

1-1-2008

# Law Interns in Africa: Human Rights Interns Tell of A Rewarding Summer's Work

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum)

---

### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2008) "Law Interns in Africa: Human Rights Interns Tell of A Rewarding Summer's Work," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 20 : No. 1 , Article 25.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol20/iss1/25](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol20/iss1/25)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

# Law School Report

GOING GLOBAL

## LAW INTERNS IN AFRICA



Brian McCarthy '07, above, served as a law intern at the Kenya Human Rights Commission and is now pursuing a master's degree in public health at UB.

*Human rights interns tell of a rewarding summer's work*

For two third-year UB Law students who traveled abroad on international human rights internships, summer 2006 was one of high emotion and culture shock – and one when they learned firsthand how badly human rights work is needed.

Nicole Parshall and Aminda Byrd, members of the Class of 2007, lived together in Nairobi, Kenya, as they pursued separate internships in Africa – Byrd working for Urgent Action Fund – Africa, which dispenses targeted grants to women's human rights organizations on the continent, and Parshall with the Kenya

Human Rights Commission.

They detailed their experiences in a March 26 forum in O'Brian Hall, in a program designed to attract the next generation of law students to international human rights work.

It was, they said, strange at first to find themselves in Nairobi, a cosmopolitan city a world apart from what they had known. "We got stared at a lot," Parshall said frankly. "A bus would go by, and every face would turn and look at us. But we got used to it quickly."

Byrd worked in the Urgent Action Fund – Africa headquarters in Kilimani, a suburb of Nairobi. The organization, she said, provides urgent grants up to \$5,000 to women's organizations throughout Africa – "rapid-response grantmaking" with the goal of building peace, seeking justice against gender-based violence, and increasing the security of women and girls.

For example, she said, UAF-Africa has provided grants to help shelter women and girls from sexual violence in northern Uganda, where millions of people have been internally displaced into unsafe refugee camps.

Her own work, she said, "was more focused on collaborative initiatives," especially on behalf of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. This movement, Byrd said, is in its early stages in Africa; advocacy groups exist, but as yet public support is minimal.

During her internship, Byrd attended the first East Africa conference on LGBTI rights, a four-day gathering that brought together advocates to define common goals and attracted funders looking for a targeted way to provide grants. She also was at the second Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights, where the Kenyan vice president spoke and where LGBTI issues also drew wide interest.

Primarily, though, her task was to work on a training manual on the International Criminal Court from a gender-based perspective. The manual, she said, is being used to train judges and lawyers in African countries.

Parshall spoke of her work with the Kenya Human Rights Commission, a non-

governmental organization founded in 1992 partly by UB Law Professor Makau Mutua to address civil and political violations under the government of former Kenyan President Danial arap Moi.

Her internship, she said, centered on a lawsuit filed against the British government, which previously ruled Kenya as a colony, by survivors of torture imposed on native rebels in what is now known as the Mau Mau rebellion. The British government in 1953 declared a state of emergency in Kenya in response to several tribal uprisings, and put up concentration camps where thousands of people died – perhaps as many as 90,000. “This history is very much buried,” Parshall said.

Her work involved traveling out of Nairobi to gather statements from survivors of sexual violence from this time, women who now are in their 70s and 80s. “These were intense sessions,” she said, “because you were talking to women who had never spoken of the type of sexual torture they went through.” It was, she said, difficult to listen to these tales of inhumanity, and there were plenty of tears on both sides – though some of the women were fiercely proud of having survived these atrocities.

Parshall also worked on media aspects of the case, trying to get media coverage of the lawsuit in Britain as well as Kenya, and wrote grant proposals seeking funding to finance the lawsuit.

Life in Nairobi, the former interns said, could be harrowing – especially in traffic. There are no traffic lights or yield signs; “Kenya has the highest rate of traffic fatalities in Africa,” Byrd said.

There was also time for a little R&R, in the form of a four-day trip to a coastal resort called Tiwi Beach, where for \$35 apiece per night they enjoyed comfortable accommodations and, for a couple of dollars more, the services of a talented Swahili chef, who cooked them a lunch and dinner feast featuring fresh tuna, crab and prawns.

UB Law’s international human rights internships are sponsored by the Buffalo Human Rights Center. Both Byrd and Parshall received partial support for their internships through the Buffalo Public Interest Law Program.



Nicole Parshall '07

*“These were intense sessions because you were talking to women who had never spoken of the type of sexual torture they went through.”*



Aminda Byrd '07

*Byrd worked in the Urgent Action Fund with the goal of building peace, seeking justice against gender-based violence, and increasing the security of women and girls.*