

**Minutes of the 21st Meeting
of the European Co-ordination Committee (ECCHR)**
February 1998, Bucharest, Romania

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened by Svend Bitsch Christensen (IRCT) who welcomed the participants and presented the organisers: The Romanian Helsinki Committee, the ICAR Foundation, HURIDOCS, and IRCT.

Svend Bitsch Christensen mentioned that it was historic to have a meeting of human rights organisations in Romania and passed the word to Camelia Doru, President of the ICAR Foundation. Camelia Doru was grateful for the possibility to have a human rights meeting in Romania including representatives of other former Eastern European countries, and briefly presented the ICAR Foundation and its work for torture victims.

2. Adoption of the agenda

It was agreed that participants should present themselves prior to electing a chairperson. The agenda was subsequently adopted.

3. Presentation of participants and their organisations

All participants presented themselves and their organisation (final list of participants in annex).

4. Election of chairperson

James Lawson (Human Rights Information Centre, Council of Europe) was elected Chairperson. He regretted the long time that had passed since the last ECCHR meeting in 1996 in Utrecht, but on the other hand expressed satisfaction over the very wide participation in the current meeting.

5. Minutes of the 20th meeting in Utrecht, May 1996

New participants had not received the minutes. Summary minutes had been published in HURIDOCS News no. 21. The minutes of the 20th meeting of the European Co-ordination Committee were adopted.

6. Micro networks

Refugees

Geneviève Bador (UNHCR) summarised the background of the refugees network (IRDN) which was established in 1986 during a meeting in Bergisch Gladbach (Germany) among NGOs and a few international organisations, and which was initially a network to facilitate the

exchange of bibliographic information related to refugees. After the 1992 IRDN Network meeting in Crete, coordination was passed over to the European Migration Centre in Berlin.

The International Refugee Electronic Network (IRENE) which disseminates information within the network via electronic mail, is still coordinated by UNHCR. The form of IRENE is currently being discussed in the context of finding the best means of communication and information sharing.

A group of refugee documentation organisations, including UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) are working together on a third edition of the international thesaurus on refugee terminology. In addition to English, French and Spanish, a draft in Russian will hopefully be published this year. The thesaurus is not currently published on UNHCR's website, but electronic dissemination via the Internet is being considered as a possible way of publication.

Recent activities of the IRDN include involvement in a training course in Namibia in February 1997, as well as other ways of collaboration, including informal contacts with many NGOs. Other activities included establishing refugee networks in Russia and Ukraine funded by the European Commission, training courses on documentation, refugees and human rights resources, publication of a newsletter to IRDN members, creation of a home page, etc.

UNHCR has produced a CD-rom with all main UNHCR documents, UNHCR Executive Committee and UN General Assembly resolutions, bibliographic references, annual reports of Amnesty International, and other materials, which should be a good source of information and reference.

The IRDN will meet at the occasion of the HURIDOCS Conference in Tunis to discuss the future and the form of the network, and to redefine its objectives. The network receives irregular funding, and it is necessary also to review funding possibilities.

Torture network

Svend Bitsch Christensen briefed about the International Torture Documentation Network (ITDN) which was created in 1992 to formalize cooperation among torture documentalists. A brief description of the ITDN can be found on IRCT's homepage, and it is hoped that all torture documentation centres eventually will be linked on the Internet.

Régine Poulet informed that OMCT/SOS Torture is disseminating appeals for intervention in cases of human rights violations through electronic communication, aiming at reaching an increased range of recipients. However, there is still a need for more traditional means of communication to Central and Eastern European countries (i.e. fax, mail). More finances are needed to increase communication in more languages as well as to provide relevant training.

Four issues gave rise to concern to OMCT:

- a. Verification of the information/data provided.
- b. Security of the source providing the information. NGOs need the support of IGOs, GOs, etc. to deal with legal issues and avoid interception and prosecution by governments.
- c. Overflow of information. The abundance of information is difficult to handle and appropriate tools such as key words, format, etc. need to be developed.
- d. Updating of information.

These issues were subsequently discussed, since they are to a large extent interlinked and could be related to all networks. In general, overflow is more feared when the source is unknown and ways to deal with overflow should be found. It was suggested to create a subgroup on issues of security. In principle, all electronic mail can be intercepted and other means of communication (ordinary mail, person to person) could be used in sensitive cases. In any case, it was advisable to split access to information between internal confidential information and external information edited for the public.

On the issue of information, Marc Agi (Fondation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme) was seeking clear definitions as to the format and the classification of information on human rights.

Bert Verstappen (HURIDOCS Secretariat) cautioned not to overreact to the security issue. In any case, leaving out names when communicating cases of violations externally would increase security.

Children's network

Becky Purbrick (Child Rights Information Network-CRIN) presented an overview of the children's network initiative. It began in November 1992 following workshops between NGOs and UNICEF on how to support the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted in 1990.

In 1995, it was decided to formally establish the CRIN network. The network has since seen an increased use of electronic mail. CRIN issues a directory of children rights websites comprising more than 80 sites. Recent projects include the setting-up of an electronic mailing list for members in 1997 containing news announcements, news from workshops, meetings, etc. In future, it is planned to have different mailing lists by topic. CRIN has also had concerns about security in this connection.

Assuming that general access to the Internet would increase, a project to establish a website was started in 1997. CRIN believes that the Internet is a good tool to encourage participation and contributions. Members have realised that information on a website reaches a wider audience and quicker. The website would contain promotion of the CRC as well as development issues, rather than reporting of violations and urgent actions.

CRIN is envisaging more work at regional levels and in more languages.

Regional networks

The European ECCHRD meetings have taken place for 15 years. Similar meetings in other regions of the world have taken place since the end of the eighties. HURIDOCS sees advantages in coordinating activities at the regional level, and Bert Verstappen briefly introduced the activities taking place in the different regions:

North America/Canada: (CUSHRID Net) was founded in 1994. CUSHRID Net has a formal membership structure with statutes, fees, publications at reduced price for members, etc. Its main activity is an annual meeting with workshops on various issues. The next CUSHRID Net meeting will take place from 1 to 3 May 1998 in Washington DC.

Latin America and the Caribbean (RIDHUALC): This network was formally established in 1990. Because of the changing landscape and priorities of human rights organisations and financial problems, it has been less active over the last few years. The next regional meeting will hopefully take place later in 1998, and will be linked to a conference on impunity.

Asia-Pacific: HURIDOCS-Asia was established in 1993 and was initially co-ordinated by Voice against Torture in Pakistan. Because of the size of the region, it seeks to set up regional and thematic micro networks. There is another recent initiative of the Murdoch University in Australia to set up a regional network for the electronic dissemination of information.

Arab-speaking world: The Arab Human Rights Information Network (AHRINET) was established in December 1995. It is engaged in various training activities, databasing and translation of HURIDOCS tools into Arabic.

In Africa, it is envisaged to create sub-regional networks instead of an overall structure in order to increase impact and efficiency across geographical and linguistic divisions.

7. Developments within HURIDOCS

Secretariat

The HURIDOCS Secretariat is a small office with three permanent staff members, headed by Manuel Guzman. The office will move to new and bigger premises around April 1998 where rent would be free for two years. New details of address, phones, etc. will be communicated as soon as available.

The Secretariat offers services such as: co-ordination of the development of tools for information handling, such as the yellow Standard Formats books and software, the organisation of training activities world-wide, the hosting of interns, advice on how to set up documentation centres, etc.

Task forces

- a. *Electronic communication:* Debra Guzman (Human Rights Information Network - HURINet) is co-ordinating this Task Force. Among others, she is providing information to the huridocs-gen-I mailing list.
- b. *Software development:* Headed by James Lawson, this task force has recently developed and disseminated a questionnaire on the use of software among human rights organisations. The results will be published at the Tunis Conference in March 1998.
- c. *Structure:* This Task Force has looked into the organisational structure of HURIDOCS and is presenting proposals to the forthcoming General Assembly of HURIDOCS.

The next International HURIDOCS Conference and General Assembly will take place from 22 to 25 March in Tunis. The agenda includes topics such as impunity, conflicts, statistics, libraries, information access, security, etc.

Participants from Central/Eastern Europe were encouraged to explore financial possibilities for participating, limited support might be available.

Tool development

EVSYS, the software for documenting cases of human rights violations is being used e.g. by NGOs preparing evidence before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and by ICFTU. A meeting in Mexico had evaluated EVSYS, and the system is now being translated into Spanish, French, Arabic and Russian (in progress).

Some of the HURIDOCS tools are being translated by local human rights organisations into other languages, such as Catalan and Croatian.

Work on a system for monitoring economic, social and cultural rights has been started. The outcome of the project will include tools for monitoring these rights and a thesaurus. It is likely that software will be developed which will be linked to the EVSYS software as much as possible.

Training

Since the Utrecht meeting in 1996, training courses had taken place in Namibia with local NGOs, in Australia (East Timor Human Rights Centre) with James Lawson coordinating, in Rwanda (on documenting the genocide) and in Senegal (a Francophone course on documenting human rights violations) with James Lawson as resource person.

As for the 1998 training programme, it is planned to do more in Europe. One workshop was planned for German speaking NGOs, and there were plans for Central/Eastern Europe as well. A course on documenting violations will take place the following week in Bucharest.

On the issue of training, James Lawson emphasised that HURIDOCS, as a general rule, reacts on requests from human rights organisations. HURIDOCS has the tools, experience and willingness to arrange training programmes, but the NGOs should assess and express their needs. It was important to add concrete proposals to the recommendations to be put forward at the Tunis meeting.

Genevieve Bador added she would be interested to hear about the training needs of the participants, also because UNHCR has produced training material.

The following training needs were expressed or suggested:

1. Appropriate list of index terms for migration (Kerstin Lau - IOM).
2. Recommendations on meta tagging for electronic publications (Lise Bruun - Danish Refugee Council). She explained that tags could be put on title, version, author, key words. These tags would then be used by search tools on the Internet. HURIDOCS should recommend members to use meta tags according to standards that would have to be defined. Lise Bruun added that in Denmark, the government policy is that it is compulsory for all ministries to use meta tagging.

It was decided that DRC would write a proposal on common key words and ways of indexing for Internet search engines for the Tunis meeting, and also look into the software that exists to add meta tags. The proposal should include the level of sophistication of the terms, i.e. should they aim at the general public and remain in daily language, or should they be more specialised (technical, scientific) to cater to another group of users. The proposal should also include recommendations on how many languages should be available.

A quick question round revealed 21 different Internet connections among the participants. Two of the participants did not have any access to the Internet in their organisations.

3. How to store and retrieve electronic documents, do we need new standards, should specific procedures be developed? (Svend Bitsch Christensen - IRCT).
4. Teaching methods: experiences and methods need to be put into a practical document (Ion Iacos - Romanian Helsinki Committee).
5. Security (Pam Clarke - Amnesty International).

Lise Bruun (DRC) enquired about channels of information about available training courses on human rights. James Lawson responded that HURIDOCS has a mailing list and a newsletter where announcements can be posted.

Marc Agi felt a need to define the term information within the context of education on human rights and democratic citizenship. He saw two steps in this process, 1) to reveal and

denounce violations, and 2) the positive construction of a democracy, involving human rights education.

James Lawson emphasised that the purpose of this meeting was to define how documentalists could handle the information flow and make it available for use by educators on human rights, i.e. this was just one step in the process of creating awareness and supporting the education effort.

Vladimir Ormeneanu (SIRDO) informed that his organisation was working on a book/guide on how to deal with refugee and asylum seekers, and on a series of seminars and round-table discussions with the police. He asked what assistance could be given to these projects.

Mirella Hagiopol (Information and Documentation Centre on the Council of Europe) replied that financial assistance could be made available through the Council of Europe upon presentation of plans. She was prepared to help with contacts, also on how the ensuing documents could be distributed to law enforcement institutions. UNHCR would also assist with copies of documents on refugee and asylum seekers.

8. HURIDOCS List of index terms

HURIDOCS has produced this general list of indexing terms as Supporting Document B. Organisations using the Standard Formats can use this list and at the same time develop additional terminology for their area of work. The Utrecht meeting in 1996 called upon all participants to make comments and amendments to this list. Svend Bitsch Christensen informed that there had been no feedback on the issue from the Utrecht meeting, but handed out suggested amendments of terms from IRCT.

Genevieve Bador cautioned to avoid duplications and work towards finding the most appropriate terms. The results of a review should in any case be communicated to all users, it was imperative to remain compatible.

Saskia Bal (Netherlands Institute of Human Rights) suggested to add a short description after each term, since not all users/registrars work within the same area (human rights, refugees, etc.), even if they were all documentalists. UNHCR could offer scope notes already developed that could be further elaborated on.

James Lawson suggested to consolidate and match all existing index terms, and eliminate duplications.

9. Revision of CDS/ISIS or alternative software

A short show of hands revealed that only seven participants used CDS/ISIS.

Svend Bitsch Christensen briefly informed that CDS/ISIS was very traditional and not easily managed, but it was free of charge and local support was available. The software has not been substantially revised over the last years, but users developed a number of utilities. A new Windows-based version might be expected in May 1998 against a small fee, but this was

not confirmed by UNESCO. Svend Bitsch Christensen added that IRCT had been mostly inclined to use Microsoft Access, but CDS/ISIS was still very powerful in export and import and a thesaurus could be built in.

Lise Bruun informed that DRC used Microsoft Access.

Ioana Borocan (Library of the Chamber of Deputies, Romania Parliament) informed that she was a long-time user of CDS/ISIS. She felt that it was very useful for cataloguing within the human rights area, it was free of charge and there were many users in Romania with a common standard set-up and thus compatible.

James Lawson concluded that the HURIDOCS task-force on the issue was awaiting the results from a questionnaire sent out recently. The survey would hopefully give more information about technology and software available, etc.

10. Use of electronic communication and Internet

Mailing lists

Among the participants, there were approx. 13 users of general mailing lists from a list server.

Svend Bitsch Christensen informed that he subscribed to lists and then on-forwarded the information to relevant persons/groups in his organisation.

Bert Verstappen informed that approx. 130 organisations were subscribing to the HURIDOCS general list on human rights information and documentation handling. The list could be used by all organisations to send and receive messages and did not require much management, except unsubscribing e-mail addresses which had become invalid.

Becky Purbrick informed that CRIN had approx. 200 organisations on its list. It was run by an Internet provider free of charge, and managed by Becky Purbrick who had issued practical guidelines for users, e.g. remembering good titles, limiting essential information to one screen, attaching files, etc. She felt that the mailing lists were good for capacity building, and was thinking of introducing thematic sub-lists, with the general list informing about the contents on the thematic lists.

She would like to use the lists more as a discussion forum, a way to share papers and make comments, announce conferences, etc. to ensure active participation and contributions, thereby keeping the list active. She urged list users to remember to change contact details.

The Meeting briefly discussed the use of "agents", i.e. specific parameters to direct mails into thematic mailboxes. It was a more intelligent way of collecting and disseminating information and could make work more efficient.

A good overview of human rights sites on the Internet is provided by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at <http://shr.aaas.org/dhr.htm>.

Home pages

Lotte Albret Wissing (IRCT) explained that at IRCT, a lot of thought and discussions on contents had gone into the planning of the IRCT home page, but it was eventually decided to focus on providing a high level of information and facts, as well as good and relevant links instead of flashy gimmicks.

Leyla Schön (BZFO) informed that her organisation had wanted an appealing, but not too overloaded home page. They will eventually add a links page.

The UNHCR home page contained two levels of complexity, with the individual pages managed by individual sections. Genevieve Bador felt that it was very time-consuming to maintain external links. Lise Bruun concurred with this and mentioned that DRC were decreasing the amount of links on their home page to include only basic links as a service to own staff.

Internet as source of information

It was noted that the Internet was widely used by documentation centres as a source of information. There could be large savings by publishing on web sites, and it was also possible to download websites on CD-ROMs. Using CD-ROMs could be a solution for organisations with bad, expensive or no Internet connections.

The legal implications of downloading were discussed, in particular the possible violation of copyright and intellectual property of authors. There seemed to be a vacuum as to international laws and conventions governing the use of information on Internet. It was recommended to at least mention the source and establish a link to the source.

Another issue was how to ensure that documents do not disappear from the source site. There were no guarantees that a source used from Internet would remain there forever.

Genevieve Bador informed about a book issued by UNHCR providing a selection of approx. 200 useful and frequently visited sites on refugees and related issues, including human rights.

11. Training on human rights documentation in Europe - needs and possibilities

Courses in Central and Eastern Europe had been organised in Warsaw, Tirana, Prague, St. Petersburg and this year in Bucharest on different aspects of human rights information handling, e.g. how to use computers and the use of Standard Formats and other tools.

A brief evaluation of previous courses revealed that two weeks was too long for a course, it involved problems of replacement and funding. It is not possible to squeeze several topics into one week, however, and specific courses on particular topics, like bibliographic information or documenting violations, is a better option. The HURIDOCs training courses are not aimed at professional librarians, but should be seen as a help to persons working with human rights organisations without formal training in document handling.

It was suggested to split the courses into two levels of complexity. The basic training course would be for newcomers and focus on the basic terminology, technical tools and aspects of documentation. It could also be relevant for organisations who were uncertain about how to

formulate training plans. A more advanced course could be offered to the experienced documentalists and contain an exchange of experience, training on more sophisticated tools, etc.

In order to adapt the courses to the experience and background of the participants, some kind of screening method was required, perhaps through CVs.

Another way of overcoming financial and other resource constraints could be by training through exchange of documentalists.

For all types of training, follow-up was very important.

DRC and IRCT offered to organise a special training course on how to identify information sources on the Internet. Index standards, meta tagging, etc. could be discussed at the same event. It would be a one week training event in Copenhagen, May or June 1999, with the following tentative programme:

First part (2 days):

- electronic human rights information sources - introduction to main sources
- good methods of finding sources - tracing new sources - how to use search engines
- general introduction to participants' sources
- evaluation/assessment of quality of sources - good/bad sites - what can be found

Second part (3 days):

- publishing on the Internet - general introduction - how to find a provider - techniques
- review of editing tools - meta tagging
- how to present human rights issues/documentation
- resources and skills required
- participants to bring material to be published - end up with product
- how to launch successfully - adding search tools

12. HURIDOCS Conference and General Assembly

HURIDOCS is a network without formal membership, and all participants in its activities can consider themselves as members. Extensive planning and funding is normally required for large international Conferences, therefore they are not held more frequently. The last Conference and General Assembly was in 1992 in Crete with 180 participants.

The conclusions of this ECCHR meeting, i.e. what does the European network want HURIDOCS to focus on in the next five years, will be brought forward to the General Assembly.

Some participants expressed concerns about the programme. The agenda seemed too far away from the information aspect and would involve NGO leaders and policy makers more than documentalists. This made it difficult to identify the right person to attend the meeting. Bert Verstappen explained that the aim was to identify the role of documentation within the entire human rights context. New approaches to changes in society, especially in conflict

resolution, peace building, etc. should be explored, and increased collaboration, coordination and dialogue between leaders and documentalists was required. It was important for documentalists to stay abreast of major human rights topics discussed at policy level.

The General Assembly

Coordination committees and the HURIDOCS Secretariat take care of work between General Assemblies. The GA's main purpose is to establish priorities for the programme of the next 5 years and to hold elections for the new board.

Preparation of European input

The European input into the next 5-year workplan was very important. In addition to a summary of activities in the European region, Lise Bruun suggested an outline of general human rights developments in the European region since 1992. IRCT will prepare such a presentation based on reports of meetings, etc. All organisations were encouraged to send available information to Svend Bitsch Christensen. Special inputs were requested from Ion Iacos and Leonid Lvov reporting from Central and Eastern Europe.

A task force on the future structure of HURIDOCS will present its recommendations and suggestions for discussion and decision by the General Assembly. A proposal will be circulated prior to the General Assembly.

Structure of the ECCHR

The ECCHR is not a membership organisation, there are no fees, and all participants in the ECCHR events are members. Suggestions for changes were discussed, but it was realised that formalisation may prevent some organisations from participating.

The increased interest in attending the meeting, in particular by organisations from Central and Eastern Europe, has made it more difficult for IRCT as Secretariat and HURIDOCS to find hosts for meetings, provide translation, etc.

It was recommended to continue the current structure of the ECCHR, i.e. no membership, no fees.

13. Date and place of next meeting

It was agreed that it was a good idea to continue to move the venue around in Europe.

The 22nd ECCHR meeting will take place in Berlin in Spring 1999, organised by BZFO and with the European Migration Office as co-organiser, the working language will be English. The function as meeting secretariat will remain with IRCT for another year.

Lise Bruun recommended to have thematic workshops on the next agenda.

14. Closing

James Lawson thanked the participants for a good and constructive meeting.

Bert Verstappen expressed HURIDOCS' thanks to Bilance/Mensen in Nood for funding assistance.

14. Market place

Participants were invited to the library of the Romanian Helsinki Committee where computers with Internet facilities were available. Some of the organisations which have produced CD-ROMs and homepages gave presentations to interested participants.