

New York

Gráinne Mellon, Garden Court Chambers

The Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR) is one of America's leading civil liberties organisations. Based in New York, CCR has been at the forefront of progressive constitutional and human rights litigation, both in the US and internationally, since its foundation in 1966. It is particularly renowned for its litigation under the Alien Tort Statute and in relation to the detention of alleged 'enemy combatants' at the US military detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

I had followed the work of CCR for some time, particularly in the international human rights field, and was always impressed by their strategic litigation record. I was delighted to find out that, although not an official Pegasus placement, CCR has a long history of working with English qualified barristers as Pegasus scholars. I was really grateful to be able to approach these former scholars for guidance, both in terms of applying to CCR and presenting a proposal to Pegasus for funding.

When the time eventually came to move to New York, I found an apartment close to the UN, located CCR's office (which was in the heart of the Village) and started to settle into work. For just over two months, I split my time between the International Human Rights and Guantanamo Bay litigation teams.

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It was an interesting time to be working in international law and civil liberties in the US during which time, David Miranda's partner was arrested in Heathrow, Bradley Manning was convicted and sentenced to 35 years for espionage, Obama considered military intervention in Syria and, just as I joined, CCR won a ground breaking stop-and-search case against NYPD.

I am lucky enough to say that my work touched on many of these issues. One of my first tasks was to brief Michael Ratner, the President and founder of CCR on the implications of Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 for international whistle-blowers. I was then involved in the 'Right to Heal' campaign, led by CCR and a number of Iraqi NGOs concerning the health consequences of the Iraq War. My work here included drafting a shadow report to the Human Rights Committee, communicating with various UN Special Rapporteurs and preparing submissions to the Inter-American Commission on Human rights for the purposes of a proposed thematic hearing.

I also assisted in the *Tanvir v Holder* case, which is currently pending before the Federal District Court of Manhattan and which challenges FBI use of the No-Fly List to coerce individuals to become informants. On Guantanamo, I worked on a report challenging government recidivism figures and on seemingly never-ending issues regarding the resumption of transfers. It was rewarding to see the transfer of two Algerians during the time I was there, but CCR continued to work hard in particular in relation to the Yemeni transfers. It remains shocking and frustrating that, as of May 2014, there remain over 149 detainees in Guantanamo, 78 of whom have been cleared for release for over 12 years.

I have no doubt that the experience I had with CCR, the lessons I learned and the people I met will be of real benefit to my future practice as a barrister, as well, of course, as a time I will always remember.

I learned a great deal from the lawyers at CCR and in particular their creative and cutting-edge approach to legal argument and strategy. Outside of work, I loved every second of being in New York and took advantage of all of the summer sights and evenings.

I am very grateful to everyone who helped make this experience a reality for me including the former Pegasus scholars, everyone at the CCR and, of course, the Pegasus Trust itself. For anyone who is interested in how other legal systems and other lawyers work, I highly recommend the Pegasus Scholarship: it really is one of those opportunities you shouldn't miss.

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