

  
 AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
 WASHINGTON  
 COLLEGE OF LAW



# Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law Annual Report 2021-2022



American University Washington College of Law established the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law in 1990 as part of its long-standing commitment to international human rights and the rule of law. For over 30 years, the Center has operated at the forefront of human rights education and advocacy, working with students, faculty, and in the international legal community to provide support for human rights initiatives in the U.S. and around the world. The Center advances the University's broader mission by championing a holistic teaching, research, and advocacy agenda, serving as the intellectual and professional engine behind human rights at the Washington College of Law. All Center programming promotes the value of service, thereby grounding the Center as a core resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, and as a bridge between academia and civil society.



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# Our Mission

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To advance a holistic teaching, research, and advocacy agenda grounded in service to vulnerable individuals and communities and fueled by intellectual curiosity, thereby positioning the Center as a bridge between academia and civil society.

# Our Vision

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We equip and empower the next generation of human rights lawyers, advocates, and scholars with the skills and ideas needed to address today's complex and multi-faceted human rights challenges that are entrenched in historical systems of oppression.



## Litigation & Advocacy

Strengthening the rule of law and providing a foundation for access to justice that helps defend and safeguard human rights around the world



## Research & Scholarship

Supporting theoretical and applied research that investigates and models ways to promote, protect, and defend human rights



## Education & Training

Promoting widespread understanding of human rights through teaching, service, and learning beyond the traditional law school curriculum



## EDUCATION & TRAINING

Promoting widespread understanding of human rights through teaching, service, and learning beyond the traditional law school curriculum

Our specialized curricula and activities support student learning of human rights issues, legal frameworks, and lawyering skills through student leadership activities, workshops and trainings, and specialized seminars. Our cross-campus programming and community engagement activities involve an array of partners throughout the Washington, D.C. metro area, across the U.S., and around the world.

## **Specialized Curricula**

**Kovler Project Against Torture (KPAT)** students conduct intensive research on the six countries appearing before the Committee against Torture during its November session, and work in teams to produce reports identifying compliance issues with the Convention. The practicum's overarching goal is to prepare students to effectively advise the Committee on the compliance of countries. The practicum also prepares students to be effective lawyers in international settings. Students develop and apply numerous professional skills, including advocacy and professionalism in multi-cultural contexts; processing faculty feedback with opportunities for guided reflection; legal analysis, reasoning, and research; professional and ethical responsibilities; handling and synthesizing voluminous materials, including confidential and sensitive information; teamwork and collaborative drafting. Together the theoretical content of the program and the students' participation in the CAT proceedings in Geneva offer a unique experiential learning opportunity. The practicum is taught by Professor & Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman, who founded the program while serving as a

member and Chair of the UN Committee against Torture (2003-2016). The practicum takes place during the fall semester and requires students to participate in the session of CAT in Geneva during the second week of November. Under the direction of Professor Grossman, Kovler students collaborate with the Committee chair and members to recommend issues that could be addressed in the interactive dialogue that takes place with countries who submit their reports to the Committee in accordance with the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Countries that will be covered this year in the November session are El Salvador, Malawi, Somalia, Chad, Uganda and Australia.

The Kovler alumni network has also proven to be a strong and robust network who have consistently opened internships and employment opportunities to other Kovler alumni. Every year, the program organizes a reunion for new graduates to connect with established project alumni. The reunions serve multiple goals, including creation of opportunities, opening externships, employment, publicizing the law school, and attracting new applicants.

KPAT also organizes a networking dinner in Geneva, Switzerland with current students and program alumni working in the region. The dinner includes members of the Committee Against Torture and its Secretariat, lawyers from international firms, the ICRC, TWO, IPO, diplomats, and ambassadors, among many other prestigious supporters of the Kovler Project.

The students' ability to travel to Geneva is due to the generosity of Mr. Peter Kovler, whose gift allows for the funding of this program designed to promote the prohibition of torture by creating a unique educational opportunity.

The Center's **Impact Litigation Project**, whose faculty director is Professor & Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman, aims to strengthen the rule of law through litigation and advocacy. Every year, the Center offers an experiential learning course, the **Seminar on Strategic Litigation in International Human Rights**, which attracts students who have an interest in human rights advocacy, strategic litigation, and seek practical experience working in the regional human rights courts and international human rights mechanisms.

The course is open to all JD students and to the Humphrey Program visiting scholars. The course draws between 13-25 students who contribute legal research, drafting, strategic advice, and substantive legal work to external clients and institutions. Through the Impact Litigation Project, students have the opportunity to collaborate on supervised cases with the potential to achieve broad and lasting impact on public policy and legislation.

In addition to documenting human rights violations, the Project seeks to promote accountability, expand public education and awareness, and provide a foundation for future litigation that helps defend and safeguard human rights around the

world. This year, the seminar was led by Visiting Scholar Viviana Waisman.

Recent work completed by seminar students includes:

- Contributing to a report on femicide in Mexico and related communication to UN Special Procedures on behalf of victims of femicide
- Providing requested legal analysis and recommendations to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture on key regions of need and priority areas of concern
- Contributing to the Center's annual report on trends and developments in the jurisprudence of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

During the 2021-22 school year, the Impact Litigation Project also worked on multiple active legal cases in numerous countries, including Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, Honduras, Egypt, and Colombia. These cases concerned human rights violations including the killing of a minor, deaths after treatment in a state-run dialysis center, and corruption, among others.

The ILP also prepared legal interventions on behalf of civil society partners during the 2021-22 year:

- Communication to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention pertaining to the detention and torture of a political activist in Uganda.
- Communication to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention under its urgent action procedure pertaining to the detention of an environmental public interest lawyer in Vietnam.

In Fall 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted the Center's request for a thematic hearing on the right to housing in the United States, the first of its kind on this topic. The hearing took place on December 16, 2021 and featured a delegation of experts from the National Homelessness Law Center and the ACLU of Northern and Southern California. Assistant Director of Impact Litigation and the Kovler Project Against Torture **Kate Holcombe** led this collaborative effort on behalf of the Center and presented testimony at the hearing. You may view the hearing [here](#).

## Student Engagement

The Center is dedicated to the continuing education and empowerment of its students in the area of human rights and international humanitarian law. We offer exciting ways for students to get involved, starting from year one: students can join the Student Advisory Board, write for the Human Rights Brief, or apply to one of the Center's numerous RA positions.

The Center's Student Advisory Board (SAB) provides students interested in and committed to human rights the opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of Center programming, and to learn tangible skills beyond the classroom for effective advocacy and activism. This year, the 2021-22 SAB worked on a number of projects related to providing research support for local mutual aid organizations and coordinating a new Student Affinity Group Coalition.

In February, the current Student Advisory Board decided to remain with the Center until Fall 2022 to continue their work. These members include: **Arielle Aboulafia** (JD '23), **Katelyn Buckles** (JD '23), **Vicky Cheng** (JD '23), **Thea Cabrera Montejo** (JD '23), **Alexander Monteiro** (JD '23), and **Kathleen Parnow** (JD '23).

The Center involves student research assistants in all aspects of its programming. Every Center project prioritizes the creation of unique opportunity for skill-building and intellectual rigor for its students at all stages of their legal education. This year, the Center offered eleven research opportunities on various issues within the human rights field. Student researchers honed essential legal research and writing skills, while making valuable contributions to our work in anti-torture, gender justice, impact litigation, global toxics management, and human rights education.



The Center's 2021-22 student RAs include: **Madison Bingle** (J.D./M.A.'22), **John Paul Bongkiyi** (LL.M.'22), **Courtney Veneri** (J.D./M.A.'22), **Aishwarya Ponugoti** (L.L.M. '22), **Katelyn Buckles** (J.D./M.A.'23), **Karine Ghazaryan** (LL.M.'22), **Paulina Lucio Maymon** (J.D.'22), **Joe Mitchell** (J.D.'22), **Thea Cabrera Montejo** (J.D.'23), **Ira Papagjika** (LL.M.'21), and **Vanessa Sarmiento** (LL.M.'22).

## Events & Activities

The Center hosted a variety of events that addressed pressing human rights issues, including panel discussions, workshops, seminars, and expert convenings.

The Center joined AUWCL's annual In My Backyard (IMBY) Service Day, organized by the Office of Public Interest, joining over 130 participants comprised of faculty, staff, returning and incoming students for a week of volunteering in the community to kick off the academic year.

In September, Center started off the Fall 2022 semester by welcoming incoming and returning WCL students and faculty to its annual welcome reception, returning to an in-person event this year!

Center staff participated in the International and Abroad Opportunities Fair in September, joining human rights faculty to meet with students and share insights about AUWCL's unique human rights-related opportunities both on campus and abroad.

Center staff also participated in AUWCL's 2021 Fall Reunion

September. Former Acting Director **Melissa del Aguila** and **Marcos Orellana**, Director of the Global Toxics and Human Rights Project, joined a panel to discuss regulation of plastics and the global pursuit of environmental justice. The panel was moderated by Center faculty advisor, Professor **David Hunter**.

In October, the Center paired over 25 students with human rights staff for 1-on-1 mentoring and resume review sessions over three days, in coordination with the Office of Career and Professional Development, to prepare students for AUWCL's externship fair, internships and career opportunities in human rights.

The Center participated in the seventh annual Films Across Borders series in October by hosting a film screening and discussion of the critically acclaimed film "Girl Rising: the Fifth Anniversary." Attendees from around the world joined the virtual panel discussion with experts from Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, and American University's School of Communication.

**Melissa del Aguila** coordinated a national network of law school-based Human Rights Centers this winter, hosting virtual convenings in October 2021 and January 2022. The network provides a forum for leaders of U.S. law school-based human rights centers to interact, share best practices, and consult on emerging challenges.



## RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

Supporting theoretical and applied research that investigates and models ways to promote, protect, and defend human rights

Our research and scholarship activities promote legal research and social scientific methodologies that can be harnessed by civil society, institutions, and advocates to advance impactful and innovative solutions to critical human rights challenges. We create and support research around robust interdisciplinary agendas for academic audiences and human rights practitioners.

## Projects & Initiatives

**The Public Finance and Human Rights Project**, a joint initiative with the University of Pretoria's Centre for Human Rights and the University of Connecticut's Business and Human Rights Initiative, had another successful year after launching in Fall 2020. The Project supports research on the intersections between human rights, central banking, and development finance, and seeks to build a network of scholars, practitioners, and policy makers interested in examining the relationship between public finance, human rights, and environmental and social sustainability.

The Project hosted three events this year; two on the Financial Services Human Rights Benchmark and one on the role of central banks in dealing with environmental and social challenges. The events featured a number of business and human rights experts from around the world, including South Africa, Ghana, and Australia.

## Student, Scholar & Faculty Research

A student-run publication of the Center, the **Human Rights Brief** provides legal analysis of cutting-edge human rights issues. This past year, the Brief enjoyed great success, contributing articles, editing pieces, and working with practitioners around the world to further scholarship.

This year, the Human Rights Brief released its latest volume, Volume 25: Issues 1 and 2, which focus on providing nuanced and critical analyses of the ways in which states perpetuate systematic human rights abuses through politics, judicial systems, and foreign policies. These issues of the Brief highlight enduring and emergent human rights issues, while exploring solutions to end cycles of violence, abuse, and deprivation of rights and to empower affected persons.

The Brief continued to release episodes in its highly rated podcast series, "Human Rights Unscripted" featuring AUWCL human rights faculty and practitioners.

In March, the Brief held its annual symposium—a two-day virtual event series titled "Reimagining the Refugee and Asylee Experience Through Law: Exploring US Culpability and (Un)Exceptionalism." The Symposium featured discussions with panelists on the lived experiences of refugees and asylees in the United States and the challenges, restrictions and opportunities they face.

## Visiting Scholars

The Center offers visiting scholars and practitioners diverse opportunities to spend a summer, semester, or year at AUWCL conducting research, supporting our programs, and sharing experiences with students and a distinguished group of peers. Meet this year's international visiting scholars!

**Viviana Waisman:** The Center welcomed Viviana Waisman in Fall 2021 as a Visiting Scholar. She taught the Center's Seminar on Strategic Litigation in International Human Rights and advanced research on curricular developments in human rights legal education. Ms. Waisman, who holds an LL.M. from Oxford University and a J.D. from UC Hastings, is an expert in women's rights and international human rights and is the president and founder of Women's Link Worldwide.

**Maria Julia Dellasoppa:** This year, Maria Julia Dellasoppa continued her work with the Center before departing in January 2022. Over two years, she served as project coordinator and lead researcher for the Center's Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American Human Rights System. Ms. Dellasoppa is an Argentine human rights lawyer who received her LL.M. from UCLA.

**Christian Finsterbusch:** Last year, Christian Finsterbusch continued his work with the Center's Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American Human Rights System before departing in November 2021. As a human rights attorney and specialist in disability rights, he previously served as a consultant with the International Labour Organization and as a legal officer with the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva. After departing the Center, he joined the International Criminal Court as a Junior Visiting Professional.

## Center, Faculty & Staff Publications

**The Impact Litigation Project** published "Annex I: the Legal Methods and Jurisprudence of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (2020)," a supplement to its 2018 report analyzing claims and opinions related to arbitrary deprivation of liberty issued by the UN-WGAD. The new annex reflects updated findings and trends related to the Working Group's jurisprudence from 2019.

**Public Finance and Human Rights Project** directors **Daniel Bradlow** and **Stephen Park** co-authored a policy brief in *Task Force 9: International Finance, T20* titled "International Standards and the Role of Central Banks in Global Financial Governance."

**Diane Orentlicher** published a keynote address, “Transitional Justice and Private Actors: Harnessing Business Incentives to Advance Victims’ Priorities,” in a briefing paper on The Roles and Responsibilities of Private Sector Actors in Transitional Justice in Africa and Latin America.

**Robert Goldman** published an article in CounterPunch, “Ukraine’s War Crimes Trials: Legal But Not Necessarily Wise” examining the ramifications of Ukraine’s decision to hold war crimes trials during hostilities with Russia.

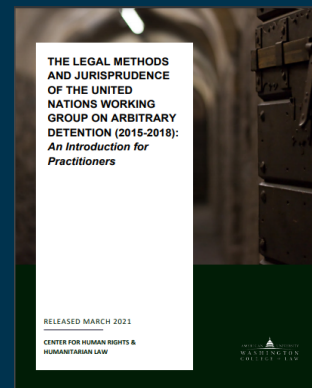
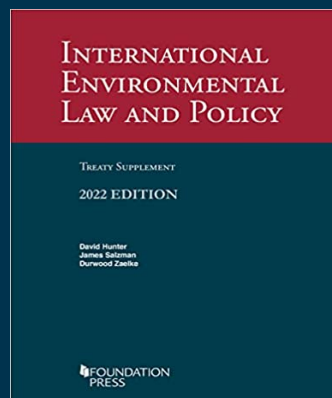
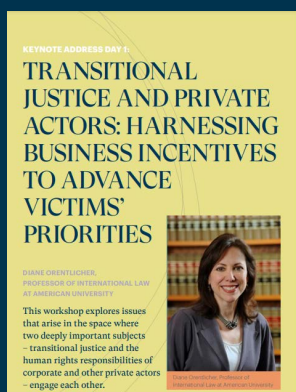
**Claudio Grossman** authored “Remedies for Gross Breaches of International Law, with Particular Attention to Transatlantic Chattel Slavery” in *The American Society of International Law*. He also published “The Invasion of Ukraine: A Gross Violation of International Law” in *The Human Rights Brief*, Volume 25.

**David Hunter** co-authored the sixth edition of the casebook *International Environmental Law and Policy*. This edition of the book reflects major new updates. In January, he published a supplement to the casebook entitled “Glasgow Climate Summit: COP 26,” as part of the UCLA School of Law Public Law Research Paper Series.

**Juan E. Méndez** joined the submission of an amicus curiae brief filed in the case of *Al Nashiri v. Biden* regarding the exclusionary rule at the Military Commissions.

**Anita Sinha** authored “Transnational Migration Deterrence,” in the *Boston College Law Review*, examining options to provide accountability for human rights violations committed within systems of transnational migration control.

## Center Faculty & Staff Publications





## LITIGATION & ADVOCACY

Strengthening the rule of law and providing a foundation for access to justice that helps defend and safeguard human rights around the world

Our activities in litigation and advocacy enhance and promote access to justice around the world through strengthening human rights frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels, while empowering marginalized individuals and communities to assert their basic human rights. This focus area supports diverse projects and initiatives with partners worldwide.

## **Project & Initiatives**

**The Anti-Torture Initiative (ATI)** engages in strategic research and advocacy and supports targeted training and litigation efforts to fight and prevent torture worldwide. The ATI supports the development of norms, promoting the implementation of reforms and best practices in different jurisdictions, including providing expert testimony and amicus curiae briefs. It also engages in strategic advocacy around thematic issues not traditionally encompassed by the torture and ill-treatment framework, such as abuses in healthcare settings or treatment of women, LGBTI persons, and gender non-conforming individuals and children.

On December 10, 2021, the Center commemorated Human Rights Day with a webinar on the development and implementation of the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering, known as the Méndez

Principles, and their application in Brazil. The webinar was organized in collaboration with Fair Trials, the Public Defender's Office of Rio de Janeiro, and the National Association of Public Defenders, among others, and featured presentations by former ATI Assistant Director **Vanessa Drummond** and Professor **Juan E. Méndez**.

The ATI concluded a one-year Ford Foundation grant in April 2022, which supported the initiative's efforts to strengthen justice and accountability in Mexico on issues of femicide and enforced disappearances. Vanessa Drummond, Assistant Director and lead professional staff member of the ATI, departed WCL at the end of the grant. Following Vanessa's departure, the ATI continued its work with support from an excellent roster of student researchers.

In January 2020, the Center launched the next phase of the **Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American Human Rights System**, which seeks to advance efforts to improve the nomination and election processes for judges and commissioners to the IAHRs. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the Center supports the work of an Independent Panel of Experts who evaluate the qualifications of candidates applying to serve as commissioners and judges.

The Center acts as the Panel's Secretariat, the coordination of which was carried out this year by international visiting scholars affiliated with the Center, **Maria Julia Dellasoppa** and **Christian Finsterbusch**. The Secretariat ensures the independence of the Panel by working with its members to gather information about the nomination and selection processes, interview the candidates, and issue a final report with its findings. The Independent Panel of Experts of the Center's Initiative on Election Monitoring in the IAHRs concluded its process of evaluating candidates applying to serve as commissioners and judges to the IAHRs this year. The Panel released its final evaluative report in October 2021, with support from the Center.

**The Syrian Initiative to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence** (Syrian Initiative) is a collaborative project of Syrian civil society organizations and American University, whose primary goal is to increase access to justice for Syrians affected by sexual and gender-based violence. Directed by alum Deyaa Alrwishdi (LL.M. '17), the Syrian Initiative has involved key faculty and staff from the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law and the Program on International Comparative Legal Studies. It aims to reduce stigmatization surrounding SGBV; provide psychosocial support

to survivors and their communities; strengthen engagement and collaboration among CSOs; improve the quality of pre-existing SGBV documentation; and enhance justice and accountability efforts within Syria.

**The Global Toxics & Human Rights Project** is a joint initiative with the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law and the Program on Environmental and Energy Law. The Project leverages partnerships with a broad coalition of stakeholders to provide technical assistance, strategic planning, case support, advocacy, awareness raising, and standard setting. The Project uses the Center's specialized knowledge and experience in environmental justice and supporting UN mandates to enrich the work of UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, **Dr. Marcos Orellana**.

In Fall 2021, Dr. Orellana presented two reports in his capacity as the Special Rapporteur. He presented a report on the right to science to the UN Human Rights Council in September. In addition, he presented a thematic report on plastics and human rights to the UN General Assembly which discussed a human rights-based approach to a potential global agreement.



In February 2021, the UN Environmental Assembly adopted one of the recommendations of the report on the right to science: establishing a global science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution. In March 2022, the UN Environment Assembly passed a resolution launching negotiations for an international legally binding instrument on plastics.

In February 2022, Dr. Orellana visited Peru to learn more about the impacts of toxics on human rights in the country. He visited several regions and met with leaders, civil society, and affected communities on exposure to heavy metals, the health and environmental effects of oil extraction, and other forms of toxic contamination. In April, Dr. Orellana visited Arica, Chile, where a public catastrophe unfolded after nearly 20,000 tons of toxic wastes were taken from Sweden and dumped in Arica in 1984. For thirty years, children and others have been exposed to high levels of arsenic and heavy metals.

The Project also supported the Special Rapporteur in submitting amicus briefs to international and domestic courts. Working with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, Dr. Orellana submitted two briefs to the European Court of Human Rights regarding cases under

consideration by the court on climate change and human rights. They also submitted an amicus brief to the Ecuador Constitutional Court regarding 109 Indigenous communities affected by an oil spill in the Amazon region.

This past year the Project continued promotion of integrating a rights-based approach in a global plastics treaty at several international conferences and programs, including co-organizing a side event on plastics and human rights, in collaboration with the Geneva Environment Network, during the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The Project continued its support of key advocacy efforts on environmental justice and human rights, including participation in the first Conference of Parties for the Escazú Agreement on environmental rights. At the High-Level Segment of the Meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, Dr. Orellana advocated for a human rights-based approach to chemicals and waste agreements.

In Fall 2022, two new reports will be presented on the effect of toxics on the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and mercury, small-scale gold mining and human rights.

# CENTER STAFF UPDATES

## Melissa del Aguila

The Center's Acting Director, Melissa del Aguila, joined the Center in 2011 and departed in April 2022. In her eleven years at WCL, she worked in various capacities at the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, including as a research fellow, adjunct professor, project director, and, most recently, as the Center's Acting Director. In that time, she expanded global partnerships, raised millions of dollars in grant funding, and mentored innumerable students and advocates who have gone on to work at leading NGOs and in the highest levels of government.



Melissa led the Center's grants operation since 2015 and was the co-architect of every successful grant proposal the Center set forth in that time, totaling over \$5M in private and federal awards. She oversaw the successful implementation of numerous largescale projects, directing collaborative research and education initiatives with partners in Cambodia, Colombia, Pakistan, Syria, and Vietnam, as well as throughout the United States. An expert in human rights education, she worked with faculty, staff, and alumni to create unique learning opportunities for students to work on such issues as anti-torture, disability rights, election monitoring, land rights, and more.

Melissa's contributions to this community extend beyond her work with the Center. She served on the DC Engagement Committee, the Public Interest Committee, and the PIPS Selection Committee, in addition to numerous high-level hiring committees. She also served on various working groups with colleagues on main campus, most recently with the AU Office of Research, focusing on strengthening strategic planning and research enterprise initiatives.

A graduate of Princeton University and Cornell Law School, Melissa has dedicated her career to public service, pursuing justice and advancing education through her work with refugees and unaccompanied immigrant children, through her commitment to addressing disparities in access to education for underrepresented students, and through her efforts to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights. Melissa is deeply missed at the Center!

# CENTER STAFF UPDATES

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## Anastassia Fagan

The Center's Interim Assistant Director, Stacy Fagan, departed the Center at the beginning of January 2022. She was appointed to lead the research program of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. In this role, she will grow the Institute's expanding research portfolio, overseeing research development and fundraising, and collaborating with faculty on publications and scholarship.



Stacy was a highly valued partner in shaping and advancing the work of the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law over the years and will be sorely missed. Stacy arrived at the Center over six years ago and quickly moved into senior coordinator roles as the Center grew and now leaves us the Center's Interim Assistant Director. Stacy was the co-architect of every successful grant proposal we have had since she joined the Center in 2015, totaling over \$5M in private and federal awards. In this time, she honed our strategic communications machinery, advanced institutional partnerships across campus, and mentored student researchers affiliated with the Center's core student activities.

A doctoral candidate in AU's department of anthropology, Stacy has received numerous awards and highest honors in her field, including the Adel Ait-Ghezala Graduate Research Fellowship and the Doctoral Student Research Award, among many others. Her interdisciplinary background and doctoral-level talents enriched and elevated the caliber of our work beyond measure. We are deeply grateful to have had Stacy at the Center, and Notre Dame's gain is our significant loss.

# CENTER STAFF UPDATES

## Vanessa Drummond

Vanessa Drummond departed her position as the Assistant Director of the Anti-Torture Initiative in February 2022, with the close of the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law's grant supporting efforts to promote justice and accountability in Mexico. She served in this role since 2017, working tirelessly with partners around the world to engage in strategic research and advocacy, and to implement targeted training and litigation efforts to fight and prevent torture worldwide. A dedicated human rights advocate with extensive experience working on torture prevention initiatives, she was instrumental in the development of the groundbreaking new Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering. Vanessa engaged and mentored dozens of AUWCL students in all of these efforts and more, bringing her talent, passion, and expertise to help form the next generation of human rights advocates.



## Katherine Holcombe

Kate Holcombe, Assistant Director of Impact Litigation and the Kovler Project Against Torture, departed the Center in July 2022. Kate supported academic programs related to the prohibition of torture under international law and strategic litigation in international human rights. Kate's commitment to the Center's Kovler Project Against Torture and the students in this experiential learning program were integral to its success. She also supervised and participated in litigation before the Inter-American human rights bodies, and worked on a wide range of issues and special projects related to impact litigation.



In Fall 2021, the IACHR granted the Center's request for a thematic hearing on the right to housing in the United States, the first of its kind on this topic, thanks to Kate's tireless work with the Impact Litigation Project. In December, Kate led the Center's collaborative effort in presenting testimony at the hearing.

# CENTER STAFF UPDATES

## Meagan DeSimone

Meagan joined the Center in April 2022 to serve as the Legal Fellow for the Project on Global Toxics and Human Rights. They provide overall coordination, logistics and research support for the Project, including processing cases and petitions, conducting research, supporting the drafting of reports and other resource documents, and overseeing the workflow of student research assistants. Meagan is also an American University alum, having received their JD from WCL in 2021.



During law school, Meagan held an internship with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Toxic Substances, and was a member of the International Law Review and the Lawyering Peace Program. Meagan also served as a Legal Research Assistant with Professor and Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman. They received their BA in Global/International Studies from Emory University in 2016. Since joining the Center, Meagan has become an indispensable team member.

## Marcos Orellana

This past year Dr. Orellana continued his role as director of the Center's Global Toxics and Human Rights Project and UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights. Dr. Orellana's expertise in international law and human rights and environmental law has been invaluable to the Center's pursuit of human rights advocacy and education.

His work as director and special rapporteur, including visits to communities affected by human rights and toxics crises, the presentation of reports to the UN and other bodies, submission of amicus curiae briefs and participation in conferences and conventions, has been integral to the Center as well as the field of human rights and environment. Dr. Orellana's research interests also include the role of global interests in shaping and operationalizing global obligations, the interface between climate change and human rights, and the right to a healthy environment.



## CENTER STAFF UPDATES

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### Julia Armstrong

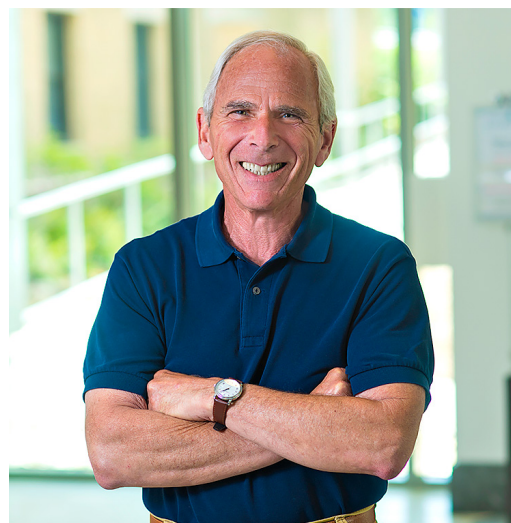
Julia serves as the Center's Graduate Program Assistant, a role she has held since August 2021. She provides administrative support, coordinates events, and manages our publications and social media outreach. She is currently pursuing her Master of Public Policy with a focus in Comparative Policy at AU's School of Public Affairs. She also serves as Co-President of SPA's Climate and Conservation Policy Club. Prior to joining the Center, Julia worked in immigration law, first as a legal intern for Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates supporting legal services for immigrants and their families. She was also a paralegal with Fragomen and Seyfarth Shaw in Washington, D.C. While earning her bachelor's degree at American University, Julia specialized in History, French and European Area Studies, and was a recipient of the Anna Kasten Nelson Award for distinction in the department of History. Julia is interested in the intersections of global human rights and climate policy.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FACULTY CO-DIRECTORS

## Professor Robert Goldman

This past year, Professor Robert Goldman was recognized for 50 years of service to American University Washington College of Law. His extensive service to the university includes co-founding the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, serving as the faculty director of the War Crimes Research Office, and teaching and writing in the fields of International Law, Human Rights Law, Terrorism, and International Humanitarian Law. In addition to his service to WCL, he continued his duties as President of the International Commission of Jurists, an appointment he has held since 2018. In March, Professor Goldman discussed the implications of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in a WCL panel along with other faculty experts. Professor Goldman spoke at a conference on war crimes committed during the Russian invasion that was broadcast throughout Latin America at an event sponsored by WCL's Academy on Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, the Academy of Political and Social Sciences of Venezuela and numerous other legal organizations. In May he was interviewed on MSNBC's *Katie Phang Show* about the prosecution of Russian war criminals, and was quoted on the same topic in *The Washington Post*.



## Professor & Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman

In Fall 2021, Claudio Grossman was appointed Special Advisor to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and in November 2021 was elected for a second five-year term to the International Law Commission, serving until 2027. Professor Grossman participated in the International Law Commission's 72nd session, in which he presented a proposal to add epidemics to the Commission's long-term program or work, and delivered opening remarks at several events hosted by AUWCL's International Law Student Association. In December, he participated in a consultative meeting of special advisors to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. In April 2022, Professor Grossman interviewed Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, about human rights developments and challenges across the world. The conversation was organized by the Human Rights Interest Group of the American Society of International Law (ASIL). He also participated as a member in the April and May session of the UN International Law Commission, and submitted comments regarding sea level rise in relation to international law, protection of the environment in the case of armed conflict, and the peremptory norms of general international law. In Spring 2022, Professor Grossman was re-elected as President of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IHR). In July 2022, he organized a conference on Sea Level Rise with participants from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and Eastern Europe. The conference was organized with the WCL International Law Students Association and numerous other institutions. Speakers included international law professors, foreign ministers, and members of the International Law Commission. In July, Professor Grossman also served as a keynote speaker at the Organization of American States' 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Inter-American Program for the Development of International Law.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FACULTY CO-DIRECTORS

## Professor David Hunter

Last year the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Commission on Environmental Law named Professor David Hunter among its inaugural recipients of the Nicholas Robinson Award for Excellence in Environmental Law, which honors individuals who have dedicated their careers toward advancing the environmental rule of law. Last September, he served on the Program Advisory Council for AUWCL's 2021 Fall Reunion where he moderated a panel discussion on plastics and the global pursuit for environmental justice. In November, he participated in a discussion on the COP26 Climate Summit, hosted by Temple University and was quoted in an article examining



whether fossil fuel companies could ever be tried for crimes against humanity. Professor Hunter co-authored the sixth edition of the casebook *International Environmental Law and Policy*. Published in December, this latest edition of the book reflects major new updates such as the development of rules to implement the Paris Agreement, the evolution of the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty into an explicit climate treaty, and the emergence of successful human rights litigation to address climate change. Last winter, Professor Hunter published a supplement to the casebook entitled *Glasgow Climate Summit: COP 26* as part of the UCLA School of Law Public Law Research Paper Series. In June, he participated in the Academy on Human Rights & Humanitarian Law's 2022 Human Rights Month Celebration, speaking on a panel titled "Independent Accountability Mechanisms' Experience on Cases Related to Meaningful Consultation and Access to Information."

## Professor Juan E. Méndez

In September, Professor Juan Méndez addressed the Cycle of Master Conferences on International Law and Human Rights on prison overcrowding during COVID-19. In October, he provided expert testimony on international law standards regarding torture before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. He also presented the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering at an event in Mexico and joined an amicus brief submitted to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in the case of *al-Nashiri v. Biden* regarding the use of torture-derived evidence in military tribunals. In November, he received an honorary doctorate from the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (Argentina) with special mention for academic-scientific merit. In December, the UN Human Rights Council appointed Professor Méndez to serve a three-year term as a member of the International Mechanism of Independent Experts on Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement, a recently established body tasked with advancing racial justice and equality in law enforcement in all parts of the world. In December, he contributed to a historic decision of the UN Human Rights





# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FACULTY CO-DIRECTORS

## Professor Diane Orentlicher

In Fall 2021, Professor Diane Orentlicher published a keynote address, “Transitional Justice and Private Actors: Harnessing Business Incentives to Advance Victims’ Priorities,” in a briefing paper on the Roles and Responsibilities of Private Sector Actors in Transitional Justice in Africa and Latin America. Her work was part of an initiative led by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience to explore issues that arise in the space where transitional justice and the human rights responsibilities of corporate and other private actors engage each other. In September, she was quoted by NPR in an article by Julie McCarthy on



the International Criminal Court’s formal investigation into the controversial anti-drug war of the Philippines. Last winter, Professor Orentlicher was an expert speaker at a webinar hosted by the Stimson Center in which she examined the Bosnian municipalities cases through the Mladic trial, focusing on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia’s genocide jurisprudence. In January she participated in a panel titled “Transitional Justice for Roma in Europe,” and served as a panelist at the annual conference of the American Branch of the International Law Association, speaking on US relations with the ICC. Along with Professor Méndez, she participated in the first meeting of the Guidance Group hosted by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations for a global project, “A Framework Approach to Prevention: Making Prevention a Reality.” In April, Professor Orentlicher was a guest on NPR’s “1A” program, discussing whether Russian war crimes will be prosecuted.

## Professor & Director of International Human Rights Law Clinic Anita Sinha

Last September, Professor Anita Sinha participated in AUWCL’s 2021-22 Faculty Speaker Series, providing commentary on the paper “Love Triangle: Nation, Spouse, Citizen” in conversation with author and Professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law Audrey Macklin. Professor Sinha continued her teaching and writing in the areas of international human rights law, immigration and refugee law and supervising student projects as director of the International Human Rights Law Clinic. In January, the AALS Section on Clinical Legal Education elected



Professor Sinha to serve as Co-Chair of the 2022 Executive Committee. In addition, she authored an article entitled “Transnational Migration Deterrence,” which will be published in a forthcoming issue of the Boston College Law Review. The article offers a reconceptualization of externalization as a system that constitutes transnational migration deterrence, providing a framework that highlights the role of destination states and assesses their accountability for extraterritorial human rights violations experienced by migrants. This spring, Professor Sinha moderated a panel organized by the WCL Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, titled “The Role of Law and Lawyers in Combating Hate.”

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