



# Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law Annual Report 2020-2021

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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## Key Numbers for 2020-2021

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\$2,238,003 in active grants and received gifts

10 student research positions

30 students in 2 seminars

5 specialized fellows and visiting scholars

6 students join 18<sup>th</sup> Student Advisory Board

46 student staffers on the *Human Rights Brief*

7 legal interventions

7,561 Facebook followers & 2,973 Twitter followers

# Foreword from the Dean, Roger A. Fairfax, Jr.



As I begin my first year as dean of American University Washington College of Law, I am proud to introduce the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law's 2020-2021 Annual Report. This year, the Center celebrated three decades of working with students, faculty and the international legal community to provide support for human rights initiatives in the U.S. and around the world through teaching, scholarship and service.

Community is at the heart of everything we do at WCL. This Annual Report is a testament to the collective power of community. At WCL, we call on our students, staff, faculty, and alumni to "Champion What Matters." What we mean by that is for every member of our WCL family to push the innovative, intelligent, and creative limits of what is possible to enact positive change. I look forward to working with the Center as they continue to enrich and influence local and global conversations on human rights.



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# Letter from the Acting Director, Melissa C. del Aguila



In my ten years at the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, I have weathered several seasons of change that have marked transitions in the people, places, and priorities that have shaped our work. This year was one such season as the Center transitioned its work to an entirely virtual setting, marked its 30th anniversary, and saw changes in its team, including the departure of our dear colleague and friend, Macarena Sáez, who, in August, assumed the role of executive director of the Women’s Rights Division of Human Rights Watch.

As the Center’s Acting Director, it is my privilege to share our 2020-2021 Annual Report with the AU/WCL community and our friends and partners worldwide. The pages of this Annual Report reflect the impressive combination of scholarly accomplishment, thematic expertise, academic leadership, and commitment to human rights that defines the extraordinary work of the Center’s students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Indeed, it is a deep-rooted commitment to this work that has kept us centered as we live through a global pandemic, the ensuing economic crisis, and the gutting impacts of systemic inequity, which have exposed the unfinished business of our social justice movement.

The continuity of the Center’s leadership in this time of transition has been instrumental in providing a solid foundation of human rights education on which our students can rely. This Annual Report highlights the incredible opportunities our students had over the past year to contribute to the development of norms, to advance advocacy, and to produce high impact scholarship, as we grew our grant-funded research related to public finance, anti-torture, and election monitoring. At WCL, we have a proud tradition of innovation, integrity, and resilience that gives me confidence about the ways in which the Center continually recommitments to constant learning, improvement, and intentional growth.

In this season of change, our team—with equal parts diligence, enthusiasm, and grace—has leaned into the challenges of our time to boldly embrace new opportunities for the creation of knowledge, the advancement of actionable research, and the broadening of opportunities for education and learning. I feel privileged to bear witness, daily, to our team’s deep and unwavering commitment to reducing spaces of vulnerability and protecting the rights of all people. This commitment has sustained the Center through this most unusual year, and it will be central to our growth and success in the year to come as we welcome new students and scholars, and expand our areas of work.

# 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

## EDUCATION & TRAINING

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

#### The Kovler Project Against Torture

(KPAT) is a unique experiential learning opportunity where students are responsible for providing strategic advice to the United Nations Committee against Torture (UN CAT) on whether countries are in compliance with the extensive obligations outlined in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Established in 2003 by Professor and Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman (during his tenure as member and chair of the UN CAT), the practicum's overarching educational goal is to provide students with the opportunity to assist an important supervisory organ of the UN in its goal of implementing the prohibition of torture and other forms of cruel and inhuman treatment.

This year, KPAT successfully transitioned to a virtual format, enabling students to provide support to the UN CAT, research potential areas of non-compliance, and prepare questions for the Committee to ask State party delegates during the periodic review process. Former Committee chair Jens Modvig and Committee member Diego Rodriguez-Pinzón joined the Kovler

practicum virtually to collaborate with students and discuss the upcoming country reviews. Thanks to the generous support of the Kovler endowment, the 2020-2021 class will travel to Geneva, Switzerland to attend the Committee sessions when the Committee resumes its in-person meetings.

The Center's **impact litigation** work aims to strengthen the rule of law through litigation and advocacy. Every year, the Center works with students in the **Seminar on Strategic Litigation in International Human Rights**, in which 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 Center 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.

During AY 2020-2021, the Center worked with 20 J.D. and LL.M. students, Humphrey Fellows, and visiting scholars on a variety of human rights issues. Students supported the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights; conducted research on behalf of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture; analyzed jurisprudence of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; and supported litigation before the Inter-American Human Rights System. Students also drafted a brief for the Inter-American Court of Human Rights assessing standards for pregnant women and primary care for women deprived of liberty, and provided litigation support on behalf of an individual seeking reparations from



the U.S. through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

## 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 many research assistant positions, among other opportunities.

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 fall, the 2020 SAB created and released an interactive "zine" on domestic and international voting rights. With con-

tributions by leading subject matter experts, the introductory guide was designed to give their fellow students a "crash course" on the human right to free and fair elections. Since the onset of COVID-19, the SAB has been connecting remotely and working on various research projects focused on creating guiding human rights principles for AUWCL's student organization policy manual, supporting mutual aid organizations in Washington, D.C., and addressing diversity and inclusion in the 1L curriculum. In February, the Center welcomed its eighteenth Student Advisory Board: Arielle Abouafia (J.D. '23), Katelyn Buckles (J.D. '23), Vicky Cheng (J.D. '23), Thea Cabrera Montejo (J.D. '23), Alexander Monteiro (J.D. '23), and Kathleen Parnow (J.D. '23).

The Center involves student **research assistants** in all aspects of its programming. Every Center project prioritizes the creation of unique opportunities for skills building and intellectual rigor for its students at all stages of their



*Anti-Torture Initiative student RAs Meera Patel '23, Karen Reitman '23, and Corney Muller '23, with assistant director, Vanessa Drummond*

legal education. This year, the Center offered 10 positions on various issues within the human rights field. In addition to supporting general activities and honing essential legal research and writing skills, RAs have the opportunity to participate in a number of opportunities to contribute to the development of international norms with projects supporting our work in anti-torture, human rights and finance, election monitoring, and impact litigation.

## Events & Activities

In addition to the Center's 30th anniversary and project-specific events, the Center hosted and co-sponsored a variety of virtual events on pressing human rights issues, including panel discussions, workshops, and convenings, such as:

- A virtual welcome reception incoming students and our flagship lunchtime learning webinars across new platforms, including a live "Human Rights 101" lecture introducing first year students to human rights law, and an on-demand lecture on the law of armed conflict.
- A discussion with United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate Jane Connors. Ms. Connors, in conversation with Professor Macarena Sáez, spoke about her work putting the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of the UN's response to sexual exploitation and abuse.
- A training for lawyers at the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, introducing strategic litigation techniques for engaging UN mechanisms and special procedures. The training focused on practical application to

the Serbian context and was led by Professors Macarena Sáez and Juan E. Méndez, together with Center staff Vanessa Drummond and Katherine Holcombe.

- Several rapid response events, including a panel on Forced Sterilization in ICE Detention Centers and a conversation on the life and legacy of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, co-sponsored with several institutional partners, including the International Association of Women Judges, the Institute for Women's Policy and Research, and AUWCL's Women and the Law Program.
- A screening and discussion of the BAFTA-nominated film "For Sama," held as part of the sixth annual Films Across Borders series, hosted with a consortium of AU entities, 19 embassies, cultural organizations, art institutions, and local advocacy and environmental groups. Over 60 attendees from around the world joined the virtual panel discussion with Syrian journalist Omar al-Mugdad and Syrian human rights activist Sana Mustafa, moderated by AUWCL Professor Rebecca Hamilton.
- An event pairing over 30 law students with human rights faculty and staff for one-on-one mentoring and resume review sessions over three days, in coordination with the Office of Career and Professional Development, to prepare students for AUWCL's winter externship fairs.

## Summer Human Rights Fellowships

In addition to the research opportunities offered throughout the academic year, the Center also sponsored two specialized summer human rights fellowships exclusively for AUWCL students that connect our community with key partners working on cutting-edge human rights and humanitarian law issues. Meet this year's summer human rights fellows!

**Nia Langley** was selected for a competitive summer internship with the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA). The internship, sponsored by the Center, provides law students with the opportunity to make an impact at the nexus of business and human rights by supporting ICoCA's human rights due diligence work on its member signatories. As a summer intern, Ms. Langley researched the private security sector, supported revisions to the Code of Conduct, and conducted media screenings on Member compa-

nies' compliance with the Code. She also advised on key strategies and tools to help build awareness on these issues with key stakeholders around the world.

**Andrea Rodriguez Burckhardt** was selected for a competitive summer judicial internship (currently in its third-year) with Colombia's Transitional Justice Court (Justicia Especial para la Paz). The internship provides law students with the opportunity to work directly with those involved in the trials of individuals accused of gross human rights violations. As a law clerk, Ms. Rodriguez Burckhardt provided research support as part of an international team of judicial interns tasked with preparing the JEP magistrates for hearings of FARC leadership being tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. She engaged in fact-finding and advised on documentation about CARC-EP's hostage-taking operations.



*Nia Langley '22*



*Andrea Rodriguez Burckhardt '22*



## RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

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



## RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

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

In the fall, the Center launched 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. Funding for the project supports research on the intersections between human rights, central banking, and development finance. It 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.

In October, the Project hosted an event series addressing the roles of central banks with respect to human rights. The events featured experts in the field, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Olivier De Schutter.

### Student 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 *Human Rights Brief* enjoyed great success, contributing articles, editing pieces, and working with practitioners around

the world to further scholarship. The *Human Rights Brief* released its latest volume, Volume 24: Issues 1, 2, and 3, featuring articles that examine how existing legal mechanisms can effectively protect human rights in the midst of a global pandemic.

The *Human Rights Brief* continued to release episodes for its highly rated podcast series, "Human Rights Unscripted" featuring interviews with AUWCL human rights faculty. In February, the Brief held its annual symposium, a four-day virtual event series titled, "Police Brutality at Home and Abroad," featuring experts who discussed issues related to race, digital surveillance, immigration, and the role of religion in policing around the world. In the spring, the Brief co-organized a panel on "Reparations for U.S. Enslavement and the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Challenges and Opportunities," featuring AUWCL faculty and leading subject matter experts.

### Visiting Scholars

The Center offers visiting scholars and practitioners diverse opportunities to spend a summer, semester, or academic year at AUWCL conducting research, supporting our programs, and sharing experiences with students and a distinguished group of peers. The Center works closely with its affiliated scholars and legal fellows to foster and promote international exchange and understanding, thereby enriching and expanding the academic life of the law school. This year, we were joined by a cohort of distinguished practitioners with expertise in strategic litigation, women's rights, disability rights, and knowledge of regional human rights systems and international bodies.

# Meet this year's cohort of visiting scholars!

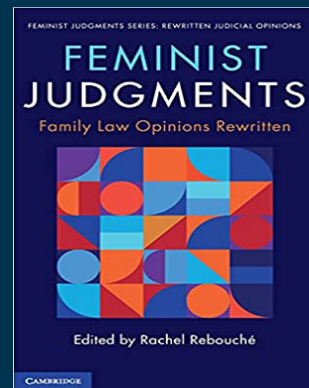
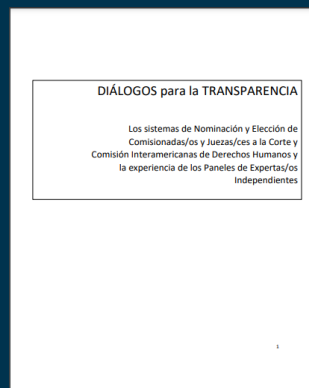
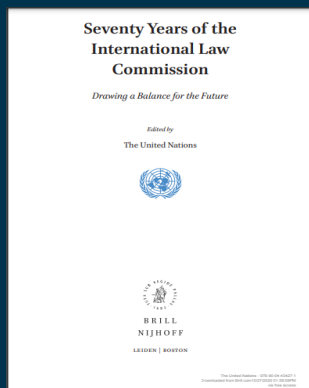
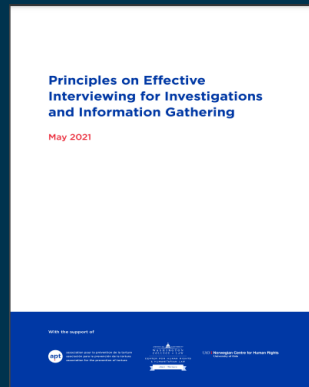
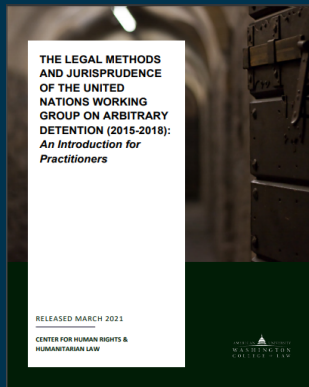
**Maria Julia Dellasoppa:** This year, Maria Julia Dellasoppa continued her affiliation with the Center by supporting the Initiative on Transparency and Election Monitoring as a project coordinator. Ms. Dellasoppa is an Argentine human rights lawyer who received her LL.M. from UCLA. Prior to coming to AUWCL, she was a public defender representing victims of gender-based violence and served as a Romulo Gallegos Legal Fellow with the IACHR.

**Christian Finsterbusch:** In August, the Center welcomed Christian Finsterbusch, a Chilean/French human rights attorney who received his LL.M. from Université Panthéon Sorbonne. As a Visiting Scholar, Mr. Finsterbusch sup-

ports the Initiative on Transparency and Election Monitoring. A specialist in disability rights, he served as a consultant with the International Labour Organization and as a legal officer with the World Meteorological Organization.

**Matilda González:** Last spring, the Center welcomed Matilda González, a Colombian human rights attorney who received her LL.M. from AUWCL. As a Visiting Scholar, she explored innovative, grassroots approaches to advocacy around trans rights and culture. A specialist in and leading activist for LGBTI rights, Ms. González was the first trans woman to lead the Secretariat for Women and Gender Affairs in Manizales, Colombia.

# Center, Faculty, & Staff Publications



## Books, Chapters, Articles, & Reports in 2020-2021

- This fall, the Center published a report, “Diálogos por la Transparencia,” which analyzes regional and international legal standards related to the election of judges and commissioners to the Inter-American Human Rights System.
- The Center published, “The Legal Methods and Jurisprudence of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (2015-2018): An Introduction for Practitioners,” which analyzes claims and opinions related to arbitrary deprivation of liberty issued by the UN WGAD.
- Claudio Grossman published concluding remarks for a book chapter, “The Changing Landscape of International Law,” in *Seventy Years of the International Law Commission: Drawing a Balance for the Future*, and an article, “ILC Report on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Humanity and Enforced Disappearance,” in the *African Journal of International Criminal Justice*.
- Juan E. Méndez and Vanessa Drummond authored, “A New Standard for Effective, Human Rights Compliant Interviews,” as part of Just Security’s blog series, “Effective Interviewing: Science, Law and Morality.”
- Juan E. Méndez co-authored two articles in Just Security, “Forced Family Separation during Covid-19: Preventing Torture and Inhumane Treatment in Crisis” and “Crises of Accountability for U.S. Systemic Abuses of Power.”
- Diane Orentlicher published three law review articles: “Worth the Effort? Assessing the Khmer Rouge Tribunal” in the *Journal for International Criminal Justice*; “Memories of Judgement: Constructing the ICTY’s Legacies” in the *Washington University Global Studies Law Review*; and “The Emerging Shape of Global Justice: Retrogression or Course Correction?” in the *Maryland Journal of International Law*.
- Diane Orentlicher published a chapter, “The Tokyo Tribunal’s Legal Origins and Contributions to International Jurisprudence as Illustrated by its Treatment of Sexual Violence,” in the recently released book, *The Tokyo Tribunal: Perspectives on Law, History and Memory*.
- Macarena Sáez authored a chapter in *Feminist Judgments in Family Law*, “Commentary on DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services,” published by Cambridge University Press.
- Macarena Sáez wrote two op-eds, “Es que no hay mujeres” for the Due Process of Law Foundation Blog and “Segregación por Género y COVID-19: ¿Ingenuidad o utilitarismo?” for Colombian newspaper, *El Espectador*.
- Anita Sinha published an article, “An American History of Separating Families,” in the American Constitution Society Expert Forum blog, examining the legacy of systemic injustice and nativism in United States immigration policy.





## 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



## LITIGATION & ADVOCACY

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. This year's major highlights include:

- In May, the ATI finalized drafting of the "Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering," (known as the "Méndez Principles") which provides guidance on the conduct of rapport-based interviewing and assists law enforcement officials in meeting their obligations to prevent torture and ill-treatment. Advocacy activities to generate support for the Principles continued despite challenges posed by COVID-19, and, in March,

the ATI participated in the 14th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Japan.

- This year, the ATI was awarded funding from the Ford Foundation to strengthen and enhance justice and accountability efforts in Mexico on the issues of femicide and enforced disappearances through research, advocacy, and litigation support. This work analyzes trends on femicide and conducts targeted awareness-raising efforts with civil society and international human rights bodies. This work includes research and the preparation of legal interventions on the applicable international norms and jurisprudence relevant to the Ayotzinapa case and supports the development of accountability mechanisms to combat impunity.
- In follow-up to its 2019 symposium on solitary confinement, the ATI co-sponsored a two-day symposium with the AUWCL International Human Rights Law Clinic on "Strategies to Combat U.S. Solitary Confinement: Domestic and International Legal Approaches." The event featured the participation of practitioners and scholars from numerous high-profile human rights organizations, as well as ATI faculty and project staff.

In January, the Center launched the next phase of the **Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS)**, 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 is carried out by visiting scholars affiliated with the Center, Maria Julia Dellasoppa and Christian Finsterbusch. The Secretariat ensures the independence of the Panel and provides technical support by working with its members. The 2021 Panel of Experts was comprised of the following distinguished professionals and scholars: Mariclaire Acosta, Carlos Ayala, Magdalena Cervantes, Juan E. Méndez, Elizabeth Salmon, and Judith Schonsteiner.

This year, the Panel reviewed the profiles of 12 candidates for open positions in the Commission and Court and will release its final evaluative report to OAS member states, civil society organizations, and other interested individuals and experts.



*Center faculty & staff with the Panel of Independent Experts tasked with evaluating candidates applying to serve as Commissioners and Judges*

The Center also worked with 25+ university-based human rights centers from across 11 countries in Latin America to create a platform for discussion around the role of academia in supporting the IAHRs, convening a series of virtual meetings with directors of various centers throughout the year.

In February, the Center, together with the Inter-American Human Rights System Observatory of the Legal Research Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), co-sponsored a global webinar to present the 2021 Independent Panel of Experts assessing national nominees up for upcoming elections to the Inter-American Human Rights System. Panel members discussed their objectives, explained their operating procedures and methods of work, and answered questions from the public.

The **Syrian Initiative to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence** (Syrian Initiative) is a locally drive project that is hosted and supported by AUWCL. The Syrian Initiative's primary goal is to increase access to justice for Syrians affected by sexual and gender-based violence. Directed by alum Deyaa Alr-wishdi (LL.M. '17), the Syrian Initiative has involved key law school faculty and staff from the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law and the Program on International Comparative Legal Studies. It aims to to reduce stigmatization around 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.

## Legal Interventions

The Center engaged in litigation and advocacy efforts in various domestic, regional, and international fora, lending expertise to a number of comments, petitions, shadow reports, and amicus briefs, among other legal interventions.

Highlights from this year include:

- *Brief to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights:* In January, students involved with the Anti-Torture Initiative provided support in submitting a brief to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding deliberations on an Advisory Opinion on differentiated approaches to persons deprived of liberty.
- *Comment to the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom:* In September, the Center submitted a comment to the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom in opposition to the proposed Overseas Operations Bill 2019-21 that would deny relief to victims of torture by agents of the United Kingdom operating abroad.
- *Comment to the Facebook Oversight Board:* In February, the Center, in collaboration with scholar-in-residence Arturo Castellanos Canales, submitted a comment to the Facebook Oversight Board, a body that hears appeals over what kind of speech should be allowed on the social media site, addressing the human rights implications of its decision to indefinitely suspend Donald Trump from the platform.
- *Expert Testimony to the Office of the Special Prosecutor in Mexico:* In May, the Anti-Torture Initiative submitted expert testimony to the Office of the Special Prosecutor in Mexico in support of the case of the 43 missing students in Ayotzinapa. This activity represents part of the Anti-Torture Initiative's litigation support activities for its Project on Justice and Accountability in Mexico, which focuses, among other topics, on enforced disappearances.
- *Interventions to the Constitutional Court of Colombia:* Professor Macarena Sáez and visiting scholar Christian Finsterbusch contributed to two legal interventions to the Constitutional Court of Colombia addressing the decriminalization of abortion and the rights of persons experiencing homelessness.
- *Oral Arguments before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights:* Professors Claudio Grossman and Macarena Sáez presented oral arguments before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of the petitioner in the case of Gomez vs. Panama. A long-standing case of the Impact Litigation Project, it addresses the political intervention of then President Martinelli to illegally remove Ms. Gomez as Attorney General.





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Felipe Abbott

Macarena Saez/AUIWCL

Udelar-SCEAM Flor d...

Camila Cedeño-CDH...

Nancy Yáñez

Eduardo Trujillo Ariz...

Alejandra Nuno/ITESO

Salvador Guerrero -...

Bruce B...

Carrancá...

Pablo Bermúdez-CD...

Mayda

Estefanía Mullally...

Fernando Ruz

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Andra Otilia (she/her)

Vanessa Drummond



# 30th Anniversary Celebration

In March, the Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law celebrated its 30th Anniversary with a week-long series of events designed to commemorate the role the Center has played in developing and implementing cutting-edge human rights programming at AUWCL. To kick off its 30th anniversary celebration, the Center hosted a fireside chat with Acting Dean and Professor of Law Robert Dinerstein and legendary disability rights activist Judith Heumann.

AUWCL students were invited to a panel discussion and Q&A featuring Center alumni who have gone on to work in human rights and/or have integrated human rights perspectives into their careers. Co-sponsored with a network of human rights centers at U.S. law

schools, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet spoke to our community about current challenges to and opportunities for the protection of human rights and how human rights institutes in U.S. law schools could effectively address these issues.

The Center's 30th anniversary also coincided with the *Human Rights Briefs* 25th anniversary, which the Center celebrated with an alumni-only virtual happy hour to provide opportunities for staff and alumni to meet, share experiences, and celebrate its enduring legacy of furthering human rights scholarship. The Center closed its anniversary celebration with a social media campaign featuring faculty who shared how they #ChampionWhatMatters.



Thank you to everyone involved who helped make our 30th Anniversary a great success, in particular, our team. The Center's staff and faculty include scholars, practitioners, and activists with combined decades of experience in human rights and international hu-

manitarian law. The highlights captured in the forthcoming pages represent a snapshot of the activities, scholarship, service, and learning our team has undertaken in our anniversary year. We look forward to celebrating our next anniversary together in person!

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR STAFF

## OUR STAFF



**Melissa C. del Aguila,**  
Acting Director

This summer, associate director Melissa C. del Aguila was named the Acting Director of the Center. She served on the 2021 American Society of International Law Annual Meeting Committee and was responsible for programs within ASIL's International Human Rights, Humanitarian Law, and Criminal Justice track. She served on the Selection Committee for IREX's 2021 Community Solutions Program in the area of Transparency and Accountability. This summer, she began a one-year term as Coordinator of a national Network of Human Rights Centers based at U.S. law schools. In June, she became a member of the D.C. Committee of the Princeton Prize in Race Relations.



**Anastassia Fagan,**  
Interim Asst. Director

This summer, program coordinator Anastassia Fagan was named the Interim Assistant Director of the Center. A doctoral candidate in AU's department of anthropology, this fall, she joined AUWCL's inaugural Staff Diversity Caucus, and she earned a certificate in "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Learning" as part of a program designed to promote the knowledge and skills necessary to create an inclusive workplace. A former Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, she served as an alumni mentor for AU's Peace Corps Prep Program and spearheaded alumni mentorship initiatives for her alma mater through the University of Notre Dame's Cross Cultural Leadership Program.



**Vanessa Drummond,**  
Asst. Director of the  
Anti-Torture Initiative

ATI assistant director Vanessa Drummond was instrumental in the development of the new Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering (Méndez Principles), serving on the Coordination Committee and as a member of the Drafting Group. She also participated in the drafting of the 2021 Revised Istanbul Protocol Manual, contributing to the Chapter on Relevant International Legal Norms and Standards. This summer, she was a panelist for the Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law's 2021 "Experts Speak Series," where she discussed current efforts to ensure the implementation of the Méndez Principles.

## OUR STAFF



**Katherine Holcombe,**  
Asst. Director of the Kovler  
Project & Impact Litigation

This fall, Kovler Project and Impact Litigation assistant director Katherine Holcombe served as the coordinator of a conference on “Reparations for Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law,” co-hosted with the Geneva Academy, and she was a panelist in a conference on “Pandemics and International Law.” She co-authored an article, “Ensuring Non-discrimination in the Context of COVID-19 Triage Protocols,” published in the *AU International Law Review* and contributed to a publication for the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. She was elected to the Executive Board of the D.C. Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.



**Julia Dellasoppa,**  
Visiting Scholar & Coordinator  
of Election Monitoring

This year, international visiting scholar Maria Julia Dellasoppa engaged in ongoing collaborations with the University of Buenos Aires on joint research related to climate change and human rights. In addition to supporting the Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American Human Rights System as a project coordinator, she drafted the report “Dialogos por la Transparencia,” released last fall, which analyzes legal standards related to the nomination and election of commissioners and judges to the IAHRs and the experience of the initiative’s Independent Panel of Experts. In November, she welcomed the newest member of the Center family, baby Felix!



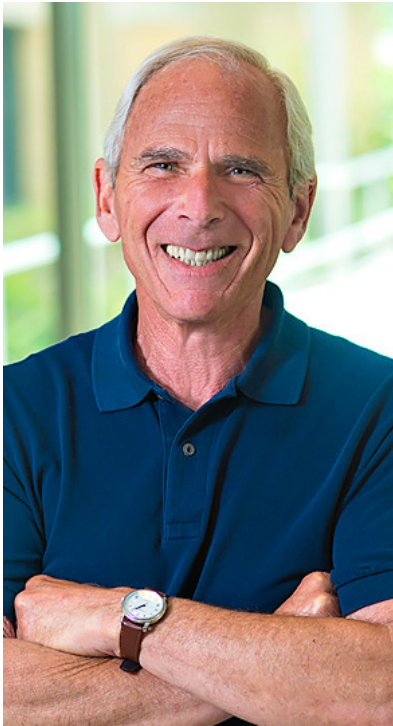
**Christian Finsterbusch,**  
Visiting Scholar & Researcher  
for Election Monitoring

An international visiting scholar, Christian Finsterbusch utilizes his extensive knowledge and experience conducting legal research, drafting reports, and advising international organizations to support the Initiative on Election Monitoring in the IAHRs. This year, he worked with Professor Macarena Sáez to submit two legal interventions to the Constitutional Court of Colombia—contributing to expert testimony addressing the right of all women to access legal abortion and an amicus related to a groundbreaking case, *Sebastián Lanz Sánchez López et al. vs. Colombia*, which redefined national protections for the rights of persons experiencing homelessness.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FACULTY

## OUR FACULTY CO-DIRECTORS



**Prof. Robert Goldman**

Professor Robert Goldman resumed teaching in the fall semester following a semester sabbatical leave from AUWCL. This fall, he conducted a virtual training on comprehensive documentation practices for Syrian lawyers and advocates working on documenting atrocities in Syria, organized by AUWCL's Syrian Initiative to Combat Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. He also served as a keynote speaker for the Inter-American Defense College's 2020 Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law workshop, joining experts from around the world to lead training sessions for sixty senior military officers from sixteen Western hemispheric nations at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, D.C.



**Prof. Claudio Grossman**

The United Nations Association of the Nation's Capital presented Professor and Dean Emeritus Claudio Grossman with the 2020 Louis B. Sohn Award. This fall, he opened the 28th annual course on human rights by the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, where he serves as President, and he was an expert panelist and keynote speaker in dozens of virtual webinars, trainings, and conferences worldwide. This spring, he organized panels on constitutional reform efforts in Chile, global conferences on reparations for gross human rights violations, and a symposium on pandemics and international law featuring members of the International Law Commission, where he served as Chair of the Drafting Committee.



**Prof. David Hunter**

Professor David Hunter was on sabbatical leave from AUWCL during the fall and spring semesters. During this time, he participated in a webinar on advocacy and litigation in times of crisis, and, in his capacity as a director on the Board of the Accountability Counsel, co-signed a letter to the executive directors of the IFC and MIGA seeking transparency and consultations on key external review processes. He also remained active in the AUWCL community, serving as a keynote speaker for the 30th Annual International Environmental Law Symposium and as a coach for a team of students that went on to achieve second place at the Stetson International Environmental Law Moot Court Competition.



## OUR FACULTY CO-DIRECTORS



**Prof. Juan E. Méndez**

This fall, the UN Secretary General appointed Professor Juan E. Méndez to a three-year term on the Board of Trustees for the UN Voluntary Fund on Victims of Torture. In addition to participating in dozens of virtual events this year, he undertook three fact-finding missions with the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts for Bolivia, a team of experts appointed by the IACHR to investigate acts of violence and human rights violations in Bolivia. In December, he testified at a trial in Peru concerning an investigation he led in the 1980s during his tenure as Americas director of Human Rights Watch. In May, he was an expert witness before the IACtHR in a case on enforced disappearances and reparations.



**Prof. Diane Orentlicher**

This year, Professor Diane Orentlicher delivered keynote and other remarks in various events, including an inter-regional exchange on “The Roles and Responsibilities of Private Sector Actors in Transitional Justice in Africa and Latin America,” and a webinar on “The Basic Principles at 15: Reparations at a Crossroads,” where she addressed the relationship between the UN Basic Principles on Reparations and the UN Updated Principles on Combating Impunity—the latter of which she developed as UN Independent Expert on Combating Impunity. She provided expert commentary for several broadcast and podcast programs. She submitted comments to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC regarding its Draft Policy on Cultural Heritage.



**Prof. Anita Sinha**

In November, the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) Section on Clinical Legal Education elected Professor Anita Sinha to serve a two-year term as Secretary of its Executive Committee. In April, the AALS Section on Clinical Legal Education presented her with the 2021 M. Shanara Award in recognition of her commitment to teaching social justice, passion for providing legal services and access to justice to individuals and groups most in need, and service to the cause of clinical legal education. The awards committee cited her work as director of AU-WCL’s International Human Rights Law Clinic on the rights of noncitizens, racial minorities, LGBT communities, and other disadvantaged groups.

## A Year of Gratitude & Transition

This was a year of gratitude and transition, as our team adapted to a virtual format, while preparing for an in-person fall semester. We welcomed Roger A. Fairfax, Jr. as Dean of the law school, and we bid farewell to our much loved faculty director, Professor Macarena Sáez, who departed the Center to join Human Rights Watch.

In this season of change, our team remains steadfast, clear-eyed, and excited about our ongoing and upcoming opportunities to engage with the newest cohort of the human rights community at AUWCL.

This July, Professor **Macarena Sáez** left her position as faculty director of the Center to join the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch as its executive director. Since joining the Center in 2015, she has expanded our work on strategic litigation, elevated the institutional profile of Center internationally, and implemented numerous



projects on a variety of human rights issues worldwide. Macarena is the model of an activist legal scholar and teacher, and she will be truly missed. We are grateful for her remarkable contributions to the Center, and we look forward to collaborating with her in her capacity at HRW!



This summer, graduate program assistant **Camila Sibaja** departed the Center to join Creative Associates International as a program associate. While at the Center, she completed her MA in International Development with a concentration in peace and conflict resolution from AU's School of International Service. Camila's capstone project involved the development of international intervention strategies in Venezuela with the Washington Office on Latin America. We thank Camila for serving as such an integral part of the Center family for almost two years, and we wish her luck on her future endeavors.

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*The Center extends its deepest gratitude to the individual donors and institutional funders who have supported our work over the past year. Our efforts to promote human rights would not be possible without your trust and support.*

*Visit [www.WCLCenterforHR.org](http://www.WCLCenterforHR.org) to learn more.*

## Our Team

**Melissa C. del Aguila**  
Acting Director

**Anastassia Fagan**  
Interim Asst. Director

**Julia Armstrong**  
Program Assistant

**Vanessa Drummond**  
Asst. Director of the  
Anti-Torture Initiative

**Katherine Holcombe**  
Asst. Director of the  
Kovler Project & Impact Litigation

## Board of Faculty Co-Directors

**Robert Goldman**  
Professor of Law &  
Louis C. James Scholar

**David Hunter**  
Professor of Law

**Diane Orentlicher**  
Professor of Int'l Law

**Claudio Grossman**  
Professor of Law & Dean  
Emeritus; R. Geraldson  
Scholar for Int'l and  
Humanitarian Law

**Juan E. Méndez**  
Professor of Human  
Rights Law in Residence

**Anita Sinha**  
Associate Professor of Law  
& Director of the Int'l  
Human Rights Law Clinic

## Visiting Scholars

**Maria Julia Dellasoppa**  
Coordinator, Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American System

**Christian Finsterbusch**  
Researcher, Initiative on Election Monitoring in the Inter-American System

**Matilda González**  
Visiting Scholar, Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law

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Meera Patel  
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