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**International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)**  
*Personal Statement*

Volunteering this past summer in Nepal has been an unbelievable and amazing experience. I am truly indebted to the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation for providing me with this incredible opportunity.

I have traveled abroad before, but always as part of an organized group or program. While I was exposed to a new culture in each of those instances, truly *living* abroad, volunteering my time, and becoming a part of the community provided me with a completely new and different experience. It introduced a fresh element to community service. The context surrounding the issue of domestic violence, for example, can not be separated from the economic development of Nepal, the religious makeup, and the political instability of the country. Trying to dissect one social issue only led to more questions about another.

Interviewing survivors of domestic violence was extremely challenging, and in all cases, heartbreaking. The most poignant moment of my summer was during an interview with Uma K.C. She was only 24 years old, but it was clear that her life experiences had aged her. In speaking with her, through a translator, I learned about her story and profiled her on my blog.

Uma was only 16 when she fled her village during the Maoist insurgency. At the height of the civil war, women were frequently tortured and raped. Afraid that she might fall victim to the same fate, she sought a better life in Kathmandu. When she reached Kathmandu with a limited skill set, she was forced to work in a dance bar. It was there that she met the man who would soon become her husband, and ultimately lead to an abusive and violent relationship. She is now fighting for legal justice, scarred on her hands and stomach from a tragic incident in which her husband set her on fire.

It is stories like these that I was exposed to, motivating me to fight even harder for social justice abroad. These experiences helped me to redefine my future career plans and the type of international work that I would like to pursue. Instead of advocacy, I am now more interested in development—strengthening on the ground institutions to ensure a functioning democratic system is in place. In Uma's case, it is unlikely that she will ever get justice. Her husband has paid off the police department, so they argue he is nowhere to be found, despite witnesses' claims that he is still in Kathmandu. The justice department is also corrupt and bribes are commonplace. Development, not just advocacy, is desperately needed before women like Uma can be helped.

Though my experience was challenging, frustrating, and difficult at times, being able to bring it back home and share these stories with others has been extremely rewarding. I can't tell you how many times I have had people reference my blog since coming home, and express their newfound interest in Nepal or South Asia—even more, their desire to help.

None of this could have been possible without the support of the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation. I am very grateful to the individuals and organizations that made this experience—sometimes, a bit of an adventure—possible.