

Dear IHRP,

First of all, allow me to say thank you once again for funding my summer internship in Dhaka. This experience was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I certainly would not have had the means to pursue this internship without the IHRP's assistance.

I will begin by discussing the extent to which I reached my personal goals over the summer, and will then evaluate my host organization and my overall learning experience.

### **My Personal Goals**

At the beginning of the summer, I set a number of goals for myself to ensure that I knew what I was hoping to get out of this experience. Although I know this was not required by the IHRP, it has really helped me measure my level of satisfaction. In particular, it has helped me put things in perspective, and ignore minor problems that may have otherwise distracted me from a greater learning experience.

The first goal that I had set for myself was to create something that would be of value to my host organization, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST). I believe that I achieved this goal, as I spent a large part of my summer putting together a proposal for a computerized case management database – BLAST's first attempt at digitalizing their case files. When I left the organization, a tender had been issued for a software company to create the system, based on the information that I collected and the proposal that I wrote. If all goes well, I feel that this contribution will make a significant difference for the organization. The increased efficiency might even enable the staff lawyers to see more clients, rather than spending their time sorting through paperwork, as they do now.

The second objective that I set for myself was to practice my legal research skills. When I initially set this goal, I imagined that I would have the opportunity to perform some international or comparative research on human rights issues. In the end, I did develop my research skills, but not those that I expected: instead of performing documentary research, I learned how to conduct interviews with lawyers, activists and other experts. The purpose of these interviews was to write a research paper on the use of medical evidence in rape trials. In the end, although I do wish that I had gained some experience doing documentary research, I am also happy to have acquired skills that are crucial to conducting field research. The findings that I gathered through all my interviews may also be the basis of a directed research project this year.

The third goal that I set for myself was to develop cross-cultural communication skills. Working with Bengalis was definitely a huge culture shock for me: things that seemed

normal to all my colleagues (like walking into someone's office without knocking, even when the door was closed) were incomprehensible to me at the beginning of the summer. With time, I started to mimic some of the behaviour that I saw in the office, and, to some extent, to understand it. However, I think the 12-week period for which I was there was too short a time to really adapt to the cultural differences. Another major barrier to my cultural adaptation was the fact that few Bangladeshis speak more than basic English (even the highly educated lawyers with whom I worked). I also spoke very little Bangla. Unfortunately, I think this inability to discuss my confusion with colleagues limited my ability to adapt to certain cultural quirks.

The fourth goal that I was hoping to achieve through this internship was to gain a better sense of the type of career that I would like to pursue after graduation. In particular, I wanted to get an idea of whether I would enjoy working for an NGO, and whether I would enjoy working in a developing country. I think that I achieved this particular goal because I can now answer both these questions with relative certainty: I would definitely work in an NGO, but not in a developing country.

The fifth and final goal that I set for myself was to walk away from the internship with something tangible. While I was always happy to perform tasks that benefited the organization, I also wanted to work on projects that I could look back on when the internship was over and be proud of. I think that I accomplished this to a certain extent by completing my research paper on medical evidence and rape trials. However, I did write the paper relatively quickly (due to the project getting off the ground late into the summer), and I am not completely satisfied with the quantity and quality of research that I was able to conduct. I am still hoping to pursue a directed research on this topic later this year.

## **The Organization**

The organization that I worked for, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), performs truly inspiring and commendable work. For the most part, their staff – both lawyers and others – was friendly and welcoming, despite speaking only broken English. I felt at ease in the office and also felt that my contributions were appreciated by others.

## **What I've Learned**

To conclude, I would also like to highlight some of the things that I have learned this summer. In terms of substantive law, I learned about sexual violence laws in Bangladesh, as well as laws generally on violence against women. I also performed a literature review for a study on human rights in Bangladesh, and was able to learn about the nature and extent of

rights violations in a number of different fields. I also learned some of the basics of international human rights law through a presentation that I prepared with a co-intern.

In terms of soft skills, I also believe that I improved my cross-cultural communication skills, despite some difficulties in surmounting the language barrier. At the very least, I think that I was able to develop certain strategies to deal with cultural differences. I am also proud to have learned some basic Bangla.

Finally, the life experience that I gained through this internship is invaluable. I learned so much about myself (both good and bad), and learned to appreciate many things that I used to take for granted.

Thank you for this unforgettable experience!



