

The Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic - A Successful Inaugural Year 2006/2007

The Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic was launched in September 2006 in order to give the law students at Al-Quds University a chance to study the Palestinian Question in international law, while at the same time being trained in practical human rights advocacy skills by some of the top human rights lawyers in Palestine. The class of 2006/2007 took part in an academic programme, a series of skills workshops, and tailor-made fieldwork projects with leading organisations in the field, as well as many relevant extracurricular events. All students graduated from the programme in June 2007 with greatly increased awareness of the legal aspects of the occupation, the tools to challenge it, and the inspiration to do so. The Clinic is the first of its kind in Palestine.

Background

Thus far Palestinian legal education has been based around studying theoretical texts, many of which are Jordanian or Egyptian and bear little relation to the unique Palestinian experience. Palestinian NGOs and society in general have a need for more comprehensively trained human rights-aware lawyers. The Clinic aims to provide for these needs, and to provide specific support to organisations through student externships, and services to the poorest sectors of the Palestinian public through a walk-in legal aid center.

The Academic Programme

The Clinic has put together a comprehensive year-long programme of teaching sessions, many of which are provided by leading human rights practitioners. Topics covered include – at the start – an introduction to IHL and IHR law, an introduction to human rights advocacy (provided by Shawa'an Jabareen, the Director of Al-Haq), the advantages, disadvantages and strategies of litigating cases in the Israeli courts (by Attorney Hassan Jabareen, General Director of Adalah), and many more topical and relevant sessions on issues of key importance to the Palestinians. Other examples include a session on Palestinian prisoners and the Israeli military court system by Attorney Sahar Francis, Director of Addameer, two sessions on the refugee issue by Badil, a session on torture by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), children's rights by Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI), and the issue of natural resources, presented by a German expert. We also held a session on UN mechanisms by a lawyer from the UN OHCHR, and one on international law and the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by the Negotiations Support Unit of the PLO. Each of our practitioner-lecturers combined a solid analysis of the law, with a discussion of real-life examples from their practice, and an evaluation of the success of the strategies employed.

The Skills Workshops

In the first semester the Clinic held two weekly series of practical skills workshops. One set was taught by Ms. Nina Atallah, Head of Documentation at Al-Haq, who trained the students in writing reports on IHR/IHL violations, taking affidavits, the requirements of evidence, etc. The second set of workshops, taught by Mr. Radi Darwish, was aimed at learning to provide legal services to Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Practical training included interviewing clients, analysing problems, writing legal letters, etc. Substantive areas of Israeli law relevant to Palestinians were also covered. These include laws and regulations on residency, benefits, permits, etc.

Fieldwork Projects and Walk-in Legal Aid Centre

The second semester gave the students the opportunity to put their new skills and insights to the test in fieldwork projects undertaken with coalitions such as United Against Torture and organizations such as Al-Haq, Badil, Mandela and Addameer. Students worked under close supervision of the lawyers at these organisations as well as the Clinic team. In addition, Clinic supervising lawyer Radi Darwish and a group of Clinic students set up a walk-in legal advice centre in the Jerusalem village of Sur Baher, where, under Mr. Darwish's supervision, the students advised members of the public on benefits and residency rights.

Additional Events

In addition to the curriculum, the Clinic hosted some very popular public events. These included a guest lecture by Professor Lisa Hajjar from the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) on the military court system, a lecture on clinical legal education in human rights advocacy provided by the experienced clinical teacher Prof. David Chavkin from the American University, a lecture by German lawyer Wolfgang Kaleck on universal jurisdiction and his prosecution of former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and a conference on Jerusalem, which saw the launch of an inter-faith coalition for the protection of Jerusalem, headed by Christian and Muslim leaders. Finally, the Clinic co-hosted, with DCI, a practitioner lunch for Professor Jaap Doek, the Chair of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child, with Mr. Wasfi Kabaha, PA Minister for Detainees and ex-Detainees Affairs, as one of our guests.

Our Partners

Our partner organisations provide us with guidance, advice and support, as well as practical contributions. Our two main partners are Al-Haq and Adalah, two of the most important Palestinian human rights organisations in the region. Al-Haq's lawyers have provided many lectures to the Clinic class, as well as the training workshops. Adalah has supported us by providing six expert lectures, as well as legal advice and strategic guidance. We have established partnerships with many other organisations which provided lectures, hosted our students and cooperated in other ways. We are also members of the United Against Torture coalition.

The Open Society Institute has generously awarded us a grant for initial set-up costs.

The Clinic Team

The Clinic team consists of Munir Nuseibah, an Al-Quds graduate with an LL.M in international human rights from the American University, Washington, D.C.; Radi Darwish, an Al-Quds graduate and lawyer with training in the Israeli legal system; and Grietje Baars, an international lawyer and former practitioner from London, who is completing a Ph.D. in international criminal law.

Vision for the Future

The Clinic will expand, both in the number of students participating in its programme, in the number of staff employed, and in its activities. In 2007/2008, we anticipate participating in

petitions to Israeli courts and UN submissions, building our legal research capacity and expanding our local and international networks.

More information on the Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic will shortly be available on our website: http://www.alquds.edu/centers_institutes/hrclinic/

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