**2025 Summer Fellowship Final Report**

International Human Rights Program (IHRP)

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This summer, I was one of four In-House Fellows working with the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. The 14-week-long fellowship provided an excellent opportunity to conduct legal research related to international human rights issues, travel internationally to meet with communities whose rights are violated, and work directly with experienced lawyers and members of non-governmental organizations who are dedicated to fostering meaningful social change. This unique experience solidified my passion for human rights work and opened my eyes to new areas of human rights law: a fascinating, multi-faceted field.

*Image 1: Me (far left) standing with Lola, Iryn, and Alysha, this year's In-House Fellows.*

**Fellowship Overview**

The IHRP is a centre for international human rights work that brings together lawyers, faculty, law students, firms, organizations, and local communities. A key part of its mission is training the next generation of lawyers in Canada to promote and protect international human rights. It achieves this goal through a wide range of work, such as litigation, advocacy, research, and education. Its projects aim to hold Canada and Canadian actors accountable for human rights violations, within the country and across the world.

Many of this summer's projects were related to the IHRP's three main focus areas: corporate accountability, Indigenous rights, and climate justice. However, they touched on various other intersecting human rights topics, including women's rights and labour rights. Often, the work also involved researching diverse areas of the law with a connection to the IHRP's projects, such as domestic and international trade law and administrative law.

I was eager to participate in the summer fellowship to gain exposure to the complex legal work involved in bringing attention to and resolving pressing human rights issues. I am particularly interested in Canadian constitutional and Aboriginal law, so began my fellowship hoping to contribute to the IHRP's ongoing projects involving Indigenous communities in Canada and worldwide. My experience allowed me to do just that, as well as explore many other timely topics.

*Images 2 and 3: A statue of the Roman god Vulcan, representing the historic iron and steel industry in Birmingham, Alabama, and a photo of the IHRP In-House Fellows, Nabila (Research Associate at the IHRP), and James (former Acting Director of the IHRP) at Vulcan Park in Birmingham, Alabama.*

**Major Projects**

The below projects provide a snapshot of some of the work I completed during my summer fellowship. They allowed me to develop my legal research, writing, and communication skills; work collaboratively with the IHRP's partners; and gain a strong understanding of international human rights issues that have a Canadian connection.

*Researching the Line 5 Pipeline*

Given my interest in Indigenous rights, I began my fellowship by conducting research related to Line 5: a large oil and gas pipeline that is owned by a Canadian multinational corporation and passes through the Great Lakes. The IHRP has taken an active role calling on the Canadian government to decommission the pipeline, including at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to avoid a potentially catastrophic oil spill.

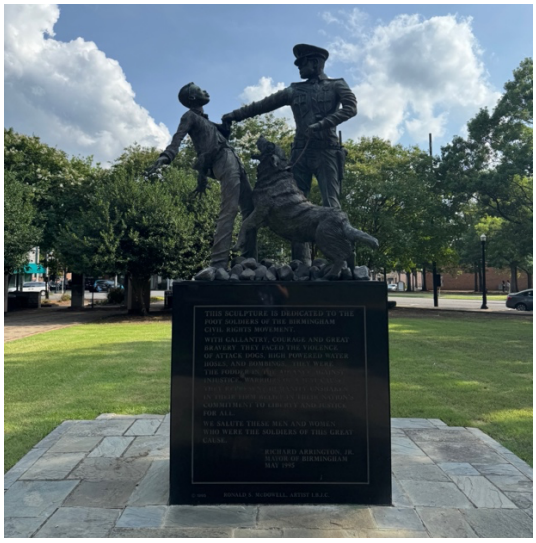
When I first began my fellowship, I enjoyed familiarizing myself with this file by researching domestic federal and provincial pipeline legislation as well as federal government policy statements related to Line 5. As my fellowship continued, I was able to connect with human rights lawyers and advocates across Canada and the United States, including representatives of Indigenous communities, to discuss my research and plan next steps for further advocacy. The opportunity to interact with those who are directly impacted by Line 5 allowed me to gain a fuller understanding of the pipeline's effects and understand the diverse considerations involved in organizing strategic, persuasive advocacy efforts.

*Drafting submissions to international and regional bodies*

Throughout my fellowship, I also drafted and revised joint submissions to international and regional bodies, including the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The submissions—some of which remain confidential—focused on different human rights complaints and involved collaboration with other In-House Fellows and human rights groups. For instance, to prepare submissions, I met with advocates from other universities and organizations to discuss the strongest possible legal arguments to hold countries and corporations accountable; reviewed affidavits from individuals and groups who believed their rights had been violated; completed or revised first drafts; and incorporated input and revisions from colleagues across the world. These experiences allowed me to explore relevant international and human rights treaties and court cases, and gain a deeper understanding of the various mechanisms available to resolve human rights issues outside of the domestic Canadian legal system.

*Drafting an upcoming IHRP report*

During the summer, the IHRP also began a new project that involved close collaboration with organizations and individuals in the United States. One of the highlights of this project—and my overall summer experience—was travelling to Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama alongside other In-House Fellows and our supervisors to gather information to be included in an upcoming IHRP report. As part of this experience, the In-House Fellows were able to participate in and lead interviews, develop connections with human rights groups, and, upon our return to Canada, draft and finalize sections of the report. This opportunity offered a fascinating glimpse at cross-border human rights concerns bridging various areas of law. During the upcoming school year, the In-House Fellows will take part in a faculty-wide event to officially launch the report and discuss our findings and recommendations.



*Images 4 and 5: The IHRP team standing outside the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and a statue "dedicated to the foot soldiers of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement" at Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama.*

**Takeaways**

I feel extremely fortunate to have participated in the IHRP's In-House Fellowship this summer. This opportunity enabled me to complete an assortment of interesting work, from conducting legal research, to drafting submissions to human rights bodies, to working with my colleagues to propose legal and policy recommendations to improve human rights situations worldwide. I am thankful to the IHRP for encouraging me to explore various human rights concerns—including those beyond my initial interest areas—and enabling me to take initiative to lead projects alongside other organizations. I strongly recommend this fellowship to any students with an interest in human rights work and advancing social justice.