

I spent the summer of 2011 at the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center). The Center is a non-profit legal advocacy organization that uses the law to advance reproductive freedom as a fundamental right that all governments are legally obligated to protect, respect and fulfill. I was assigned to the Center's International Legal Program, which collaborates with women's advocates around the world to promote and defend internationally recognized reproductive rights.

My work schedule was organized so that I had exposure to reproductive rights issues in three regions – Europe, Latin America, and Asia – and so that I had the opportunity to work with different lawyers. I drafted a press document to publicize a recent Center victory at the European Court of Human Rights, compiled background research for a shadow letter that will be submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, summarized case law on emergency contraception for a United Nations Population Fund newsletter and researched medical confidentiality standards. The issue I found to be most interesting was United Nations (UN) advocacy. I arrived at the Center with a lot of interest in how the UN worked to protect human rights, but with only a vague understanding of what actually happened there. Through a number of research projects with the International Advocacy division, I got a clearer picture of how the UN treaty bodies function and the ways in which non-governmental organizations can help shape, promote and protect international human rights standards.

One day, the interns filed out of our Wall Street office and took the subway uptown to the United Nations Plaza. After posing for our official security passes (great souvenirs!) and passing through the various security checkpoints, we made our way to a meeting of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the government of Costa Rica. This type of meeting is where the Committee evaluates whether a State is abiding by its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. One of the tools that the Committee uses to conduct this evaluation is the "shadow letter", a letter submitted by a non-governmental organization – such as the Center. The letter outlines areas where the State may not be fulfilling their human rights obligations. The meeting was particularly meaningful for me because at this point, I had spent several weeks compiling research for a shadow letter that would be submitted to the Committee. Seeing how these letters are used in practice brought my advocacy work full circle; nothing beats seeing international law in action in order to understand how it works.

The Center ran an extensive educational program for summer interns, which was centred around a series of brown-bag lunches. The lunches were designed to give us a general perspective of all areas of the Center's work. Each week a different lawyer, from either the United States Legal Program or the International Legal Program, gave a presentation on her practice area. The lunches were a great way to learn about issues I didn't have a chance to explore through work projects. For me, this meant learning about reproductive rights issues in the American context. It was fascinating to learn just how heated the political controversy is over reproductive rights in the United States, especially in comparison to international human rights norms. For example, this summer the Center kicked off a "Trust Texas Women Campaign" to fight an intrusive bill that would prevent Texas women from getting an abortion unless she first has an ultrasound and listens to her doctor describe the image in detail, even if she says no. Following the Texas Campaign in the courts and in the media, was an exciting way to see how the

law can be used to protect women's human rights in the domestic context.

Last, but certainly not least, the people I worked with at the Center were very helpful and informed. The lawyers and support staff gave the interns a very warm welcome. They hosted welcome and farewell parties for us, and they planned special summer social events including a karaoke night in Times Square and a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge to enjoy a slice of world famous Grimaldi's pizza (delicious). Each intern was assigned a formal summer mentor, but the open and friendly atmosphere at the office also resulted in a lot of informal mentoring opportunities. Everyone from the most senior to the most junior lawyer was excited that we were around, and was happy to answer questions about their careers and practice areas over a cup of coffee. I should also mention the wonderful group of summer interns. It was inspiring to go to work everyday with a group of smart and driven peers who want to work in international human rights law. And, of course, New York City herself is in fine form during the summer months. On my last day of work, I sailed around the harbour on the Staten Island ferry to look up at Lady Liberty one final time. I am so grateful to the IHRP and the Center for this wonderful experience.