed Melissa to investigate the laws and jurisprudence of a foreign legal system and deepen her understanding of how civil society organizations use international human rights instruments and laws as advocacy tools.

While drafting a petition challenging the constitutionality of a penal law discriminating against female sex workers, Melissa learned that certain more progressive arguments, such as decriminalizing sex work, would not be pursued due to significant opposition. This experience led Melissa to question how some marginalized groups, like sex workers, can best access justice when advocacy groups are unwilling to support agendas that best protect these groups' rights.

Melissa found the AHRC to be a well-organized and highly professional organization that provides very good support to its interns and which performs very important work in the region. She enjoyed living in Manila, exploring the Philippines and discovering the country's culture and fascinating history. As the ACHR is situated at the law faculty, Melissa was able to benefit from human rights guest lectures and presentations. Melissa was even able to teach a human rights course lecture on domestic children's

Intern: Edward Béchar-Torres

Location: Yaoundé, Cameroon

Placement: **CONGEH/CIAH**

Research Paper: *Finding Their Way by Conceptualizing Their Role: Court Orders and Social Rights in South Africa*

**Recipient of the Litvack Award*

During the summer of 2012, Edward worked with the Coalition of Non-Governmental Organisations and Community-Based Organisations of Cameroon working in the domain of Human Settlement (CONGEH) and its sister organization, the Collectif Inter-Africaine des Habitations (CIAH) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. CONGEH was initially established in the mid-1990s in collaboration with the government in order to address the land and property issues of Cameroon's most impoverished. Since this time, the organization's focus has shifted towards women's issues, especially matters affecting women living with HIV/AIDs.

Through his participation in this internship, Edward was able to make several meaningful contributions

to CONGEH, including assisting in the development of CONGEH's plan for the 2012-2013 year and ensuring that the plan adhered to a Performance Monitoring Framework. He also helped in drafting reports aimed at advancing vulnerable women's right to property and inheritance. Edward had the opportunity to research Cameroonian formal and customary law extensively during his internship.

Edward counsels that an intern with initiative and flexibility would be best suited to this internship. The organization dealt with some staffing difficulties and legal resources were not always available. Despite these challenges, Edwards notes that this internship provides an invaluable social and professional experience for aspiring human rights community-based lawyers.

Intern: Roger Bill

Location: Mexico City, Mexico

Placement: **Disability Rights International**

Research Paper: *Persons with Disabilities in Mexico's new penal justice system: hope for a fresh start?*

**Recipient of the Lord Reading Society Award*

Disability Rights International (DRI) has the specific mandate of protecting the rights of vulnerable people with disabilities, especially individuals with mental and psychosocial disabilities. DRI focuses its scarce resources and time primarily towards ending systemic abuse of people with disabilities in Latin America.

Roger spent most of his time on two large projects. The first project saw Roger researching and writing a report on the global implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This experience enabled Roger to analyze the improvements Mexico has made to adhere to its obligations under the UNCRPD. This allowed him to see just how deplorable conditions are for persons with disabilities in the country. For his second main project, Roger collaborated on an application to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) requesting precautionary measures to protect the lives of over 300 internees at the

Federico Mora National Mental Health Hospital in Guatemala City from gross human rights abuses. This project allowed him to develop and refine his legal training in research and writing.

Roger also assisted the director of Mexico's DRI office prepare for a conference on the "Paradigm Shift from Social Welfare to Disability Rights." For this conference he undertook research into two IACHR decisions which demonstrate the shift in legal thinking towards the concept of rights owed to persons with disabilities and away from the idea of welfare obligations applicable to these individuals.

Roger feels that his internship with DRI was everything and more. Although he did not have prior familiarity with the subject area, following his internship Roger reports that he feels quite comfortable in disability rights discourse, and his world perspective about human rights generally has transformed in very positive ways.

Intern: Will Colish

Location: New York City

Placement: **Human Rights Watch**

Research Paper: *The International Criminal Court in Guinea: A Case Study of Complementarity*

**Recipient of the Nancy Park Award*

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a global organization which advocates for and defends human rights on a global scale. Beginning in 1978 as Helsinki Watch, the organization originally focused on the observance of the Helsinki Accord, and combined with other regional watch committees to form HRW in 1988. HRW hosts over one hundred interns at its New York office each year.

Will found the work to be both challenging and varied, and as a result acquired new competencies in the area of international criminal law. His work focused on either countries under examination by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and countries facing strong pressure to subject themselves to the ICC's jurisdiction.



Will attending a LGBT March in New York City.

In one project, Will drafted a report on Guinea's efforts to investigate a large massacre and public rapes that took place in September 2009. Much of this work was in French and, as Guinea is a civil law country, he felt that McGill interns could expect to receive assignments that draw on the strengths of McGill's bilingual and bilingual program.

One of the most exciting times during his internship was when the international justice division was rushing to release a statement on a current news event which gave Will a sense of how seriously the organization takes itself as an important voice in global matters. Will occasionally had the opportunity to draft sections of news releases, an

opportunity to draft sections of news releases, an exercise which helped him pay attention to his writing.

Will found the working conditions at HRW to be excellent and the office staff kind and welcoming. While it is expensive to live in Manhattan, the intern can save money by accessing less expensive restaurants, grocery stores and free entertainment available in New York City.

Intern: Chris Durrant

Location: Nunavut, Canada

Placement: Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik Legal Services

Research Paper: "None of that Paper Stuff Works": An Anti-Essentialist and Anti-Colonial Analysis of Efforts to End Domestic Assault in Nunavut

**Recipient of the Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik bursary*

Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik Legal Services provides criminal law, family law, poverty and civil law services to the population of the Baffin Region of Nunavut. Maliiganik works with two other legal aid clinics which service other parts of the territory. All three clinics work under the Nunavut Legal Services Board, which is a statutorily created body mandated to provide the best quality legal services that the circumstances allow to eligible individuals.

Chris believes this internship would be an excellent opportunity for anyone who has an interest in criminal law and litigation or aboriginal peoples and their intersection with the law. As an intern, Chris was able to interact one-on-one with individuals facing criminal charges, including representing them in the Justice of the Peace Court, and doing research for experienced and talented lawyers.

His main tasks centered on bail hearings. For summary and hybrid offences, Chris had the opportunity to do all of the work including representing his client in court. He also assisted lawyers by doing preparatory work for indictable offences. During his internship, Chris learned how to more effectively communicate with lawyers about clients and was able to improve his courtroom techniques.



Chris hanging out near ice in Frobisher Bay.

Chris' primary insight into human rights from his experience was the strengths and weaknesses of legal aid clinics for advancing human rights in an environment like Nunavut. In light of the distinct socio-economic and cultural realities in the territory, lawyers are able to make some gains—such as ensuring that evidence obtained through an unreasonable search is not used at trial and addressing instances of police brutality. But the legal aid clinics remain stuck, having to work in a justice system that is colonially imposed with few restorative elements.

Intern: Anne-Claire Gayet

Location: San José, Costa Rica

Placement: **Inter-American Court, San José, Costa Rica**

Research Paper: *Contexts of Structural Discrimination in the Jurisprudence of the IACHR*

**Recipient of the Novak-Weil Award*

Anne-Claire trouvait son stage à la Cour interaméricaine des droits de l'homme durant l'été 2012 une expérience enrichissante tant sur le plan professionnel que personnel et humain. Établie en 1979, la Cour interaméricaine des droits de l'homme est une institution judiciaire autonome de l'Organisation des États américains. Sa fonction est d'appliquer et d'interpréter la *Convention Américaine des Droits de l'Homme* et quelques traités régionaux.

L'expérience lui a exposé à une variété de tâches exercées par les avocats de la Cour, des tâches de la recherche jurisprudentielle, la réalisation de mémos sur divers sujets et la rédaction de parties de décisions, et des tâches de nature plus administratives quoique reliées à l'analyse et la vérification de la preuve. Ce stage lui a permis de développer des liens avec des avocats et des étudiants en droit de divers pays d'Amérique Latine, des États-Unis et de la France, ce qui a donné lieu à des échanges culturelles, culinaires, et des réflexions juridiques internationales.

Some of the highlights of her internship include attending court hearings and seeing a traditional



Anne-Claire visiting the Irazu volcano.

Mayan ceremony on the patio of the Court.

Listening to victims tell their stories helped Anne-Claire realize the importance of the cases before the Court. Anne-Claire made the most of weekends by exploring Costa Rica, discovering the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, and using these opportunities to practice her daily Spanish.

Intern: Miatta Gorvie

Location: Kampala, Uganda

Placement: **Legal Actions for Persons with Disabilities**

Research Paper: *Disability rights in Uganda: Challenging the opposition of culture and law*

**Recipient of the Rathlyn Award*

Miatta spent three months interning at the Legal Action for Persons with Disabilities (LAPD) in Kampala, Uganda. Founded in 2005, LAPD has used legal approaches to improve the well-being of persons with disabilities in Uganda. The organization serves several goals, including providing free legal aid to poor persons with disabilities, monitoring legislative compliance, lobbying and raising public awareness about

During her internship, Miatta's activities primarily involved shadowing a legal officer through the course of his work. She occasionally had the opportunity to sit in on client intake meetings and accompany the lawyer to court. Miatta also assisted in the drafting of legal documents to assist the expedition of legal proceedings. Near the end of her internship, she attended a meeting of a

parliamentary working group which was discussing amendments to the national electoral scheme that related to persons with disabilities.

At times Miatta felt that she did not have enough responsibility or assignments, in part because of the unpredictable nature of legal aid work.

Intern: Molly Joeck

Placement: **Refugee Law Project**

Research Paper: *Gender Inequality and NGOs in Africa*

**Recipient of the Novak-Weil Award*

The Refugee Law Project is an organization based in Kampala, Uganda, which works to ensure the respect and implementation of the rights of all forced migrants in Uganda as prescribed by international and domestic law.

Molly was placed in the legal and psychosocial department, a client-based department, providing various services to the city's urban refugee population. In her role, Molly assisted refugees seeking appeals and this involved researching the appeal process in Uganda and to find the best way to present the client's case for refugee status determination. She also assisted clients who sought resettlement and her work involved evaluating their claim for resettlement. As part of her internship, Molly participated in meetings with other Kampala-based refugee organizations including the UNHCR, the African Treatment Centre for Torture and others.

However, in her spare time she volunteered to create summaries of the cases that LAPD had managed to provide a snapshot of all of the areas already covered. Miatta also suggests that it would be beneficial for future interns to have a solid background in disability issues.

Location: Kampala, Uganda



Molly Joeck with four of her coworkers at RLP.

Intern: Celina Kilgallen-Asencio

Placement: **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**

Research Paper: *Towards Meaningful Reconciliation in Canada*

**Recipient of the Lindsey Cameron Award*

Celina spent the summer working for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada in Winnipeg. The TRC was established as a result of the 2007 Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Settlement Agreement. Its mandate is to gather statements from IRS survivors, create a historical record of the IRS, and to raise public awareness amongst Canadians about

what happened in the 150-year history of the residential school system. In addition, the TRC guides and inspires a process of reconciliation to renew relationships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals based on mutual understanding and respect.

Location: Winnipeg, Canada

Upon arriving, Celina began work on the Missing Children Project, where she reviewed private statements in which Residential School survivors describe the psychological and physical trauma they experienced. This task proved to be very taxing emotionally, and Celina got approval to split her time between researching French-language documents from Quebec along side the Missing Children Project.

Overall, Celina describes her learning experience and working environment as positive. However, the work done at the TRC is extremely sensitive and deals with difficult issues. As such, she suggests that the intern adequately prepare for the emotionally difficult work and challenges of the work performed by the TRC intern.

Intern: Jihyun Rosel Kim

Location: Toronto, Canada

Placement: **Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

Research Paper: *Implementing Treatment as Prevention in Canada: Towards a Holistic Framework*

**Recipient of the Novak-Weil Award*

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is a non-profit organization which aims to protect the human rights of people living with HIV or who are at a great risk of HIV by the means of research, advocacy, public education and litigation. The Legal Network's focus is both domestic and international, and it has played key advisory roles to the Canadian government and the United Nations.

Rosel described her internship with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network as a transformative experience that helped her discover the rich potential of her legal education and career. Through her participation in the CHRLP internship program, Rosel was able to research numerous socioeconomic issues concerning HIV including administrative law, constitutional law, international human rights law, and the criminalization of HIV status non-disclosure. She explored how policy matters and the implementation of laws can advance or impede the human rights of individuals affected by HIV, specifically prisoners and sex workers.

As part of her internship, Rosel explored various issues, but reports that the most fulfilling project was her involvement with the Charter challenge to the absence of needle exchange programs in prisons. She also had the opportunity to be participate in creative advocacy activities including writing subtitles for a short video clip series called "Inside Stories" about the lack of clean needles in prisons. This task was instrumental in helping Rosel understand the detrimental living and



Jihyun Rosel Kim distributes information during Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network event.

health conditions of prisoners and to appreciate the Legal Network's combined approach to legal and extralegal tactics to raise public awareness.

Rosel appreciated that the staff members at the Legal Network are passionate about their cause and very knowledgeable in the field. The group stays connected to other community organizations' activities, and the working environment is one that encourages civic activism. Given the research basis of this internship, Rosel suggests that the ideal candidate should have strong research skills, work well independently, and possess good time management skills.

Intern: Jeanne Mageau-Taylor

Location: Montréal, Canada

Placement: **EQUITAS**

Research Paper: *La question LGBT au Cameroun: Réflexions sur la criminalisation des pratiques homosexuelles et sur ses effets*

**Recipient of the Justice Maurice Fish Award*

L'expérience que Jeanne a vécu à Equitas a été incroyablement enrichissante. Equitas est une organisation sans but lucratif qui avance l'égalité, la justice sociale et la dignité humaine à l'aide de multiples programmes d'éducation novateurs. Son travail chez Equitas lui a permis d'avoir une meilleure idée de ce à quoi peut ressembler le travail dans une ONG de droits humains. Cette expérience a confirmé que ce type d'environnement de travail en est un où elle j'aimerais travailler plus tard.

Comme stagiaire en éducation, Jeanne a pu participer à la préparation de deux programmes, soit le *Programme international de formation aux droits humains* (PIFDH) ainsi que le *Commonwealth Training of Youth Trainers Program*, et elle a eu l'opportunité de rencontrer plusieurs défenseurs des droits humains et spécialistes en la matière œuvrant aux quatre coins du globe.



During her internship, contributed this International Human Rights Training Program.

Jeanne trouvait que ce stage est une chance inouïe pour tous les participants et participantes de se créer un réseau de contacts extrêmement riche. Elle est reconnaissante au CHRLP de l'avoir permis de faire ce stage et elle le recommande à n'importe qui voulant être immergé dans une expérience unique, riche en émotions et où d'innombrables découvertes sont garanties.

Intern: Shantha Priya Morley

Location: Nairobi, Kenya

Placement: **The Equality Effect**

Research Paper: *The Equality Effect's "160 Girls" Claim: The Promise and Limits of Using Law to Fight for Social Change*

**Recipient of the Novak-Weil Award*

Priya's internship with the Equality Effect was an incredible experience that allowed her to work with people at the grassroots level while contributing to a test case litigation project on an international scale. She spent her summer in Meru, Kenya working on the Equality Effect's "160 Girls" project which aims to hold the Kenyan government accountable for its failure to protect female children from defilement (girl child rape). Specifically the claim looks at police failure to adequately investigate cases of sexual violence against girls.

Priya's work consisted in court monitoring, gathering evidence through field work, and providing legal support to the case's lead lawyer. She was able to co-draft a factum for a constitutional challenge

and witness firsthand the nuts and bolts of litigation strategy through her experience.

Priya found her relationship with the other Equality Effect workers to be very rewarding. Given the emotional challenges of hearing stories of sexual assault of children, Priya was glad to have the support of her fellow intern and the social workers.

The internship gave Priya the opportunity to work simultaneously with a grassroots organization and an international human rights organization on the same important issue. This aspect of the internship demonstrated the importance of the grassroots approach to human rights work, which is fundamental to meet the needs of the people it is meant to reach.

Intern: Éloïse Ouellet-Décoste

Location: Phnom Penh

Placement: **Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)**

Research Paper: *Forced Evictions & Grassroots Resistance in Phnom Penh: Lessons for advancing the rule of law in Cambodia weak and captured states and captured states*

**Recipient of the Wiseman Award*

Éloïse spent the summer at the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO). Established in 1992, LICADHO is a prominent human rights organization in Cambodia. It has been at the forefront of efforts to promote governmental and institutional respect for civil, political, economic, and social rights through two programs: the Monitoring & Protection Program and the Promotion & Advocacy Program. The Monitoring and Protection Program collects information about and investigates human rights violations perpetrated by the State. The Promotion and Advocacy Program advocates domestically and internationally to raise awareness about specific human rights violations and issues.

Her main work was to prepare a bi-annual report of the threats and attacks against human rights defenders. Éloïse saw this report through from the initial research stage all the way to the final editing stage.

She specifically enjoyed learning about the daily inner workings of a successful human rights organization that excels in local grassroots and high-level international advocacy. LICADHO has an important strength – its reputation. It is respected by local and international groups alike. Community members who are victims of human rights abuses feel comfortable that they can turn to the organization for help. Furthermore, its voice reaches international organizations, embassies, and UN agencies.

According to Éloïse the work environment at LICADHO is quite flexible and casual. She found Phnom Penh to be an easy city to live in. It is full of foreign workers, interns, and volunteers and she found that there were many social activities that are easy to join.



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