

US Intern Touches Down at the Castan Centre

By Erica Contini

Having just left behind -2 degree temperatures and about 15cm of snow, the 40 degree heat hit me like a ton of bricks as I stepped foot outside the Tullamarine airport on Australia Day just gone. While my body was lagging sluggishly behind, my mind was racing ahead with anticipation and excitement. I was finally back in Australia, onto my next adventure. While this would include further academic study, I was most interested in the research work I would be doing with the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law. Having sat through hours of endless boring courses on sales, contracts, and corporations law, I was ready for a change to practical work in the area that drew me to the study of law in the first place.

While I had a general idea of the area of law I would be researching, I never realized that I would be working on projects that would lead to practical implications nor did I realize the range of issues the Castan Centre dealt with. My first project had me addressing the issue of race discrimination in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. While the research I did specifically looked at the way race discrimination is proven in the US, it



Erica attempts to prove that she's not un-Australian

might eventually be used as comparative precedent to help battle discrimination in Australia. From there I moved onto researching different State Parties' views on a draft recommendation on the Administration of Juvenile Justice under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. I then jumped into research on possible means by which to prosecute manufactures of landmines for war crimes.

Researching these three completely different areas has been rather refreshing as the subject areas I am researching are new and different from each other. It has also forced me to learn about areas of the law that up to this point I have had no exposure to. With such a strong emphasis placed by USA law schools on "passing the bar exam" (which typically tests the more 'traditional' law subjects), it seems we often fail to really learn about these other areas of the law, which, while they may not hold much weight in the eyes of the Bar Associations of the USA, are very important and play a huge role in the every day lives of many individuals.

It's great having the exposure to human rights law in a manner that combines both research and learning with a practical component. Racial discrimination will be a problem for a long time to come but perhaps the work I am doing will some day be used to finally put an end to it. Landmines indiscriminately kill innocent people every day, and any role I can take in banning their use, even to prevent the death of one innocent person, would be worth it. While the work I do won't put an end to these problems tomorrow, I believe every little bit will help, and I think that's what the members of the Castan Centre believe as well. I'm really looking forward to the rest of my short time here and hope that it continues to be the good experience it has been thus far.

Erica Contini is undertaking an internship at the Castan Centre. She is studying law at the Washington College of Law, in Washington DC.

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"The Castan Centre is unique in that it blends the intellectual rigour of human rights law and brings human rights to life in practical ways. As a place of learning and action, I have had a long and warm association with the centre. I had the honour to present their 2004 Annual Lecture, and was able to see at close hand the centre's impressive list of achievements. Their brief is wide-reaching and gives testament to the essential need for human rights scholarship and jurisprudence."

Jose Ramos Horta

Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 1996
Senior Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Timor-Leste