



Internships with UNHCR – London

A presentation to SOAS students March 23 2006

Presentation by

Duncan Trevan – UNHCR External Relations Department

Munzar Sharif – Intern

Both ex-SOAS students

The UNHCR has a worldwide staff of 6000. Its mission is focused on the rights and needs of refugees.

Getting a job with UNHCR is closely linked with getting the right kind of previous, relevant, experience. Volunteering is an absolutely vital step. Munzar, one of UNHCR's current interns had previously worked with children and in particular refugee children. His profile was broadened by voluntary work with the Kurdish Human Rights Project. His role was concerned with media relations.

The Internship

There are 8 six month internships available. While they do disbar you formally from applying for UN jobs for six months after completion it is commonly accepted that UN internship experience is an important factor in successful applications to the organisation for permanent positions. Duncan, for example, had done an internship with UNHCR and came back to work for the person who was managing him during that time. After the internship he had gone on to work for an MP with a brief to cover immigration and asylum issues.

UNHCR in London has a significant legal team. With 60% of staff having a legal background. This is because the organisation has to use legal instruments to protect refugees. Twenty per cent of staff would have a PR/media background and the rest drawn from areas such as finance and IT.

Out of the 8 internships available 5 require a legal background and other interns work in areas such as external relations, administration and HR.

The London office is especially concerned with external relations. This involves monitoring the UK asylum system and in particular the UK press, especially the tabloid press which produces a lot of negative stories about refugees. The office also has a fundraising function and in the past this has involved representing UNHCR at festivals such as Glastonbury.

Applicants will need good spoken English but do not have to be UK or EU citizens. There are around 10 applicants for every internship.

Those who are shortlisted will be given an interview. If you are interviewed it means that on paper your skills and qualifications are considered good enough. A typical question would be, 'How would you get more positive coverage on refugee issues?' You may also be asked if you have any good ideas for fundraising and if you have any media contacts.

You may also be asked to complete a written exercise which could include, for example, drafting a letter to a newspaper on a relevant issue. You will also need to know why you want to volunteer with UNHCR.

For further information about internships and occasional volunteering opportunities with UNHCR's London Office please visit

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/interns/index.html>

Jeff Riley – SOAS Careers Service.

August 2005

More Employer Studies like this are available in the book, 'Getting Into Development' published April 2006. Buy a copy online at www.careers.lon.ac.uk/output/Page612.asp or call in to your university careers office.

