Penn Law Global Institute for Human Rights

May 22–26, 2017

Skadden Arps, New York
The 2017 Penn Law Global Institute for Human Rights

brought together Penn Law faculty, leading human rights practitioners, United Nations officials, and attorneys actively working on human rights cases to train and engage with the next generation of human rights advocates. Led by Associate Dean Rangita de Silva de Alwis of Penn Law, the institute took students far beyond the traditional academic study of human rights, exposing them to the complex realities of front-line human rights advocacy. The 2017 institute focused on the issues of women’s rights, migrant and refugee rights, and business and human rights.

The 25 students invited to the program were chosen based on their exceptional academic achievements and their proven commitment to advancing a variety of human rights causes. Most of the students were completing their undergraduate degrees, while a few were early-career professionals either already working in the human rights field, or looking for a career in human rights advocacy.

We are at a pivotal moment in the development of human rights advocacy, and there has never been a more urgent need to train the next generation of human rights advocates.

― Rangita de Silva de Alwis
Women’s Rights

Dean de Silva de Alwis introduced the Institute students to the critical norms of international women’s rights with a special emphasis on studying the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Paloma Duran, Director of the UN Sustainable Development Goals Fund, then joined the Institute to give a lecture on Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the afternoon, the Institute was honored to welcome Farahnaz Ispahani, former member of the National Assembly of Pakistan and Media Advisor to the President of Pakistan, former Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and a distinguished journalist and author. Ms. Ispahani led a difficult but necessary discussion on the horrors of honor killings and acid crimes.
Migrant and Refugee Rights

Professor Sarah Paoletti, Director of Penn Law’s Transnational Legal Clinic, joined the institute on the third day to outline the unique challenges facing migrants and refugees in today’s turbulent political climate. She was later joined by her former student Natasha Arnpriester L’16, current Chubb Rule of Law Fellow at Human Rights First, who gave a first-hand account of her experience working with Syrian refugees in Greece.

In the afternoon, the students were given an inside look at how a top, multinational law firm such as Skadden Arps contributes to the fight for human rights. Skadden Associate Elena Coyle gave the students an account of the work she does for asylum applicants in New York City, who often find themselves facing a language barrier as well as legal barriers in their search for a new home away from the horrors of war.

In one of the highlights of the institute, Skadden Litigation Partner Eben Colby gave an inside account of the groundbreaking $20 million settlement in the labor trafficking case involving Signal International, a marine construction firm based in Mobile, Alabama. Mr. Colby led a coalition of top law firms in their coordinated effort with the Southern Poverty Law Center and the ACLU in their legal battle against Signal International. After reviewing 2.5 million documents and conducting 90 days of depositions, this coalition was able to bring a much-needed measure of justice for the hundreds of Signal workers who were fraudulently induced into working for Signal by false promises of permanent resident status in the United States.
On the fourth day, the institute welcomed Ursula Wynhoven, Chief of Social Sustainability, Governance, and Legal for the UN Global Compact as well as Nicola Port, Senior Vice President of Global Legal for Chubb, to inform the discussion on business and human rights. They spoke extensively on the need for public-private partnerships, and the increasingly important roles that businesses play in the fight for human rights.

In the afternoon, Robert Cusumano L’80, Founder and CEO of the Legal Horizons Foundation, and former general counsel of international insurance company ACE Limited, spoke on the importance of the rule of law and business. He was later joined by Dr. Ariel Meyerstein, Senior Vice President for the Corporate Sustainability Program at Citi. Mr. Cusumano and Dr. Meyerstein led the students through case studies of corruption around the world and the difficult decisions that large multinational companies face when entering new and emerging markets. They forced the students to negotiate with complex legal and cultural issues involving bribery, and the difficulties of doing business in countries without an independent judiciary.
The institute culminated in a trip to the United Nations Secretariat Building where the students presented policy proposals to Antonio M. Cisneros, Human Rights Officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Mr. Cisneros gave valuable feedback on the proposals, and also gave a lecture on the history of the United Nations and human rights.

The institute concluded with a lunch at the United Nations Delegate Dining Room where the students were joined by Ms. Akiko Ito, Chief of the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and UN/Focal Point on Disability.
The University of Pennsylvania Law School Legal Education Programs would like to thank all of our speakers for being a part of the institute. We would also like to extend a special thank you to Skadden Arps for generously hosting the 2017 institute in their New York Office.
"I will forever look back on the institute as the week that cemented my desire to work as a human rights activist. I am honored to have been given a seat at the table and the chance to engage in these critical conversations about human rights. I would like to thank Dean de Silva de Alwis for her knowledge and passion, and I would like to thank my peers in the program for challenging my conceptions, contributing their insightful thoughts and experiences, and making the program such a fantastic experience.”

–Helena von Nagy

"On the first day, Dean de Silva de Alwis said we were the next generation of human rights leaders, and I was immediately hesitant to accept such a title. By the last day, however, I found comfort in Dean de Silva de Alwis’ words in that she, as well as the many established human rights scholars and practitioners we met, had provided me and my classmates with the skills necessary to support human rights around the world. As a Middle East studies major with a focus on human rights, I’ve always felt like I was missing the firsthand knowledge to fully understand and practice human rights. Now, I feel more ready to pursue my academic and professional goals in human rights, and it is all thanks to the Penn Law Global Institute for Human Rights.”

–Brendan Carchidi, Fulbright Scholar to Jordan, 2017-2018

"Every time Dean De Silva de Alwis spoke, I felt transported, elevated, and inspired. My time spent at the Penn Law Global Human Rights Institute was incredibly memorable for all its inspirational moments, challenges, thought-provoking questions and discussions, and opportunities. I leave the institute with a confirmed passion and devotion to the field of human rights, as well as excitement and hope for the future after having been surrounded by stellar students and fellow human rights advocates for a week. The words of Dean de Silva de Alwis will echo in my ears for years to come as I contemplate my future career in law and human rights advocacy: “the personal is political.” I will go on to use the skills and knowledge gained in this institute in combination with my personal stories and narratives to champion the protection of human rights around the world. Thanks to this institute, I am more confident in my abilities as a Latina woman and first-generation child of immigrants, to secure a seat at the table and have my voice, as well as the voices in my community, heard.”

–Ayling Dominguez

"Applying to the institute, I was fearful that being an individual working in the field rather than in academia would single me out from my undergraduate peers. I found the institute to be incredibly beneficial and a source of knowledge and wisdom that I would never be exposed to elsewhere. The parallels between human rights and business were profound and I will carry my learnings into any future role I hold within the corporate sector. Highly recommended for those who may not be ready to commit to law school, but want to empower themselves with first class education and insights as they head into the working force.”

–Amanda Squires

"The institute was an amazing learning experience; I have always been interested in international human rights but the platform the institute provided coupled with the amazing speakers increased my interest two fold. The institute showed me ways in which I could truly be on the forefront of creating global world change by utilizing law as a tool. The speakers were engaging and highly impressive and the material was very relevant and potent. I would highly recommend any students who feel passionately about international human rights to attend this institute to learn more about the ways in which they can actively effect change.”

–Shruti Kumar

"Penn Law’s Global Institute for Human Rights was a critical step in my education as a human rights advocate and prospective law student. The speakers, as well as my peers, engaged in a profound level of discourse, inspiring important and productive conversations. I am grateful that I had this opportunity to learn more about human rights and the United Nations. As a byproduct, this experience solidified my decision to apply to law school and helped me understand how I can contribute to human rights work with a law degree.”

–Madison Marlow

"Partaking in the Global Institute of Human Rights was one of best decisions I could have made for my post-graduate career. I came here immediately after graduating from college with an interest in Human Rights law. This program allowed me to ask questions to some of the biggest trailblazers in the field of Human Rights, satisfying my curiosities while allowing me to engage in discourse as a Human Rights advocate myself. I got to discuss issues that mattered to me like race, immigration & refugee rights and women’s rights. Thanks to this program, I am confident that Human Rights advocacy is where I find a seat at the table!”

–Samuel Buchanan

"The institute not only confirmed that the very subject I am most passionate about is the right path for me to take in life, but it gave me the knowledge and resources necessary to succeed in it. From meeting some of the most influential international actors in the world to being hosted at one of the country’s premier international law firms and the United Nations, the institute was one of the most valuable experiences of my educational career. If I could do this program again next year, I would without question.”

–Matthew Buckwald

"As a result of attending the Institute, I was exposed to many avenues in which I could work in international human rights that I would have never considered otherwise. I think that no matter where you are in your career, whether you are a first-year college student or are a few years out, the institute can provide you with the knowledge and guidance on how to integrate human rights into your career, no matter what that may be.”

–Mahrulk Badar
2017 Guest Speakers

Paloma Durán  
Director of the United Nations Sustainable Development Fund (SDGF)

Pinky Mehta  
Associate, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP

Farahnaz Ispahani  
Global Fellow Asia Program, Wilson Center, Author and former Member, Pakistan Parliament

Sarah Paoletti  
Practice Professor of Law and Director, Transnational Legal Clinic  
at the University of Pennsylvania Law School

Natasha Arnpriester  
Chubb Rule of Law & Human Rights Fellow

Elena M. Coyle  
Associate, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Eben Colby  
Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Ursula Wynhoven  
Former Chief, Social Sustainability, Governance and Legal for the United Nations Global Compact

Robert Cusumano  
Founder and CEO of the Legal Horizons Foundation

Nicola Port  
Senior Vice President & International Counsel, Global Legal, Chubb

Dr. Ariel Meyerstein  
Senior Vice President, Corporate Sustainability Program, Citi

Antonio M. Cisneros de Alencar  
Human Rights Officer, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights