

**Minutes of the 23rd Meeting
of the European Co-ordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation
24-25 March 2000, Barcelona, Spain**

Rapporteur: Lotte Albret Wissing (IRCT)

The year 2000 meeting of the European Co-ordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation (ECCHRD) was organised by the International Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (IRCT), which served as secretariat of the meeting, and the Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya (IDHC), with the assistance of HURIDOCS.

The meeting was held at the Civic Centre Pati Llimona of Barcelona.

1. Opening of the meeting

Sven-Erik Baun, IRCT, welcomed the participants to the meeting and presented the organisers: Montse Tafalla (IDHC), Bert Verstappen (HURIDOCS) and staff from IRCT. A special thank you was extended to IDHC, the local organisers of the meeting, also for hosting a very nice reception in the IDHC office the previous evening.

On behalf of IDHC, Montse Tafalla welcomed the participants to Barcelona and provided practical information.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The presentation of the European Human Rights Internet Site (EHRIS) announced in the draft agenda was cancelled, since the presenters from EHRIS could not attend the meeting. It was replaced by a presentation of XML.

3. Election of the chairperson

James Lawson (Council of Europe) was elected chairperson with acclamation.

4. Presentation of participants

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

James Lawson welcomed the new participants and stressed that the ECCHRD meetings were very informal, allowing people with similar interests to meet and share information and experiences. The work in smaller sub-groups (thematic network groups) should allow for more interaction.

5. Minutes of the 22nd meeting in Berlin, March 1999

The minutes were adopted.

6. Presentation of and reports from Thematic Networks and Task Forces

The Chair re-iterated that issues taken up in thematic networks and task forces should focus on but can also go beyond using tools and techniques for information handling and exchange.

Refugees/minorities/migration

Geneviève Bador (UNHCR) reported about latest developments of the refugees network, IDRN. The network had reduced its ambitions, with currently no co-ordinator and hence a more informal structure. A smaller task force composed of the UN library, IOM, the ICRC Refugee Studies Centre, and UNHCR had been reconstituted.

The International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology was currently too complex to be published on the Web, but an international working group was in the process of reviewing and simplifying it.

Torture

Sven-Erik Baun, IRCT, informed about the International Torture Documentation Network (ITDN) which currently had an informal structure of 31 rehabilitation centres for torture victims. There was however a wish to re-establish the network, supported by IRCT's regionalization project through the establishment of information-documentation activities. Questionnaires had been used to identify needs, wishes and capacities in the network.

A wish for increased European networking along the lines of the global approach was expressed in this connection.

Index terms on torture

Sven-Erik Baun informed about the current manpower constraints of this task force. There was thus nothing to report on this issue this year.

The Psychotrauma Documentation Network (PDN)

Marc van Kuik (Foundation ICODO) presented this new network. The ICODO Foundation is mainly dealing with consequences of war and violence, but saw a problem of keeping up with new information in a multidisciplinary environment. In response, the PDN was launched in November 1999 in Utrecht. The network currently consisted of 11 participants, but was open to new members, especially to users of the network. Users would be defined eventually, but it was also necessary to disseminate information about the services of PDN.

Children

Frederiek Eggink (Foundation ICODO) had received no response to solicited feedback on this subject. ICODO covers rights of children in war and conflict situations, Defence for Children International was another existing network, and Frederiek Eggink recommended that interaction with other networks be sought.

Freedom of expression

No reporting.

Interface IGO/NGO

James Lawson (Council of Europe) advised of the Council's intention to work on a more bilateral basis, but due to reorganisations there had been a lack of networking.

Geneviève Bador (UNHCR) informed that a guide on protecting NGOs in the field had been issued by UNHCR.

It was suggested that some IGOs in Geneva should organise a meeting with some Geneva-based NGOs for a discussion on increased collaboration between IGOs and NGOs.

Information Technology

No reporting.

Client documentation

Sven-Erik Baun (IRCT) cautioned that this was a sensitive issue closely related to confidentiality, client protection, etc., but that IRCT was looking at the possibilities of some recording and documenting in connection with the development of a torture incidence reporting system.

Detention

Patrick Müller (CPT Documentation Centre, Council of Europe) reported on the different approaches to the topic among the task force group members. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) works primarily within prisons, Penal Reform International (PRI) promotes a reform of the entire prison system.

Patrick Müller was working on index terms for detention issues for eventual publishing on the website for public use. The development was based on internal work and requirements, with some expected adjustments for external use.

General list of index terms

Agneth Olesen (Danish Centre for Human Rights) presented the final draft list of suggested added terms to the list. After the last deadline by end-March, the final list will be distributed in the HURIDOCS network. Bert Verstappen is co-ordinating global input from a HURIDOCS working group. The list could eventually ALSO be used as keywords for meta-tagging.

7. Utilizing the Internet for Human Rights Documentation: Practical experiences of Nizkor/Derechos

Antonia Macias and Gregorio Dionis (Nizkor International Human Rights Team) gave a presentation of their organisation and how they used the Internet for human rights documentation and dissemination.

Nizkor originated in the seventies when global communication systems began to grow. In the early nineties, with human rights organisations' increased access to Internet and electronic information, Nizkor developed a system of making documents from grassroots human rights organisations in Latin America available in electronic formats in Spanish, due to the lack of documentation in Spanish in these areas, and undertook an analysis to understand systematic violations.

A computer system was established in the USA, and work started on the principles of international law from the human rights activism viewpoint, with impunity as a main topic. Eventually Nizkor looked into cases before international courts, co-operating with national human rights organisations. Another line of work was on conflict areas, to prevent conflict and reach peaceful solutions (active in the Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, Peru). Another activity was the Global Internet Liberty Campaign, to promote freedom of expression, cryptography, privacy and access to Internet.

The main philosophy of Nizkor was to disseminate information about human rights violations as soon as they occur in support of documenting the events, and also in an attempt to prevent the violations. Use of all known technology, basically the Internet (web pages with documentation and links to situation and information related to each country), and electronic mail were used in this effort. Nizkor is currently active in 120 countries in collaboration with local human rights organisations, especially on cases not covered by mainstream media. The activities covered both information messages and urgent actions. Through its network, Nizkor delivered daily 250-300 MB = 130,000 A4 pages which could not be distributed in printed format. It enabled even very small organisations to make public dissemination of documentation. The Spanish network reached 3,500 human rights activists and organisations.

Nizkor was experiencing an enormous development, but lack of resources prevented analysis and dissemination of all incoming information.

8. Reports from separate meetings of Thematic Networks and Task Forces

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The Torture Network

The plans for further development of the torture thesaurus initiated by Kirsti Sparrevohn (OASIS) and Sven-Erik Baun (IRCT) were presented. An initial draft of preferred terms, based on existing terms in other areas (e.g. UNHCR), will be circulated. The possibility of a joint clearinghouse on documentation had been discussed, but requires further work.

On the issue of training in torture documentation, IRCT would develop a questionnaire to make a needs assessment, funding might be available at IRCT for participants outside Europe.

A journal in Russian was required for post-totalitarian countries, the International Medical Rehabilitation Center (IRC) had taken on this initiative and solicited inputs (such as articles, etc.).

Electronic publishing was another issue dealt with by the group, including the problem of copyright especially for scientific articles. A 'pool' of general clearing of texts by collaborating organisations was suggested, an idea for a special topic at next year's meeting.

9. From HTML to XML

Fiona Bolt and Carolyn Eager (Amnesty International) gave a general presentation of the developments in Internet text languages, based on seminars at Amnesty.

XML was good for searching (unlimited meta-tags could be added according to own needs, but unified search engines were still missing), viewing (flexibility in the sense that different style sheets could be applied to suit different needs), and data exchange (standardised, not platform dependent – Mac, PCs, etc.).

The HURIDOCs standard terms had already been developed and could be translated easily into XML, with the possibility of displaying different characters from different languages in the same document. Unfortunately, Microsoft was not currently supporting XML.

A small HURIDOCS project on embedding Dublin Core meta-tagging into HTML coding was mentioned, the document was available on the HURIDOCS website. HURIDOCS was encouraged to establish relevant links on the issues (now available at www.huridocs.org/elecpubl.htm).

A working group on XML was proposed, consisting of Jeff Howarth (Anti-Slavery International - co-ordinator), James Lawson, Carolyn Eager, Fiona Bolt, and Patrick Müller. Others interested were most welcome. A short article in HURIDOCS News was suggested, as well as taking up the issue as a theme at next year's meeting, including a workshop.

10. Human Rights Developments within the Council of Europe

James Lawson briefed that there had been many changes in structure within the Council in Europe (CoE), which now included 41 member states. Working from a number of treaty bodies on human rights, a range of monitoring activities were carried out in the CoE. Within the Convention on Human Rights, the changes had resulted in a single court (the European Court on Human Rights) divided into smaller chambers, with only major cases presented in plenary. Decisions were now only available in one language for publication in the Official Series, others were only published in HUDOC. Surveying execution of decisions was now becoming a crucial issue.

All public documents were available on the web site, divided currently into four different topics. New web sites on social charter and police would be launched soon. Web sites on minorities, media, and equality between women and men were in the final stages. Country by country reports were mostly not on the web, due to resources not currently available. By the end of 2000, the CoE expected to have a search facility on all web sites.

11. Developments within HURIDOCS

Bert Verstappen gave a summary of latest developments within HURIDOCS (for a full description, including background information about HURIDOCS, please consult the HURIDOCS web site at WWW.HURIDOCS.ORG).

As part of a new strategic plan to meet the challenges of the new millennium, the HURIDOCS activities have been reorganised into five programmes.

Tools, Standards and Techniques Development

Among new tools mentioned were: (1) adaptations of WinEvsys (the Windows-based software for monitoring human rights violations), HURISEARCH (a search engine), and various tools and resources for monitoring economic, social and cultural rights.

Training

The HURIDOCS Training Programme focused mainly on the use of its tools. A major goal for HURIDOCS is to expand its training capacities with a series of training courses for trainers and with the issue of comprehensive training and users manual.

Consultancy, Advice and Support

This new HURIDOCS programme was designed to give more attention to providing constant on-site support to users of the growing number of HURIDOCS tools.

Information and Outreach Programme

This programme encompasses among others participation in and presentation at meetings and conferences, publication of the HURIDOCS Newsletter, and dissemination of tools and information with publishing via the Internet and CD-ROMs as supplement to other means of distribution.

In addition, HURIDOCS intends to convene an international conference in 2000 under the theme: *From Gross Violations to Reconciliation and Justice: An International Conference on Truth Commissions, Tribunals and the International Criminal Court.*

Networking and Institutional Development

This programme aims to make the entire HURIDOCS network continue and to increase its dynamism.

12. Reports from separate meetings of Thematic Networks and Task Forces (point 8 continued)

The PDN Network

Frederiek Eggink (Foundation ICODO) reported from the session that had brought the refugee and the PDN networks together.

The refugee area had an extensive thesaurus to be updated with approx. 200 terms, with world-wide coverage and a new lay-out to be expected. The thesaurus was not currently on the web, but solutions are being sought.

In the psychotrauma area, a merge with torture and refugee terms was envisaged. This thesaurus was on the web via ICODO, who requested input for new terms. A list would be sent to UNHCR for review.

The UNHCR web site carried many relevant publications, the PDN web page (via the ICODO web site) included library addresses and useful relevant links. Possible interface between the UNHCR and PDN web sites should be explored, including the possibility of incorporating trafficking issues.

13. Presentation of the new version of EVSYS and the Huridocs Standard Formats for Documenting Human Rights Violations

General presentation:

Bert Verstappen explained about the principles of human rights monitoring: to record specific time-limited acts/human rights violations as they occur, including involvement, intervention, etc. An event in this context was a combination of relations between person, act, role, etc. HURIDOCS was continuously trying to improve access to the documentation and information with a series of tools adapted to specific needs. The benefits of standard formats were facilitation of data analysis (e.g. patterns), record tracking, communication and exchange of information, and design of information gathering tools such as interview questionnaires.

EVSYS, the initial DOS-based programme, was not able to handle the increased complexity of recording and exchanging information. It was thus further developed into WinEvsys, a more user-friendly windows format.

The presentation was followed by a practical demonstration of the programme.

Comments and presentation of suggestions for additions to formats (medical aspects/client documentation)

Ion Iacos (IRCT) informed that a global system combining extensive recording of torture incidences and to be used in medical process day-to-day work was in the preparatory/feasibility stage at IRCT. Adding information about perpetrators was currently being discussed.

An important part of the system was intervention, i.e. the medical part with a lot of clinical data. This had raised the problems of data protection, and the issues of confidentiality and transmission of data would need to be addressed. Regional information gathering could take place as part of IRCT's regionalization project. It was necessary to develop a simple tool to ensure use by all. There was a wish to cover as many regions as possible, assessing needs through questionnaires, surveys, etc.

14. Closing comments from participants

It was briefly mentioned that EHRIS is a project undertaken by the University of Belfast in an attempt to try and make an Internet site that gives access to a distributed search engine, mainly in the legal field. A prototype was available on the Internet, at the address .

15. Date, place, secretariat and theme of next meeting

On behalf of the Harold and Selma Light Center for Human Rights Advocacy, Leonid Lvov invited the ECCHRD to hold its year 2001 meeting in St. Petersburg, in connection with local training. The generous offer was accepted with acclamation.

In the absence of other volunteers, IRCT accepted to continue as Secretariat for the next meeting. IRCT emphasised, however, that the 2001 meeting will be the final one for which they will be the secretariat, and that this is a definitive decision on their part. The IRCT Documentation Centre will, of course, lend advice and support in order to facilitate the transition and transfer of the secretariat for the 2002 meeting to its new host. The willingness of ECCHRD members to act as secretariat is a necessity for the continuation of the annual meetings, and all members are urged to seriously consider taking a turn at this task.

Suggested themes were: Copyright and XML follow-up.

Next year's agenda should allow more time for thematic network meetings at the beginning or at the end of the meeting, as well as ample time for introduction of Russian NGOs.

Sven-Erik Baun adjourned the meeting by thanking once more the local organiser, Montse Tafalla and IDHC, as well as the participants and chairperson James Lawson in particular.