

December 2020

Dear Friend,

While this year has been one of great challenges, it has also been a significant milestone for the War Crimes Research Office (WCRO). 2020 marks the **25th anniversary** of the WCRO's founding, and as we reflect on this marker, we are reminded that while much has been accomplished, much work remains in the fight against impunity for atrocity crimes. COVID-19, in particular, has presented a new and unique challenge to accountability processes, resulting not only in delays in investigations and prosecutions but even, in some instances, the unanticipated early release of perpetrators. In some places, promising efforts for accountability have stalled, while in others, we have continued to see the perpetration of grave crimes with



The WCRO Advisory Board: (top) Aryeh Neier, Patricia Viseur Sellers, Hon. Phillip Rapoza, Hon. Patricia Whalen, (bottom) James Goldston, Hon. Mary McGowan Davis, Hon. Richard Goldstone)

impunity. In the face of these challenges, it is even more critical that prosecutors, legal representatives, and others engaged in the fight against impunity have the resources, tools, and training they need to effectively advocate justice for victims.

We are extremely excited to announce that to help us meet the challenges ahead, this year the WCRO launched a new [Advisory Board](#), comprised of leading experts and practitioners in international criminal law (ICL) and international justice. Click the photo to the left to learn more about current Advisory Board members.

RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND SCHOLARSHIP

Throughout 2020, the WCRO promoted accountability for atrocity crimes through research, advocacy, teaching, and public education, including by:

Providing specialized legal and technical assistance to mechanisms charged with investigating and prosecuting atrocity crimes, as well as civil society organizations representing victims in atrocity crime cases.

- A notable example is the WCRO's work in the *Manta y Vilca* case on behalf of survivors of sexual violence perpetrated during Peru's internal armed conflict. In an [amicus curiae](#) brief, the WCRO argued not only that sexual violence crimes may constitute crimes against humanity, but also that international evidentiary standards

apply to this case, including the widely accepted rule that reliable and credible testimony of survivors or other witnesses is sufficient, without further corroboration, for conviction under international law.

DEMUS, a women-led civil society organization representing the survivors in the criminal case, praised the amicus as “vital” in their efforts to seek justice for survivors, as it “rigorously defend[ed]” and bolstered their arguments about the admission and evaluation of evidence – particularly the assessment of victim testimony – in this “emblematic case of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict in Peru.”



Victims and advocates celebrate the successful Manta y Vilca judgment (Photo: Siarna Horna, DEMUS)

- In another project, a partner congratulated the WCRO for the memo it produced, calling it as “outstanding” and noting that it was not only “extremely well drafted” and a “pleasure to read” but had also given them a “framework ... to guide [their] work” by providing both the critical “theoretical foundation” and specific examples of how that theory had “been operationalized.”

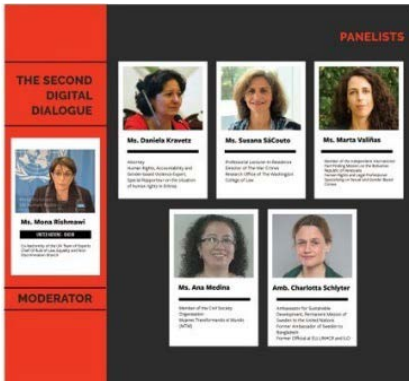
Hosting our annual [War Crimes Speaker Series](#) and participating in a number of other events on current issues in ICL, including:



Convening a panel on “Careers in U.S. Criminal and Civil Litigation of Serious Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Violations,” which included WCL alumnae Christian Levesque (JD ’01), Jennifer Rasmussen (JD ’94), and Jennifer N. Smith (JD ’10), as well as Katherine Gallagher of the Center for Constitutional Rights;

Co-sponsoring a panel on “Reproductive Injustice: Forced Sterilization in ICE Detention” with the Women and the Law Program, Office of Public Interest, Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, and International Human Rights Law Clinic;



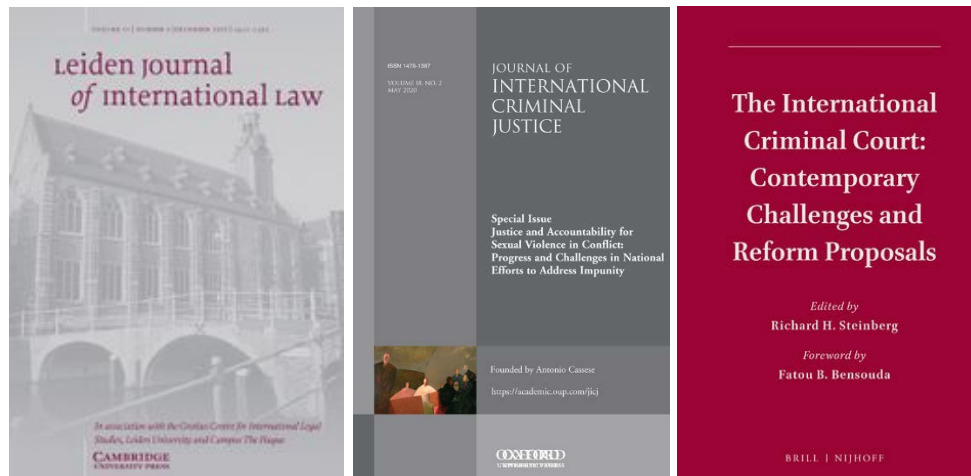


Serving as a panelist in the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict's Digital Dialogue series panel on [“The National Prosecution of CRSV in Guatemala and Colombia: Closer to a Victim-Centered Justice?”](#), which hundreds of people attended live and nearly 1,200 have viewed since on YouTube; and

Co-hosting a two-day online expert meeting on [Strategic Litigation on Gender-Based Violence in Latin America](#) with the Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and colleagues from the Women's Rights and Gender Section of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies of Leiden University.



Publishing new scholarship on accountability, including:



- *Collective Criminality and Sexual Violence: Fixing a Failed Approach*, by Susana SáCouto, Leila Sadat, and Patricia Viseur Sellers, published in the Leiden Journal of International Law.
- *Access to Justice for Victims of Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Lessons Learned from the Sepur Zarco Case*, by Susana SáCouto and Claudia Martin, published in the Journal of International Criminal Justice; and
- A chapter titled “Improving NGO and IGO Capacity to Gather Evidence,” by Susana SáCouto in the book *International Criminal Court: Contemporary Challenges and Reform Proposals*, edited by Richard H. Steinberg.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW

We have also found innovative ways to offer substantive experiential learning opportunities in international criminal law to our students in a virtual format. For instance, this year:

The WCRO pivoted our [Summer Law Program in The Hague](#) to an online format, which brought students the same rigorous curriculum in international criminal law and international legal approaches to terrorism that they would have had in The Hague. Over four weeks in May and June, students heard from 28 guest speakers working in these fields, attended virtual site visits to key Hague-based institutions at the front lines of international criminal law, participated in a networking session with practitioners in the field, and joined intercultural exchange sessions with our partners at the T.M.C. Asser Instituut to learn about living and working in The Hague. Students praised the program as “fascinating” and “incredibly engaging,” adding that it was “such a privilege to hear from such incredible and knowledgeable speakers.”



Launch of the 2020 Hague Summer Program with Judge Fausto Pocar, Janne Nijman of the Asser Instituut, and Director Susana SáCouto

CONCOURS JEAN-PICTET



With the help of WCL alumna Kate Holcombe (JD '18), the WCRO selected and coached WCL students, Autumn Claybaugh (2L), Stephen Keith (2L), and Erica Levin (2L), to represent WCL at the Jean-Pictet International Humanitarian Law Competition in Denpasar, Indonesia. The team benefited from mooted by WCL alumnae Rachel Bruce (JD '20) and Kate Tomaszewski (JD '20).



This year, WCL alumna Lindsey Miller has joined the WCRO to help prepare and coach WCL students Caroline Butler (3L), Megan Cox (2L), and Courtney Veneri (2L) to represent WCL at the 2021 Clara Barton competition, set to take place virtually in March 2021.



WCRO Dean's Fellows and Practicum Students (top) Rawad Ahmad, Karen Kim, Alexandria Bowles, Anna-Katharina Groschinski, (bottom) Tyler Nolley, Maria O'Sullivan, and Eleanor Holloway

The WCRO offered twelve students an opportunity to engage in real-life projects undertaken in partnership with organizations involved in the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide through the [International Criminal Law Practicum](#) and [Dean's Fellowships](#).

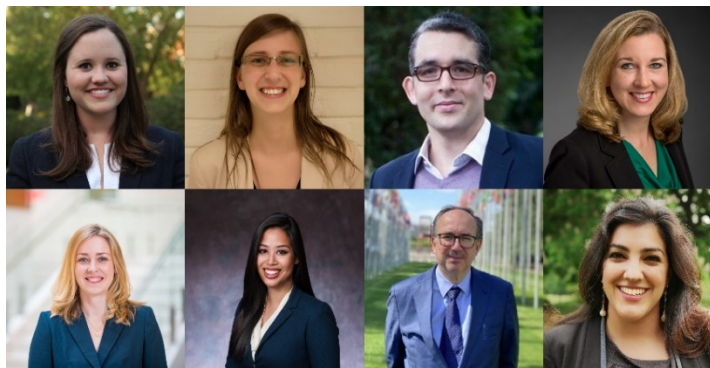


WCRO volunteers (top) Shima Bozorgi, Olivera Necakovska, (bottom) Miranda Carnes, Sydney Kiefert, and Anael Gardner

Fifty students volunteered on WCRO projects, including supporting our legal research and publishing posts on news and jurisprudential developments from accountability mechanisms for the [International Criminal Law Updates blog](#).

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Taking advantage of the ability to connect alumni virtually from around the world, this summer the WCRO launched a new [Alumni Council](#) as a space for WCRO alumni active in international justice and related fields to engage with WCL students interested in those fields and to participate in and support the planning and implementation of WCRO programming. Click the photo to the right to learn more about current Alumni Council members.



WCRO Alumni Council members (top) Ali Boyd (JD '19), Emma Brandon (JD '17), Christian De Vos (JD '07), Christie Edwards (LL.M. '10), (bottom) Katherine Holcombe (JD '18), Vy Nguyen (JD '15), Rochus Pronk (LL.M. '95), Tara Vassefi (JD '16)



Alex Mehner (JD '19)

Tapping into the WCRO's extensive alumni network, this year, about 10 alumni from around the world – including from South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and elsewhere – volunteered invaluable time on WCRO research projects.

One of these alumni, Alex Mehner – a 2019 WCL graduate – responded in April to the WCRO's call for more volunteers to assist on projects that had been affected by the pandemic. Over the past eight months, he has reviewed nearly 3,000 pages of Spanish-language investigative files from a Latin American country, helping the WCRO document crimes for further investigation and prosecution. This extraordinary effort has been driven by his passion to help achieve justice for survivors of crimes. Before law school, Alex assisted the District Attorney's Office in Queens in charging crimes involving elder abuse, child abuse, and sexual violence. Despite the challenges of 2020, he is delighted to have had the opportunity to work closely with the WCRO this year to help the office support criminal accountability, and hopes to use his legal education and skills to help others through a career in the criminal justice field.

The WCRO has received wonderful feedback from alumni this year on the impact the WCRO has had on their careers to date:

- “I truly believe in the work of the WCRO. Besides the extraordinary group of people that work at the WCRO, my experience there has had a great influence in my research and writing skills. The memories of those days working with you rank really high on my life.” – Matias Hernandez, LL.M. '04



Matias Hernandez (LL.M. '04)



Kate Tomaszewski (JD '20)

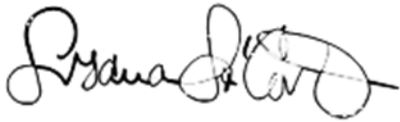
- “[The] WCRO had a major role in what I do now pro bono. My work heavily involves the intersection of the law of war, human rights, international law, and civil rights.” – Michael Murali, JD '13
- “[My experience participating in the IHL competitions] has been something I mention in every cover letter and that I mentioned in my clerkship interview. Even where the law itself that I learned is not quite applicable, the experiences demonstrate the ability to quickly learn and apply bodies of law I was originally unfamiliar with and find answers to questions with significant consequences.” – Kate Tomaszewski, JD '20

We are excited to continue working with alumni this year, and we encourage alumni who would like to be involved to fill out a brief [survey](#) on your interests and ways in which you would like to stay connected to the office.

As we look forward to 2021 and our return to campus, we invite you to consider joining us in our efforts by [making a tax-deductible contribution](#). Your gift will ensure we can continue our commitment to ensuring that practitioners on the front line of this fight have the tools, training, and resources they need to effectively advocate for victims.

[Make a Gift](#)

We thank you for your support and wish you a warm, safe, and healthy holiday season.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susana SáCouto', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Susana SáCouto, Director