

SO...YOU WANT TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL LAWYER?

REALITY CHECK

Bad News - Few lawyers are "international lawyers" in the sense that they spend their lives jetting around the world offering advice to countries on what to include in their constitutions, how to set up truth and reconciliation commissions, or how to implement WTO commitments. The few that do are generally senior lawyers with years of experience under their belt.

Good News - Starting out in your career, or looking for a mid-career change? There are lots of places to look for international legal work!

NETWORK

- ✍ **Join** interest groups and organizations like the Canadian Bar Association, the American Society of International Law and the International Bar Association (they generally have discount rates for students and new lawyers)
- ➔ **Go** to conferences with an international focus (the Canadian Council on International Law has a yearly conference, as do the other organizations mentioned above) and make an attempt to meet speakers that are doing what you want to do one day (you can often attend free of charge if you volunteer at the conference)
- ✍ **Write** articles in your area of interest and get them published - small publications are often looking for interesting articles (the University of Montreal Student Chapter of CLA-ACE has an annual law journal and are always looking for interesting articles)
- 📁 **Register** with Canadem (www.canadem.ca), a great Canadian organization that keeps a roster of skilled Canadians for use by the UN and other agencies when they're looking to fill positions

DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

- ☑ Figure out what type of work you're looking for and where you want to do it.
- ☑ Write down a list of everyone that you know who might be able to give you advice or suggest contacts in your field, organization and/or country of interest. Alumni from your law school are a very good source and you can often get a list of them from your law school career centre.
- ☑ Talk to all of these people and talk to the people that they recommend to you.

International Work in Canada

- ✓ **Private Law?** Law firms with an international practice (Cross-border mergers, international trade files, infrastructure programs in developing countries)
- ✓ **Public Law?** You may be surprised at the number of government departments whose lawyers do international work. There are the obvious ones like Foreign Affairs Canada and International Trade Canada, but you'll find interesting international work at other Departments (e.g., Kyoto implementation at Natural Resources Canada, international trade at Agriculture Canada, etc.).
- ✓ **NGOs** Then there are NGOs that do work that is entirely or partly focused on international issues (e.g., Rights and Democracy, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International Canada, etc.).

Getting expertise in Canada and then going abroad

If you've recently checked out the job boards of international organizations or NGOs doing international work, it's clear that they are almost exclusively looking for individuals who are experts in a specific area and have some development experience. Much of the expertise isn't country specific. So if you want to eventually want to prosecute serious crimes in a post-conflict country, get experience working as a crown prosecutor in Canada. Want to work on women's human rights issues? Work for a Canadian organization that advocates on behalf of women. Want to work on legal reform projects that focus on private sector development? Develop expertise in an area of corporate law.

Be patient - once you've got some hard experience, you'll be much better placed to find a job abroad in your area of expertise.

Taking off

You really want to work with an international organization like the UN or an interesting NGO operating abroad, **your best bet is to take a chance and go to a country where these organizations work.** This of course, isn't for the faint of heart, particularly if you want interesting work in a country in transition. Places like East Timor, Kosovo and Burundi aren't for everyone, especially if you don't have experience in a developing country. **A good idea is to get some international development experience first by organizing an internship** either on your own or with CLA-ACE. However, if you show up with a bit of money and hell-bent on finding a job, there's a pretty good chance that you'll land on your feet. And, if you happen to know one of the local languages, or make the effort to learn basic conversational skills, you'll find the job hunt much easier. While you might not get the UN or World Bank job that you'd die for, you might find an amazing local NGO to work for or a challenging United Nations Volunteer position that could lead to the job you've always wanted sometime down the road.