

2018 Summer Fellowship Reflection
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This past summer, I was awarded with the Gonzaga School of Law's Center for Civil and Human Rights Fellowship and was provided with the opportunity to return to Afghanistan and work with Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA). In my role as a legal intern in IWA's judiciary monitoring program, I was able to understand the great barriers the legal system suffers due to high corruption and lack of accountability of judiciary members who abuse their powers. My position at IWA involved reviewing the data from the court monitors to identify the most common procedural and civil right violations, and then provided suggestions on the action IWA should take to address these matters.

My initial task with IWA was to familiarize myself the past procedural violations noted by court monitors, and then cross examine this information with the most current court monitoring data. This process allowed to me identify what the most common violations were, and whether the violations continued to occur even after IWA's involvement. From analyzing the data, I feel extremely fortunate for the legal system that exists in North America, and now have an even greater desire to mend the systems elsewhere to ensure that the liberties and rights of individuals are not being infringed on during their encounters with the justice system.

During my internship I also helped in writing a concept note to promote the idea of Open Justice Reform in Afghanistan. I enjoyed this assignment because I was able to use my own legal knowledge and provide justification on the importance of such a reform and discuss the benefits it will have to the rule of law in a conflict-stricken country like Afghanistan. The report took extensive research, including interviewing relative judiciary members, prosecutors, local lawyers, legal experts and numerous local and international NGOs active within the country, to obtain a greater understanding. This report is still in the process of being completed and will later be distributed to funding organizations, including USAID and US Institute of Peace, and international organizations, such as UNAMA.

From my experience in Afghanistan and working with the Afghan community, I understand how detrimental a weak legal system can be on the people it was designed to protect, and thus I am dedicated to improving such systems. Learning about the basic violations that

occur in the judiciary system was surprising. One of the constant violations noted was judges holding trials in their chambers rather than the constitutional required public courtroom. This concern was addressed numerous times in monthly judiciary- IWA committee meetings, and the judges would say that security and confidentiality were their greatest concerns, but promised to no longer follow such practices. However, it was evident from later obtained data that the violation continued to occur. From reading the responses of the judges, I felt as if the judges did not understand the importance of holding trials publicly for transparency and accountability reasons, and that confidentiality of an entire trial proceeding was not a constitutional requirement. I also learned from this experience how important accountability of members of the judiciary and the government is to combat wide-spread corruption and to rebuild a struggling society's trust in the legal system. Some judiciary members felt as if they were entitled to do anything they pleased because of their title. I tried to explain in my concept note that lack of accountability is one of the greatest concerns that needed to be addressed when reforming Afghanistan's justice system because its citizens constantly expressed their unwillingness to go through the legal system because of the "power" judges and governmental officers had. This was a devastating thing to learn because even though I have concerns regarding our justice system at times, it has never been to the level the Afghan citizens have felt. I now have some insight into those living in a society where they have little faith in their government and the justice system, and it has made me want to do more to aid these citizens.