

**European Co-ordination Committee Meeting on Human Rights Documentation
20th meeting, 14 and 15 May 1996**

1. Opening of the Meeting

The meeting was opened by Svend B. Christensen of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, which is the Secretariat of the European Co-ordination Committee. He welcomed all participants.

2. Election of Chairperson

The meeting elected Svend B. Christensen as its Chair.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was introduced and adopted.

4. Presentation of name and organisation

All participants briefly presented themselves and their organisation.

5. Minutes of the 19th meeting

The minutes of the 19th meeting of the European Co-ordination Committee (Paris, 18-19 May 1995) were adopted.

6. Micro-networks

-Refugees

Lise Bruun (Danish Refugee Council) gave a report on the activities of the International Refugee Documentation Network (IRDN). She pointed out that this network continues to function, despite a lack of financial resources.

She announced that the Danish Refugee Council and the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles will hold a European workshop on human rights and refugee resources on Internet and APC, in Copenhagen from 10 to 12 October. A draft program was available, and co-organisers were still being looked for.

Geneviève Bador (Centre for Documentation and Research, UNHCR) added that HURIDOCs has partially taken over the training function of the IRDN. She pointed out that the update of the refugee thesaurus has been finalised, and that the English version is to be published in June. The proof-reading of the French and Spanish versions is currently underway. The International Refugee Electronic Network (IRENE) continues to be co-ordinated by CDR. It is a means for exchanging information among organisations involved in the net-

work. With the increasing access and use of the Internet, one question to be dealt with is whether it is still necessary to send information via regular “snail” mail.

-Torture

Ben Schoneveld (OMCT/SOS Torture) said that his organisation seeks to target information to particular types of organisations in its network. For example, information on violations of the human rights of refugees goes in particular to refugee groups. SOS Torture continues to use mail for communication with groups that do not have e-mail.

With regard to the network of documentation centres of organisations concerned with rehabilitation of torture victims, Svend B. Christensen pointed out that about 50 persons in 30 organisations have received training over the last years. Exchange of data takes place in a decentralised way and is facilitated because the various centres use the HURIDOCS Bibliographic Standard Formats and CDS/ISIS.

-Children

With regard to children’s rights, it was pointed out that the Children’s Rights Information Network (CRIN) was established at a conference in Paris in July 1995. Its Secretariat is with Save the Children in London.

James Lawson raised the question why some of the micro-networks do not appear to be very active. Lise Bruun responded that they have partially served their purpose: the tools for recording and information exchange are available, contacts between various groups have been established, and exchange of information takes place. The mandate of the refugee network for example has expanded. There appears to be no need for a large, formal structure for the operations of the micro-networks.

An overview was made of contact points in each network (see annex 3: addresses).

7. Report on the activities of HURIDOCS

a. Regional networks

Manuel Guzman (HURIDOCS) gave an overview of the various networks in the other regions of the world.

In North America, the Canada-United States Human Rights Information Network (CUSHRID Net) was established at the end of 1994. It is co-ordinated by a Steering Committee consisting of four permanent members (AAAS, Amnesty International USA and Canada, and HURIDOCS) and three annually elected members. The Secretariat is with the Science and Human Rights Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. A main activity is the annual meeting (for more details, see point 8)

The Red de Informatica y Documentación en Derechos Humanos de America Latina y el Caribe (RIDHUALC) is the regional network in Latin America and the Caribbean. It focuses on the development of tools and the exchange of experiences on information handling issues. RIDHUALC has a Steering Committee, and the Secretariat is with APRODEH in Peru. It has held two meetings before, and there are plans to have a third meeting in Bogota, Colombia.

The first regional meeting in the Arab-speaking world took place in December 1995 in Cairo. The participating organisations decided to establish a regional network, called Arab Human Rights Information Network or AHRINET. It has a Steering Committee of four organisations: the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, the Arab Lawyers Union and HURIDOCS. The Steering Committee has developed a program which includes various training activities as well as the translation of tools. Organisations in the network are building up different types of databases. The Secretariat of AHRINET is with the Arab Institute for Human Rights.

The regional meeting held in Hong Kong in 1993 decided to establish a regional focal point for the co-ordination of activities in the region. Until recently, the focal point was hosted by Voice Against Torture in Pakistan. The second regional meeting took place in Bangkok on 30 and 31 March, where a Steering Committee of seven members was elected. This Committee will select a host for the regional focal point and develop a program of activities.

In Africa, there is no regional network concerned with human rights documentation. The reasons for this are the geographical and linguistic divisions of the continent as well as communication problems.

Manuel Guzman concluded that the regional networks are distinct from HURIDOCS, although HURIDOCS plays an active role. While the focus of HURIDOCS is to develop tools and provide training, regional networks may go beyond this, and agree for example to share information and undertake joint actions.

b. Tool development

Bert Verstappen provided an overview of HURIDOCS activities in the fields of tool development and training.

Concerning tool development, the French and Spanish translations of the Bibliographic Standard Formats, the Standard Formats for Documenting Human Rights Violations and the Supporting Documents are ready for lay-out and printing. A new version of the EVSYS software for documenting human rights violations with a detailed manual has become available. HURIDOCS and the American Association for the Advancement of Science are embarking upon a new project to develop resources for monitoring economic, social and cultural rights.

c. Training

With regard to training, since May 1995 HURIDOCS together with local and regional human rights organisations co-organised training courses in Morocco (regional course at advanced level), Benin (regional course for Francophone organisations), Pakistan (two national courses), the Philippines (course for women's organisations concerned with violence against women), Thailand (regional course for groups concerned with migrant workers, trafficking in women and Burma). In Europe, HURIDOCS provided resource persons for a national course in the Czech Republic in August and co-organised a course in Albania in December. Some organisations received on-site training, and the HURIDOCS Secretariat continued to receive interns for training in human rights information handling.

d. Task Forces

James Lawson (Human Rights Information Centre, Council of Europe and Treasurer of HURIDOCS) described the work of the Task Force on Software development which he chairs. It aims to develop an overall HURIDOCS policy on software development. Main issues are how HURIDOCS can satisfy the various needs of organisations in the network with regard to software, and who is to develop software: organisations in the network, professional consultants or the HURIDOCS Secretariat.

Lise Bruun added that a Working Group of Copenhagen-based organisations had developed a Standard Electronic Exchange Format (SEEF), on basis of a recommendation of the HURIDOCS Conference in Crete, 1992. This Format which will facilitate the exchange of data by providing standards for the import and export of data in different softwares.

Debra Guzman (HRNet) gave information on the HURIDOCS Task Force on International Communication, which she co-chairs. HURIDOCS has set up a mailing list as a means for organisations involved in the network to communicate on issues related to human rights information handling. Organisations can subscribe to this mailing list by sending the message "subscribe huridocs-gen-l" to the e-mail address "majordomo@mail.comlink.apc.org". The Task Force will compile a directory of e-mail addresses of organisations involved in the HURIDOCS network. It will also assist in making information on HURIDOCS, its publications and newsletter available electronically.

Agneth Olesen (Danish Centre for Human Rights and member of the HURIDOCS Continuation Committee), member of the HURIDOCS Task Force on Structure, pointed out that this Task Force was established on basis of a resolution at the 1992 General Assembly of HURIDOCS. It seeks to analyse the present structure of the HURIDOCS network and propose amendments. The Task Force will make recommendations to the next General Assembly. For this purpose, it has circulated a questionnaire to organisations involved in the network.

8. Report on CUSHRID Net

Lucie Lamoureux (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Canada), who is on the Steering Committee of CUSHRID Net, added that the network also accepts members from outside North-America. A main area of interest is the use of the

modern communication techniques and the Internet by human rights groups. The AAAS produces a directory of human rights sites on Internet, and CUSHRID Net has its home-page on the Internet. At the 2nd annual meeting in November 1995, new working groups were established on women's human rights and electronic publishing. The meeting also includes training sessions and discussion panels. The next meeting will take place from 8 to 10 November 1996.

It was noted that CUSHRID Net has a formal structure, with a Charter and a membership fee. A formal structure helps to co-ordinate the work, and the membership fee covers part of the costs of the Secretariat.

The structure of the European Co-ordination Committee is more loose. It is open to all organisations concerned with information and documentation in the field of human rights. The main activity is the annual meeting, which is convened by the Secretariat. The Council of Europe played a leading role in the initiation of the Committee, and hosted the Secretariat for several years. Afterwards, the Secretariat was with the International Institute for Human Rights in Strasbourg, and since 1995 it is with IRCT in Copenhagen. While HURIDOCS assists the Committee, it cannot be considered to be a "HURIDOCS Europe".

A short discussion took place on the changing need and role of networks, because of the emergence of the Internet. It was agreed that it was important for documentalists to monitor the quality of information presented and to deal adequately with the information overload.

9. Human Rights Documentation in Central and Eastern Europe

James Lawson introduced the open floor discussion and requested representatives of groups in Central and Eastern Europe to present their work and needs in the field of information and documentation.

It was noted that most organisations do have computers and other equipment. Organisations in Central Europe and the former Yugoslavia can relatively easily obtain equipment. However, the equipment is not always sufficient, and has to be used for other purposes besides information and documentation work.

Many human rights organisations have only been established during the last years, and are still in the process of defining their priorities and working methods. It was noted that many of these groups are not yet familiar with the main concepts of information and documentation work. They have not yet heard of the assistance and training which HURIDOCS can provide.

A number of organisations requested training in fact-finding, setting up a documentation centre and the tools for information handling developed by HURIDOCS and others. It was noted that the HURIDOCS tools are useful, and understandable for non-professional information workers. Training is also required in the administration and management of a documentation centre, including fund-raising.

It was pointed out that systematic information handling, and training in it, are not aims by themselves but should help organisations to be more effective in their actions and campaigns. Training should be based on the expressed needs of organisations, and during courses they should be given an opportunity to express their needs. Documentation training courses are also important because they bring people from different organisations in contact with each other, and help to create awareness about human rights work in general. Internships of documentation staff with larger, more experienced organisations were also found to be useful, in addition to training courses.

Language could be a problem in training. It could be overcome by internships for potential local trainers who then train in their country's language.

Several groups are interested to be part of national and international networks for the purposes of exchanging information and undertaking joint actions. Groups from Central and Eastern Europe found it useful to have contacts with each other as well as with organisations based in Western Europe. It was pointed out that some groups are not aware of the importance of their documentation work, and do not know which large organisations to contact with their information, and how to contact them.

There is a need to bring together groups with common characteristics, such as University-based human rights centres or organisations concerned with particular human rights issues. They would like to discuss common concerns (such as how to set up a documentation centre or fund-raising) in a concrete sense: on basis of their experiences, and in this way build up networks.

It was also remarked that organisations should first define their mandate and their activities. Main issues of concern in the region are health, freedom of movement, minority rights and ethnic conflicts - one has to see how the human rights approach can help in solving existing problems. Monitoring economic, social and cultural rights is becoming more important. Not all organisations may want to set up a specialised resource centre on human rights, but would rather receive specific information from other groups whenever required.

In particular newly-established groups require information about international human rights. It was realised that various organisations provide training in human rights standards and their implementation, and monitoring.

The Council of Europe has established ten Information and Documentation Centres in Central and Eastern Europe. These centres have received documentation and equipment from Strasbourg. The Council is also willing to provide its documents to other human rights centres and institutes in the region.

Various organisations based in Western Europe, such as the Danish Centre for Human Rights, the Documentation and Information Network on Nationalities and Inter-Ethnic Relations, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva provide human rights documents to groups in Central and Eastern Europe. They all have developed a standard list of most relevant books and journals. It was proposed that these

organisations share their lists and see how their book provision programmes could be coordinated.

Several participants expressed a need for information about organisations in their countries and regions, and their activities, so that they could more easily establish the necessary contacts. It was realised that various national and regional directories of non-governmental organisations concerned with human rights and related issues had been prepared. For example, among the organisations present, Migration and Ethnic Relations Group for European Research (ERCOMER) has published a directory of migrant organisations in Europe, including human rights organisations and research-documentation centres, and the Documentation and Information Network on Nationalities and Inter-Ethnic Relations (DINNIR) has built up a database of groups concerned with ethnicity and minority rights.

It was recommended that HURIDOCS makes an inventory of existing directories, and possibly assists in the publication of new directories. All organisations were requested to forward copies of directories published by them or others to the HURIDOCS Secretariat.

The main points raised in the discussion were summarised by Manuel Guzman. They were:

I. Organisations want to strengthen their own documentation centre

- a. institutional matters: provisions of equipment and of documents
- b. how to improve information handling: in particular through training courses on the basics of information handling (library-type of documentation, violations, monitoring economic, social and cultural rights) and specialised matters (for example, the use of the Internet).

II. Organisations want to build-strengthen networks

- directories to get an overview of who does what
- for inter-network contacts
- through own exclusive meetings or meetings of like-minded organisations

It was pointed out that both I and II take place within the general framework of competence building of human rights organisations.

It was recommended that also human rights organisations in Greece and Turkey, which work in difficult circumstances, receive training and support.

10. HURIDOCS List of index terms

Many organisations use the HURIDOCS List of index terms (Supporting Document B) to index their documents. At last years' meeting, Agnethe Olesen had requested comments on this List, in order to amend and improve the next edition. She had received some comments, but would appreciate to have more feedback from users of the List.

All participants who have comments on the List are requested to forward them to Agnethe Olesen at the Danish Centre for Human Rights by 1 July. She will compile the responses and pass them on to the HURIDOCS Secretariat.

A note on this is to be included in the HURIDOCS News as well as on the HURIDOCS mailing list.

It was suggested that the revised List be translated into Russian.

11. Organisation of the Meeting

An evaluation of the day's meeting was held. The following suggestions were made with regard to the organisation of the meeting:

- with the large number of participants, the meeting requires more organisation and preparation as well as more space. It would be more fruitful to have some working group sessions, with a Chair and rapporteur for each group.
- the special session for newcomers on HURIDOCS should be continued. At the end of that meeting, there should be an opportunity for a meeting of organisations involved in the different micro-networks.
- there should be a market place with information on the different groups and micro-networks
- the meeting may be held at a university campus, outside of the university period (second half of June), or at a conference centre in a low-cost country. This would allow the participants to stay together at relatively limited costs
- some government agencies may be willing to provide logistical support in organising the meeting.

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims was requested to continue as Secretariat of the European Co-ordination Committee in 1997, and agreed to do so. It will take the comments made into account in organising the 1997 meeting.

Debra Guzman offered to inquire whether the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in Lisbon would be interested to host the 1997 meeting.

Yvo Peeters of the Documentation and Information Network on Nationalities and Inter-Ethnic Relations (DINNIR) said that his organisation would be willing to host the 1998 meeting in Brussels.

12. Use of the Internet by Human Rights Organisations

The morning session of 15 May was a presentation and demonstration of the use of the Internet. It started with a presentation by Debra Guzman of HRNet, an information service which brings together providers and users of human rights information through modern communication techniques. She first presented some publications dealing with the Internet, and then provided all participants with one copy of *The Internet & World Wide Web: the*

rough guide, by Angus J. Kennedy, which had been kindly provided by the publishers, Rough Guides in London.

She pointed out that human rights groups are increasingly using electronic communication tools. Electronic mail has become a common tool in most parts of the world. Training in e-mail is provided by various e-mail hosts and others, including HURIDOCS.

The Internet can be seen as the network of networks. It is used by human rights groups for various purposes, including:

- collecting information for inclusion into databases
- disseminating appeals for urgent action on cases of human rights violations,
- providing access to one's own publications

A mailing list allows organisations interested in particular subjects to exchange information. For example, HURIDOCS has a mailing lists for groups willing to share information about human rights information handling.

Some participants gave examples of the ways in which they have been using electronic mail and the Internet. A problem they face are how to manage the information received, in particular because often there is an overload of information available on many topics. A sender of a message does not know for certain whether a message has been received unless one asks for a receipt.

Chris Ingelse (Faculty of Law, University of Limburg) gave an on-line demonstration of different ways of using the Internet to receive and supply information related to human rights. After an introduction, he gave an overview of the main human rights sites on the Internet. One way to find information is to directly type in the address of the provider. One can also search information using one of the several search engines of the Internet. Many Internet sites and documents contain references to related documents, and one can easily "surf" between different sites. Relevant information found can be printed or saved in a file. One can regularly obtain information on subjects of interest by subscribing to a mailing list or news-group.

For making one's own homepage with information about one's organisation, or preparing a document on the Internet, one mostly uses the symbols and codes of the HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language). An example of an HTML document was given, and circulated among the participants.

A discussion took place on some issues related to electronic communication and the Internet. One comment made was that for exchanging urgent action appeals human rights groups only need access to electronic mail, and the Internet is not necessary.

There is a large interest among the general public in the Internet, and many people access the home pages and documents on human rights. Documentation workers need to familiarise themselves with the new technologies, and also have to handle an increasing number of requests for information. Large organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees and Amnesty International, which have full-time staff to respond to the large number of queries received. One can develop a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to respond to most queries.

It was noted that disseminating press releases via electronic mail can considerably reduce the costs of traditional mail. At the same time, one may want to avoid that people download documents free of charge from the Internet who otherwise would have paid for the hard copy, by asking for payment for certain types or a certain amount of data.

It was pointed out that the Internet is an open system, and that there is no systematic monitoring of linkages made between different sites.

Heidi Lobato and Pauline Oosterhoff of the Dutch section of Amnesty International announced that this section is organising an international human rights film festival from 15 to 19 September. The programme includes video's, films and documentaries, CD ROMs and World Wide Web sites, readings, discussions and workshops.

13. Market Place

On 15 May in the afternoon, various participants gave demonstrations of a number of their projects, in three different rooms.

The following demonstrations were provided:

- Presentation of the INCORE Conflict Data Service on the Internet, by Gillian Robinson, Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE), University of Ulster, Londonderry, Northern Ireland
- Refworld: a CD ROM with information on refugees, including country information, legal information and policy-related documents, by Geneviève Bador, Centre for Documentation and Research (CDR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Switzerland
- EVSYS, the software developed by HURIDOCS for documenting cases of human rights violations according to the HURIDOCS Standard Formats: A Tool for Documenting Human Rights Violations, by Bert Verstappen, HURIDOCS
- The documentation system of the Danish Refugee Council, with six different types of databases including a cumulative bibliographical database with data from three other Danish documentation centre exchanged in the Standard Electronic Exchange File, by Lise Bruun, Danish Refugee Council, Denmark
- HURI-LIB, a software in Access, developed for recording bibliographical information according to the HURIDOCS Bibliographic Standard Formats, by Lise Bruun, Danish Refugee Council, Denmark
- WINISIS, the beta version for Windows of the CDS-ISIS software for bibliographical information developed by Unesco, by Kirsti Sparrevohn, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, Denmark

Micro-networks

refugees - network:

International Refugee Documentation Network (IRDN)

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