

HRLA Report

Firstly, I would like to send my most sincere thanks to HRLA for awarding me with this much needed, and hugely prestigious, bursary award. The costs of travelling and living in a place such as the West Bank were hugely subsidised by this award enabling me to fully immerse my time in the internship.

Who are DCI?

Defence for Children International are an international NGO, based in Geneva, with offices operating in 45 countries. DCI-Palestine Section (DCI-PS) seeks to promote and protect the rights of Palestinian children in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as other international, regional and local standards. DCI-PS operates in the West Bank mainly, with field workers in Gaza and East Jerusalem as well. The main areas DCI-PS focus on are: Settler and Soldier Violence, Human Shields, Child Detention and Fatalities & Injuries. The organisation has various aims which range from child protection to accountability of primary duty-bearers. My exposure, however, was centred around the organisation's documenting and advocacy department where it produced reports commissioned by various international organisations and case studies for its website.

What I was doing?

For the first week I was given the very harrowing task of reading affidavits taken from parents who had lost their children after Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. My task was to read the statements and convert them into case studies which were concise enough to be put on their website. Having to read such graphic and emotive statements one after the other was a very blunt way to break me into the type of work DCI did. Beyond this, the task of shortening the affidavits into powerful case studies was quite a difficult task in itself. Which sentences do you remove when all describe terrible events? I had to implement a combination of arbitrariness and a certain degree of desensitisation to cut the sentences and produce a powerful yet concise case study. This was a skill that helped me in later such tasks where I was working on more case studies regarding children being used as human shields by the Israeli Army.

After the first week, members of staff started to give me more complex and lengthy projects to work on due to my legal background. This put me right into the core of studying and analysing the Israeli occupation within a legal, mainly international law, context. One of my main tasks was to proof read a UNICEF-commissioned report on the Palestinian Juvenile Justice System. This introduced me to the basic legal framework of the Palestinian justice system and how international law was integrated within domestic law. In this report I was also asked to cross-reference the law used, which meant that I had to check whether every mention of a law, regulation, ordinance, section, article or Treaty really did state what was written about it. I was asked to help improve the legal language of the report as not all staff members came from legal backgrounds and the terminology in these reports matter a great deal.

Some of the staff members were interested in my English legal background and asked me to compile a précis on the English juvenile justice system and its procedural framework. Specifically, I was told to focus on rights and duration, such as the right to have someone notified immediately of a

juvenile's arrest, the right to have someone present in interviews and how long a juvenile could be detained lawfully. This was valuable for the organisation as they could compare the procedure in England and Wales with that of the Israeli and Palestinian juvenile system. With this comparison data, a good case could be made that both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government needed to improve their efforts on incorporating international legal standards.

One of the big tasks of DCI was to push the Israeli military authorities to install audio-visual recordings in their interview rooms. There were 2 reasons for this; firstly, many children who were arrested by the Army reported being coerced into confessions, insulted, beaten and tortured during their interrogation. If such activities were happening, which the Israeli Army usually denied, then audio-visual recording would provide solid evidence for such human rights abuses. Secondly, it provided protection for the interrogating officers in instances where a juvenile did make false accusations. To create a convincing argument for the organisation to use, I was asked to write a small report on the development of audio-visual recordings in the UK. To do this, I delved into the past and studied the miscarriages of justice which concerned procedural impropriety. This mainly meant researching IRA cases of innocent men and women who were wrongly convicted, such as the Guildford Four. I trawled through Hansard and found statements from MPs who initiated the need for audio-visual recording in interviews.

After getting my first experience of proof reading and editing an NGO report I was asked to redraft another commissioned report on Palestinian children being used as 'human shields'. This was a big responsibility, to bring a skeletal report of such importance to a stage of a final draft version. I first spent a few days reading as much literature I could on human shields operations in Israel and Palestine and then with a clear structure agreed with my line-manager I set about 'fleshing-out' the report to around 30 pages. By the time I left, it needed some more drafting by the staff members and the insertion of a few maps and pictures.

What I wanted to get out of the internship?

I applied for the HRLA bursary under the premise that I wanted to explore the extent of the Israeli Army's human rights abuses. Focusing on children in the West Bank was a good way of finding out to whether to what extent we, as British citizens, hear about the plight of the Palestinians was real. For these purposes, my internship did answer my questions and went beyond that by showing me a reality where for the Palestinian child, their human rights begin to be abused the moment they are arrested and thrown into the back of the military jeep. Most juveniles in the military courts, who rarely have a lawyer representing them and have no idea what is being said due to the proceedings being in Hebrew, tend to plead guilty in the hope of a shorter sentence. Most of these children were prosecuted for alleged stone throwing.

Equally, the task of upholding the human rights of these children who live in the West Bank are being flouted by the Palestinian Authority. The institutions and legal structures are relatively new, however the complexity of the region means most people are unclear which law applies to whom alongside jurisdictional issues. Through this chaos, many Palestinian children fall through the gaps and are either mistreated by the Palestinian police or are failed by the legal system in Israel.

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