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Alumni Profile

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ALUMNI PROFILE

Courtesy of United States Institute of Peace



Neil J. Kritz, a 1986 graduate of the Washington College of Law (WCL), currently serves as Associate Vice President of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) and Director of USIP's Rule of Law Program. As an independent, non-partisan, national institution established and funded by U.S. Congress, USIP is dedicated to confronting, managing, and resolving threats to international peace in new and innovative ways. The Rule of Law Program works to advance peace through the development of democratic legal and governmental systems. Building upon and refining principles of the rule of law articulated by various international bodies, the Rule of Law Program also provides practical guidance for the successful implementation of such principles in countries throughout the world. In the international arena today, interstate wars, intrastate armed conflicts, extremism, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are among the most significant challenges to international peace and security. However, societies governed by the rule of law are less likely to be international aggressors and more likely to contribute to the stability and sustainability of international peace. Because of the multifaceted nature of such threats, the Rule of Law Program, under Mr. Kritz's direction, operates under the belief that adherence to the rule of law involves more than strict application of inflexible legal technicalities: it requires an evolutionary search for the institutions and processes that will best bring about authentic stability through justice.

Even before attending law school, Mr. Kritz was devoted to working in the field of human rights. Mr. Kritz found WCL an ideal academic institution to engage his interests in and dedication to promoting the rule of law and human rights. Mr. Kritz commended WCL for its strong programs in international law and human rights, as well as its outstanding faculty, making specific reference to Professor Claudio Grossman, now Dean of WCL. Mr. Kritz was involved in the WCL community and served on the first editorial board of the *Journal of International Law and Policy*, now the *International Law Review*.

After leaving WCL, Mr. Kritz worked in the American Bar Association's Government Affairs Office (ABA GAO), which serves as the focal point for the ABA's advocacy efforts before Congress. While at the ABA GAO, Mr. Kritz coordinated the Immigration Law Task Force and the immigration reform effort. He also played an integral role in advocating for the passage of the Genocide Convention in the Senate. Mr. Kritz went on to serve as Special Assistant to the Chairman

at the Administrative Conference of the United States. In that position, Mr. Kritz recommended policy reforms on issues including, but not limited to, asylum and ethical questions within the government.

Mr. Kritz has focused much of his work on research, writing, and consultation about how societies transitioning into functional democracies cope with a legacy of repression, abuse, and conflict. When the notion of transitional justice was at its earliest stage of development, Mr. Kritz published a three volume work entitled *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*. There had never before been a publication addressing many of these issues — for example, persecution, victim compensation, and how countries should deal with past abuses — together. Drawing from over 17,000 sources, Mr. Kritz compiled a comprehensive and coherent analysis of development in the legal portion of the transitional justice field. The first volume focuses on the various legal, philosophical, and political perspectives influencing the transitional justice field, while the second volume analyzes over 20 case studies of transitional justice systems throughout the world. The third and final volume is a compilation of primary documents, providing samples of legislation, constitutional provisions, and relevant treaty excerpts.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is arguably Africa's best-known example of transitional and restorative justice. Drawing from Mr. Kritz's three volume work, as well as earlier truth commissions and transitional justice systems in Latin America, South Africa's experience provides a prime example of how to begin the process of reconciling past abuses. Emphasizing that truth commissions must work to reject notions of collective blame and guilt, ease victims' trauma by distinguishing actual perpetrators, and, most importantly, find the truth and preserve the evidence, Mr. Kritz commended South Africa on its monumental progress. In his modesty, he only expressed gratitude at the opportunity to have been a part of that process.

Mr. Kritz has also provided advice and organized numerous conferences on war crimes and mass abuses throughout the world, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. Mr. Kritz stated that it is incredibly moving to know that, even as an outsider, he has been able to help people deal with a very painful process. Where massive human rights abuses have plagued certain countries, victims tend to view their suffering as unique. As a result, Mr. Kritz emphasized the importance of helping people to recognize that they are not alone and that comfort may be found in the fact that others share their experiences. Understating the extent to which he has contributed to the process of reconciliation in many countries, Mr. Kritz

again only expressed gratitude for the opportunity to help societies turn a page in their history and move forward, rather than simply closing off the past.

On February 5, 2008, USIP held a screening of a film that presents archival, on-location footage from truth commissions in South Africa, Peru, East Timor, and Morocco. During the introduction to the film, Mr. Kritz was recognized as the intellectual foundation of the documentary. "Confronting the Truth: Truth Commissions and Societies in Transition" is a powerful film that bears witness to the importance of Mr. Kritz's work and to all those who are involved in helping victims of mass human rights violations come to terms with a painful period in their past. Mr. Kritz's dedication to the rule of law and promoting peace throughout the world has contributed to making it difficult for countries to deny horrors such as apartheid in South Africa or the Rwandan genocide. The immediacy and accuracy of first person accounts make the past impossible to dismiss. According to Kritz, to forget the past is to ignore the suffering of the people, and to confront the truth is the only way to move toward a new

and better future. When asked whether the 22 countries with truth commissions have been successful in their transitions, Mr. Kritz stated that the mere idea that the past will be examined is a step toward a new, better future of ensuring basic human rights and promoting peace and stability.

Having recently returned from Uganda, Mr. Kritz continues to devote himself to empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources for successful peace-building around the world. Mr. Kritz, a person so obviously passionate about his work, is an example to all who hope to pursue a career in human rights. The WCL community is honored to have Mr. Kritz as an alumnus and commends him for his devotion to promoting the rule of law and working towards a more secure and peaceful future for countries throughout the world.

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Julie Gryce, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the Alumni Profile for the Human Rights Brief



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