AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON
COLLEGE of LAW

CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HUMANITARIAN LAW

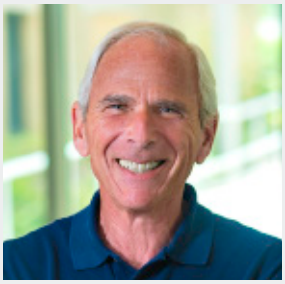
2025 - 2026
ACADEMIC YEAR REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIRS

After six years serving as Chair of the Faculty Board of the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, I step down with a deep sense of gratitude and pride. During this period, the Center has strengthened its role as one of the most vibrant and relevant human rights centers at any law school in the country—one that brings together rigorous academic inquiry with engagement in some of the most pressing human rights challenges of our time. As reflected in the Center's recent work, students and faculty have been engaged on issues ranging from environmental justice and democratic resilience to the human rights aspects of emerging technologies. The Center continues to engage in high-level events and partnerships that enrich the academic life of the law school and provide students with meaningful opportunities to participate in advocacy, research, and public debate.

I am particularly pleased that the Faculty Board has unanimously elected one of the founders of the Center, Prof. Robert Goldman, as the new Chair. This choice ensures both continuity and renewed leadership grounded in the Center's original vision. With Prof. Goldman's leadership, I am confident that the Center will continue to be an essential pillar of our academic community, fostering critical thinking, practical engagement, and a sustained commitment to human rights among our students and colleagues.

— David Hunter
Professor of Law (ret.), Co-Director, Program on Environmental and Energy Law



On behalf of the Faculty Board, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to David Hunter for his outstanding leadership as Chair of the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law`s Faculty Board. His tenure has been marked by a clear commitment to strengthening the Center as a dynamic space for teaching, research, and engagement within WCL. Under his leadership, the Center expanded its programming through timely and impactful events—addressing issues such as human trafficking, racial justice in the Americas, and the implications of new technologies—while also deepening its collaborations with institutions such as the OAS and leading civil society organizations. Equally important, he has reinforced the Center's role in creating opportunities for students to engage directly in research, dialogue, and practice.

We remain committed to ensuring that the Center continues this important work that is essential not only to its core mission, but also to maintaining WCL's leadership in the field of human rights and humanitarian law.

— Robert Goldman
Professor of Law and Louis C. James Scholar and a Faculty Director of the War Crimes Research Office

EVENTS

The Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law's events serve as a cornerstone of our mission to foster dialogue, advance scholarship, and connect theory with practice in the field of human rights. Throughout the year, we convene leading experts, practitioners, policymakers, and students to engage with some of the most pressing challenges facing the international community today.

From symposia and panel discussions to informal conversation series and practitioner-focused workshops, our events create space for critical reflection, interdisciplinary exchange, and meaningful collaboration. They also provide students with unique opportunities to learn directly from those shaping human rights law and advocacy on the ground.

Over the past year, the Center strengthened and expanded its digital presence, increasing followers and engagement by more than 200% across students, practitioners, and the broader human rights community. The Center grew its Instagram and LinkedIn presence to highlight events, achievements, and professional connections, while maintaining active Facebook and X accounts to share updates, initiatives, and opportunities. Event announcements and materials were also distributed across Engage, social media, and campus notice boards to ensure broad and consistent outreach.

To further enhance outreach and provide a more comprehensive overview of our work, the Center also launched a new newsletter, distributed each fall and spring, to keep our community informed and engaged with our programs, events, and initiatives.

Student Welcome Event

On September 10, 2025, the Center hosted its annual Student Welcome Event, bringing together over 60 students and 10 professors and program directors for an engaging conversation about the Center's work and the many opportunities available to the WCL community. Students heard directly from faculty about their involvement in the field and learned how they can engage with the Center through its programs, initiatives, and projects.

Symposium on Crimes Against Humanity, Atrocity, and Genocide Prevention: From Norms to Obligations

On October 3rd, 2025, the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law co-hosted a one-day symposium with the International Law Review and in collaboration with the War Crimes Research Office. The symposium examined how international norms can be translated into binding obligations, featuring Professor Leila Sadat's keynote on the proposed UN treaty on crimes against humanity, Ms. Mô Bleeker's reflections as the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect, and Professor Juan Méndez's closing remarks as former UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Discussions explored the legal evolution and moral urgency of atrocity prevention, including domestic and international strategies, civil society engagement, emerging tools such as satellite technology and open-source investigations, and pressing issues such as gender justice, ecocide, transitional justice, and structural reforms to strengthen accountability. The symposium concluded with a forward-looking session highlighting pathways to operationalize atrocity prevention, bridging normative frameworks with practical implementation, and reaffirming the role of law, policy, and interdisciplinary collaboration in promoting a more just and resilient international order.

Symposium on Critical Minerals, Critical Business, and Critical Rights

On October 30, 2025, the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, in partnership with the Program on Environmental and Energy Law (PEEL), the International Legal Studies Program (ILSP) at the American University Washington College of Law (AUWCL), and the Inter-American Institute on Justice and Sustainability (IIJS), co-hosted the symposium "Critical Minerals, Critical Business & Critical Rights."

The full-day event brought together leaders from law, policy, industry, and civil society to explore the complex intersection of human rights, environmental protection, and international business law across the life cycle of critical minerals essential to the global energy transition. The four panels featured voices from the UN, academia, industry, and advocacy organizations, covering issues from corporate accountability and environmental justice to Indigenous rights and global governance. This symposium also builds on the Center's growing body of work examining the intersection of human rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development, continuing conversations from last year's environmental events, including the panel on La Oroya vs. Peru, in which this groundbreaking decision has set a significant precedent in the intersection of environmental and human rights law.

Neurotech on Trial: Hacking for Healing and Guarding Privacy Symposium

On January 28th, 2026, in celebration of Data Privacy Day, the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law hosted the one-day symposium "Neurotech on Trial: Hacking for Healing and Guarding Privacy." The event examined the intersection of emerging neurotechnology and human rights in an increasingly connected world. As brain-computer interfaces, wearable health devices, and neural interventions advance rapidly, they present both unprecedented opportunities for healthcare innovation while raising significant challenges to privacy, autonomy, and human dignity.

Bringing together policy leaders from Meta, Stanford, and the UN Human Rights Council, alongside scholars from Geneva, Bogotá, and across the United States, speakers included Alex Joel, Jennifer Jin, Diego Borbón, Brittan Heller, Milena Costas Trascasas, Roberto Andorno, Jared Genser, David Lehr, and Koy Miller. Panels explored questions at the intersection of privacy, autonomy, freedom of thought, data protection, and democratic accountability—asking how the law must evolve to respond to technologies capable of accessing, interpreting, and potentially influencing the human brain.

Migration in Context and Law: Global Displacement & the U.S. Immigration System Symposium

On February 20th, 2026, the Human Rights Brief hosted its annual symposium at American University Washington College of Law, exploring U.S. immigration law. The event examined migration as a global phenomenon shaped by international forces and domestic legal frameworks. Scholars and practitioners discussed why people migrate, the challenges they face, and how U.S. immigration law addresses contemporary displacement, protection, and inclusion.

The CEDAW Shadow Report: A Practitioner's Guide to International Accountability

On March 4th, 2026, the Program on Gender, Theory, Law & Practice, the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, and the Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law hosted a panel at American University Washington College of Law on advancing global gender justice. The event explored how practitioners use CEDAW shadow reports to hold governments accountable within the UN treaty-body system. Panelists shared practical insights on evidence gathering, advocacy strategies, and comparative approaches drawing on the Inter-American human rights framework.

What Does the Future Hold for Afrodescendants in the Second UN Decade? A Panel Discussion

On March 25th, 2026, the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, in partnership with the Washington Office on Latin America and the Organization of American States, hosted a conversation on the Second International Decade for People of African Descent (2025–2032), launched by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2024. The event examined the outcomes of the first decade and explored priorities for the second, with a focus on advancing justice, recognition, and development. Discussions highlighted key issues, including women's rights, the protection of cultural and religious practices, and the collective land rights of Afro-descendant communities in the Americas. The Organization of American States Assistant Secretary General, Laura Gil, attended and opened the meeting, underscoring the importance of sustained international commitment to the Decade's objectives. Also in attendance was: Roberto Rojas Davila, head of the Vulnerable Groups Section of the Department of Social Inclusion of the Organization of American States (OAS); Carlos Quesada, president, International Institute for Race & Equality; Vicky Leyva, president, the International Multicultural Network of Leaders in Action for Human Rights; Julio Guity, Executive Director of Sustainable Development and Climate Change (SUDECC, Inc.); Julia Mota, lobbying specialist, Fundo Agbara; and Renaldine Lafleche, legislative advisor, office of Hank Johnson, representative of Georgia's 4th congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives. The event was held in Spanish.

COFFEE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONVERSATION SERIES

The Coffee and Human Rights Conversation Series invites students to an informal conversation with leading human rights experts who share their insights and experiences in the field over lunch.

- **With Viviana Kristicevic**

  On September 2, 2025, renowned human rights practitioner Viviana Krsticevic was hosted as part of the series. Viviana is an international lawyer and advocate with experience in gender equality, climate justice, and defending human rights across the Americas and beyond. She currently serves as Executive Director of the Center for Justice and International Law.

- **How Do Human Rights Advocates Keep Accountability Alive?**

  On March 3rd, 2026, the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law hosted a Coffee & Human Rights conversation with Angelita Baeyens, Vice President of International Advocacy and Litigation at the Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center, moderated by our Center Director Eduardo Bertoni. Drawing on her experience leading high-impact cases before regional human rights bodies and the United Nations, Baeyens reflected on the challenges of pursuing accountability and advancing justice in today's political climate.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Kovler Project Against Torture

A prominent part of the Center's programming is through the Kovler Project Against Torture. Established in 2004 by Professor of Law and Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman, former member and chair of the UN Committee Against Torture, the Kovler Project was endowed in December 2016, in recognition of the Blum-Kovler Foundation's generous support since 2009.

Through the Kovler Project, students engage in a practice-oriented deep dive into the prohibition of torture under international law. Each year, participants travel to Geneva, Switzerland, where they observe sessions of the UN CAT, conduct legal research, reflect on advocacy strategies, and assess States' compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture. For 20 years, the Kovler Project has trained the next generation of human rights advocates-preparing students with the skills to become strategic, globally-minded lawyers. The Kovler Project also offers unparalleled opportunities to explore careers and build networks within multilateral organizations and international institutions.

Impact Litigation

As part of the Center's Impact Litigation Project, the Seminar on Strategic Litigation in International Human Rights offers AUWCL students the opportunity to critically examine litigation as a tool for advancing human rights. The seminar explores both courtroom strategies and the broader social, political, and institutional factors necessary to achieve meaningful legal change.

On Tuesday, March 24, 2026, Impact Litigation hosted the event "Child Trafficking in Latin America: The Relevance of Impact Litigation in Human Rights." The conversation featured Jimmy Thyden González, Founder of Grafting Hope and human rights advocate, Claudio Grossman, Faculty Director of Impact Litigation, Eduardo Bertoni, Director of the Center, and Marta Treviño-Leyva, Assistant Director of Impact Litigation. Speakers explored how impact litigation can confront systemic challenges, support victims, and strengthen human rights protections.

Human Rights Brief

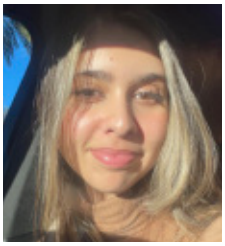
The Human Rights Brief (HRB) is an electronic publication at American University Washington College of Law (WCL). The HRB, WCL's oldest Brief, was founded in 1994 in partnership with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. Today, the HRB maintains global readership, and it is supervised by an eight-person Faculty Advisory Board. Student staff members participate in creating and editing content in a variety of mediums, and they learn valuable skills through workshops, events, and mentorship opportunities.

Volume 29 of the HRB examines a range of topics such as reproductive rights, educational discrimination, capital punishment, transitional justice, and the role of the media. Beyond its publications, the HRB also maintains a podcast series, Human Rights Unscripted, which dives into diverse human rights topics. Episodes this year have covered data privacy, including an episode with the Center's Director Eduardo Bertoni, gender parity, and immigration.

STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD

The Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law is proud to work alongside an exceptional group of students who help shape our programming, strengthen student engagement, and connect the Center's work to the broader WCL community. This years' Student Advisory Board (SAB) members are: Mika Goswami, Ian McCarthy, Lindsey Stumpp, Aly Orvis, and Summer Robert.

The SAB serves as a bridge between students and the Center. Their responsibilities include advising the Center's leadership on student perspectives, assisting with events and discussions on pressing human rights issues, and facilitating connections between students, faculty, and practitioners. They also contribute to research projects, assist in outreach efforts, and advocate for policies that strengthen the Center's impact on campus and beyond. Through their work, they ensure that student voices are actively involved in the Center's efforts to advance human rights and humanitarian law.



Mika Goswami

Ian McCarthy

Aly Orvis

Summer Robert

Lindsey Stumpp

DEAN'S FELLOWS

The Center's Dean's Fellows play a vital role in advancing our mission by supporting the development and execution of our programs, events, and research initiatives. As emerging scholars and practitioners, they contribute meaningfully to the Center's work while gaining hands-on experience at the intersection of human rights law, policy, and advocacy.

Our 2025–2026 Dean's Fellows—Federico Gaitán (S.J.D. Candidate), Austine Jobe (3L J.D. Candidate), Jordan Bellamy (3L J.D. Candidate), and Cathleen Cowell (SIS/MA'26)—brought a diverse range of academic backgrounds and professional interests to the Center. Throughout the year, they supported major initiatives including symposium planning, academic outreach, research projects, and student engagement efforts.

Photo from left to right: Eduardo Bertoni, Center Director; Jordan Bellamy, 3L; Federico Gaitán, SJD Candidate; Austine Jobe, 3L; Marta Treviño-Leyva, Assistant Director of Impact Litigation and the Kovler Project Against Torture; Cathleen Cowell, SIS/MA

ABOUT US

AUWCL established the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law in 1990 as part of its long-standing commitment to international human rights and the rule of law. Today, our faculty and staff include scholars, practitioners, and activists with decades of experience in human rights and international humanitarian law. The Center's program staff and faculty co-directors engage in cutting-edge research, create scholarship, organize events, develop training, and implement a host of projects focused on cultivating the next generation of human rights advocates and improving the rights of vulnerable and marginalized populations around the world.

Staff

EDUARDO BERTONI
Director of the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

MARTA TREVIÑO-LEYVA
Assistant Director of Impact Litigation and the Kovler Project Against Torture

Board of Faculty Co-Directors (2025-2026)

The Board provides guidance, expertise, and support for the Center's programs, initiatives, and strategic vision. In 2026, the Board welcome Carlos Ayala, Marcos Orellana, and Gustavo Ribeiro as new members. The Board also elected Professor Robert Goldman as the new Board Chair. Board of Faculty Co- Directors consists of:

CARLOS AYALA
Professor of Constitutional and International Human Rights Law, President of the Inter American Institute of Human Rights

ROBERT GOLDMAN
Professor of Law and Louis C. James Scholar and a Faculty Director of the War Crimes Research Office

CLAUDIO GROSSMAN
Professor of Law, Dean Emeritus, and the Raymond Geraldson Scholar for International and Humanitarian Law

DAVID HUNTER
Professor of Law (ret.), Co-Director, Program on Environmental and Energy Law

JUAN MÉNDEZ
Professor of International Law (ret.), Former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture (2010-2016)

MARCOS ORELLANA
Assistant Professor, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Director of Global Toxics and Human Rights Project

GUSTAVO RIBEIRO
Associate Professor, Director of the Brazil–U.S. Legal and Judicial Studies Program

ANITA SINHA
Professor of Law, Director of the International Human Rights Law Clinic (IHRLC), Director of the Program on Gender, Theory, Law & Practice