



THE PROMISE INSTITUTE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REPORT  
2020 - 2021

# OUR FOUNDING STORY

## *AWARENESS THROUGH THE ARTS*

The Promise Institute owes its founding to Dr. Eric Esrailian, producer of the film, *The Promise*. As the first feature film to tell the story of the Armenian Genocide, *The Promise* is a powerful example of the way art can connect history to action. The Armenian genocide began in 1915, and in time more than 1.5 million people would perish in an atrocity driven by ethnic and religious intolerance.

Following the film's premiere, Dr. Esrailian and fellow producer Anthony Mandekic used the film's proceeds to launch our Institute. "The Promise Institute is so named because UCLA and the UCLA School of Law are making the promise to refugees and people suffering from injustice that we will create the tools and train the people to address these crises."



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

UCLA School of Law acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders), and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present, and emerging.

# EXCERPT FROM "UN/SAFE"

KAREN McCARTHY WOOLF / FULLBRIGHT SCHOLAR  
PROMISE POET-IN-RESIDENCE



On our road trip from Wyoming to Colorado via South Dakota I notice the animals, the cattle are all more tightly penned, squashed together like marshmallows in a packet, though deer still run at the edge of the fence. We've been in Nebraska two minutes when the police pull us over. The younger officer is the Sheriff. He's nervous. Terribly polite. Introduces himself. As Rhett. *Not Rhett Butler* he says. But it is like Rhett Butler. It is a gleaming, multi-columned southern mansion. Especially when he laughs, nervously, did I say that he was nervous? Did I say the older officer never takes his hand off his gun? Won't look me in the eye? Keeps his distance. That I'm careful to move slowly as I reach into the glove compartment for Zoë's papers? Did I say that Zoë is dark skinned? *Can you imagine a whiter name?* Rhett asks.

KAREN McCARTHY WOOLF'S POETRY EXPLORES NATURE, THE CITY AND THE SACRED AND HOW HUMAN RIGHTS ACROSS DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES ARE CONFIGURED IN ECOLOGICAL CONTEXTS.

UN/SAFE IS AN ESSAY WRITTEN DURING McCARTHY WOOLF'S TIME IN RESIDENCE AT THE PROMISE INSTITUTE.

# MEET THE TEAM



ASLI BÂLI  
Faculty Director



KATE MACKINTOSH  
Executive Director



CATHERINE SWEETSER  
Deputy Director



JESS PEAKE  
Assistant Director



JOSEPH BERRA  
Human Rights in the Americas  
Project Director



PRIYA MORLEY  
Racial Justice Policy Counsel



RIE OHTA  
Human Rights Litigation  
Clinic Fellow



SHERRY YUAN  
Program Manager



NATALIE MONSANTO  
Communications and  
Development Manager



KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW  
Promise Institute Chair  
in Human Rights



KAL RAUSTIALA  
Promise Institute Chair  
in Comparative and International Law

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The 2020-2021 academic year was certainly a unique one. As we adapted to pandemic conditions, our body of work continued to grow along with our team. Our students proved themselves resilient and dedicated during the remote experience, and we count ourselves among the very, very fortunate to have been able to continue our work in such an extraordinarily uncertain landscape.

As the pandemic unfolded, we worked to safely continue in-person support of vulnerable clients, and use our scholarship to expose racial and global inequities in the COVID-19 response - including book chapters, articles, and podcasts. We were part of litigation, on-site inspections and negotiations to improve conditions in the LA County Jails. We monitored the situation at homeless encampments, and we raised issues with the City about the ability of unhoused persons to shelter in place.

The work of our previous Faculty Director, E. Tendayi Achiume, led to a report in June 2021 from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on systemic racism against Black people and people of African descent. We received funding to amplify our work on racial justice and have used it to support efforts across Promise, including the Human Rights Litigation Clinic and our Reimagining Rights in the Americas project. As our first Racial Justice Policy Counsel, newest team member Priya Morley will reinforce this work for wider policy impact.

Efforts seeded in our 2020 symposium bloomed this year into the announcement of a proposed definition of ecocide - a watershed moment in international law and a potentially powerful tool to protect our climate. We expanded the curriculum with innovative new skills training such as our new Human Rights Digital Investigations Lab. As more of our lives move to digital platforms, and as mis- and dis-information ripple throughout information ecosystems this work is at the cutting edge of human rights and the digital frontier and trains our students in Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) methodology.

The Fall 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan became a key research initiative. We compiled a publicly available Conflict Research Database to support future scholarship; convened a high level panel and report on the right to self-determination, and will soon publish our OSINT research into related online disinformation. In Spring 2021, we were proud to convene our annual symposium on International Human Rights and Corporate Accountability: Current and Future Challenges, with an adjacent practitioners' workshop.

As we look to the coming year we know we have much yet to do, but the breadth of our efforts and the power of our impact illustrate the vital importance of this work. Thank you for joining us in supporting human rights - in the United States and around the world.



KATE MACKINTOSH  
Executive Director

# OUR APPROACH

- *FOCUS AREAS.* -

**THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**TECHNOLOGY**  
**MIGRATION**  
**RACE & INDIGENEITY**  
**ACCOUNTABILITY**

- *STRATEGIC GOALS* -

## **EMPOWERING**

the next generation of  
human rights lawyers  
and leaders

## **GENERATING**

new thinking on  
human rights

## **ENGAGING**

our students and our  
research to drive  
positive real world  
impact



- *STRATEGIC GOAL* -

EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
LAWYERS & LEADERS



# *INNOVATIVE HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION*

*Engaging leading scholars and practitioners allows us to enrich the law school curriculum with a broader array of human rights courses. Our students graduate with the right foundation for impactful careers.*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS LITIGATION CLINIC**

From international cases defending victims of child slavery in the cocoa industry to defending the rights of the unhoused in Los Angeles this past year, Deputy Director Catherine Sweetser's Clinic was a powerhouse experience for students, fusing domestic and international human rights work.

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY**

Taught by Danny Vannucchi, former Global Head of Impact & Learning at Amnesty International, and offered for the first time this year, this course offered a masterclass in leveraging human rights legal frameworks for real world impact.

## **PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE**

Through his 30+ year tenure with Human Rights Watch and longstanding role as Director of their International Justice Program, Richard Dicker brought his wealth of experience and insight to this course.

## **REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION: THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**

The strategy and nuanced expertise taught in this course by Visiting Professor James Cavallaro is informed most notably by his tenure as President of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.

## **ICC FORUM**

Professor Richard Steinberg continued his longstanding oversight of the ICC Forum this year. The Forum works closely with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Court, and invites in-depth commentary from invited global experts twice yearly. Students research and help craft the questions and prepare submissions for publication on the Forum.



## *EVENT & SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS*

- Reparations for Slavery and Colonialism Series
- Women, Gender & the Law Series
- Human Rights Around the World Series
- Spanish-Language Speaker Series
- A conversation with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet



LEYMAH GBOWEE  
Nobel Peace Laureate, 2011



MICHELLE BACHELET  
UN High Commissioner  
for Human Rights



PATRICIA SELLERS  
Special Advisor for Gender  
to the ICC Prosecutor



JOSÉ FRANCISCO CALÍ TZAY  
UN Special Rapporteur



RICHARD FALK  
Professor Emeritus



DUBRAVKA ŠIMONOVIĆ  
UN Special Rapporteur



SHIRLEY WEBER  
California Secretary of State

- *STRATEGIC GOAL* -

GENERATING NEW THINKING  
ON HUMAN RIGHTS



## *SYNTHESIZING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP*

We pushed forward with research at intersections of our focus areas this year. Cross-pollinating our environment and accountability themes was our work on a new international crime of **ecocide**. Throughout 2020-21 we hosted a Promise Institute Working Group, bringing together experts on international criminal law and international environmental law. The group's work fed deliberations of an International Expert Panel which launched a new definition of the crime of ecocide to much fanfare and press coverage in June 2021. Our Executive Director Kate Mackintosh was deputy co-chair of the Panel. We also launched [www.ecocidelaw.com](http://www.ecocidelaw.com), a legal and historical resource, in partnership with the Stop Ecocide Foundation.

In keeping with technological advancements and their impact on human rights, we are excited to be developing a new **Human Rights Digital Investigations Lab**. Assistant Director Jess Peake is leading the UCLA branch of a collaboration with research labs at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz to make our three programs the combined national leaders in digital investigation. She secured a University of California Multicampus Research Programs and Initiatives grant to support Digital Fact Finding Training, through which our students learn cutting edge Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) methodology to identify and verify evidence of war crimes and human rights violations discoverable online, and to ensure that it is admissible in court. As more of our world moves to digital platforms, these initiatives are increasingly valuable tools for human rights work. One example of this is our forthcoming **report on disinformation in the Fall 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh conflict**.

Our annual symposium this year addressed **International Human Rights and Corporate Accountability**. The symposium was followed by a dynamic and fruitful strategy workshop for practitioners in this evolving area. Research in our Reimagining Rights in the Americas project, directed by Joseph Berra, led to publications on the **racialized impact of COVID-19** and a chapter on the exercise of **Indigenous language sovereignty** together with Dr. Shannon Speed, Director of UCLA's American Indian Studies Center, and Odilia Romero, Executive Director of CIELO.

One important force-multiplier for us has been supporting human rights-related research across the wider UCLA campus. We have **provided research funds** to a broad range of projects, ranging from forensic video evaluation of asylum seeker claims to universal jurisdiction for international crimes and the provision of immigration counsel to indigent criminal defendants in California.

- *STRATEGIC GOAL* -

DRIVING POSITIVE IMPACT



## *GENERATING CHANGE*

In the spring of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, our then faculty director and current UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, **E. Tendayi Achiume**, spearheaded a call from over 40 United Nations experts for the United Nations to investigate systemic racism in the U.S. The call resulted in an **investigation into discrimination** against Africans and persons of African-descent globally, which reported this summer. This chain of events has also led, most recently, to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken issuing a formal invitation to Prof. Achiume to visit and report on the United States under the auspices of her mandate.

Our **Human Rights Litigation Clinic** launched in fall 2020 to defend the human rights of plaintiffs at home and abroad through domestic US courts. Led by Deputy Director Catherine Sweetser, clinic cases over the past year include a case before the Supreme Court on behalf of children trafficked from Mali into the Ivory Coast and **held in slavery** to harvest cocoa on cocoa plantations; vindicating the rights of a family of brothers, **wrongfully detained** for four years on the basis of false evidence, through the Inter-American human rights system; monitoring conditions in the **LA jails** during the COVID pandemic, and defending against the appeal of an injunction that was issued to prohibit the City of Los Angeles from depriving **unhoused people** of their property without due process.

**Impact through litigation** is also a feature of our **Reimagining Rights in the Americas** project. Director Joseph Berra is co-counsel on three cases against Honduras before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. He has been active in the International Expert Observer Mission covering the trial of David Castillo, who was found guilty in the assassination of Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres of the Lenca Indigenous rights organization COPINH. We are supporting a host of cases making their way through Honduran courts, and potentially to the Inter-American human rights system, involving protecting **Indigenous land rights**, the environment and resisting **extractivist industries**.

On the **policy** level, Berra and his students collaborated with CIELO (Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo, or Indigenous Communities in Leadership) to **map Indigenous language communities** in the Greater Los Angeles area as a step to identifying and so remedying policy and service gaps. And we are delighted to share that work with the IEN Coalition (Indigenous Education Now) obtained Los Angeles Unified School District Board approval of a **\$10M budget to support Native and Indigenous children** within the school district. We will continue working with the IEN Coalition on a tribal consultation model for implementation of the initiative.

## JUMP-STARTING CAREERS

*One of the most impactful things we can do is place our students in meaningful careers where they can be vectors of change in society. This year, six students received prestigious Promise Institute graduation awards to support them as they enter their careers in human rights. We are also directly supporting two of our 2021 graduates with year-long post-graduate fellowship funding to enable them to work with leading human rights organizations.*



ARY HANSEN

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award  
Fellow, International Refugee Assistance Program Litigation Team



LINA JEMILI

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award  
Associate, Morrison and Foerster



JACKIE KALLBERG

The Promise Institute Award for Transitions into Human Rights  
The International and Comparative Law Award for LLM Students  
Associate, Wilson Elser



BRADY MABE

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award  
The International and Comparative Law Program Award  
Legal Associate, Int'l Committee of the Red Cross Delegation to the UN



RAMYA SWAMI

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award  
Extrajudicial Executions Fellow, Reprieve



XUCHEN ZHANG

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award  
The International and Comparative Law Program Award  
Research Fellow, European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights

*LOOKING AHEAD*

**2021 - 2022**

We are as grateful for your support this year as we are proud of our work in the midst of such shifting circumstances.

As our next year unfolds, we look forward to expanding our impact on every front, and are excited to see what's next. Above all, we are proud to be the innovative home for human rights at UCLA.

We invite you to join us as we work to bring human rights to the fore, everywhere.



*FOLLOW US*



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