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Work Placement Reflection: Asaf Rashid Law

My work placement assignment was working for Asaf Rashid Law, a practicing international lawyer residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I had my first meeting with Mr Rashid in mid-December, where we talked about the contents of my work and what the next few months would look like. From that meeting, he assigned me two separate areas of work; one would be doing more minor research questions and tasks for his cases as well as shadowing him at court hearings when possible, and the other would be working for a coalition of lawyers across Canada that he was a member of. The Coalition was organized through the Legal Center for Palestine and named 'The Coalition for Canadian Accountability in Gaza.' The Legal Centre of Palestine and the Coalition comprises volunteer lawyers who advocate for Palestinian rights and protection in Canada and provide legal support to individuals facing discrimination, harassment and legal challenges related to their identity/activism. At the moment, Asaf Rashid and seven other lawyers across Canada are working with two Palestinian Canadians to take legal action against the Government of Canada for violating international law under the Genocide Convention. As a country that signed the Genocide Convention, Canada has specific duties and responsibilities to prevent genocide, which they have not complied with regarding Palestine. Over Christmas break, Asaf gave me the task of getting familiar with the LCP and their current case against the government.

We had our second meeting over Zoom the first few weeks of January and went over options for me regarding work besides the LCP research. He got me in contact with some of the lawyers who worked with the LCP, and I sent emails to them to introduce myself properly. Mr Rashid was very flexible with me on what kind of work was required and really wanted me to gain the shadowing experience I needed through this work placement, which I appreciated, although it did feel a little unstructured at times. My first opportunity to shadow Mr Rashid was January 20th at a criminal trial in Dartmouth. The trial didn't last very long because of a scheduling issue, but I got to ask him questions about his legal education and information on what kinds of cases he usually works on before and after the court session. I also met the

prosecutor on the case, and they walked me through the upcoming hearing and the information that would be discussed. Mr Rashid also sent me the case beforehand, so I got to ask questions surrounding the methods for that specific trial. Overall, it was a great experience, and Mr Rashid was open to any questions I had; he also gave me lots of valuable advice on law school and the different times of legal practice. Watching the process and questioning him on certain decisions/routes he could take with the case was exciting. Although that first shadowing opportunity wasn't long, I found it valuable, and I took advantage of my time in person to ask questions and learn as much as possible about the process.

Research work for the LCP started slowly. The first few weeks of my work placement were spent booking a time to meet with the heads of the research team. Emilio Dabad was one of the lawyers in charge, and during the second week, I had my first Zoom call with him to go over the process. He explained the values behind LCP's work and their advocacy for Palestine and Palestinian Canadians and introduced me to some preliminary research questions. He also explained that I would be joining a small team of other students across Canada to work on these research tasks together. I was excited to work collaboratively with other students on the research tasks at hand. Emilio invited me to an introductory call a few days later, where I would meet the rest of the team and the volunteering students. The first collaborative meeting went well; most of the other students were in law school or graduated and articling, so I felt a little underqualified compared to them, but everyone was extremely welcoming. During the meeting, we divided roughly into two groups to work on research for two separate LCP cases, but we didn't receive any research questions, so I didn't have much to work on for the remaining week. Because of this, Mr Rashid gave me some extra research questions to work on and introduced me to CanLII, a legal research site that I had never used before. Between CANLii and the Dalhousie Law Library, I had some decent resources to work from, but it was definitely hard sometimes not having access to the websites or sources law students might have. I was worried about such a research-heavy work placement, especially with my other classes and my final semester of school, but I enjoyed the legal research process and found it interesting. I finalized most of that research for Mr Rashid before the reading break and

submitted a brief to him. The week before reading week, Mr Dabad also reached out with some research questions to work on for LCP.

After the reading break, a lot of my work was individual. Mr Rashid gave me a few opportunities to shadow him in court, but many of them conflicted with my course schedule, and I found it hard to find the time. The LCP provided us with around 20 research questions to work on; the first few were case law specific, whereas the last few were more technical and questions of legal practice. Although the legal research seemed interesting, it was disorganized regarding tasks. Within our groups, we were not specified which questions to focus on, so I wasn't sure where to start in some ways. I decided to stick to the case law-specific questions, mostly summaries of other cases, and to pick out important information. I consolidated a lot of that information over weeks 7 and 8. On March 7th, I had a group meeting with the other members, and we went over which questions we had been focusing on. Luckily, another student and I had worked through most of the questions. I told them I would finalize and clean up the research document over the next few weeks and send it off to them.

I was grateful for the opportunity to work with the LCP because the research I did for them taught me a lot more about Palestine and Palestinian history. I also felt like I was doing something tangible, and it was nice to feel like I was a part of LCP's mission of accountability and transparency from the government regarding Palestinian rights and freedoms in Canada. Working with a unique group of lawyers who all seemed passionate about the cause was also enjoyable. After that second meeting with the research group, I sent over my answers to the research questions in week 9 but haven't heard back from the team.

Besides my work for LCP, Mr Rashid had some personal issues at the beginning of March, which slowed down the workload from his side. But he made me aware of a public human rights tribunal that he was representing someone in at the end of March, which I was welcome to attend. This would be a more extended event, probably taking up the whole day, that I could sit in and ask him questions about after. The human rights tribunal was on behalf of a black woman from East Hants who had been racially profiled in a Source store two years ago. Mr Rashid was representing her in a hearing against Bell

Canada where they were trying to prove that racial profiling occurred but also that Bell Canada lacked proper diversity equity and inclusion training on consumer racial profiling.

The hearing lasted three days, and although I missed the first day, I was there for the second and third. The second day was exciting. During the hearing, the witness in question was the corporate security investigator for Bell, who was put in charge of the case when it happened two years previously. She was questioned by the lawyer representing Bell Canada first, then cross-examined by an impartial human rights representative and Asaf Rashid on behalf of the complainant. The hearing didn't occur in a traditional courtroom but at a hotel in one of their conference rooms. I asked Mr Rashid why this was, and he said it's because it's a human rights complaint that doesn't necessarily go to a traditional courtroom.

During the lunch break, I got to ask Mr Rashid questions about his process, and we had a video call a few days later to go over the whole court day in detail. I appreciated how much detail he gave me about his process. I asked him how he prepares for the questions, what it's like to question witnesses and what makes a witness harder or easier to question. He also gave me insights into how he handled the specific case, why he asked certain questions during the cross-examination, and what he planned to ask the next witness instead. The debrief was really useful, and I was glad to be able to go over the process in depth with him.

In the final 3 weeks of my placement, I worked most of my hours attending the two days of the hearing. My experience overall at Asaf Rashid Law was good; I learned a lot of beneficial legal researching skills and made connections with the lawyers at the Legal Centre for Palestine. The main contents of this work placement were research-based; each week, I would spend my hours working on research questions and consolidating that information into briefs to send off to the LCP or Mr Rashid. The only downside from this experience was the lack of organization at times from both Asaf Rashid and the Coalition. At the same time, I appreciated both parties' flexibility regarding my class schedule and workload. I didn't know what to expect going into this placement and was a little hesitant when I learned

that it would be primarily research-based, but all in all, it was a good experience, and I'm thankful for the opportunity and my time working with Asaf Rashid and the Legal Centre for Palestine.