



From Moots to Geneva: My Placement at the United Nations International Law Commission

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International law has always struck me as one of the most intellectually fascinating areas of legal study. My introduction to this field came through my participation in international mooting. Competing in the Vis Moot, the FDI Moot, and the HSFK Competition Law Moot exposed me to areas of law that transcend any single jurisdiction: international commercial arbitration, international investment law, and EU competition law. It was through these experiences that I came to appreciate how international legal frameworks operate in practice, not merely in theory. That appetite for international law was what led me to apply for the Research Assistant placement at the United Nations International Law Commission, where I had the privilege of working under the supervision of Professor Martins Paparinskis. I had long wanted to deepen my understanding beyond the classroom, and this placement offered an opportunity to observe international legal development from the inside.

My primary duties centred on attending and taking detailed notes at the Commission's meetings, which included plenary sessions, drafting committee meetings, and working group meetings. The role demanded sharp concentration, a strong command of legal vocabulary, and the ability to follow highly technical discussions in real time. The Commission does not simply apply existing law; it deliberates, debates, and constructs it. The rigour and precision with which the members of the Commission approached each topic were humbling and inspiring in equal measure.

The breadth of topics on the agenda gave me new perspectives that I had not anticipated gaining in such a short period. Over the course of the placement, I engaged with discussions on: (1) Immunity of State officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction; (2) Settlement of disputes to which international organisations are parties; (3) Non-legally binding international agreements; (4) Prevention and repression of piracy and armed robbery at sea; and (5) Succession of States in respect of State responsibility. Each topic opened a new corridor of legal thought, and together they gave me a deeper appreciation of the diversity and complexity of international law.

In the conference room, I found myself surrounded by fellow LLM and PhD students, future academics and practitioners from around the world who were serving as assistants for other members of the Commission. The environment was remarkably welcoming and intellectually stimulating. Our conversations about the differences between our legal systems, our career aspirations, and what had brought each of us to Geneva were among the most stimulating discussions I have ever had. Adapting to this international environment challenged me to articulate my own perspectives more clearly and to listen more carefully to others, an invaluable form of professional and personal growth that no textbook can provide.



Charles Chan (first from the left), Professor Paparinskis (second from the left), Professor Claudio Grossman (third from the left), and other assistants.

The most memorable aspect of the placement was, without doubt, the sense of camaraderie among the assistants. Because most of us spent the entire day in meetings, informal moments over lunch, during coffee breaks and conversations in corridors became spaces of genuine connection and intellectual exchange. I will carry those conversations with me long after the placement has ended. Equally memorable was the opportunity to hear Professor Paparinskis speak candidly about his experience as Chair of the Commission last year and as Special Rapporteur of the Commission this year. Hearing a scholar of his standing reflect on his professional journey with such openness was both motivating and grounding.

The key lesson I take from this experience is that international law is not a fixed set of rules but a living process: one shaped by careful argument, scholarly dedication, and a willingness to engage seriously with different perspectives. I leave this placement not with all the answers, but with better questions and the determination to pursue them. I am sincerely grateful to Professor Paparinskis and CUHK LAW for providing such a wonderful opportunity and experience for me as a final year LLB student at CUHK LAW.