Alumni Profiles

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FABIOLA CARRIÓN,  
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Fabiola Carrión understands the fear that arises from armed conflict—she grew up during the Peruvian civil war in the 1980s. She would often hear bombs explode while at school in the highlands or while she was in downtown Lima. As government employees, her parents worked closely with individuals who were killed or disappeared. Thus her appreciation for social justice developed during her first-hand experience with conflict, poverty, racism, and classism. Although she was able to escape the fighting, many were not so fortunate. It is estimated that about 80,000 people died in the conflict in Peru, which lasted from 1980 until 2000. Directly experiencing the armed conflict gave Fabiola a sense of duty to become a human rights advocate in Latin America. As an undergraduate student at the University of California, she majored in Political Science and Latin American Studies. She became a fellow with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, which selected her to work with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR, Commission). The experience was eye-opening: she analyzed cases with events that were strikingly similar to those that she experienced as a child, such as a case that involved the bombing of civilians in Tarata, Lima. She was able to work closely with prominent human rights advocates, including Nobel Prize recipient Rigoberta Menchú, a member of the K’iche’ ethnic group who is renowned for her efforts in increasing awareness of the massacre of Guatemala’s indigenous populations during that country’s civil war. Fabiola also worked closely with Santiago Canton, who was the Executive Secretary of the IACHR and is now the Director of the RFK Partners for Human Rights at the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, as well as with Susana Villarrán, who at the time was the Commission’s rapporteur on women’s rights and is now the mayor of Lima.

Fabiola chose WCL because of the school’s reputation for human rights and its relationship with Latin America. While in school, she worked for the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), an NGO that coordinates much of the litigation in the Inter-American System of Human Rights (IAS), advocates for the strengthening of the IAS, and empowers human rights defenders. After finishing at WCL—where she was a staff member of the Human Rights Brief—and before receiving a Licenciatura en Derecho, a legal degree in Spain, she worked at Just Detention International, an organization that fights sexual abuse in detention centers. While there she spearheaded a program that exposed rape and torture during the Mexican government’s campaign against the Zetas crime syndicate.

It was the relationships that she developed at WCL that led to her current role as policy counsel working on digital due process for Access. Professor Anthony Varona, now Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs, enlisted Fabiola to help work on a project in which she developed a curriculum on comparative telecommunications law for scholars in Peru. Thanks to this experience, Fabiola developed a firm understanding that access to methods of communication is a fundamental right that reinforces other rights, such as freedom to expression as well as economic and cultural rights. Mobile communication, for instance, has been a great equalizer for access to information for many Peruvians. Landline phones were not available in the rain forest where she spent her childhood, yet cell phones have opened communication to parts of the world that were previously inaccessible. In her view, telecommunication is a tool for human rights advocacy as well as a right on its own. Information, Fabiola affirms, is no longer a privilege of the elite.

Her work on digital due process is a natural extension of her work in telecommunications and her experience with criminal justice, a foundation she developed working at the IACHR and during a clerkship with Judge Joseph Maltese, a New York state trial judge. She has also worked directly on legislation, challenging bills that included funding cuts to Internet access or that prevented local governments from installing broadband networks. She trained legislators on telecommunications policy across the country and promoted the idea of legislation that increases security and expression on the Web.

Fabiola and her fellow advocates have created programs that seek to ensure strong international awareness for access to digital communication. In June of 2012 the UN Human Rights Council passed Resolution 20/L.13 promoting human rights on the Internet. In the words of the Council, “The Internet is an issue of increasing interest and importance as the rapid pace of technological development enables individuals all over the world to use new information and communications technologies.” Currently Spain, Costa Rica, France, Finland, Greece, and Estonia have constitutional protections or other laws ensuring Internet access. Fabiola not only hopes that number increases but that more countries realize the importance of privacy on the Web and maintain a balance between government interest in accessing
Fabiola is optimistic about the effectiveness of her work and the future of human rights advocacy, though she believes the level of success will depend on the ease of communication. With her focus on digital due process, she encourages policy makers to ensure surveillance practices conform to domestic and international human rights standards. There is a danger that human rights defenders, which increasingly includes bloggers and technologists, will continue to be targets of attacks by governments that feel threatened by the advocates' work. But she does believe that Latin America in particular is on a positive trajectory and could champion access to information and economic development, eventually setting a global standard. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Uruguay have all signed Resolution L.13. Chile enacted the first net neutrality law in the world and Brazil is likely to pass the first ever Internet Bill of Rights called Marco Civil da Internet.

She tells those who are interested in pursuing a career in human rights advocacy to not be dissuaded by the lack of glamour or high-paying jobs. Instead, she thinks people need to be true to their own experiences, values, skills, and weaknesses in order to be effective attorneys or professionals. Personal experience, she insists, separates the impassioned advocate from the distant attorney. She thinks it is important to make strong personal connections to people who have experience in human rights and to pursue interests while perfecting one's skills. Fabiola credits experiential programs—she participated in the Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition—and her experience at a law school that supported all of its students, in particular students of color. Fabiola has carried her experience with the IACHR, her work with Dean Varona, as well as her experiences from childhood with her as she has progressed in her career as a human rights advocate.

Drew Mitnick, a J.D. candidate at the American University Washington College of Law, is the managing online editor for the Human Rights Brief.
Amalia Greenberg Delgado  
JD ’09

Amalia Greenberg Delgado came to the American University Washington College of Law (WCL) wanting to explore the many areas of the law to help her become a better advocate for human rights. Already proactively working to bring social change, Greenberg Delgado had started an organization, Asylum Access, before law school that is dedicated to making refugee rights a reality in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Greenberg Delgado sought to take advantage of the practical opportunities at WCL, including the International Human Rights Law Clinic and the various externships and professional connections that the law school offered. She credits these experiences, among others, as key to further propelling her career in immigrants’ rights.

As an immigrant from Venezuela, Greenberg Delgado endeavored to advocate for protections that immigrants around the world were not afforded. To pursue this end, she moved to Egypt and worked for African and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA), where she interviewed asylum seekers and prepared legal claims for proceedings before the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). She loved her work, which focused on Somali woman, and found herself inspired by the impact of her efforts. In her subsequent travels to Turkey, she realized that the refugee legal services available in Egypt were lacking in Turkey and in most parts of the world.

After several months working in Turkey, Greenberg Delgado was offered a job in Ecuador to open a local office in Quito for the Jesuit Refugee Service. There, she developed projects with local and international agencies to facilitate the legal and social integration of refugees in Ecuador by opening access to legal, health, education and other services. A year later, Greenberg Delgado was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to return to Turkey and work with the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Refugee Legal Aid Project to continue her work on improving refugee rights. In Turkey, she conducted trainings for local lawyers on international refugee law and legal aid, while providing legal assistance to asylum seekers in the refugee status determination process.

Greenberg Delgado’s experiences in Egypt, Turkey, and Ecuador showed her the importance of empowering refugees. In order to harness U.S. funding, political, and legal support, she founded Asylum Access, now a thriving nonprofit organization with offices in the United States, Ecuador, Thailand, and Tanzania. Greenberg Delgado continues her work with Asylum Access as a member of the organization’s Board of Directors.

Greenberg Delgado came to WCL in 2006, where she continued her activism and exploration of the many of the areas of the law that influenced immigrants’ rights. Her first summer, she opened Asylum Access’s first international “on the ground” office in Quito, Ecuador. She got an adjudicatory perspective externing with the U.S. Immigration Court in Arlington, Virginia, outside Washington, DC. At both the DC Employment Justice Center and United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, she was able to gain an understanding about the implications of workers’ rights on immigrant rights. She continued fostering her growing knowledge of immigration law through a clerkship her 2L summer with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Immigrants’ Rights Project and by working with Professor Jayesh Rathod as a Dean’s Fellow in her 2L year. Following a series of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) workplace raids that led to the deprivation of due process rights and detention of undocumented workers, Greenberg Delgado published an article in the Human Rights Brief entitled, “How ICE Threatens the Ethical Responsibilities of Key Players in Worksite Raids: Postville Study.”

One of her most rewarding experiences was practicing as a Student Attorney in the International Human Rights Law Clinic. Together with her clinic partner, she represented a Sudanese man who was seeking withholding of removal and protection under the Convention Against Torture. The client was bi-polar and convicted of an aggravated felony after he was found wandering through someone’s house during a bipolar episode. The U.S. government initiated removal proceedings to send him back to Sudan. The client’s mental health situation and his detention in an immigration detention center four hours from the law school created additional challenges for Greenberg Delgado. Through the support of her professors and the resources at WCL, Greenberg Delgado and her clinic partner achieved a grant of withholding of removal. In his oral grant, the Judge stated that he had been impressed by the work put into the case, noting the importance of providing pro bono legal aid—sentiments Greenberg Delgado found particularly motivating.

After her 2009 graduation, Greenberg Delgado was awarded a Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowship to work with the ACLU of Northern California on the policing of immigrant communities and threats to individuals’ Fourth and Fifth Amendment rights. There, she participated in impact litigation to address police abuses that occurred when police tried to unlawfully enforce immigration laws. She provided technical, legal, and Know-Your-Rights support for community leaders to advocate for improved law enforcement practices, such as vehicle impounds and checkpoints, and the DHS “Secure Communities” program. She also developed and led public education campaigns with several media outlets to counter myths about immigrants and crime.
After her fellowship ended, she worked with Amnesty International (AI) as an immigrants’ rights coordinator for the United States southwest border region. At AI she again served as a multi-faceted advocate: visiting the border; researching and publishing a report on the human rights violations of individuals at the border; training activists; advocating on behalf of migrants facing deportation; and drafting policy and legal analysis on local, state, and national policies and laws.

While observing the borders in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, Greenberg Delgado was drawn to addressing the complexities faced by people on either side of the Mexico-United States border. People are pushed by such negative forces in their home country that they are willing to cross a dangerous border and be subjected to terrible conditions and human rights abuses as they cross the border. If and once they make it across the border, they face additional abuses at the hands of police officers, employers, home owners, and others who prey on undocumented immigrants who are often too afraid to assert their rights. In some cases migrants at the Mexican border faced the same plight as refugees with whom Greenberg Delgado had worked in other border regions—deportation before they were granted their right to seek asylum.

After working at AI, Greenberg Delgado wanted to get back to direct legal services. Therefore, she worked as a Staff Attorney at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) and most recently at OneJustice where she works closely with legal services organizations and pro bono attorneys to launch legal clinics in rural areas of California for underserved migrant communities. Greenberg Delgado sees a constant theme in her advocacy from the time she first sat down with her refugee client in Cairo. She states, “Individuals, who cross borders fleeing persecution and seeking a better life, have a unique resilience and power to survive. The information and courage they can gain through legal services might be just what they need to land and stay on their own two feet.”

WCL was an important part of Greenberg Delgado’s success. She advises that students can make the most of their time spent at WCL by seeking a wide variety of experiences in the law to hone their skills as advocates and determine where they are most passionate. She credits networking and interning with different types of organizations as the reason she was able to identify her skillset and develop a successful career route. She urges current students to use the law school resources—professors, clinics, other students—to nourish these relationships. She has found that WCL’s public interest-minded graduates stay in touch, grow their skills together, and support each other. She is grateful for the growing community of WCL grads bent on improving the rights of marginalized populations and supporting each other in pursuing this end.

Anna Naimark, a 2013 J.D. recipient from the American University Washington College of Law, is the social media editor for the Human Rights Brief.