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United Nations Committee against Torture Project

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UN CAT Project Brings “Law School to Life” | American University Washington College of Law’s one-of-a-kind United Nations Committee against Torture (UN CAT) Project offers students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of international human rights law and experience firsthand the UN CAT proceedings in Geneva, Switzerland. Founded in 2004, the Project expanded in 2009 with generous support from the Marjorie Kovler Fund, enabling additional WCL students to engage in the Project’s vital work. “The UN CAT Project is a unique opportunity for students to concretely participate in the work of an international legal mechanism,” says Gillian Chadwick, UN CAT Project ’08 and current Equal Justice Works Fellow. “As a student who came to law school to pursue human rights law, this experience was invaluable.”

The UN Committee against Torture consists of 10 experts of high moral standing and recognized competence in human rights, who serve in their personal capacity. Established pursuant to article 17 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Committee supervises compliance with the Convention against Torture, which has been ratified by 146 countries to date. In addition to issuing observations and recommendations based on its public review of country reports, the Committee decides individual petitions and conducts site visits to countries where serious indications exist that torture is systematically practiced.



“The possibility of participating in the UN CAT Project was one of several reasons that I wanted to come to WCL. . . . In Geneva, we had front row seats to the development and application of [human rights] law.”

~ Solomon Shinerock
*UN CAT Project ’08
Associate, Cadwalader,
Wickersham & Taft
(Fall 2009 – Fall 2010)*

*Law Clerk, Honorable Harold Baer Jr.,
United States District Court for the
Southern District of New York
(Fall 2010 – Fall 2011)*

American University Washington College of Law (WCL) Dean Claudio Grossman was elected chair of the United Nations Committee against Torture (UN CAT) during its 40th session in the spring of 2008. Grossman was elected to the two-year position by unanimous vote of Committee members and has been a member himself, and formerly vice chair, since 2003.



As WCL dean since 1995, Grossman has had a distinguished career in the field of human rights. The Raymond I. Geraldson Scholar for International and Humanitarian Law since 1985, he was also a member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (from 1993–2001) where he served in a variety of capacities, including twice as its president (in 1996–97 and again in 2001). Grossman has authored numerous publications concerning human rights and international law, and is the recipient of awards for his work in those fields.



“WCL’s United Nations Committee against Torture Project is part of the law school’s rich array of unique experiential learning opportunities. WCL’s longstanding commitment and contributions to strengthening human rights around the world have attracted a diverse and exceptional student body, faculty, and staff who share this vision, and have opened up extraordinary collaborations in the field.”

~ Jennifer de Laurentiis '92
UN CAT Project Coordinator

leadership in the UN Committee against Torture has inspired our students to get involved in the campaign to stop state-sponsored torture all over the world. The meetings in Geneva are not only a remarkable education but an opportunity for WCL students to play a role in the progress of civilization.”

During the UN CAT session in Geneva, students and faculty witness the dialogue between the Committee and State Party delegations, identify germane developments and issues, and meet regularly to strategize and conduct follow-up research. “Attending

“Not only did [the UN CAT Project] increase my appreciation and understanding of the UN reporting system, but it affirmed my desire to pursue a career defending human rights, both in the United States and around the world.”

~ Christian M. De Vos
UN CAT Project '06
Law Clerk, United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit,
Office of Legal Affairs (2007-09)



the UN CAT meetings helped me see a practical application of international law and gave me new ideas for creative lawyering in the U.S.,” says Amalia Greenberg Delgado, UN CAT Project '08 and current Soros Justice Advocacy Fellow, ACLU.

Following the group’s return to WCL, students build upon this unique human rights experience by authoring articles, giving presentations, and participating in other campus and community initiatives to raise awareness and ultimately help eradicate torture around the world. “The UN CAT Project brought law school to life as I witnessed the UN Committee against Torture using my research to investigate allegations of torture,” says Charles “Chip” Rosenberg, UN CAT Project '07 and associate, Hogan & Hartson. “It was a unique and invaluable experience.”

For more information on the UN CAT Project, visit www.wcl.american.edu/go/uncat, or contact jdelaurentiis@wcl.american.edu.

Participation in the Project is determined through a competitive application process. Upper-level students chosen for the Project take a for-credit seminar with specialized readings and instruction on the prohibition of torture and the universal system, co-taught by WCL Dean and UN CAT Chair Claudio Grossman and UN CAT Project Coordinator Jennifer de Laurentiis. Students research and synthesize materials concerning torture and human rights in pertinent countries and draft extensive papers identifying potential compliance issues involving the UN Convention against Torture. In addition to Grossman and de Laurentiis, WCL faculty join the student delegation in Geneva, contributing their expertise in various areas of the law to enhance and expand the context of what the students are learning. Jamin Raskin, constitutional law professor, director of the WCL Program on Law and Government, and Maryland state senator says, “The struggle against torture is very old but also suddenly very new again. Dean Grossman’s



“I am certain that my involvement in the project played a significant role in my securing subsequent work in the human rights field, and in eventually being offered a position with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bogota, Colombia.”

~ Kelleen Corrigan
UN CAT Project '04
Associate Protection Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Bogota, Colombia

“The UN CAT Project teaches you that advocacy in the international arena is about more than case-law and precedent — it is about bringing officials, citizens and the international community into the same dialogue to create room for the furtherance and protection of a fundamental human right. Only by appealing to the core of the human spirit with patience and persuasion can consensus be achieved in an arena where not all feel capable of obtaining, or even bound by, the parameters. To say this insight will be useful in my career is a gross understatement — I have already begun applying it to my everyday life!”

~ Alexandra Bradley
UN CAT Project '08
Clerk, Chief Judge Restani, U.S. Court of International Trade, New York City
(Oct. 2009 – Nov. 2010)
Subsequent associate position at Hughes Hubbard and Reed, Washington, D.C.



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