



Eight questions for: Adam Fletcher

What made you apply for the Accountability Project Manager position?

I've been a fan of the Castan Centre's work since I first studied human rights law during my undergrad days. I also worked for the Government for several years, and eventually decided I'd like to contribute to the other side of Australia's human rights debates.

How are you finding the job thus far?

Is this a trick question? It's great of course! Not only do I get to write about the most important human rights issues of the day in submissions and papers, I also get to give my opinion on them on the Centre's blog. When you're as opinionated as I am, that's a pretty good gig!

Who inspires you the most in the human rights field?

Over the years, both within and outside Government, I've worked with some amazing people, but perhaps the most inspiring have been my bosses: Julian Burnside QC, Geoff Skillen, Mark Thomson OBE, Dr Sarah McCosker and Professor Sarah Joseph. I must also mention Michael Kirby (AC CMG), who, during his time on the High Court, gave students like me hope for human rights in Australian law.

What did you do before working for the Centre?

I worked at the Attorney-General's Department in Canberra, specifically in the Office of International Law (aka OIL). I also took about 18 months out in 2009-2010 to work as a Legal Adviser at the Association for the Prevention of Torture in Geneva.

What was it like working in Canberra?

For those who are interested in international (and constitutional) law, Canberra presents an opportunity to be involved at the cutting edge. Canberra may not set Australia's cultural or social agenda, but to live and work there is to be at the centre of politics and (federal) law, and I learned at least as much about the law from working in the public service as I did at university.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not busy keeping the government honest?

I like mountain biking and messing around with cars - especially (slightly tragic) old Italian cars.

If you could be prime minister, what would you change?

Oh, a few little things...for starters, I'd:

- call a referendum on the insertion of a Bill of Rights into the Constitution;
- commence a thorough redraft of the Migration Act and several other pieces of legislation to reflect better our international obligations;
- increase international aid to 0.7% of GNP;
- sign an enforceable treaty with the Indigenous peoples of Australia;
- increase funding to public education, health, scientific research and associated institutions, and
- tax both pollution and resource extraction appropriately to pay for it all.

We hear you're an All Blacks fan, why's that?

I was actually born in New Zealand, and it's really not optional there!

News from our human rights community: Peace Brigades International

On 28 March this year, President Obama said that the international community faced a choice – invade Libya and oust Gaddafi or stand by and witness a massacre of unarmed civilians that would 'stain the conscience of the world.'

In 1981, a group of peace activists advocated a third choice in situations like these – send international volunteers to conflict zones to observe and assist with the movements for peace and democracy. Building on a tradition of non-violent citizen led intervention, Peace Brigades International was formed.

At that time the government of Guatemala was murdering thousands in their attempt to put down a left wing guerrilla movement, and PBI went to Guatemala to work with a support group for relatives of the disappeared called GAM. When three leaders of GAM were murdered shortly after PBI's arrival, the PBI team decided that around the clock unarmed accompaniment by PBI volunteers was the only way to keep the members of GAM safe. Since then 'protective accompaniment' has been the backbone of PBI's work.

PBI currently operates in four project countries – Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala and Nepal, providing accompaniment and security training for organisations and individuals at risk of human rights violations. We work with women's, indigenous and social justice groups and, increasingly, human rights lawyers facing threats in carrying out their work. Our project countries are supported by fifteen country groups in Europe, the United States and Australia.

Country groups, like PBI Australia, fundraise and recruit volunteers for projects, organise human rights events, and most crucially operate a political support network that can pressure host governments if our volunteers or accompanees are at risk. At the moment we are seeking legal professionals and law students to assist with starting an Alliance for Lawyers at Risk.

PBI is always looking for volunteers to work in its field projects and assist with its Australian activities. If you'd like to enquire further about getting involved, please contact Ellen Roberts at coordinator@pbi-australia.org, or check out pbi-australia.org.

Correction

An article appearing on page 16 of the May newsletter, "Getting into international humanitarian law", misstated the author of the article. The author was Laura John, not Neda Monshat.