

My experience at the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF) this summer was simultaneously powerful and challenging. I am incredibly grateful for the chance to do a variety of substantive work that exposed me to both the far-reaching impacts and significant limitations of international human rights law, and personally helped me get a better sense of the kind of work that I want to pursue throughout my career: case-driven, people-centric law and organizing.

At DPLF, I worked on a wide variety of issues related to human rights law in the hemisphere, challenging me to learn quickly about topics and draw on my previous coursework to ensure I could adapt quickly to the assignment. The first work I dove into was editing a grant proposal for a project addressing state violence and militarization in El Salvador, responding to the “iron fist” policies of the government that responded to a high rate of violence in the region with more violence. This project was one of the most intellectually stimulating assignments for me because not only did I have to very quickly familiarize myself with the situation on the ground, but I also was able to apply my previous grant writing experience to make this project more persuasive to the grantor. I was able to participate in planning discussions where I could share my thoughts about both the substance and argumentation, and I particularly focused on ensuring the intersectionality of state violence was adequately studied and addressed by this proposal. It was also surprising to learn that everybody, especially the lawyers, in the organization played a role in preparing the grant proposals, and that this skill set was fairly universally applicable.

A large part of my work focused on post-conflict transitional justice processes, in particular those still underway in El Salvador. I worked on a writing case study, based on expert interviews, describing the use of civil society documentation in the case of the El Mozote massacre, and edited/translated various documents related to the impunity program. Perhaps the biggest assignment I tackled in my internship was writing an article ([linked here](#)) about the efforts of politicians in El Salvador to pass a law that would grant amnesty to perpetrators of grave human rights abuses during the civil war, just three years after the constitutional court struck down a practically identical law that had prevented prosecutions and state investigations of massacres, forced disappearances, and sexual violence committed during the war for nearly 25 years. In particular, I focused on chronicling the strong mobilization of civil society organizations, particularly those representing victims and their families, to criticize this new attempt at broadly applying amnesty to powerful perpetrators.

This work on transitional justice was morally challenging for me. As a prison abolitionist and an anti-carceral activist, I strongly believe that prisons and jails are fundamentally harmful in themselves, and do little to address the root causes of harm and violence in society. However, the human rights community invests a lot of time and resources in the fight against impunity and for the rule of law, which often focuses on the prosecution of and seeking imprisonment for perpetrators of grave human rights abuses, such as military commanders or dictators. This was a tough space for me to navigate -- while I personally don't believe prison is the answer, my family members have not been subject to mass killings and forced disappearance under a dictatorship or armed conflict, and I will never truly understand myself what a survivor would want in that situation. Further, I learned that regardless of the

conviction, there is an incredibly important symbolic and tangible reparatory value in the act of investigating and prosecuting these crimes: for families who have lived without knowing the fate of their loved one for decades, finding their remains and being able to publicly testify to their pain can be a hugely transformative process and a huge component of what justice looks for them.

I was very excited to work on my second article ([linked here](#)), which recounted the long journey towards achieving reparations for victims of the armed conflict in El Salvador. Again focusing on the role of civil society in pushing for these programs, this article explored the varied political landscape of reparations in El Salvador and the wider international framework guiding reparations. What struck me the most was how well reparations fit into a rights-based legal framework: even a country in turmoil with scarce resources managed to answer the call of victims for both material and symbolic reparations, even if the response leaves much to be desired, in contrast with the United States, where reparations still feels like a political third rail, even among progressives.

Another large component of my work focused on environmental justice. In particular, I drafted research and memos examining the relationship between agribusiness, pesticides and agro-toxins, and human rights. I found that regulatory standards for these chemicals varied wildly across the world, and scientific consensus on the human and environmental health impacts of agricultural chemicals is not clear, especially when the industry is heavily invested

in the same laboratories conducting these studies. This work particularly illuminated the limitations of international human rights law, as it primarily applies to nations, not the companies who are actually causing the harm.

Finally, a large component of my work focused on editing a dossier on the alleged intellectual author of the assassination of an indigenous activist defending her community's land from destruction by a hydroelectric dam that the businessman examined in the report was developing. This was an incredibly labor intensive process to exhaustively cite and investigate every claim made about the corruption surrounding the dam project, the active investigations of him and his companies for corruption and murder, and his links to drug cartels and the Odebrecht scandal. In particular, I was responsible for developing an argument that asserted it was in the U.S.'s interest to sanction this individual for his alleged links to corruption and human rights violations.

Overall, I think this process expanded my understanding of what justice can look like: while I still fundamentally believe we should be moving towards a world without prisons and punishment in our definition of justice, I think I better understand why prosecution and investigation can be of great importance for survivors, but also the importance of centering victims and survivors in the discussion about what justice and reparations look like to them.