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## Center News

Human Rights Brief

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## CENTER NEWS



**H**adar Harris is the new executive director of the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. She brings a wealth of experience to the position and possesses an exciting vision for the Center. Regarding her wide-ranging background in human rights law, Ms. Harris states, "Human rights activism is multi-pronged. You can change

the law, but unless you get laws implemented, and unless you ensure that people know what their rights are, you've only done a small part of the work." She has worked in all facets of human rights activism, including legal reform, implementation, and citizen education. "I believe strongly that all of these things should be linked together."

### Work in the Field of Human Rights Law

In the area of legal reform, Ms. Harris consulted on proposed reforms to the Moroccan Criminal Procedure Code. "There were good aspects to the proposed changes, but also other provisions which undercut the positive aspects. For example, one provision codified the presumption of innocence, yet another stated that defendants could not rebut police reports. We worked very hard to amend this provision, and in the end, we were successful in changing the law. Now training is needed for judges, prosecutors, and police to implement the changes. Reform alone is not enough. There must be a link between theory and practice, law and implementation."

Regarding her work in implementing legal reform, Ms. Harris spent five and a half months in Armenia piloting an assessment tool developed by the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) to review national compliance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. "I was able to take the intellectual framework created by the ABA and implement it in the field, evaluating and rethinking the tool in order to better assess compliance given the realities of implementation. The pilot program served as a bridge between academic theory and activism in the field."

While working in Armenia, Ms. Harris also consulted on implementation of the assessment tool in Serbia and Kazakhstan, and developed methodology, an implementation guide, and a training manual for use of the tool around the world. The final report from the Armenia pilot program was submitted for review to the United Nations and the Armenian government.

To help citizens exercise their human and civil rights, Ms. Harris has worked in private practice in the area of labor and employment law. Recently, she was involved in *Mehinovic v. Vukovica*, a lawsuit initiated on behalf of four Bosnian Muslims against their Serbian torturer. The case, brought in U.S. Federal Court in Atlanta, Georgia under the Alien Tort Claims Act and the Torture Victim Protection Act, resulted in an award of nearly \$140 million.

Additionally, Ms. Harris spent six years living in Jerusalem, working for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Israel's premier human and civil rights organization. ACRI focuses on various issues regarding rights and liberties including

freedom of and from religion, due process, rights of the Arab minority in Israel, and gender equality. At ACRI, Ms. Harris was in charge of program and resource development. Currently in Israel, religious courts govern all personal status, making it impossible for Israelis of different religions to marry. While there, Ms. Harris helped develop projects to streamline the implementation of due process mechanisms in the Ministry of the Interior and to create options for civil marriage in response to the current law. She pursued these goals using advocacy in the Israeli court system, legislation in the parliament, and public education and media outreach in civil society.

Ms. Harris has also worked to defend civil and human rights by helping write shadow reports to the UN for the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Ms. Harris also worked as an international election observer with the UN/OSCE joint mission in Azerbaijan. Ms. Harris points out, however, that citizens cannot exercise their rights if they are not aware of their rights. With the aim of educating citizens in this regard, Ms. Harris has taught law

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### **Eighth Annual Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition May 18–23, 2003**

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#### **For more information, contact:**

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at Khazar University in Baku, Azerbaijan. She has also piloted innovative distance learning programs, and has conducted training and educational workshops on a wide variety of subjects including human rights, pluralism, and democracy education around the world.

This wide range of practical experience that Ms. Harris brings to the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law enhances her vision of how the Center can serve the WCL community and beyond. "As I see it, there are three key roles for the Center. First, working with students, being a resource for them, providing hands-on research and advocacy experiences and being an incubator of student-driven initiatives and ideas. Second, working with faculty engaged in scholarship and research on international human rights and humanitarian law and facilitating their work. And finally, working with the international community to engage in substantive research and project development to help expand the role of international human rights and humanitarian law in the international community."

#### Vision for the Future of the Center

Ms. Harris believes the Center should play both practical and academic roles. "The Center can serve as a resource for students to do academic research, but in order for them to have good opportunities in international human rights, they should not just sit in the library and do research. The Center can help students see how human rights are violated and how they are protected, and what it really means to be an advocate and a lawyer. We are doing this by creating projects with practical elements for students, such as internships and field placement opportunities, and by constantly thinking through projects to take into account the realistic side of what we're trying to do. Human rights advocacy is strategic. I see the work of the Center as being able to think through how we can push the envelope strategically and address cutting-edge issues."

Many students at WCL who are interested in international human rights and humanitarian law stand to gain from such opportunities and also to benefit from Ms. Harris's advice on seeking a fulfilling career. "There are very few full-time, paying jobs for international human rights attorneys, so it is hard to make a living at it. But there are many other worthwhile ways to be involved in human rights. You can serve on the board of directors of an organization, donate your time or your money, or even just read about what is happening. Every person must find what his or her point of entry is, and what he or she is willing and able to do, given practical realities. If you think that human rights and humanitarian law is your life's work, take advantage of the unique opportunities in law school to meet people, do substantive work, and gain an understanding of the field. This will give you an advantage." As a first step toward getting students involved in human rights and humanitarian law, the Center has launched a program this semester called "Munching on Human Rights" that will help students get involved in human rights issues even before they take international law classes.

Ms. Harris envisions the Center as an incubator of ideas and projects that will serve the international community and the cause of international human rights and humanitarian law. She looks forward to partnering with international organizations to providing students with substantive opportunities. Projects currently in development deal with a wide range of novel issues, including reparations for people affected by development projects, developing assessment tools to evaluate international treaty compliance, training indigenous peoples on legal rights and advocacy, freedom of expression in the Americas, and more. 🌐



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