

Mallory Minter • 2012 AP Peace Fellow • First Report

As a 2012 Peace Fellow of The Advocacy Project (AP), this summer I am working with AP's partner organization, Initiatives for Peace and Human Rights (IPHR), in Kigali, Rwanda.

About IPHR

IPHR was originally founded in 2001 as a student organization of the National University of Rwanda. Over the past decade, IPHR has grown into a non-profit that works to equip citizens and government leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to build a global culture of peace. In order to accomplish this mission, IPHR trains leaders in good governance as well as educates citizens of their legal rights and ensures that these citizens have access to justice services. IPHR believes that sustainable peace will be realized once people come to know and share common principles of good governance and human rights.

Goals of My Internship

This summer, I am working with IPHR to accomplish the following goals:

- Help to establish a Family Mediation Center
- Assist with creation of a Mobile Legal Aid Clinic
- Update and refine the organization's online web site and internal regulations
- Broaden IPHR's national and international presence through social media tools
- Create an IPHR blog and newsletter
- Provide requested advice on legal and human rights concerns

Work Progress

I arrived in Kigali on June 9, 2012 and am writing this update on July 3, 2012. Over this past month, I have been able to get a real sense of the work of IPHR and have started making progress on most of the above listed goals.

Since arriving in Rwanda, IPHR has made a conscious effort to involve me in all of their activities. Thus far, I have attended their Legal Aid Clinic (LAC) multiple times. This LAC, which meets in an open grassy space behind the National University of Rwanda's Faculty of Law Department in Butare, provides Rwandan citizens with free legal services. Most of the individuals who attend the LAC are women, children, and/or older men who do not have the money necessary to pay for legal counseling. This LAC is held every Thursday and, on average, between 30-50 people show up each week to receive free, needed legal advice.



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In addition to attending the LAC, I have also attended a Supreme Court hearing in which one of IPHR's lawyers defended a minor accused of crime. This minor has no parents, no money, and no foundation for emotional support. IPHR helps individuals such as this accused minor to receive a fair trial and the justice deserved.

Over the past few weeks, I have also attended a workshop for women on their rights regarding succession, marriage, and gender based violence. Given the fact that women only just received the right to succession (i.e.-inheritance) in 1999, this workshop was highly lauded and very valued by the participants. During this two-day workshop, approximately 40 single mothers were educated on their rights. Many of these women have personal cases regarding land disputes for which they will be seeking legal consultation. Nevertheless, the first step of exercising one's rights is knowing about them, and these women were very grateful to learn about the rights that they are legally granted.¹



In terms of work completed, I am steadily making progress on the goals stated in the section above. At present, I have drawn up an outline for the framework of a Family Mediation Center and am currently awaiting further feedback from IPHR before proceeding. Additionally, I have begun collecting resources and pulling together training material in order to host a workshop on mediation best practices and techniques.

With regards to the Mobile Legal Aid Clinic, IPHR is currently awaiting incoming funding. Once this funding comes through, I will begin assisting with a strategic plan for implementation and for subsequent project phasing.

¹ For more information about these experiences, please check out my blog: <http://advocacynet.org/wordpress-mu/mminter/>

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In order to broaden IPHR's national and international presence, I have begun linking IPHR to various social media tools. For example, this past week I established a Facebook and Twitter account for IPHR and, over the next few weeks, I will work with one of IPHR's members on how to cultivate and maintain an effective online presence. Additionally, I have begun updating IPHR's website to ensure that all information is current and easily accessible. In the future, this website will also include a blog and a routinely-scheduled newsletter.

Over this past month, I have also assisted IPHR in providing requested information regarding how to provide legal assistance to children.

Initial Impressions

I am utterly floored by the work of IPHR.

As mentioned, IPHR works to instill sustainable peace within a society by equipping citizens with Human Rights education, by providing needed access to justice services, and by training government leaders on the principles of Good Governance. These three components in tandem create a society where citizens and government leaders hold each other accountable to maintaining high standards of human welfare.

From what I've seen so far, the services offered by IPHR are both needed and appreciated. For example, the individuals of the LAC sometimes travel days to receive needed free legal advice. Additionally, the women at the workshop that I attended a few weeks back were so engaged and grateful to be learning of the rights they recently received in 1999.

If anything, my frustration with the work of IPHR stems from their lack of resources. The core of IPHR is made up of six full-time lawyers who provide their pro-bono services as much as possible. While IPHR does valuable work, their resources are limited and, thus, they cannot always meet the demand presented to them. In addition to accomplishing the goals listed in the section above, my hope is to also somehow help IPHR strengthen its capacity so that it can establish justice in more areas in order to ultimately create a pervasive culture of peace and coexistence.

Thank You

I would be remiss if I did not extend a "Thank you" to JJCF and its supporters. Thus far, my time in Rwanda has been an amazing experience where I often feel like I am learning more than I am giving. Thank you for helping me to be a part of something great in Rwanda, and for allowing me to absorb foreign yet valuable pieces of the world that I hope to forever keep in my mind.