O'NEILL INSTITUTE
CENTER FOR HEALTH & HUMAN RIGHTS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

CENTER FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS



OSCAR A. CABRERA

Co-Director, Center for
Health and Human Rights



SILVIA SERRANO-GUZMÁN

Co-Director, Center for
Health and Human Rights

OUR TEAM

Oscar A. Cabrera Co-Director
Silvia Serrano-Guzmán Co-Director
Isabel Barbosa Associate Director
María Belén Saavedra Senior Associate
Ivonne Garza Senior Associate
Mariel Ortega de los Santos Senior Associate
Margherita Cinà Associate
Valentina Castagnari Senior Associate
Gloria Orrego-Hoyos Senior Associate
Fernanda Rodríguez-Pliego Associate
Adi Radhakrishnan Associate
Patricio López Turconi Associate
Nathalie Milfort Program Associate
Bethanie Fletcher-Perez Program Associate
Guillermina Pappier Fellow
Pamela Flores Subias Fellow
Ariadna Tovar Ramírez Senior Consultant
Natalia Acevedo Guerrero Senior Consultant
Gretzel Brozovich Consultant
Andrés López Cabello Consultant
Natasha Lauletta Consultant
Olohikhuae Egbokhare Consultant
Francesca Nardi Consultant

About the Center for Health and Human Rights

The Center for Health and Human Rights (CHHR) works to improve health through applied academic research that focuses on the nexus of health and international and national human rights frameworks. Our team collaborates closely with local partners to build capacity, provide technical assistance, and pursue the strategic use of the law in health and human rights issues. The work of the Center for Health and Human Rights seeks to maximize the real-world impacts of law, policy, and academic scholarship.

The team is grateful to the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, Georgetown University, and the center's many generous funders and partners who make this work possible.



HOW WE WORK

Each of CHHR's research projects relies on a methodology that can be applied to a range of health topics and adapted to fit the needs of diverse local contexts.

Our research projects not only formulate innovative law and policy solutions for a given health problem in a specific context, but also evaluate their relevance for other health topics and applicability in other countries.

We carry out our work in close collaboration with local partners (including academia, government, and civil society), prioritizing engagement of new constituencies and fostering cross-country, cross-disciplinary, and cross-movement dialogues across each of its projects.

The CHHR methodology for transforming rigorous legal research and analysis into real-world law and policy solutions relies on the following core strategies: academic scholarship, capacity building, and strategic use of the law.

CORE STRATEGIES

ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP

A focus on systematizing, generating, and disseminating innovative legal theories and arguments related to priority health and human rights topics in academic scholarship.

CAPACITY BUILDING

A focus not only on strengthening the ability of current and future lawyers to engage in law and policymaking on priority health and human rights topics, but also on enhancing the familiarity and expertise of other legal actors related to these topics (judges, government lawyers, etc.).

STRATEGIC USE OF THE LAW

A focus on conducting or facilitating targeted interventions in law and policy reform efforts related to priority health topics (amicus briefs, expert testimony, etc.) that enhance the impact of those interventions. This work includes the provision of technical assistance, strategic litigation, and standard-setting.

AREAS OF WORK

The Center for Health and Human Rights works to improve health through applied academic research that focuses on the nexus of health and international and national human rights frameworks. Our team collaborates closely with local partners to build capacity, provide technical assistance, and pursue the strategic use of the law in health and human rights issues.



Litigation and Standard-Setting

This area of work focuses on engagement in domestic and international litigation and standard-setting processes to advance health in all of its dimensions through the strategic use of human rights legal frameworks. Strategic use of the law includes directly representing individual and collective victims of human rights violations, often seeking structural remedies and changes, as well as providing technical assistance to relevant actors involved in legislative drafting, policymaking, and judicial practice. CHHR conducts academic research and analysis to inform the adoption of laws and policies that advance justice and equity in the provision of health care services. CHHR also compiles, analyzes, and disseminates legal standards for health and human rights.

CHHR represents victims of human rights violations, with ongoing cases at the national level in countries including Chile and Colombia, the Inter-American level, and before United Nations Treaty Bodies. To see the full list of CHHR cases, please visit our case tracker.

At the international level, in 2025 CHHR submitted key legal arguments and requests for individual reparations and structural reforms to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the matter of K.M. v. Guatemala, arguing that the State of Guatemala is responsible for having failed to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. K.M. is a woman with physical and intellectual disabilities who lives with her family in a situation of poverty in rural Guatemala. At the age of 17, K.M. suffered sexual violence, perpetrated on several occasions by her uncle, which resulted in a pregnancy. K.M. was never informed about the possibility of accessing an abortion, and after she carried the pregnancy to term and gave birth, she was sterilized without consent.

At the regional level in 2025, the CHHR, continued its representation of the victims of human rights abuses at the Federico Mora psychiatric hospital in Guatemala in a case before the Inter-American Court alongside co-counsel Disability Rights International and the Colectivo Vida Independiente de Guatemala. This year, we presented submissions before the Court, including the main legal arguments regarding the alleged violations, requests for reparations and guarantees of non-repetition, and submission of evidence and witness and expert testimony. The case presents a crucial opportunity to address severe and long-standing abuses faced by persons with disabilities in such institutions.



In May, members of the Center for Health and Human Rights appeared before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to oversee compliance with the landmark judgment in the case of Vera Rojas and Others v. Chile (2021), where they acted as co-petitioners alongside Chilean attorney Karinna Fernández to support the implementation of the reparations ordered by the Court.

Additionally, CHHR continued its work on cases at the national level in several countries. In Colombia, we continued working towards the implementation of the Constitutional Court of Colombia's decision in the judgment T-237, where it ordered the Ministry of Health to regulate so-called "ethical triages" during health emergencies in the country. The Court recognized that the Ministry failed to regulate prioritization decisions for access to health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, jeopardizing the rights to health and to equality and nondiscrimination of the users of the Colombian health system. The decision came as a result of the legal challenge presented by 26 people with disabilities, individuals over 60 years of age, and individuals with chronic health conditions with the support of the CHHR and the Action Program for Equality and Social Inclusion (PAIIS). In 2025, CHHR provided observations and technical inputs to the Ministry of Health on their proposed resolution.

In Chile, CHHR continued work on the case of Oscar Walter, a young man with Down syndrome who died at 38 years old of COVID-19 Santiago, Chile. Because he was a person with an intellectual disability, Oscar was deprioritized and mistreated by health personnel. He was not provided with the medical attention he needed, he was not assigned a clinical bed, nor did he have the chance to use a mechanical ventilator. The authorities did not even attempt to transfer him to another healthcare center where he could receive proper care. His family, with the support of CHHR and the Colombara Legal Strategy Firm have demanded a finding of civil responsibility for the discrimination experienced and seeks both reparations and measures to prevent future discrimination of people with disabilities. In 2025, key evidentiary work was completed in this case.

Meanwhile, in a significant move to address gender inequality in healthcare, the CHHR presented a submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The submission emphasized the detrimental impact of pervasive gender stereotypes on women's health, emphasizing that health inequities are reinforced by biases in diagnoses, treatment, and medical decision-making, often leading to the dismissal of women's symptoms. Sexual and reproductive health is particularly impacted, as demonstrated by barriers to contraception, abortion, and cases of forced sterilization. Similarly, obstetric violence persists due to harmful stereotypes and beliefs about childbirth, leading to mistreatment, denial of anesthesia, and coercive practices.

Also in 2025, CHHR and other academic institutions participated in a consultative process the United Nations Committees on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW), leading to the adoption of the Joint General Comments 38–39 (CERD) and 7–8 (CMW), establishing new authoritative guidance on combating xenophobia and racism, and safeguarding the rights of migrants and others perceived as such.

Noncommunicable Diseases and the Law

CHHR works on noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention through research, capacity building, advocacy, and litigation. Using the lens of commercial determinants of health, CHHR focuses on modifiable risk factors, including tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy diets, prioritizing accountability and the regulation and accountability of corporate actors. This area of work develops technical analyses of international and comparative domestic legal frameworks to inform litigation and law and policy reform processes at the national, regional, and global levels.



In 2025, Oscar A. Cabrera participated in a plenary panel at the World Tobacco Control Conference held in Dublin, Ireland, where he underscored the importance of translating global tobacco control strategies into actionable national policies.

Notably, this year in a case supported by CHHR, Uruguay took a significant step to reaffirm its leadership in tobacco control by repealing two decrees that had weakened its tobacco control laws, marking a triumph for public health over corporate interests. With our support, the case used innovative legal tactics including a writ to safeguard children's rights and prevent the decrees' enforcement.

Furthermore, the CHHR, in collaboration with the Center for Constitutional Studies of the Supreme Court of Mexico, co-hosted an important event in Mexico City that attracted over 2,000 online participants and a packed auditorium. The event reflected on the five years since Mexico passed its front of pack labelling regime, and speakers highlighted the government's authority and obligation to regulate ultra-processed products to protect public health, emphasizing the urgent need for a human rights-based approach to transform the food environment.

AREAS OF WORK

Global Center for Legal Innovation on Food Environments

The Global Center for Legal Innovation on Food Environments serves as a transnational venue for legal research, capacity building, and technical assistance related to the different legal and policy aspects of diet-related noncommunicable disease prevention. In collaboration with global and local partners, the Global Center builds connections between academic and applied initiatives, amplifying the impact of both in the process.

GLOBAL CENTER FOR
LEGAL INNOVATION ON
FOOD ENVIRONMENTS
An Initiative of the O'Neill Institute at Georgetown Law



In 2025, the Global Center actively contributed to shaping public health and legal frameworks in various contexts, supporting courts and legislators in their decision-making around the world.

This included, for example, the submission of amicus briefs to both the Constitutional Courts of Colombia and Ecuador in the cases of Expediente D-15865 and Caso 1333-24-EP. Our submissions addressed how taxation can contribute to healthier food environments. This also included the submission of an amicus brief to the Colombian Tribunal Administrativo de Cundinamarca in support of public health policies, which emphasized the importance health and human rights standards in regulating unhealthy products within school environments. In support of marketing regulations, the Global Center also submitted a legal brief to the Colombian Congress, underscoring the alignment of these policies with public health and human rights principles.

In Kenya, we provided written comments on draft marketing restrictions and engaged in webinars to support the Technical Working Group on Front-of-Package Labeling (FOPL), while in Jordan, we offered technical support on FOPL and marketing regulations through collaborative workshops organized with the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health.

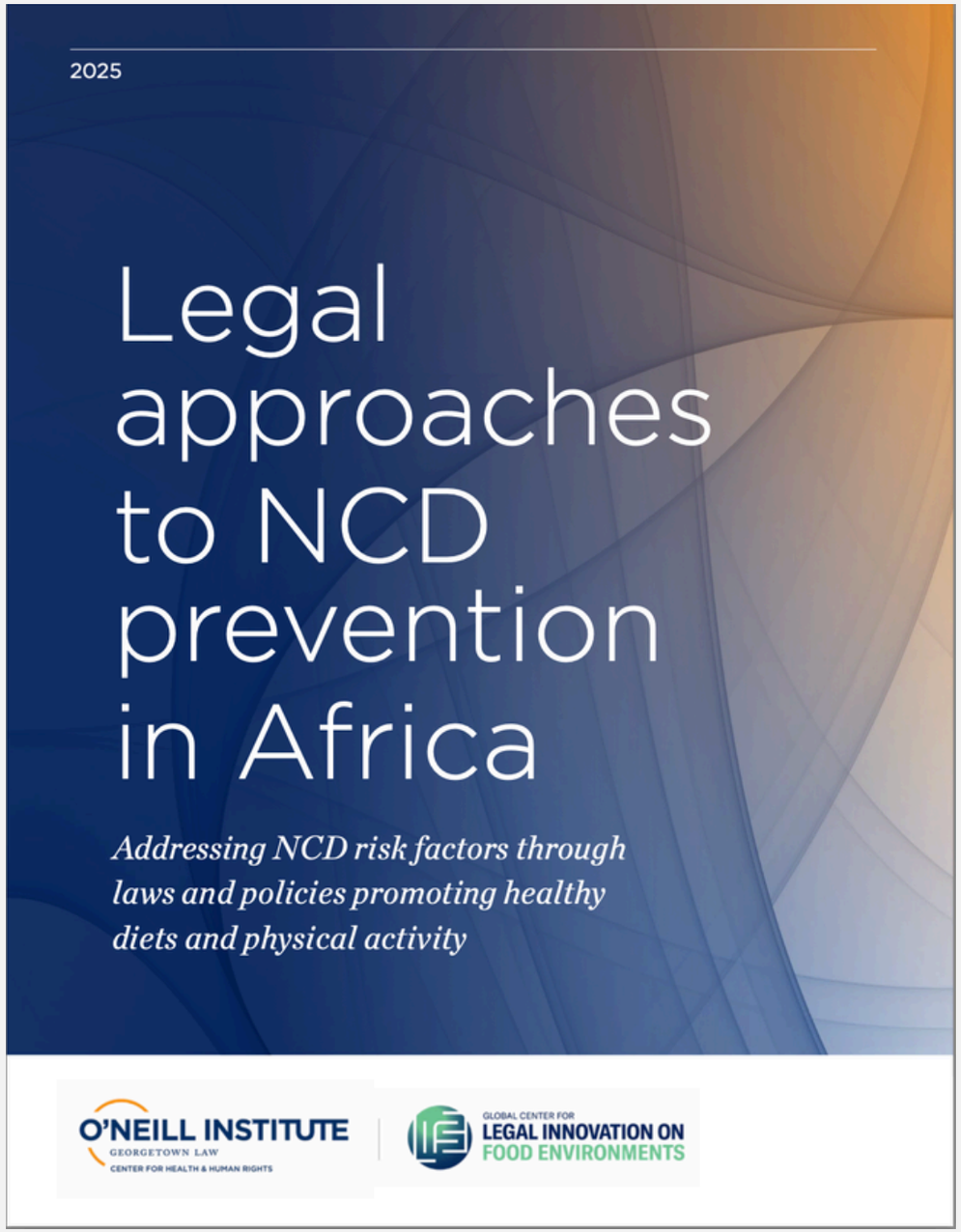




Additionally, the Center contributed important commentary and scholarship on a range of issues. For example, we published several articles in Jota Legal Media including one entitled “ANVISA and the Case on the Advertising of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages,” in collaboration with the Law and Public Policy Group, and a second piece addressing the inadequacies of the National Council for Self-Regulation in Advertising (CONAR) in Brazil.

In 2025, the Global Center hosted a number of capacity strengthening programs, including the “Latin American Legal Workshop” in Cartagena, Colombia, in partnership with the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and Dejusticia, which brought together 35 participants from across Latin America to discuss fiscal measures for promoting health, legal strategies to counter industry narratives, and regulatory approaches to conflicts of interest in areas like school nutrition and tobacco control. We also convened the Second Edition of the “Strategic Lawyering Workshop” with 20 lawyers, focusing on advancing food policies through discussions on progressivity, the concept of risk, and evolving understandings of damages and causality, drawing on insights from previously published papers by Davi Bressler.

Finally, in December, the Center published the book “Legal approaches to NCD prevention in Africa: Addressing NCD risk factors through laws and policies promoting healthy diets and physical activity”, an edited volume seeking to address Africa’s growing and unequal burden of preventable noncommunicable diseases alongside infectious diseases, and explore how law, grounded in human rights and equity, can be used to address key risk factors and inform effective public health policy.




CELEBRATING 5 YEARS
OF THE GLOBAL CENTER
FOR LEGAL INNOVATION
ON FOOD
ENVIRONMENTS!

GLOBAL CENTER FOR LEGAL INNOVATION
ON FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

STUDENT WRITING COMPETITION

In line with its capacity-strengthening mandate on issues related to healthy food law and policy, in 2025, the Global Center launched the fourth edition of its Food Environments and the Law Student Writing Competition for students pursuing their first degree in law at law schools in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, and South Africa.



COMPETITION WINNER

Pedro Nishioka was selected as this year's winner with his paper on the excise taxation of ultra-processed food. Nishioka is an undergraduate law student at the University of São Paulo. As a winner of the competition, Nishioka was selected to intern in Washington, DC, with our team.

GLOBAL CENTER FOR LEGAL INNOVATION
ON FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Scholars and Fellows

The Global Center facilitates a number of educational and practical opportunities for law students at the Georgetown University Law Center. For students seeking an LL.M. in National and Global Health Law, the Global Center awards scholarships to select exceptional students with a strong substantive interest in healthy food law and policy and with the potential to contribute to the field in their home countries. Upon their graduation, these scholars may be selected for a fellowship program at the O'Neill Institute to collaborate with the Global Center.

In previous years, the Global Center has welcomed fellows — previously LL.M. students awarded Global Center scholarships — from Argentina, Barbados, Jamaica, and South Africa.



ANNALOY LEE

Annaloy Lee is a student of the 2025-2026 LL.M. program in National and Global Health Law and an O'Neill Institute Global Health Law Scholar. Lee has an interest in healthcare accessibility and noncommunicable diseases.

Prior to joining O'Neill, Lee was a summer research associate at a Jamaican advocacy group, which aims to reduce paternal absenteeism. Her role has since expanded to being a policy officer of that group, where she oversees organizational compliance with local laws and ensures that position papers are posted to the joint select committee. Lee has also volunteered at the main hospital in her parish as a medical records clerk and in the medical outpatient clinic.

Lee won the Faculty of Law, UWI, Mona, International Law Moot Court Competition. Lee holds an Associate of Science Degree in natural sciences and completed her Bachelor of Laws (LLB) at the University of the West Indies Mona.

GLOBAL CENTER FOR LEGAL INNOVATION ON FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

FULL Database

Launched in December 2022, in partnership with the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, FULL is a repository of laws and judicial and administrative decisions across the world with various built-in and customizable features to facilitate food policy-related research. The database offers researchers, policymakers, advocates, and journalists the ability to explore the legal framework related to the prevention of diet-related noncommunicable diseases. Currently, FULL features documents from the following six countries: Barbados, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Jamaica, and South Africa, as well as relevant international documents and standards.



Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Law

This area of work focuses on improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes through legal and policy change, including increased access to quality sexual and reproductive health services. We use technical analyses of international and comparative domestic human rights legal frameworks to inform litigation, law and policy reform, and regulation related to reproductive health, rights, and justice throughout Latin America. This work includes critically assessing the impacts of criminal law on abortion, as well as other legal issues that impact reproductive health services, including doctor-patient confidentiality, and obstetric violence.

In 2025 CHHR continued to organize and participate in important spaces across Latin America to improve reproductive health.

We co-organized a virtual forum with ONU Mujeres Chile and UNFPA Chile that brought together healthcare professionals, policymakers, and multidisciplinary experts in a safe, confidential space across three sessions to analyze the prevention and response to obstetric and gynecological violence through a comparative lens, share best practices, and develop practical, context-sensitive strategies. Each session was followed by discussions to foster reflection and dialogue between participants.

CHHR also participated in the CLACAI (Consorcio Latinoamericano contra el aborto inseguro) annual meeting and the 2025 International Conference on Family Planning, where we supported partners in legal and policy discussions and contributed to academic and strategic discussions on litigation approaches, access to services, and emerging opposition strategies.

The Center for Health, Human Rights (CHHR) submitted several amicus curiae briefs to advance reproductive rights litigation in Latin America, including before the Constitutional Court of Ecuador in cases No. 41-22-IN and No. 22-24/IN (the “Justa Libertad” case), which challenged restrictive abortion laws in the country, and before the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court in Arguição de Descumprimento de Preceito Fundamental 989 addressing barriers to legal abortion in the public health system, and in Cordoba, Argentina in the case of Paola, where our amicus focused on gender stereotyping in the administration of justice.

This year CHHR and the University of Toronto also published the 2025 book Las Deudas Pendientes del Caso Beatriz: Aportes Desde la Academia, which seeks to sustain academic debate, support monitoring of the Beatriz judgment, and urge the Inter-American system to take a clearer stance on human rights violations linked to restrictive abortion frameworks while guiding legal reforms across the region.



ENGAGEMENT WITH JUDGES

Judicial Dialogues on Health and the Law

CHHR and Ríos held the second annual "Judicial Dialogues on Health and the Law in Latin America and the Caribbean" event, bringing together high court justices from across the region to promote meaningful dialogue between judges, academics, and experts and reflect on shared challenges and opportunities.

The event featured Justice Natalia Ángel Cabo of the Constitutional Court of Colombia, Justices Army Ferreira Reyes and María del Carmen Santana de Cabrera of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic, Chief Justice Daniela Marzi Muñoz of the Constitutional Tribunal of Chile, Justice Rubenia Galeano Barralga of the Supreme Court of Justice of Honduras, and Justice Alí Lozada of the Constitutional Court of Ecuador. It also included contributions from Christian Courtis of the UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights and Professor Gonzalo García Pino, former Justice of the Constitutional Tribunal of Chile, whose perspectives enriched the event's comparative and interdisciplinary discussions.







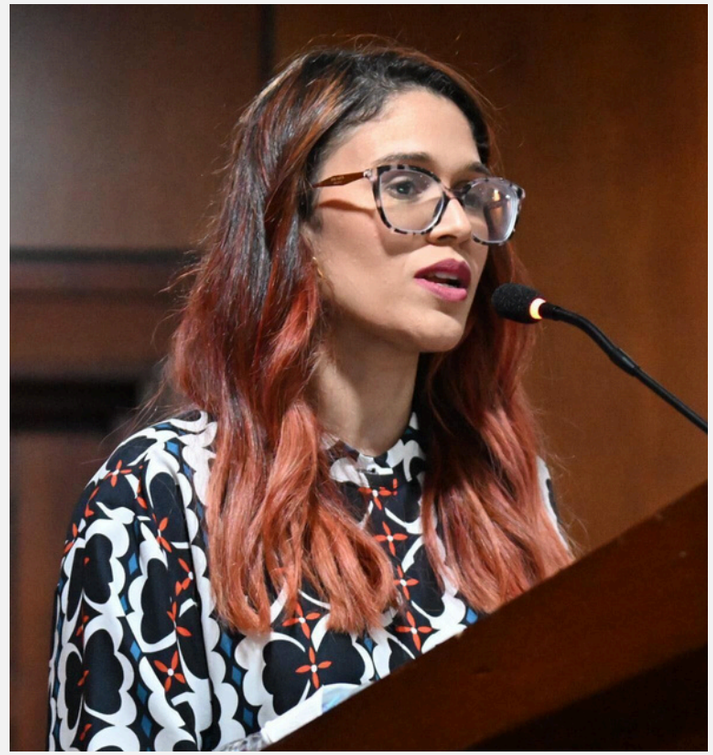
ENGAGEMENT WITH JUDGES

Collaboration with the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic

This year CHHR deepened our collaboration with the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic, co-hosting several important events.

We co-hosted the “Constitutional Dialogues: A Comparative Approach. The Tensions Between Rights and Judicial Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.” This was an important space for dialogue and the exchange of experiences and knowledge among constitutional scholars from the Dominican Republic and throughout region, particularly judges and former judges of high courts, academics, and international experts.

We also hosted trainings for public defenders on integrating a gender perspective into their defense of criminalized women, as well as the conference “Constitutionalism in Tension: Challenges, Setbacks, and New Perspectives in Latin America.”





ENGAGEMENT WITH JUDGES

CHHR hosted Justice Ríos Farjat of the Mexican Supreme Court

In March, CHHR was honoured to welcome Justice Ríos Farjat of the Mexican Supreme Court (SCJN) to the O'Neill Institute offices to give a presentation on "The Right to Choose in Mexico: The Criteria used by the Supreme Court."

Justice Ríos Farjat provided a fascinating history of the Mexican Supreme Court's jurisprudence on gender-based violence, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive rights. She highlighted the Court's leadership and innovation on these issues, through the creation of protocols on judging with a gender perspective and on the Court's jurisprudence, and the recognition of new kinds of violence against women, including obstetric violence and vicarious violence within families. She also provided insights into the factors that led to the Court's landmark decision that found the criminalization of abortion to be unconstitutional in Mexico, including her perspective on the role of criminal law in Mexico and the punitive power of the state. She noted, in particular, that the existence of the crime of abortion in Mexico was impeding critical access to health services. Following her presentation, our team led a discussion on the judgments, and the possibilities for the region.





OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Health and Human Rights Practicum

With both a seminar and project-based component, the Health and Human Rights Practicum explores the potential of using international and regional human rights frameworks to improve health, well-being, and equity. By covering the fundamentals of the right to health and other related entitlements, the seminar component of the course seeks to provide students with the substantive expertise needed for this task. For its project-based component, students engage in research projects that respond to current national and global health challenges. For instance, past projects have addressed the links between human rights and medical confidentiality, end-of-life dignity and care, and the institutionalization of persons with psychosocial disabilities. For their projects, students work closely with external partners of the Center for Health and Human Rights, including key civil society organizations and public institutions.



BELÉN RÍOS SCHOLARSHIP



In memory of Belén Ríos' leadership in health and human rights and to honor a legal career dedicated to social justice and civil society, the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law has created a full scholarship to support a student in their pursuit of an LL.M. in National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University Law Center.

Judith Murungi



2025 BELÉN RÍOS SCHOLAR

Judith Murungi is a student of the 2025-2026 LL.M. in National and Global Health Law. She is from Uganda. Murungi is interested in health research and policy advocacy, and her work is focused on the intersection of health, technology, and human rights. Murungi is an advocate of the High Court of Kenya and a research associate at the Young African Policy Research Hub. She is a member of the Expert Group on Health and Mental Health at the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD). She is also a member of the scientific advisory council at Health AI, the Global Health Agency for Responsible AI in Health, working towards the Global Governance Forum 2025. Murungi has also worked with various international organizations in a consultative capacity on multiple projects, including the World Bank, the Global Data Barometer, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, and the health-tech regulatory sandbox project. Murungi was trained at the British Institute for International and Comparative Law in AI, Law, and Ethics, and was recognized this year by Women in AI Ethics as a "Rising Star in AI Ethics."

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