

Adam Taylor

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During the summer of 2013, I worked at People's Watch, a Human Rights NGO, located in Madurai, India. Madurai is in the southern portion of India. People's Watch started out as a human rights defender for victims of torture in 1995 and has since evolved to cover a wide range of human rights violations through monitoring, intervention, and community support. People's Watch also educates the community on the human rights they are entitled to and what to do if their human rights have been violated.

I worked on a variety of projects during my time at People's Watch. My first project was researching and writing India's annual report to the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI) regarding the work and compliance of India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for the previous year. My second project was analyzing the cases India's NHRC took suo-moto cognizance of for the previous year. The purpose was to find out if the NHRC followed the proper guidelines and what actions, if any, the NHRC ordered.

I also had the opportunity to participate in two human rights trainings from the preeminent human rights lawyers in India. The first training taught the UN Paris Principles and the ways these principles have been integrated into Indian law. The second training was about human rights lawyering, and it was held at the prestigious National Law School of India in Bangalore. At this training, I learned how to practice as a human rights defender in real-world situations from the most respected human rights defenders in India. I learned about lawyering in conflict zones, encounter deaths, and growing support for human rights defense from lawyers who practice daily in Andhra Pradesh, Kashmir, and the other regions of India.

Living in India was an eye-opening experience for me. I have lived in a few other countries during my life, but none of them have been like India. The area I lived in had a population of around 1 million people yet was structured like a small town. Madurai, a town that is about 2500 years old, is very spread out and tallest building is only four

stories. At the center of Madurai is Meenakshi Temple, which has been the central focus and heart of the town. The new mixes with the old. A cell phone store sits across from Meenakshi Temple. I had a wonderful time exploring this city and interacting with the people.

I learned a great deal from the wonderful experience that one cannot gain from just a classroom. I learned how to be a lawyer in a foreign country and the flexibility and adaptability that it requires. I learned that there is more to being a human rights defender than just knowing the law. I learned about the culture, customs, and peoples of India. Most importantly, I learned to not take human rights for granted and that the struggle is not over so long as even one person is denied their human rights. I will always treasure the memories and experiences I gained in India.