

## THE LAW FOUNDATION HUMAN RIGHTS SCHOLARSHIP

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to the Law Foundation for supporting my internship at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) based in Geneva, Switzerland. I am very grateful for being selected for the scholarship and the financial support provided by the Foundation. The experience was very enriching academically, professionally and personally. I did not know what to expect going into the internship even after having read extensively about the work of UN OCHA. I sensed this next chapter would be what I made it, I therefore embarked on it with an open mind, ready to learn and be challenged into new ways of thinking, and it delivered.

OCHA is part of the Secretariat, the administrative body of the UN, responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors for a coordinated response to emergencies. OCHA's mission is to alleviate human suffering during natural disasters and complex emergencies by mobilising humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors; advocating for the rights of those in need; promoting preparedness and prevention and facilitating sustainable solutions. This mandate is achieved through five core functions: coordination, humanitarian financing, policy, advocacy and information management. I worked in the Emergency Services Branch (ESB) of OCHA, responsible for the planning and implementation of humanitarian action.

My internship was in the Activation Coordination Support Unit (ACSU) of ESB and was to be for 6 months from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 until April 30<sup>th</sup> 2017. I was tasked with assisting my supervisor on several different projects including Emergency Supplies Prepositioning Strategies (ESUPS), Customs Facilitation and Airport Efficiency. The first was classified as a Working Group, something I have come to learn the UN is very fond of creating, and the latter two were still in their infancy and classified as Focus Task Forces. These projects were initiated because coordination between humanitarian actors was lacking, wasting precious time and resources that could mean the difference between saving and losing lives. The workshops were formed for practitioners to come together and discuss the issues they face and agree on possible solutions. The forum for these discussions was the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week, an annual conference held in Geneva with the aim of facilitating year-round collaboration. The idea was that once the week was over, participants would continue to work together on the next steps discussed during the sessions. I was involved in all three and helped organise the workshops and assisted with follow up such as writing reports on meeting outcomes and commencing the next steps agreed upon in the sessions.

After 5 months, I secured a transfer to the Humanitarian Strengthening and Leadership Unit which is based in Geneva. I thought this would assist my understanding of the UN's humanitarian efforts. The unit identifies and trains high level humanitarian leaders and most of the work is highly confidential. It has clear priorities for those it selects as leaders and takes seriously the need to identify those with the necessary qualifications as well as the ability to carry out complex tasks. My work entailed working through referee reports to ensure that the Unit had the information necessary to make an informed decision. It was good to learn about the bigger picture and work with a different team to broaden my perspective and understanding of the UN system. During my time in Geneva I undertook French classes as I had realised that UN fieldwork often entails tasks in French speaking areas of Africa.

I made a point of immersing myself in the whole internship experience and all it had to offer. I believe this approach is one of the keys to an enriching experience for any future students wishing to do an internship

overseas. The work I undertook for UN OCHA influenced the substance of my LLM thesis. My work on ESUPS informed the conclusions I reached about the manner in which humanitarian aid can bring peace to conflict zones and the importance to this process of an improved preparedness response.

One of the best things about the internship was the opportunity to attend various functions, events, debates, screenings and social gatherings where I was exposed to new ideas and the chance to interact with people from a diverse range of cultural and professional backgrounds. Even though I have lived in different parts of the world I gained a much better appreciation of what it meant to be in 'the real world', something no book can adequately teach until you experience it for yourself. I gained an appreciation of my own strengths and weaknesses, the area of humanitarian work I would like to pursue, the differences in peoples' working styles and how to deal with stress in the work place. My understanding of 'the real world' has expanded significantly, for instance, the hardships and lack of opportunity faced by people simply because they were not born into a privileged family or society. This has inspired me even further to try to make a difference in the lives of people who are not afforded opportunities similar to mine.

All in all, the internship has been an immensely positive experience but like any new venture it was not without its challenges; challenges which have caused me to rethink and reprioritise what matters to me personally and professionally. I would highly recommend any graduate considering an internship with the UN or international NGO to take the opportunity such an internship provides to broaden their horizons.

Rebecca Hall, May 2017

