

From its inception as one of the first human rights clinics at a U.S.-based law school, CUNY Law's International Women's Human Rights Clinic has pursued a multifaceted strategy to access justice, paying particular attention to the intersections of race, gender, and class worldwide. The clinic's innovative legal advocacy and in-depth collaborations with clients, activists, and co-counsel in diverse and multicultural settings are distinct marks of its groundbreaking work in the areas of violence against women and reproductive, sexual, and economic justice.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Students In Their Own Words

A conversation with third-year law clinic students Farnoosh Moghadassi and Renee Love

What inspired you to choose the International Women's Human Rights (IWHR) Clinic as your clinic placement?

FARNOOSH: I chose to attend this law school specifically for the IWHR Clinic, as it is one of the few human rights clinics in the U.S. that focuses on women's rights. Being from Iran, a country with an oppressive patriarchy where conservative rulers have stripped women of their basic rights, opened my eyes to the many injustices faced by women throughout the world. I wanted to join the IWHR Clinic in order to acquire a foundational knowledge of international law and to gain the capacity to challenge injustice through creative, strategic thinking. In addition, I wanted to learn more about particular issues such as trafficking, gender discrimination, religion, and culture as they relate to international human rights law.

RENEE: I chose to go to law school after living in an impoverished area in the former Soviet Union for two years and witnessing firsthand what women's lives are like when they are not given the same rights as men, or don't have the same access as men to a better life. This is also why I chose the International Women's Human Rights Clinic. Through the clinic, we are able to learn about different human rights and different techniques and venues to advocate for those rights. The clinic also introduces us to options for fighting for international human rights laws and norms domestically in the United States, which hopefully I will be able to do after law school.

What are you working on in the clinic?

FARNOOSH: I'm currently working on the case of a young woman who was trafficked to the United States from her home in South America when she was 16 years old. She was falsely promised that she would be paid to take care of her stepsister's newborn infant and that she would have the opportunity to go to high school in the United States. This action was brought under federal and state wage and hour laws, pursuant to the Alien Tort Claims Act for trafficking, slavery, forced labor, involuntary servitude, unjust enrichment, and state torts. At this point, we are preparing for oral arguments on a summary judgment motion. This case is important because while trafficking within families is a common occurrence, it has been overlooked by the legal system. This case shows that abuse and exploitation of domestic workers occurs not only in traditional settings but also among family members.

RENEE: My group and I have teamed up with the Nobel Women's Initiative to present the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women of Burma, which was held in New York City in March 2010. This project consisted of doing a lot of research on international human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. We also worked with the judges, who were Nobel laureates and human rights advocates, to determine what the findings were and what the recommendations should be for addressing these human rights issues. Currently, we are working on the final judgment, which will explain the facts, taken from the testimonies and human rights reports; the international criminal law and human rights violations that apply to Burma; and the findings and recommendations from the judges. The most memorable part was that we were able to work with the testifiers before the tribunal to make sure their stories were told to the world. ●●



Farnoosh Moghadassi

Renee Love