

August 31, 2017

Dan Ruben,  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

**RE: Fellowship Experience**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting my summer fellowship experience at AEquitas-Prosecutor's Resource on Violence Against Women. Thanks to the generous contribution of Equal Justice America, I was able to undertake a three months fellowship which reinforced my passion and determination to pursue a public interest career, and more particularly, to work towards ensuring victims of Gender Based Violence in my country Uganda receive justice.

As a women's rights lawyer who has worked extensively among rural communities in my country, harrowing stories of Gender Based Violence related crimes is common place. Social-cultural norms and perceptions which undermine the status of women and glorify male dominance often leave the latter vulnerable to all forms of abuse. Archaic and poorly implemented domestic laws present victims of Gender Based Violence with no recourse for the crimes that are committed against them. As a result, Gender Based Violence crimes in my country often go unprosecuted in spite of the alarming frequency with which they occur. My desire to see women in my country with a means through which they can live free from abuse inspired my decision to work with an organization of AEquitas' reputation. Although AEquitas is a D.C based organization, it also works with criminal justice professionals in the United States, and across the World to improve the quality of justice in Gender Based Violence cases. With this wealth of experience from having worked in various developing countries including my own, I was certain that working at AEquitas over the summer would be an invaluable experience for me.

While at AEquitas, I conducted research on prosecution of Gender Based Violence crimes in refugee settlements in Uganda. I particularly looked at refugee settlements because Uganda is currently hosting over a million refugees amidst staggering resource restrictions. The

conditions within these settlements have exacerbated Gender Based Violence crimes such as rape, child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and domestic violence. Majority of these crimes go unpunished leading to the perpetrators acting with impunity and the victims, most of whom are women continuing to live without dignity and respect for their rights. Through utilizing the resources availed to me by AEquitas over the summer, I sought strategies to address the plight of victims of Gender Based Violence in refugee settlements. A key recommendation I put forward was the creation of specialized Gender Based Violence Mobile Courts and Legal Aid Clinics that can be equipped to visit refugee settlements and hear these matters. Using the numerous handbooks, monographs and articles AEquitas has developed on prosecuting Gender Based Violence crimes, I was able to put forward key considerations judges and prosecutors trying these cases in refugee settlements can take into account to ensure justice for victims.

During the research process, AEquitas attorney advisors also made themselves available to provide support and expertise where needed. I was put in touch with numerous contacts the organization worked on matters related to my research topic. This included attorneys from my country who worked on Gender Based Violence crimes. I also found it extremely helpful to interact with the AEquitas team on how crimes involving Violence Against Women were prosecuted in different states of the United States. From the information I attained during these discussions, I was able to replicate applicable best practices that could feed into the recommendations I developed in my research paper. My overall experience working at AEquitas over the summer and researching on this issue was extremely enlightening. Because of this experience I have been inspired to approach number of organizations in Uganda which provide legal aid to refugee victims of Gender Based Violence and offer to volunteer. Thanks to Equal Justice America and AEquitas, I have further been equipped with the tools to pursue my passion and make a difference in the lives of women in my country.

Thank you so much,

Sheila Kinaheirwe

Georgetown University Law Center (LLM Graduate, May 2017)