

GISSOU NIA
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PROFILE

US trained lawyer specialized in war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights trials. Nonprofit leader with years of experience heading organizations focused on human rights. Extensive human rights reporting, investigations and monitoring experience. Significant expertise in building and implementing major global advocacy campaigns and engaging with multilateral organizations and governments.

WORK EXPERIENCE (LEGAL & HUMAN RIGHTS)

ATLANTIC COUNCIL (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

JUNE 2019-PRESENT

- Founder and Director of the Strategic Litigation Project at the Atlantic Council, a leading global think tank.
- Leads the day-to-day work of Strategic Litigation Project (SLP), which works at the intersection of law and policy to hold state actors, state proxies, non-state actors, and affiliated entities to account for human rights violations and abuses, atrocity crimes, corruption and acts of terrorism. Runs a team of 5 full time staff lawyers, 10 part time legal and policy consultants, and 8 part time researchers, and a wider network of partner organizations and volunteers.
- Past and current projects include:
 - Establishment of a fund for victims and survivors of the conflict in Syria.
 - An ongoing effort to codify the crime of gender apartheid under international law.
 - A successful campaign to remove the Islamic Republic of Iran from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women with a winning vote in December 2022.
 - Ongoing accountability efforts and representation of victims and survivors in cases involving human rights violations and atrocity crimes in Iran, Syria, China, Afghanistan and Ukraine.
- Frequent commentator in media outlets on SLP work, for print, radio and television.

PURPOSE (NEW YORK CITY/LOS ANGELES, USA)

APRIL 2016-MAY 2019

- Strategy director at Purpose, a social change agency based in NYC.
- Responsible for the human rights and international development practice at the group, principal point of contact for partner organizations in Southern California.
- Director lead for major projects including with UNICEF, Council on Foreign Relations, World Food Programme, International Rescue Committee, United Way, Anti-Defamation League and others.
- Conceptualized, launched and led major campaigns and innovations in support of refugees worldwide including [Team Refugees](#), the fan movement for the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team that competed in Rio in August 2016, and [Refugees Welcome](#), a global series that brings new arrivals and locals together for a meal and conversation to foster social integration in communities.
- Won a Lovie award (recognition of the best of the European internet) in October 2017 for work on Team Refugees. For work on Refugees Welcome, won a Webby award (the leading international award for honoring excellence on the internet) in April 2018 and a Lovie award in October 2018.
- Have advised/led other projects including on AI for global good, a documentation and justice project in Zimbabwe, a film and advocacy project featuring a political dissident and medal-winning Olympian from Ethiopia, a Saudi-Iranian women's forum around human rights and entrepreneurship and a storytelling and advocacy project concerning the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

CHECKMATE (NEW YORK CITY, USA)

OCT 2015-APRIL 2016

- Co-founder and director of strategy for Checkmate, a documentary and advocacy project dedicated to freeing prisoners of conscience worldwide.
- Worked with the families of prisoners of conscience to create documentary and advocacy tools to secure their release.
- Premiered documentary short at the Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway in May 2016 concerning case of Iranian-Canadian web developer Saeed Malekpour, who was imprisoned at the time and free as of August 2019.

CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN (BROOKLYN, USA)

NOV 2014-SEP 2015

- Deputy Director of non-profit organization based in Brooklyn, NY that engages in reporting and advocacy on human rights violations in Iran.
- Along with the group's founder, developed and supervised all aspects of operations, including programming, legal, development and management.
- Media spokeswoman for the group and led group's on-going Free Them Now initiative in support of Iranian prisoners of conscience. Conceptualized and implemented English language media campaign in support of Ghoncheh Ghavami, a jailed British-Iranian dual national who was subsequently freed on account of global pressure.
- Led group's UN advocacy efforts in Geneva, New York and UN member states' country capitals that resulted in renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran and passage of Iran human rights resolutions before the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council.

IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION CENTER (NEW HAVEN, USA)

NOV 2011-JULY 2014

- Served as Executive Director of non-profit organization based in New Haven, CT that documents human rights abuses in Iran.
- Supervised all documentation, reporting, fundraising, media, outreach and development programs.
- Oversaw staff of 11 full-time paid employees based on three continents, as well as numerous consultants, pro bono legal assistants and volunteers.
- Final author and editor of all reports, witness statements, press releases, articles, support letters and expert declarations and opinions issued by IHRDC.
- Led successful UN advocacy campaign in support of passage of UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution on human rights in Iran, as well as renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran at the UN Human Rights Council. Involved extensive advocacy meetings in Geneva, New York and at foreign ministries in various country capitals.
- Founded, developed and led [*Unlock Iran*](#), an award-winning digital campaign in support of the release of Iranian prisoners of conscience. The campaign was profiled in dozens of mainstream media outlets and helped raise awareness about hundreds of previously unknown Iranian prisoners of conscience to the international community.
- Published opinion pieces for media; appeared on television and radio; and drafted briefs for governmental and public interest actors on Iran human rights issues.
- Gave lectures on the human rights situation in Iran at policy and academic institutions and other public forums; gave evidence collection trainings to Iranian activists and other actors in the Middle East.
- Conducted multiple workshops and lectures on human rights reporting methods and best practices, including a three-day workshop on evidence collection techniques in English and Persian to MENA activists in Sofia, Bulgaria in July 2012.
- Member of prosecution team in Iran Tribunal proceedings, a people's court established to adjudicate allegations of crimes against humanity by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1980s, which was held at the Peace Palace in The Hague, NL in October 2012.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (THE HAGUE, NL)

AUG 2011-NOV 2011

- Represented Mr. Henry Kiprono Kosgey in confirmation of charges proceedings against him in the case of the *Prosecutor v. Ruto et al* in the situation in the Republic of Kenya.
- Drafted formal written filings in the pre-trial stage for the Kosgey defense, including a 50-page final written submission.
- Advised on international criminal procedure and substantive issues during the course of confirmation hearings.

IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION CENTER (NEW HAVEN, USA)

FEB 2010-AUG 2011

- Researcher and legal analyst whose primary duties included reporting on the human rights situation in Iran and advising governments and other decision makers on Iran's human rights situation including the Iranian government's on-going crackdown on civil and political activists and the Iranian government's treatment of ethnic and religious minorities.
- Produced 50-page human rights report on governmental crackdown on women's rights activists in Iran in the year following the June 2009 election from investigative phase to final draft, published August 2010.
- Completed two-week investigative mission to Central Turkey in April 2010 to interview Iranian refugees who escaped persecution in Iran, including ethnic and religious minorities and political dissidents.
- Completed two-month investigative mission to Europe and Central Turkey in January-March 2011 to interview Iranian Kurdish refugees who were subjected to human rights violations by the Iranian government following the 1979 Revolution up until the present day.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA (THE HAGUE, NL)

NOV 2007-FEB 2010

- Defense in the cases against Mr. Bruno Stojić (*Prosecutor v. Prlić et al*) and Mr. Astrit Haraqija (*Prosecutor v. Haraqija and Morina*).
- Responsible for drafting all formal written filings (e.g. motions, replies, responses, notices, appeals) for the defense.
- Primarily tasked with completion of the final trial brief in *Stojić* case (involved daily transcript analysis as well as analysis of documentary evidence, in-depth research on both substantive and procedural legal issues).
- Led investigations for case preparation, including ten-day mission in Kosovo (e.g. interviewing potential witnesses, taking written statements, gathering documentary evidence).
- Prepared cross-examination questions for key witnesses and assisted in witness proofings.
- Drafted budgetary proposals for defense funding for trial and appeal phases within bounds of Completion Strategy at the Tribunal.
- Wrote winning Appeals Brief in *Prosecutor v. Haraqija* that overturned conviction for contempt against client Astrit Haraqija.

LAW CLERK TO THE HONORABLE ROBERT G. MILLENKY, J.S.C. (CAMDEN, USA)

SEPT 2006 – AUG 2007

- Law clerk to Civil Law Division Superior Court Judge in Camden, New Jersey.
- Drafted legal opinions to be issued by Judge Millenky.
- Completed legal research and writing on range of civil law issues before the court, including issuance of PIP (personal injury protection) benefits, Law Against Discrimination, contractual disputes, Tort Claims Act, toxic tort (asbestos) and many other legal issues arising out of both statutory and regulatory law.
- Responsible for case motion management of 150+ active cases on docket.
- Trained mediator in New Jersey courts; mediated 2-3 cases per week.

**INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA (THE HAGUE, NL)
JAN-JULY 2005**

- Pro bono legal assistant for the defense in *Prosecutor v. Limaj et al.*
- Drafted discovery and evidentiary motions.
- Drafted section of final trial brief addressing count of joint criminal enterprise.
- Prepared research memoranda on range of issues including: sentencing guidelines, choice of law issues, evidentiary disclosure obligations, joint criminal enterprise liability.
- Intern to the Head of Office of the Association for Defence Counsel at the Tribunal.
- Drafted suggested proposals for formulation of Code of Ethics for defense counsel.

**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, LAW CLERK
SUMMER 2004**

- Worked in the Transnational and Major Crimes Unit on cases involving Indonesia and the Middle East region.
- Close working association with DOJ Counter-Terrorism Section.
- Helped research and draft motions for the department.

EDUCATION

RUTGERS SCHOOL OF LAW – CAMDEN

AUG 2003 - MAY 2006

- *Juris Doctorate*, concentration in International Law and Immigration Law.
- Recipient of Hamerling Scholarship for 2003-2004 academic year.
- Recipient of Association of Public Interest Law (APIL) grant for Summer 2004.
- President of International Law Society.
- Contributing Editor to ILSA International Law Portal.

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY – FACULTY OF LAW (LEIDEN, NL)

SPRING/SUMMER 2005

- Focus on IHL and Advanced Law of the External Relations of the European Union.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA – LOS ANGELES (UCLA)

SEPT 1999 - JUNE 2003

- Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.
- Contributing Editor for Political Science Student Association Quarterly.