

# 2014 Global Intern report: Human Rights First

By Ruvini Leitan

**As I'm sure most global interns feel, my time at Human Rights First has flown by incredibly quickly. It's hard to believe it has been three months, but at the same time I have been involved in so much interesting work, met a so many dedicated and inspiring individuals and become a part of a human rights organisation that really does make a difference.**

My core work assisting with intake interviews for asylum seekers has been confronting, challenging and rewarding. The three hour interviews chart clients' lives, delving into their experiences of torture, death and displacement, all in the space of an initial meeting. Taking that information and then researching the situations in their home countries to support their claims has enriched my understanding of their personal experiences and given me more general insight into these countries. I had to become something of an expert in the enforcement of China's one-child policy, the conflict in southern Yemen and gang violence in Central America, just to name a few!

This intake process feeds into a system of pro-bono representation for asylum seekers pioneered by Human Rights First. Given their limited capacity to see these cases through the US immigration court system, Human Rights First instead trains, encourages and supports lawyers from a range of commercial and other law firms to take on asylum cases. Managing the initial intake process and providing ongoing support to these lawyers ensures that the program builds capacity and interest in refugee law and uses the expertise of the Human Rights First legal team as effectively as possible.

My three months at Human Rights First has also exposed me to a range of other refugee support work. The organisation's advocacy efforts focus on domestic policy and processes in the United States, taking a targeted approach to identify concrete problems and strategies to push for change. During my time in New York the advocacy team was looking at refugee treatment and abuse at the US-Mexico border. Working with US Customs and Border Protection authorities, they were able to visit detention centres and shed light on the crowded, chaotic conditions in which individuals are given 'credible fear' interviews to ensure that those facing persecution are not returned to their home countries. These interviews are being done in open areas with no privacy for vulnerable individuals as they discuss their fears of persecution, and are even done by telephone rather than

in person, compounding language and communication barriers.

The team's main focus was on developing a blueprint document for government officials and politicians, to spell out specific problems regarding the policy and processes at the border and what actions these stakeholders need to take to address the issues, which can be found [here](#). I learned a great deal from observing and assisting the team with the research on this project, working through asylum cases that Human Rights First had taken on to support their findings at the border as well as seeing how firsthand accounts were translated into tangible advocacy goals and outcomes.

In addition to the direct knowledge and experience I gained from my time at Human Rights First, this internship also inevitably pushed me to compare and contrast the US asylum system with our own policies and procedures in Australia. While Human Rights First encounters significant policy challenges like the danger of refugees being subject to expedited removal at the border rather than being given the chance to express their fears of persecution and the ongoing problem of the one-year filing deadline which bars applications for asylum if they are lodged over a year after arrival in the US, I was also constantly reminded of Australia's shocking track record in this area. My supervising lawyers and others in the office were baffled by the notion that we detain children for longer than the few weeks they face in the US, that we send asylum seekers to remote tropical islands for years on end and that the current policy is based on a promise that no refugee arriving on a boat will ever be resettled in Australia. Explaining the political climate which has led to these extreme measures enhanced my own understanding of the issues and fuelled my own desire to return and work to demand more of Australia in this area.

In conclusion, my time at Human Rights First has been invaluable. I am incredibly grateful to Human Rights First and the Castan Centre and its supporters for the opportunity to learn, expand my experience and understanding and fuel my passion to continue working in refugee protection and human rights. The financial support in particular ensures that such opportunities are equitable, mitigating the challenges of supporting yourself whilst volunteering and especially assisting young human rights advocates from less affluent backgrounds to succeed.

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# 2014 Global Intern report: IWRAW-AP

By Sally Harris

**Having been home for two months now, I am starting to realize how much I truly learned during my internship at IWRAW-AP. This semester I'm studying several international law based subjects and it has been incredible to sit in class and hear lecturers discuss topics such as the United Nations and think 'wow I've been there and seen this in action!'**

The goal of IWRAW-AP is to achieve full human rights for women, particularly those in the Global South. The main tool that IWRAW-AP uses to do this is the CEDAW convention. CEDAW is used because it allows women to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the convention domestically and utilize it to advance their interests. Women also get the chance to sit before an international committee and demand change from their governments.