



THE PROMISE INSTITUTE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REPORT  
2022 - 2023

# OUR FOUNDING STORY

## *AWARENESS THROUGH THE ARTS*

The Promise Institute owes its founding to Dr. Eric Esraillian, 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. Esraillian 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.

# MEET THE TEAM



STEPHEN GARDBAUM  
Faculty Director



KATE MACKINTOSH  
Executive Director



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Deputy Director



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Promise Institute Chair  
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KAL RAUSTIALA  
Promise Institute Chair  
in Comparative and  
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# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

As Promise reaches its fifth anniversary, our team grew to nine and a long-planned dream materialized when we hosted the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in a historic first for UCLA. Over the week of hearings, students got to see and support the international body that protects human rights in the western hemisphere in action. Sessions were attended by victims, activists, lawyers and governments from across the Americas, and with support from across the UCLA campus, we were proud to organize a constellation of accompanying events as our Reimagining Rights in the Americas Conference.

The strength of the team has enabled us to develop research, advocacy and collaborations in all of our focus areas this year, as well as to offer a broad and deep selection of classes, speakers and other events. Highlights include significant work on the intersecting areas of climate, environment and race. In October, Professor Achiume, former Promise Institute Faculty Director, concluded her tenure as U.N. Special Rapporteur on racism with a powerful report on environmental racism and climate injustice. We drew on this to structure an expert discussion on climate reparations, and this increasingly urgent area will continue to be a focus for Promise. We also brought together scholars from as far afield as Mauritius, Australia and Brazil to contribute new perspectives on an international crime of ecocide.

We continue to explore the power of storytelling to move the needle on human rights, and this year launched our first ever collaboration with the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, which saw law and film students work together on advocacy strategies and short films in support of human rights campaigns. We were also proud co-presenters of the third annual Spark Change Summit, which offered a deep dive into power of stories and storytellers to shift things for the better around the world.

Our work at the expanding nexus of technology and human rights continued with an emphasis on Open-Source Digital Intelligence (OSINT), including a new class for students, a report on election-related online disinformation, and training for two dozen legal professionals focused on corporate accountability. Meanwhile our litigation clinic chalked up successes for unhoused clients, as well as for a man held in solitary confinement, and supported the Inter-American Commission site visit on homelessness in LA.

There are many exciting developments on the horizon. Until we can announce these changes, suffice it to say it has been a dynamic and powerful year at the Promise Institute, and we're just getting started.

Thank you for joining us in this future-shaping work,



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

- A HISTORIC EVENT -

HOSTING THE INTER-AMERICAN  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
IN LOS ANGELES



# A FIRST FOR UCLA & LOS ANGELES

*We added to the canon of UCLA and Los Angeles firsts this March with a very special event: **hosting the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)** who adjudicated human rights claims against governments from across the Americas right here in LA.*

*Our **Reimagining Rights in the Americas Conference** was held in constellation with the visit, highlighting themes of race, Indigeneity, climate and migration.*

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The **Commission's hearing schedule** included voices from across the Americas. Among them was Brazilian Minister of Indigenous Peoples Sônia Guajajara in the case of Indigenous peoples of Raposa Serra do Sol vs Brazil. Maroon Queen Gaa mang Gloria "MaMa G" Simms testified on behalf of Jamaican Taino and Maroon peoples who seek recognition as Indigenous and the protection of their collective rights from the Jamaican government. Promise students contributed by taking official notes throughout the week.

Our International Human Rights Clinic partnered with the clinic from a UCLA Law sister-institute, the Center for Immigration Law and Policy, to **organize a watershed hearing before the IACHR** — the first time the Commission has been asked to investigate the impact of racism on

on migrants in the region. Harrowing testimony was covered by the *Miami Herald* and camera crews from *Telemundo* and *Univision*, while a *New York Times* journalist spoke at length with survivors.

IACHR Special Rapporteur Soledad García-Muñoz made history as the first rapporteur to conduct a **Site Visit on the situation of the unhoused in Los Angeles**. The visit included meetings with Mayor Karen Bass and testimony from unhoused veterans and local residents of encampments in Van Nuys, Mar Vista, Echo Park and Skid Row. Students collaborated with UCLA experts and the Los Angeles Community Action Network to brief the Special Rapporteur and coordinate the Site Visit.

Meanwhile, Conference attendees were able to hear **keynote addresses** on the rights of women, girls and two-spirit persons from Judge Marion Buller, and from Professor E. Tendayi Achiume on the entangled nature of racial and climate justice. U.S. Ambassador Francisco Mora spoke on the United States and human rights, and a **film screening** of *Ferguson Rises* was followed by a panel discussion with the film's director and Michael Brown Sr. Our closed **expert workshop on Climate Reparations** rounded out Conference events.



*IACHR Special Rapporteur García Muñoz spoke at length with unhoused Angelenos during her historic Site Visit.*



*Rapporteur García Muñoz, accompanied by UCLA clinical faculty and students, visits permanent supportive housing developed by Venice Community Housing to speak with Venice community members and John Raphling of Human Rights Watch.*



*The Site Visit team, including UCLA Law students, faculty, Los Angeles Community Action Network staff and IACHR staff, in front of a mural in Skid Row.*



*A snapshot of KTLA's interview with Rapporteur García Muñoz.*



*IACHR President Margarette May Macaulay is shown speaking to the hearing room, flanked from left to right by Commissioners Roberta Clarke and Joel Hernández García.*



*The hearings saw visitors from across the Americas, including Brazilian Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Sônia Guajajara (second from right).*





Maroon Queen Gaa mang Gloria "MaMa G" Simms, shown here with Catherine Sweetser (left) and Jess Peake (right) requested recognition for Jamaican Maroon and Taino peoples.



Members of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, including co-founder and executive director, Guerline Jozef, supported a woman whose testimony on sexual violence and racial discrimination she endured while migrating horrified the hearing room.



During the hearing on racism and migration in the region, IACHR Commissioners, shown here during a particularly unsettling portion of testimony, heard a range of experiences detailing the myriad ways racism has harmed migrants and asylum-seekers in the region.



Telemundo's Carmen Márquez interviewed a number of racism and migration hearing participants for a segment outlining the hearing and the Commission's visit which was televised in that evening's news broadcast.



A former migrant who faced severe racial discrimination while moving through Latin America was approached by reporters after his devastating testimony.



Some of the organizers of the racism and migration hearing posed before the Period of Sessions banner with clients who testified during the hearing on human rights violations for which they hold the U.S. responsible.

- *STRATEGIC GOAL* -

EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
LAWYERS & LEADERS



# INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

*Training our students is one of the most powerful things we do as an institute. Promise supplements the robust UCLA Law curriculum with an array of innovative and experiential opportunities.*

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We offered a unicorn of a class this fall: **Human Rights Advocacy & Storytelling**. Developed with the Creative Visions Foundation and offered jointly with the School of Theater, Film and Television, instructors Isabella Alexander-Nathani and Danny Vannucchi trained film and law students to produce short films to support international advocacy organizations.

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The newest addition to our course lineup is Jess Peake's **Human Rights and War Crimes: Digital Investigations** class which prepares students for cutting-edge work and introduces the concepts and practices underlying digital Open-Source Investigations. From legal requirements to practical skills, from ethical considerations to the history of open-source investigations, the class provides students with valuable training for any legal career.

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Catherine Sweetser's **Human Rights Litigation Clinic** gained a new fellow this year, Tessa Baizer, who joined us from the Silicon Valley Law Foundation where she had been representing tenants and unhoused people.

The clinic chalked up successes in cases

concerning solitary confinement and the rights of unhoused Angelenos. In the former, against a for-profit detention facility contracted under ICE, the judge made a preliminary ruling that holding our client in solitary confinement for fourteen months was intentional, outrageous, and may warrant punitive damages. A win in the second case, prohibiting the City of LA from destroying the personal items of unhoused people because they are "bulky", led this year to a change in LA City ordinance.

This coming year, the clinic will assist with an appeal on behalf of four Cambodians trafficked into Thailand to work in shrimp factories.

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Designed to complement the IACHR visit in March and taught by its former President James Cavallaro, our course on **Regional Human Rights Protection: The Inter-American System** provided an in-depth introduction and overview of the doctrine and practice of the Inter-American Human Rights System.

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Described by one former student as "the best experience of my time in law school, hands down," we were thrilled to work with Hague veteran Gregory Townsend to revive our **UCLA Law in the Hague** program after a pandemic-hiatus. Through the program, students work full-time, semester-long internships at an international court or tribunal in The Hague, The Netherlands. Concurrently, they take part in a course on the practice of international courts and participate in field excursions which further bring human rights law and its history to life.

Under the leadership of S. Priya Morley and Joseph Berra, the **International Human Rights Clinic** joined forces with the Center for Immigration Law and Policy's Clinic, as key architects of the landmark IACHR hearing on racism and migration in the Americas. Students also witnessed systems designed to thwart the rights of asylum-seekers on a guided visit to the U.S. southern border this spring.



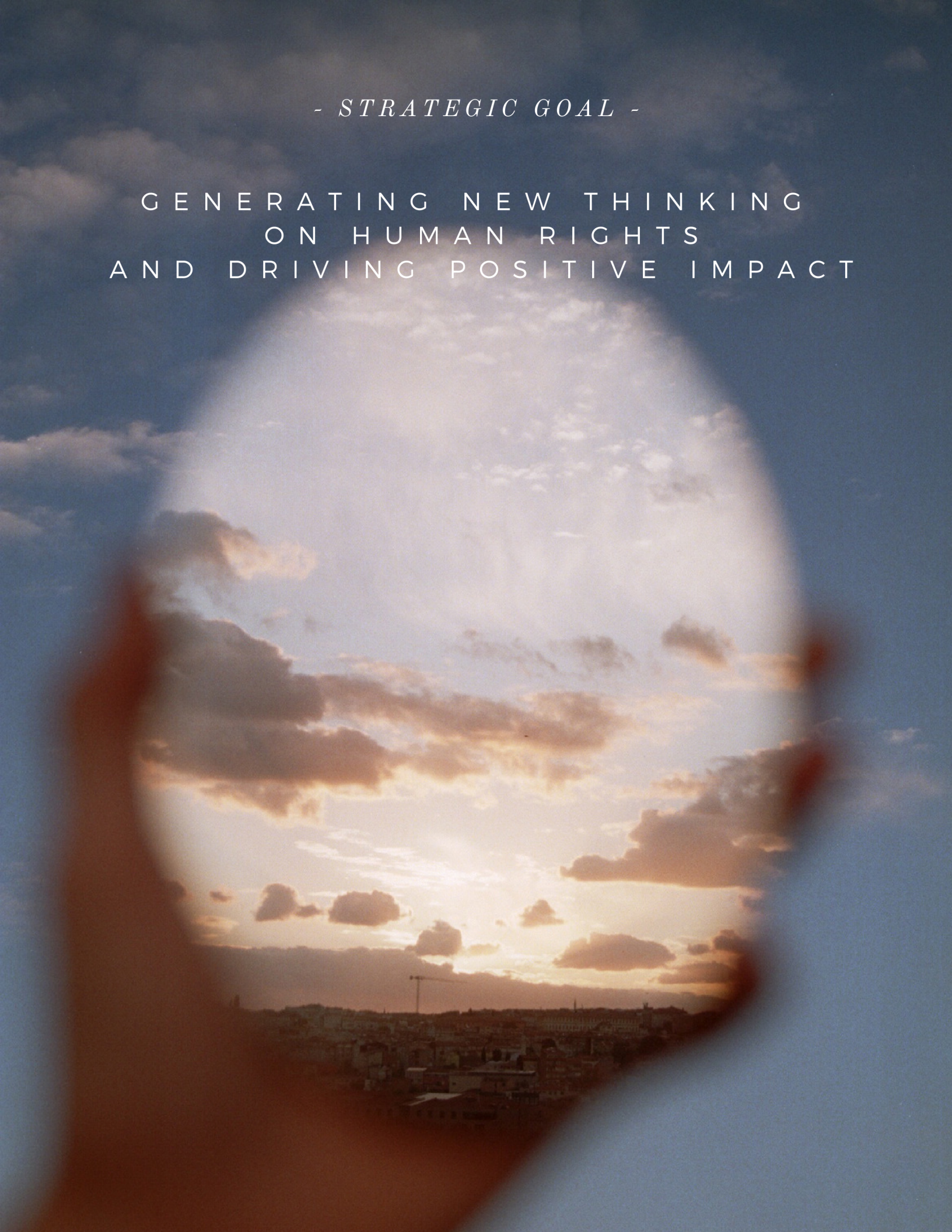
*Starting second from the left in the back row, Joseph Berra, Research Affiliate Amanda Pinheiro and S. Priya Morley posed for a photo with students from the International Human Rights Clinic during their visit to the U.S. southern border.*

Each spring, we offer short courses on a range of human rights issues. This year saw Rosalind Dixon and Mila Versteeg teach a constitutional law class on **Comparative Sex Equality**, and former President of the International Criminal Court, Chile Eboe-Osuji, offer a class on **The Law of Peace**. Students in Nadejda Marques' course **Public Health, Migration and Human Rights** considered how human rights principles apply to the public health challenges faced by migrant populations, and Human Rights Watch veteran director Richard Dicker, examined the multiplying efforts across jurisdictions to render justice for crimes that shock the conscience of humankind in **Prospects for International Justice**.

This year we contributed nuanced analysis of headline-grabbing developments with our **events on breaking human rights issues** around the world, such as the protests in Iran, the blockade in Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh, and the struggle for accountability in Ukraine or abortion rights in the U.S. We invited a range of speakers on issues within our **areas of thematic focus** and curated a special series of events during the run up to the visit of the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**.

- STRATEGIC GOAL -

GENERATING NEW THINKING  
ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND DRIVING POSITIVE IMPACT



# RESEARCH AND IMPACT

*We generate new thinking on human rights through research and critical engagement with diverse frameworks, disciplines and actors, and drive positive impact on human rights through effective exchange, advocacy and litigation. Our work centers on the intersection of human rights and the below five thematic areas:*



Technology



Environment



Accountability



Migration



Race / Indigeneity

Designed to complement the IACHR visit, our 2023 Symposium focused on **Bringing Human Rights Home**: Bridging the Gap Between the International and Domestic Frames for Human Rights in the United States. We offered a particular emphasis on critical perspectives, as well as the struggles of impacted communities advocating for social justice and their human rights. Keynote speakers included three IACHR Commissioners, and we rounded out the day with a poetry reading of *Un/Safe* from former Promise Poet-In-Residence, Karen McCarthy Woolf.



*From left to right, Elisa Massimino, Jim Cavallaro, Asli Bâli and Jamil Dakwar during our symposium panel "The United States and the Human Rights Project Writ Large."*



Following a call for papers on new perspectives on an international crime of ecocide, we hosted an **Ecocide Workshop** with scholars and practitioners from as far afield as Mauritius, Jamaica and Brazil. Final papers will be published

this year and work continues towards a special edition of the *International Journal of Human Rights*.



*The Ecocide Workshop participants posed for a group photo outside the Law School.*



Last year marked the **75th anniversary of the Nuremberg Doctor's Trials** and we commemorated the solemn occasion with a symposium in partnership with Cedars Sinai's Center for Medicine, Holocaust and Gender Studies. The full-day lineup discussed how the legacy of the Nuremberg Trials can be used to foster ethical leadership among the medical professions of tomorrow, including conversation on medical professionals' participation in torture and non-consensual medical experimentation in what are (tragically) recent and current cases.



We were proud co-presenters of the third annual **Spark Change Summit** this past October. Held in the beautiful Hammer Museum, the lineup featured award-winning producers, writers, directors, academics and creatives focused on the generative synergies between rights-based thought leadership and the change-making entertainment that amplifies it.



*Filmmaker Scott Z. Burns and Kate Mackintosh on stage during the Spark Change Summit's panel "Shift the Planet (Storytelling for Today's Climate)."*



In July 2022, the Promise Institute supported two consultations with civil society experts, and one with academics to inform the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Racism's report on **Environmental Racism & Climate (In)Justice**, which was presented to the U.N. General Assembly in fall 2022. In her report, Professor Achiume underscored that the global ecological crisis is a racial justice crisis whose devastating effects are disproportionately borne by racially marginalized people and groups, concentrated in racial sacrifice zones - regions rendered dangerous and even uninhabitable by

environmental degradation. The report demands urgent action on racial and climate justice.

Alongside the U.N. General Assembly, S. Priya Morley organized a launch of the Special Rapporteur's report at New York University that put its findings into conversation with scholars and activists working to combat Caribbean climate (in)justice.

We continued to build on these themes during our Reimagining Rights in the Americas Conference in March 2023.



Open-Source Digital Intelligence (OSINT) techniques continue to offer a powerful toolkit for human rights researchers and advocates. Under the leadership of Jess Peake, our **Promise Human Rights Digital Investigations Lab** has trained scores of students and professionals in partnership with the UC Network on Human Rights and Digital Fact-Finding.

In partnership with the Human Trafficking Legal Center, Jess Peake and Catherine Sweetser developed an **OSINT corporate accountability training program** for over twenty human rights advocates from around the world.

Meanwhile, we presented our lab's work in our report, **Disinformation and Decentralization: How Viral Videos Helped Spread Election Denialism in Arizona's 2022 Midterm**. Complementary documents detail the team's

process and offer a comprehensive list of 2020 election deniers voted into public office during the midterms.



This year, Promise helped sponsor two scholars. **Promise Research Fellow** Mohammad Ali Soroosh is investigating the potential for a federal government system to provide relief from ethnic conflict and an alternative to a centralized unitary government in his native Afghanistan. **Promise Distinguished Graduate Fellow** Suraj Girijashanker is tracing imperial and racial narratives in asylum decisions, documenting the relationship between foreign intervention and displacement as part of his doctoral project on the nexus of race, empire and displacement.



Those familiar with the tragedy of Berta Cáceres' assassination will be aware that the International Observer Mission's work continues. Known as the **Trial of Fraud on the Gualcarque**, advocates in Honduras and around the world, including our own Joseph Berra, are maintaining pressure for accountability for all those involved in Cáceres' murder.



Each year we work with students to build on a work of theirs which features original scholarly thinking and encourages them to develop it into publishable work with additional feedback and recognition. Our **Second Annual Student Scholarship Conference** saw scholarship on sexual violence against Black women during armed conflict in Colombia from Lina Córdoba Moreno, potential regulation of fully autonomous weapons from Gerardo Gorospe, and analysis of Greece's international liability for its treatment of refugees from Leigh Dannhauser.





- *STRATEGIC GOAL* -

PLACING GRADUATES IN  
IMPACTFUL CAREERS



# ACCELERATING 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, three 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 2023 graduates with year-long post-graduate fellowship funding to enable them to work with leading human rights organizations, including at the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.*



STEFFI COLAO

Promise Institute Postgraduate Fellowship  
The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award



LINA CÓRDOBA MORENO

The Human Rights in the Americas Award:  
Promise Institute for Human Rights Fellow at the  
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights



LEIGH DANNHAUSER

The Promise Institute for Human Rights Award

# STUDENT REFLECTIONS

## *VALUABLE HUMAN RIGHTS LEGAL TRAINING*

"With Promise, I had the chance to work on local and international litigation against policing and detention, support U.N. advocacy concerning climate change, volunteer with several international organizations through clinics and internships, and develop original research on the United States' international humanitarian law violations. Promise created remarkable opportunities to combine international human rights frameworks with local and domestic movements, and I greatly appreciated the Institute's critical and innovative approach to what human rights could mean in the United States."

STEFFI COLAO

"My experience at the Promise Institute for Human Rights has been truly enriching. It has served as a haven of knowledge, providing me with invaluable opportunities for personal and academic growth. Through active engagement in a wide array of events organized by the Institute, and my role as a Research Assistant under the esteemed guidance of Professor Joseph Berra in the Human Rights in the Americas Project, my educational journey at UCLA has been transformed into something truly remarkable.

The Promise Institute embodies a warm and inclusive environment, facilitated by its exceptional and approachable staff. Their extensive expertise in human rights, international law, and ethnic rights, among other domains, further enhances the educational experience offered by the Institute. This makes it an indispensable and transformative opportunity for students who share a passion for human rights. I am immensely grateful for the invaluable experiences and teachings that the Institute has imparted, making it an indispensable resource for any student interested in the field of human rights."

LINA CÓRDOBA MORENO

"The Promise Institute is why I chose UCLA School of Law and my experiences during these past three years have not only confirmed that I made the right decision, but exceeded any and all expectations that I had. I have been able to work on several unique projects through the Promise Institute. I was part of a team that prepared for and facilitated the visit of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights through the Human Rights Litigation Clinic. Then that very next week I was sitting in on the 186th Period of Sessions for the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in their first period of sessions in Los Angeles, helping cover the hearings for the Voices of Promise blog.

I was also able to take many human rights classes on a variety of subject matters while at UCLA School of Law thanks to the Promise Institute. Finally, the Promise Institute mentored me throughout my time as a student. For all of this and more, I am forever grateful to the Promise Institute."

LEIGH DANNHAUSER

*LOOKING AHEAD*

**2023 - 2024**

There are some exciting developments on the horizon for Promise, and we look forward to sharing these with you soon. In the meantime, thank you for supporting our work.

We are just getting started.



*FOLLOW US*



@promiseinstUCLA

*EXPLORE OUR SITE*

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