

Human Rights Research

Olivia Wendel

OVERVIEW:

This past summer, I had the incredible opportunity to work with Dr. Koenig, the executive director of UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center. During this internship, I became interested in a new sector of foreign policy: human rights. Therefore, I decided to focus my capstone project around research on ongoing human rights violations through a historical context, in the hopes that this would further expand my understanding of the field and the current problems facing the world.

PREPARATION:

To avoid researching too broadly, I decided to focus on human rights violations that are officially considered "serious" or "gross", because based on the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court, a violation categorized as such mandates the Court "to protect the safety, physical and psychological well-being, dignity and privacy of victims", which fundamentally means it necessitates international actions to reduce harms and provide reparations. The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights is a renowned postgraduate joint center in Switzerland that has identified the considerations of international bodies when determining if a human rights violation can be considered "serious". The criteria taken into account is the nature of obligations engaged, scale of the violations, status of victims, and impact of the violations.



Logo for UN Human Rights Council

RESEARCH:

As I began my research into human rights violations officially considered to be "serious", I found myself temporarily overwhelmed by the sheer number and types of violations occurring in every region of the world.



Protest against the Chinese government's internment of the Uighur ethnic population.

I wanted to ensure that I explored a diversity of problems and regions in order to gain a more holistic understanding. To begin this diverse exploration, I went on the Human Rights Watch website, and began finding topics that I could use other sources to research in more depth. As I went deeper into each of my selected topics, I researched not just the current situation in the country, but the history of that particular issue/violation in that country. Once I felt that research was complete, I dove into the historical context of each violation, analyzing how, for example, ethnic cleansing campaigns of the past relate to the most well-known campaign in the present. As I furthered my research in this area, I decided I wanted to go beyond just independent research and create a website that compiled my research succinctly and allowed me to share it with others.

FINAL PRODUCT:

After going through several different website creators and formats, I finally finished creating my website: <https://thehumanrights101.weebly.com/>.

I created an introductory page, which explained the reasoning behind the website's creation and gave background on the definition of a "serious" human rights violation.

Then, I spent an embarrassingly long time trying to figure out how to create a drop down list in my menu bar, but once I mastered that technique, I was able to input my research on the following selected topics:

- Illegal Gold Mining in Venezuela
- Uyghur Muslim Detention Camps
- Lebanon Education Crisis
- Lord's Resistance Army
- Sexuality Education Ban in Brazil
- Climate Refugees



Home page of my website

After finishing the formatting on my list of selected topics, it occurred to me that I had been completely unaware of 4 out of the 6 topics prior to beginning my project. Moreover, I had had no idea that educational equality would become a central focus of my work. That being said, my research into Lebanon and Brazil highlighted the importance of creating an environment in which all children have access to well-rounded, high-quality education. For me, I became really interested in this issue because the lack of policy briefs addressing it was startling, and I couldn't understand why more people weren't heavily concerned with these disparities.

After finishing these pages, I felt discouraged, and I knew that it was likely other people reading my website could feel the same way. It's easy to feel that there is nothing we can do to solve these problems, but that's why I decided to make my final page centered around why that isn't the case. I have a list of organizations to donate to that are helping fight these issues, and I also provide an array of local volunteer organizations where readers can get involved with a group that helps vulnerable populations, like refugees and queer children.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS 101



How An Individual Can Help

Top of Creating Change page on my website

NEXT STEPS:

Creating a website is far from the end of my journey with human rights. Next year, I plan to major in political science and gain a far more educated perspective on these issues through classes, internships, and a semester in Washington D.C. Assuming all goes to plan, I will be able to continue my interest in human rights and its relationship to the law in law school, where I hope to gain the qualifications to begin assisting on real cases and minimizing the harms occurring globally as a human rights lawyer.