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International Center for Transitional Justice

As societies make the transition from dictatorship and democracy, from war to peace, an examination of often deeply permeated/entrenched injustices is necessary. The International Center for Transitional Justice is a non-governmental organization that assists countries in pursuing accountability for the human rights abuses that often rise from repressive rule and armed conflict. The organization works directly with nations, providing governments and non-governmental organizations with comprehensive legal and policy analysis, documentation, and comparative information. The ICTJ also works with established democratic societies that continue to struggle with a legacy of violence, fear, and systemic insecurity. “The ICTJ assists in the development of strategies for transitional justice comprising five key elements: prosecuting perpetrators, documenting violations through non-judicial means such as truth commissions, reforming abusive institutions, providing reparations to victims, and advancing reconciliation.” In the long term, the organization’s stated aims are to help prevent future human rights violations by strengthening the very policies that effectively address their impact and legacy. ICTJ also aims to increase the overall international understanding of the transitional justice field so that policy developments are grounded in a clear knowledge of best practice and a nuanced appreciation of local and global conditions.

The office has a decidedly international flair. On any given day, half of the associates are abroad attending conferences, meeting with government officials and consultants on the ground. Its relatively small size (25 full time staff) lends itself nicely to a friendly community atmosphere. It is the type of place where everyone knows each other’s name. The interns are encouraged to attend the bi-monthly staff meetings. The meetings themselves are thoughtfully and effectively organized, with each associate explaining their current projects and reporting on their travels. Through these meetings, I was able to gain a fuller understanding of the field and the breadth and density of the organization’s work.

The organization’s documentation center proved to be a vital tool. The center is comprised of an extensive book library on the field and related topic and a collection of

internal and external reports, from the final findings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Iraqis' receptivity to tentative transitional justice initiatives. Also available is an extensive video collection of Truth Commission hearings and topic reports. This proved helpful when beginning my internship last June. After doing background reading on the field, it was crucial to my understanding to see an actual hearing unfold, complete with all its shortcomings and challenges.

My internship experience at the International Center for Transitional Justice was divided between the Communications Department and the Outreach/Analysis Department. Headed by Susana Grego, Communications focuses on various ICTJ publications (such as the annual report) and press relations. My tasks and challenges varied widely as they spanned from database updates to annual report design contributions. Some of my time was spent working on press kits, electronic press kits, obtaining contact information from media outlets through the world, and deciding which reporters would be most appropriate for various events. During the earlier portion of my time at ICTJ, I helped to organize a conference at the United Nations marking the release of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. This first event, and the Communications internship experience in general, helped me to understand the role Communications and press relations played in the mechanisms of an international non-governmental organization.

The latter halves of my weeks were spent interning with the Outreach/Analysis Department. Headed by Priscilla Hayner, the world's foremost scholar of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, the department develops exhaustive analytical reports covering a wide spectrum of the organization's work as well as working actively to expand the organization's international role. My individual tasks were focused on developing short reports with the general aim of assisting Ms. Hayner's understanding of varying issues. This portion of my internship began with a book proposal and concluded with researching the public hearings of the South African and Ugandan Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Interning with the Outreach/Analysis department provided me with a greater understanding of the extent of transitional justice initiatives and a greater appreciation of the process of reconciliation.

My internship experience with ICTJ was an invaluable opportunity and I thank Thomas Keenan and the Bard Human Rights Project for making it possible.