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Alumni Profile

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ALUMNI PROFILE



Courtesy of Meghan Stewart

Meghan Stewart, second from left, at a home in Maela, a Burmese refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border.

Meghan Stewart, a graduate of the Washington College of Law (WCL) and former Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Human Rights Brief*, continues to work towards conflict resolution and human rights. A member of the New York bar, Stewart currently works as a Senior Peace Fellow for the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG). A 2005 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, PILPG is a non-profit, global pro bono law firm that assists states with the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements, post-conflict constitution drafting, and war crimes prosecution. Since its establishment in 1996, PILPG has advised over two-dozen clients in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

As a Senior Peace Fellow with PILPG, Stewart has worked with over a dozen of PILPG's clients throughout the world. Stewart currently heads the organization's Burma program, through which she advises Burmese pro-democracy leaders on the development and implementation of strategies aimed at achieving democratic reform in Burma. One of the primary objectives of PILPG's Burma program is to utilize international legal mechanisms to challenge the legitimacy of the Burmese military junta. In the fall of 2008, Stewart assisted Burmese democratic leaders with the filing of a rival

claimant credentials challenge in the United Nations. Stewart works closely with the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), the largest coalition of Burmese pro-democracy groups in existence, encompassing the Burmese government in exile and various Burmese ethnic groups. In May 2008, Stewart traveled to Mae Sot, Thailand, to assist Burmese leaders with preparations for monitoring the Burmese military junta's constitutional referendum.

Stewart recently returned from South Sudan, where she worked with the Government of South Sudan and the chiefs and elders of the Nine Ngok Dinka chiefdoms on preparations for the international arbitration over the Abyei area. The status of Abyei is one of the key sticking points in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. Stewart traveled to Abyei Town, Abyei, to interview Ngok Dinka chiefs and elders and to support a local community mapping project that is documenting the Ngok's traditional lands.

During 2008, Stewart was stationed in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as Chief of Party of PILPG's Sri Lanka program

assisting the Government of Sri Lanka to prepare for peace negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebel group. In Sri Lanka, Stewart worked closely with the Sri Lankan Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process and key government ministries on strategies to advance the peace process, models of state structure, and other issues related to the conflict.

Stewart served as advisor and primary drafter to the Post-Dayton Constitutional Reform negotiations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2005–2006. The negotiations focused on increasing the functionality and strength of the Bosnian Constitution. During the negotiations, Stewart traveled regularly to Sarajevo and other European capitals to support talks among Bosnian political leaders. She also reported on the status of the negotiations to a formal meeting of the Peace Implementation Council, a group of 55 states and agencies that supervise implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords. In addition, Stewart worked with a team of experts in 2006 to draft a peace agreement and negotiation strategy for the Government of Georgia for peace negotiations with the Government of Abkhazia.

According to Stewart, the ability to help clients work through challenges related to peace negotiations and post-conflict reforms is incredibly rewarding. She explains that “when clients decide they want to negotiate or use legal mechanisms, it’s really exciting to be able to provide them with tools and information to help them be more effective.” Such assistance can support the durability of peace agreements and constitutions because it can help parties feel that their interests are represented in the final product. Stewart acknowledges, however, that working on peace negotiations and conflict can be personally and professionally challenging: “Dealing with the atrocities of war can be hard, and in this type of work there are so many external factors that affect you and your clients.” Despite these challenges, Stewart finds that the rewards far outweigh the challenges because “[she is] constantly learning, [she] get[s] to deal with fascinating legal issues, and every week brings something new and interesting across [her] desk.”

Stewart attributes many of her career opportunities to the faculty, practitioners, and her fellow students at WCL: “When I arrived at WCL, I knew exactly what type of law I wanted to practice, and WCL provided so many ways to gain the knowledge and skills I needed to get started in this field.” She says that the practical training she received while at WCL allowed her to transition quickly from a student to a practicing attorney in her selected field, and the commitment to pro bono work at WCL made it easy to stick to her original goals.

A 2000 graduate of Brown University with a B.A. in Political Science and Anthropology, Stewart moved to Washington, D.C. before beginning law school to work in the Office of Public Policy and Government Relations at CARE, an international humanitarian organization. At CARE, Stewart dealt with a range of issues including international humanitarian aid, post-conflict reconstruction, and international human rights. She also traveled to Nepal to investigate how the Maoist insurgency was affecting CARE’s programming there and to Peru to lead a congressional delegation to visit reproductive health programs. She was previously stationed in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where she worked with ABA CEELI on legal education and judicial reform issues.

Stewart served as the Asia staff writer for the *Brief* in her first year and as Co-Editor-in-Chief in her second year. Stewart describes her involvement in the *Brief* as an opportunity to expand beyond the realm of law school to tackle various international issues. In 2006, Ms. Stewart graduated from WCL magna cum laude, Order of the Coif, and attained her Masters in International Affairs from American University’s School of International Service. **HRB**

Lynn Burke, a J.D. Candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the Alumni Profile for the Human Rights Brief.