



Left: Sarah Placzek, JD/MSW '10, says her international clinical experiences, such as the one with a United Nations anti-human-trafficking project in Thailand, have inspired her to pursue a future career in international human rights. Right: Placzek works with clients in conjunction with her placement through the Africa Public Interest Law Initiative.



A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

International Human Rights: A Global Pursuit

By Sarah Placzek, JD/MSW '10

BEFORE ENTERING LAW SCHOOL and graduate school in social work, I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Timor-Leste, and it whet my appetite to work internationally. Although my stint was interrupted by civil unrest, the experience confirmed my belief that law and social work could be combined to effectively support peace and human development in post-conflict nations. Once I arrived at Washington University, I pursued opportunities to foster my goal of a career in international human rights.

Following my first year of law school, I did a summer internship at the Legal Resources Centre in Accra, Ghana, through the Africa Public Interest Law Initiative, coordinated by Professors Karen Tokarz and Kimberly Norwood. I engaged in human rights education with various community-based organizations working to gain better access to health care and to combat repressive widowhood rites. Through this experience, I learned the importance of linking community concerns to national policy development in order to better protect economic, social, and cultural rights of the less privileged.

As an intern with the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) in Bangkok, Thailand, after my second year, I assisted in the design and implementation of a research study aimed at assessing the influx of Cambodian deportees from Thailand and establishing the level of unidentified or misidentified trafficking victims within these deportees. I also initiated a media project that would enable victims entering shelters to gain more information about their rights through an illustrative video available in multiple languages.

My capstone learning experience, however, was my semester externship in the spring of my fourth year at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in the Appeals and Legal Advisory Division within the Office of the Prosecutor. I received this

assignment through the law school's new International Justice & Conflict Resolution Field Placement, facilitated by Professors Karen Tokarz and Leila Nadya Sadat. After studying international criminal law at Washington University, I was excited to utilize what I had learned in the classroom and to further my understanding of international justice systems.

Being a small part of the tribunal's work provided invaluable insight into the challenges Rwanda and the international community face in working to end impunity and support lasting peace. I realized the historic significance of the tribunal for setting a strong precedent for the International Criminal Court and national jurisdictions; there is much to learn from the tribunal's achievements, as well as its disappointments.

MY SEMESTER at the tribunal also provided practical work experience relevant to both domestic and international legal work—I conducted legal research and analysis, drafted appellate briefs, participated in oral advocacy training, and practiced on a multinational team.

I had amazing international learning experiences through the law school in large part because of the support and professional connections of my international and clinical faculty mentors. I am grateful for these unique learning experiences and the many efforts of my professors to ensure international opportunities designed to advance my career goal.

After graduation, I accepted a two-year clerkship with a judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals in my hometown, Springfield, Missouri, where my brother, sister, and father, Mathew Placzek, JD '73, practice law. I am enjoying this period of time to refine my research skills, reconnect with my family, and refuel for what I hope is a meaningful career in international human rights. ||||

Former international extern Sarah Placzek, JD/MSW '10, is currently clerking for Judge William W. Francis, Jr. of the Missouri Court of Appeals for the Southern District.