Introduction to Foreign Legal Research

Comparative and International Law Survey

April 2014
Overview

Basic introduction to foreign legal resources – where to begin your research
Definitions

• **Foreign Law**
  – The national, or domestic, law of any country other than the one within which you are working
  – No effect outside the boundaries of that nation

• **Comparative Law**
  – The study of the similarities and / or differences between two or more countries or between two or more legal systems
URGENT TASK FROM MANAGING PARTNER

A client, Shangelina Molie, is looking to adopt a child in Ghana. I need some preliminary research to answer following questions ASAP:

1. **What type of legal system are we dealing with?**

2. **Can you locate a current English copy of the Constitution of Ghana?**
Legal Systems

**COMMON LAW SYSTEM (E.G., UNITED STATES)**

- Constitutions
- Statutes/Codes
- Regulations
- Cases

**CIVIL LAW SYSTEM (E.G., FRANCE)**

- Constitutions
- Statutes/Codes
- Regulations
Where to Look for a Quick Overview of a Nation’s Legal System

• CIA World Factbook
• Bureau of Justice World Factbook of Criminal Justice Systems
• JuriGlobe
• Foreign Law Guide
• Modern Legal Systems Cyclopedia
CIA World Factbook

Each country profile tracks such demographics as population, ethnicity and literacy rates, as well as political, geographical and economic data.
Bureau of Justice World Factbook of Criminal Justice Systems

Provides narrative descriptions of the criminal justice systems of 45 countries around the world
Initial overview of the applicable legal systems
Modern Legal Systems Cyclopedia

• An introduction to legal systems, legal education, the practice of law, and forms of government.
• K530 .M63 1984 (Reference Area)
• Also on HeinOnline
Foreign Law Guide

Provides sources of law, legislation, English translations and selected references to secondary sources
Where to Look for a Nation’s Constitution

- Constitute Project
- World Constitutions Illustrated
- Constitutions of the Countries of the World
Constitute Project

...includes the constitution that was in force in September of 2013 for nearly every independent state in the world.
World Constitutions Illustrated

Brings together current and historical constitutions, the Modern Legal Systems Cyclopedia, and other books and commentary on constitutions.
Constitutions of the Countries of the World

- English-language text for more than 190 countries.
- K3157.A2 B58 1971 (Reference Area)
Evaluating Online Information

• Is it reliable?
  – Who is the author?
  – Currency?
  – Scope?

• Translation issues
  – Official translation?
  – May not include latest revisions/amendments
  – Look for official government websites
Research Guide

• Legal & Judicial Systems in Countries Around the World
Need help?

Visit the Reference Office or
Call 543-6794 or
http://lib.law.washington.edu/questions.html