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Alumnus Profile

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ALUMNUS PROFILE

WCL Alumna Works on International Standards for the Internally Displaced

by Ayesha Qayyum

Since May 1994, Cecile Meijer, LL.M. '93, has worked with the International Human Rights Law Group and the American Society of International Law (ASIL) to develop legal principles for the protection of internally displaced persons. The project was undertaken at the request of Dr. Francis Deng, Repre-

sentative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. (see related story page 4). Meijer is part of a three-member team, along with Janelle Diller and WCL Professor Robert Goldman, working on this project.

In order to accurately analyze the existing law, the team is utilizing a "needs approach." This involves first determining what particular problems internally displaced persons face, and then examining how the existing international legal regime treats those needs. In particular, Meijer focuses on the sufficiency of human rights law, humanitarian law, and refugee law in meeting the needs of the internally displaced.

The team was also asked to draft principles addressing the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons, particularly in areas where the law is currently inadequate. As a result, Meijer, Goldman, and Diller are involved in the drafting and development of new international standards, which Meijer hopes that the United Nations will eventually adopt.

Meijer, who is originally from the Netherlands, describes the time she

spent as an LL.M. student at the Washington College of Law as "excellent preparation" for her current work. Although she was always interested in the problems of refugees and the movement

"I really learned about the issue of internally displaced persons once I came to WCL."

of peoples, "I really learned about the issue of internally displaced persons once I came to WCL," she says. In addition to her WCL education, Meijer feels that her previous experience—working in civil, comparative, and private international law in the Netherlands—provided her with the skills she is currently applying to her work on the internally displaced. ☉



Gabriel Eckstein



Cecile Meijer

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ty are required to assist in peacefully resolving many conflicts, such as ethnic or tribal-based secessionist disputes, before they develop into environments which foster well-founded fears of persecution. Unless and until such cooperative and pacific dispute resolution mechanisms become a practical reality, however, it appears that alternative measures must be taken which provide genuine asylum seekers with humanitarian assistance and protection from persecution, and at the same time take into account the financial and social pressures on states traditionally capable of accommodating refugees.

One possible approach could be for developed countries to work together to establish a centralized international immigration system to fairly allocate refugees among the developed countries according to their respective sizes, populations, and resources. Alternatively, developed

countries might consider establishing and supporting, on a multilateral basis, temporary refugee communities outside of their borders in territories of amenable third countries. Such temporary facilities would provide refugees with short term protection and assistance. Unlike past arrangements such as the strategy at Guantanamo Bay, however, future accommodations should either provide refugees with meaningful opportunities to apply for asylum in other countries, or incorporate equitable resettlement plans to prevent refugees from being placed in long term "limbo".

In the absence of concerted efforts on the part of developed countries to find a balance between domestic concerns over proliferating refugee crises and the need to provide refugees with humanitarian assistance and genuine protection from persecution, current trends suggest that the right to seek asylum is in danger of becoming a right without substance. ☉

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jure refugees. The OAU Convention is silent on this point. This problem, however, concerns three times as many people and is potentially even more explosive than the refugee crisis.

Although the protection of refugees in Africa is far from complete, it is at least in principle more inclusive than in many, if not all, other regional systems. One of the most significant aspects of this relatively new model of protection is that it has prompted other regional systems, in particular the Inter-American system, to emulate its positive factors and minimize its inadequacies. ☉