

THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC (IHRC)

At the cutting edge of education and advocacy, the IHRC is a force driving tangible change in human rights. Our work is carried out in partnership with international, grassroots, and movement-based organizations across the globe, as well as communities and individuals directly affected by abuse. Our students become part of this community of advocates working to create a more just and equitable world. Through clinical projects and classroom seminars, students learn and practice a variety of skills deployed by strategic and creative human rights advocates. Students work in small teams under the close supervision of expert clinicians, who provide guidance, mentorship, and continual feedback. Students are involved in all aspects of their projects—conceptualizing goals and formulating strategies, researching and drafting reports and legal briefs, interviewing witnesses and stakeholders, and presenting findings before courts and international bodies. More information is available on our website: <https://humanrightsclinic.law.harvard.edu/>.

SEMESTER(S) OFFERED	Fall 2025, Spring 2026
CLINICAL COURSE COMPONENT	Yes—choice of Human Rights Lawyering in Action (F25, S26) or Armed Conflict and Civilian Protection (F25)
COURSE CREDITS	2
CLINICAL CREDITS	3, 4, or 5
LOCATION	Cambridge MA (with travel opportunities)
REGISTRATION TYPE	Helios Preferences

TYPES OF CASES/CLIENTS/PROJECTS

IHRC's docket draws on our expertise and networks in six broad areas, while remaining dynamic and responsive to emerging needs and the evolving field. Our primary areas of work are: (1) accountability & remedies; (2) armed conflict & civilian protection; (3) climate justice & the environment; (4) gender, race & non-discrimination; (5) protecting fundamental freedoms; and (6) social & economic justice. Examples of projects from 2024-2025 include:

- Advocating for access to remedies for communities whose rights are violated in the name of aid. In the fall 2024 term, IHRC traveled to Kosovo to interview Roma communities who suffered severe lead poisoning in displacement camps managed by the UN after the Kosovo war. The UN spent years evading claims for compensation. Eventually its own Human Rights Advisory Panel issued a decision calling for reparations, yet the UN has ignored the decision. Working for several years with civil society partners to conduct outreach to UN member states, high-level officials, and the media, the Clinic's advocacy persuaded the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice and Reparations to recommend "full and effective reparations" for the impacted community.
- Campaigning against corporate exploitation (human and environmental) in the seafood sector. Since 2022, the Clinic has developed and launched a strategic advocacy and litigation campaign and employed a range of tactics—from cooperative to confrontational—to influence the behavior of multinational corporations who profit off labor rights and environmental abuses in their supply chains. Three years of media work, negotiation, and legal submissions have enabled the campaign to gain traction and win specific concessions from target companies. The Clinic has also strengthened the campaign's techniques by advising on best practices in transnational accountability litigation. Students have conducted legal research and drafted both reports and a legal complaint for a case being litigated in French courts, in which our partner organization is the complainant.
- Building cases for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russia in Ukraine. Russia's relentless drone and missile attacks have exacted a devastating toll on civilians. For the past 18 months, IHRC and its partners have conducted extensive factual and legal research on the patterns and scale of these violations, using witness testimony, open-source intelligence, and on the ground fact-finding to corroborate claims and collect evidence. The Clinic has prepared a 200+ page legal brief to be shared with the Ukrainian Office of the Prosecutor General to inform and influence ongoing investigations and cases. No international criminal tribunal has ever held individual perpetrators responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity caused by aerial attacks, so this project breaks new ground by advancing international law to address the tactics of modern warfare.
- Preparing advocacy and litigation options to decriminalize homosexuality in Tunisia. The Clinic and its partner are drafting a legal complaint for an international body that explores how the Tunisian penal code contravenes Tunisia's obligations under international and regional human rights law. Drawing on international human rights research as well as analysis of how the law functions in practice, the complaint will consider questions related to the right to privacy, the prohibition against torture, equality under the law, access to justice, and the exhaustion of domestic remedies.

- Advancing humanitarian disarmament, a people-centered approach to governing weapons. The Clinic is a driving force behind the UN treaty banning nuclear weapons, in conjunction with ICAN, a global civil society coalition and Nobel Peace laureate. Current advocacy focuses on victim assistance and environmental remediation obligations. In partnership with Human Rights Watch, IHRC is also spearheading efforts to push for a new treaty on autonomous weapons systems (“killer robots”); strengthen international law on incendiary weapons; and turn commitments on the bombing and shelling of populated areas into practice. Clinic publications and participation in diplomatic meetings have helped shape civil society and state positions and led to concrete developments in each of these areas.
- Leading efforts to create a new global treaty through the UN General Assembly to delegitimize and ultimately end international trade in law enforcement equipment, devices, and weapons used for torture or other ill-treatment. Although international law provides a right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment, international trade in law enforcement equipment is largely unregulated. In partnership with Amnesty International, the Center for Victims of Torture, and the Omega Research Foundation, IHRC is supporting an emerging global network of organizations calling for a treaty. IHRC and its partners have published guidance on essential elements of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty and seen our views reflected in authoritative UN reports.
- Offering strategic and legal advice to domestic workers and street vendors globally. Over the past five years, the Clinic has been a key partner to lawyers representing informal economy workers in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. By supporting litigation in national courts and advocacy before regional human rights commissions, IHRC has expanded the forums where exploited workers can vindicate their rights. In addition to this accountability work, the Clinic has taken a proactive approach. In the fall of 2024, an IHRC team traveled to Casablanca, Morocco to research legal language that African states could enact to better protect the livelihoods of their most marginalized workers.

SKILLS

The specific skills you develop will depend on your project, and can include learning how to:

- Formulate legal strategies and deploy advocacy tactics through engagement with partners, clients, and stakeholders.
- Investigate abuses and collect facts by interviewing experts, witnesses, or survivors of human rights abuse, or by undertaking open-source research and analysis.
- Participate in high-level convenings, court hearings, and diplomatic meetings.
- Undertake legal research and analysis to inform and develop litigation and advocacy campaigns.
- Write legal briefs, treaty-body submissions, and advocacy or policy reports.
- Engage with and brief partner organizations about findings and recommendations.
- Create and deliver trainings or advocacy materials.

You will acquire knowledge to navigate the varied practice settings in which human rights advocates work, and to evaluate and implement a range of methods. All students in the IHRC:

- Examine where you, your project, and your partner(s) are positioned, and the available routes for action.
- Determine how to pragmatically develop and responsibly implement groundbreaking strategies to craft change and achieve desired outcomes.
- Engage with dilemmas that advocates face in a variety of contexts and consider the ethical and strategic implications of different options.
- Assess and deploy a range of methods to accomplish your project’s goals and elevate your impact as a practitioner.
- Learn to navigate multiple practice settings by thinking creatively and innovatively about different tools and tactics.
- Develop resiliency and self-care practices that make sustainable activism possible.

TYPICAL WORK SCHEDULE

There is no typical day in our clinic and no one-size-fits-all approach to our work. Students and clinicians work collaboratively and are in regular contact. Students meet with their entire project team and supervisor for at least two hours each week, and also have some combination of smaller meetings, one-on-one conversations, and other interactions with their teammates, supervisor, and partner organization. Team meetings are a chance to share and discuss the substance of their work, give and receive feedback, strategize about next steps, revise workplans and assignments, and reflect on the direction of the project as a whole. Students usually prepare some type of written work product each week. Team meetings also cover broader strategic and ethical questions about a project, and often involve discussions with the partner organization. Between weekly team meetings, students complete some combination of research, analysis, writing, planning, and coordination with teammates.