

**Minutes of the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
of the  
European Co-ordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation  
(ECCHRD)  
20-21 April 2001, St.Petersburg, Russia**

*Rapporteurs: Ion Iacos, Kirsten Reimer, Sven-Erik Baun (IRCT)*

The 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Co-ordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation (ECCHRD) was organised by the Harold and Selma Light Center for Human Rights Advocacy (Light-Center), St. Petersburg in collaboration with Citizen's Watch, St. Petersburg, and with the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) in Copenhagen acting as Secretariat for the meeting. The meeting was held at the Hotel Rus', St. Petersburg.

The meeting was preceded, on April 18-19, by an Introductory Session for Russian-speaking participants on human rights documentation, by Bert Verstappen, HURIDOCS Secretariat, and a Training Session on the HURIDOCS Bibliographic Standard Formats and the WinISIS software by Ion Iacos and Sven-Erik Baun, IRCT Copenhagen.

Throughout the Introductory and Training Sessions and the ECCHRD meeting there was simultaneous English-Russian/Russian-English translation by Mr. Rostislav Drapkin and Mr. Vadim Namakonov.

On the evening of April 19 a reception for the participants was hosted by the local organisers.

This was the first ECCHRD meeting in the region of the Former Soviet Union, and the first meeting with general participation of representatives from the Newly Independent States and Russia, in particular the Northwestern part of Russia.

### **Friday, April 20<sup>th</sup>**

#### **1. Opening of the meeting**

On behalf of the Secretariat Sven-Erik Baun, IRCT, welcomed the participants, in particular the many new representatives from the Newly Independent States and Russia, and extended a special thank you to the local organisers, the Light-Center and Citizen's Watch, for generously hosting the meeting, and for arranging a very enjoyable reception the previous evening.

#### **2. Opening address by the local organisers**

Leonid Lvov of the Harold and Selma Light Center welcomed all the participants, and expressed his hope that this meeting, with the many new participants, could be taken as a sign that the HURIDOCS 'virus' is now spreading throughout Eastern Europe, and that it will continue to do so.

#### **3. Adoption of the agenda**

The proposed agenda was adopted unchanged.

#### **4. Election of the chairperson**

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

The Chair proposed that agenda item

#### **6. Minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting (Barcelona 2000)**

be dealt with at this point. The minutes were adopted unchanged.

#### **5. Presentation of participants and their organisations**

All the participants gave a short presentation of themselves and their organisations (see the list of participants in annex).

#### **7. Refworld 2000 : a presentation**

*Geneviève Bador, UNHCR's Centre for Documentation and Research*

Geneviève Bador presented the latest version of Refworld 2000 : Information on Refugees and Human Rights, a set of 4 CD-ROMs containing a number of databases of refugee information dating mostly from the year 2000, but with some 2001 information also included. Some of these databases are also available online through the UNHCR website (free of charge), but CD-ROM will continue to be an important distribution medium for Refworld, because of many UNHCR field offices' lack of internet access. The set of CD-ROMs is presently priced at \$150.00.

During the ensuing questions-and-answers session a number of questions and criticisms were put to GB concerning UNHCR policies and practices in Russia and the Newly Independent States; GB tried to answer these where possible, but emphasised that the Centre for Documentation and Research does not make UNHCR policy, and that such matters must be dealt with by the UNHCR field offices or Geneva headquarters.

GB distributed free copies of the Refworld 1999 CD-ROM, and of printed materials on the refugee situation in the Newly Independent States.

#### **8. Electronic publication in the human rights field : access, storage, distribution and copyright problems : exchange of experiences**

*Introduced by Sven-Erik Baun, IRCT*

Sven-Erik Baun started this session by relating the experiences of the IRCT Documentation Centre (DC) when considering the possibility of creating access through the IRCT Website and DC databases to electronic full-text files and picture materials, both stored locally and on the internet. Linking to internet-files is not problematic (except for the fact that they tend to move or disappear), but copyright rules relating to local storage are, the DC had found, very strict, and from a Danish perspective even the legality of entering the contents lists of monographs in a bibliographic database is in doubt. SEB asked for the participants' thoughts and experiences, and if investigating this issue might be something for which a ECCHR workgroup could be established?

From the following discussion it became apparent that within the human rights documentation community there is a general willingness to share information, in all formats, for non-commercial purposes. However, several organisations reported that, in dealing with outside agents such as

commercial publishers, freelance photographers etc., they had met with restrictions relating to copyright that would in effect prevent the redistribution of their publications from other websites.

Saskia Bal, Edward Halpin, Genevieve Bador, Andrea Khan, Bill Dishington and Sven-Erik Baun (who offered to coordinate the group) expressed interest in joining a task force on the issue of copyright. Various participants suggested that the task force might also deal with issues of data security (viruses; the risk of locally stored versions of documents being altered by mistake or with malicious intent).

## **9. Human rights documentation in Russia : issues and challenges (discussion)**

*Introduced by Leonid Lvov, the Harold and Selma Light Center for Human Rights Advocacy*

Leonid Lvov emphasised that this meeting represented the chance for human rights organisations in the Newly Independent States to enter, or re-enter, the European network, and make up for lost time. To support the spreading of knowledge on human rights documentation, his organisation is translating, adapting and developing materials in Russian, in collaboration with HURIDOCS. Mr. Lvov would see this meeting as an opportunity to obtain indications of how great the interest in these tools would be. Mr. Lvov emphasised the difficult conditions under which Eastern European NGOs operate, caused by unsupportive or even repressive authorities, underdeveloped civil societies (particularly in rural areas), problems in obtaining IT-equipment and well-functioning electronic connections through the Internet, etc. He also pointed out that Eastern European NGOs' ways of operating must often be quite different to the ones used in the West.

The following discussion and exchange of experiences raised a wide number of issues, but focused particularly on the problems of standardisation of methods and tools for documentation, especially of human rights violations. The HURIDOCS EvSys format (presented at the one-day training session preceding the meeting) was by some participants found to be more detailed than they would need, and difficult to work with for NGOs who have few resources to spare for recording information. In response to a question it was emphasised by Bert Verstappen that not all the fields in the EvSys are mandatory, and that the software gives considerable freedom for adaptation to local requirements. Some organisations, such as those of Sergey Shimovolos (Russia) and Natalya Ablova (Kyrgyzstan) had developed (or were in the process of developing) simpler systems for their own organisations. Many participants, however, expressed interest in using the HURIDOCS EvSys and bibliographic formats, and there was general agreement on the need for standards in order to facilitate exchange of information. It was clear from the many contributions heard that there is enormous interest in documentation issues, and that a great number of initiatives have been launched or are being planned. Many comments and viewpoints were put forward, among which can be mentioned:

- the lack of networking between NGOs inside countries and in the region is a problem
- the lack of financial resources is a severe problem for most organisations, with some regions being particularly hard hit by a bad economy
- the fact that much useful human rights information and many training materials are only available in English is a hindrance to development of human rights documentation; but some organisations are working on developing materials in local languages - HURIDOCS is assisting, but it is a problem that Russian and other East European languages are not priority languages on the WWW

- there is a need to collect information in order for NGOs to be able to publish corrections to inadequate government reports submitted to e.g. the UN Committee Against Torture
- in some countries certain national laws and government documents are not publicly available, though legislation requires them to be
- procedures to check the reliability of information provided by NGOs are needed; some organisations may, because of the competition for grants, be tempted to exaggerate the extent of human rights violations
- there is concern that human rights data is viewed by some organisations as a private 'commercial' commodity, to be used primarily for raising the organisations' own fundraising potential, and that for this reason circulation of information in open networks is diminishing

In response to some of the comments, James Lawson emphasised that networking and standardisation are desirable and possible, and are what HURIDOCS and the annual ECCHR meetings are all about. An important part of the HURIDOCS idea is to recognise the differences - technological as well as in knowledge and experience - between organisations, and to try to cooperate to overcome these in order to improve our separate and collective performance. Many of the ECCHR 'veterans' in the room had experienced difficulties similar to ones that the new members face, but HURIDOCS is there to share the burden and help find solutions to problems, he said.

Bert Verstappen, in response to the comments on the EvSys stressed that HURIDOCS is willing to work with individual partners to adapt the tools to local needs, and that this offer of course includes organisations in the Newly Independent States and Russia.

## **10. The new database of the CPT (the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture) - an introduction**

*Patrick Müller, Council of Europe, CPT Secretariat*

Patrick Müller gave a detailed introduction to the new databases of the CPT, containing all reports of the CPT, all public statements made by the CPT, and the "substantive" sections of the CPT's Annual General Reports.

**Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup>**

## **11. Developments within HURIDOCS**

*Bert Verstappen, HURIDOCS Central Office*

Bert Verstappen started by giving an overview of the structure and work of the HURIDOCS Secretariat and network ( a full description of this can be found on the HURIDOCS website, at [www.huridocs.org](http://www.huridocs.org) ).

BV then introduced new tools developed by HURIDOCS: INDEP and SERIAL are two databases which contain the two formats for In/Dependent Units and Serial Units of the Bibliographic Standard Formats. The Documentation Centre of the IRCT has programmed these two databases in the CDS/ISIS for Windows software. They are available from the HURIDOCS

Secretariat. The second edition of the Events Standard Formats was published in early April; the Formats, and the MICRO-thesauri to be used in conjunction with them, are now available for free on the website, or as printed publications from the Secretariat. The MICRO-thesauri include the revised HURIDOCS list of index terms.

HURIDOCS has cooperated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on a project to assist NGOs wanting to do human rights monitoring. Two publications had been developed: 'Thesaurus on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' (available on the AAAS website, at: <http://shr.aaas.org/ethesaurus> ), and 'Promoting and Defending Economic, Social and Cultural Rights : a Handbook' (available at <http://shr.aaas.org/escr/handbook/> ). These can also be ordered in print versions from the AAAS.

THE HURIDOCS Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Series, a series of short practical manuals, had been initiated with the publication of Vol. 1: What is documentation, and Vol.2 : What is monitoring. They are both available on the HURIDOCS website. In the discussion following BV's presentation, the need for translation into Russian of these tools was mentioned.

BV also mentioned a project to establish a cross-website search engine for human rights organisations. James Lawson had done successful tests of the engine, but the project needs funding to be developed further. BV gave an overview of recent and planned HURIDOCS courses worldwide. He also mentioned future plans for a conference on the International Criminal Court.

The Martin Ennals Award, for which HURIDOCS holds the secretariat, was in 2001 given to Peace Brigades International.

## **12. Using XML in the human rights area : a practical demonstration**

*James Lawson, Council of Europe*

At the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting in 2000, a working group on XML was established. James Lawson's presentation should be seen as a result of the work of this group.

JL started by lining out the history of databases and database standards on the Internet. The XML, or eXtensible Markup Language, is a tool to publish and facilitate data exchange on the www. Whereas HTML is a display-only technology for text and graphics, XML is about structuring the types of information, or intellectual content, that one wishes to make available through the www. They thus supplement each other, and are likely to co-exist in the future www-environment. JL explained the differences in detail, and gave a mention to various XML-sofwares and XML-editors that are available.

During the ensuing discussion JL suggested that a document type definition and structure for the human rights context should be worked out, in order to make exchange of www-documents easier. In the world of commercial publishing XML is already a standard, even though browsers do not yet support XML 100%.

## **13. Suggestion to create a 'List of HURIDOCS databases'**

*Harriet Nyback-Alanen, Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Academy, Finland*

This agenda item, in the agenda listed under item 15 'Other matters' was moved ahead of the 'thematic networks' sessions, on the suggestion of James Lawson. Besides proposing that a list of databases conforming to HURIDOCS standards should be created, Harriet Nyback-Alanen also suggested that the computer department at Åbo Academy could easily and cheaply create a facility for doing cross-database searches of all databases using the HURIDOCS Bibliographic Standard Formats. It was decided to refer this matter to the afternoon meeting of the task force on information technology.

#### **14. Meetings and subsequent reports to the plenary of the thematic networks and task forces**

James Lawson gave a brief introduction to the thematic networks and task forces. Most of these had not been able to spend much time on the work during the preceding year. It was decided to hold parallel sessions on three themes: torture, IT, and NGOs/IGOs. In addition, Frederiek Eggink would report to the plenary on the work of the Psychotrauma Documentation Network (PDN).

##### **14a. Report on the work of the Psychotrauma Documentation Network (PDN)**

*Frederiek Eggink, ICODO, the Netherlands*

This network, established as the outcome of a conference arranged by ICODO in 1999, consists of libraries and information units specialising in (or having a major interest in) the subject of psychotrauma. The PDN sees it as one of its major goals to facilitate search and retrieval of electronically available information on psychotrauma by creating an 'electronic clearinghouse' on the PDN homepage (<http://www.icodo.nl/pdn/pdn.htm>). FE mentioned the 15 present participating organisations, and emphasised that the network is open for organisations wishing to join this work.

##### **14b. Report from the session of the task force on torture**

*Leyla Schön, Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer (BZFO), Berlin, Germany*

The group discussed how to progress with the long-proposed (and long-delayed) work on a controlled list of index terms/thesaurus on torture. It was decided that organisations interested in this work, and who have a list of terms should send these to the IRCT Documentation Centre, where they would then be compiled and annotated and sent out to task force members for comments. The IRCT presented briefly its proposal for a project to create a 'Global Torture Victims Information System' for which fundraising was in progress.

##### **14c. Report from the session of the task force on NGOs/IGOs**

*Andrea Khan, Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), London, UK*

The task force had initially established definitions of the terms 'NGO' and 'IGO', and noted that both organisation types were represented in the task force. The group exchanged information on recent national elections, and discussed IGO and NGO interaction with the general public. The issue of linguistic diversity and access to information was raised; are the official languages of the UN and the Council of Europe sufficient? However, translation into additional languages is costly, and funds for professional translation will not necessarily be available.

##### **14d. Report from the session of the task force on information technology (IT)**

*Saskia Bal, Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, Utrecht*

The proposal from Harriet Nyback-Alanen to create a cross-database search facility for databases using the HURIDOCS formats was discussed; it was decided to set up a pilot project with the Institute for Human Rights, Finland (HN-A), the Danish Center for Human Rights (Agnetha Olesen), the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights (Betty Haugen), the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (Saskia Bal) and the IRCT, Denmark (Kirsten Reimer) as participants. It was suggested that the HURIDOCS Secretariat should compile a list of users of the Bibliographic Standard Formats and suggest to them to consider using the new Micro-thesauri for indexing. The task force recognised the need to start work on XML standardisation in the human rights field right away, in order not to 'miss the boat', and in order to prevent duplication of work caused by each organisation developing its own standards.

## **15. Other matters**

No other matters had been announced (HN-A's proposal having been moved ahead), or were raised.

## **16. The future of the ECCHR (including new secretariat)**

The future participation of the new members from the Newly Independent States and Russia was discussed. As funds in the region are scarce, it was suggested that HURIDOCS might assist with fundraising for participation in future ECCHR meetings, or that organisations that would have the ability to contribute financially do so in order to make sure that at least one representative from the region can attend.

In connection with the discussion of venue for the next and future meetings it was suggested by participants from the newly independent states that meetings should not necessarily be held in regions where NGOs already know each other well, but that regions where networking is in need of strengthening should be preferred. James Lawson explained that the practice in recent years has been to move the ECCHR meetings around, in order to avoid putting too heavy a burden on the NGOs of one region year after year, and also to give members a chance to get a first-hand impression of the existing conditions in the various regions.

Saskia Bal on behalf of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights generously offered to take over the ECCHR secretariat from the IRCT, for a period of 3 years. This was received with enthusiastic acclamation.

It was proposed to have the 2002 meeting, which will be the 25<sup>th</sup> ECCHR meeting and thus a jubilee for the network, in Geneva, the home of the HURIDOCS Secretariat. There was broad support for this idea, and Bert Verstappen on behalf of the Secretariat graciously accepted to take on the host duties. The time should be April 2002, the exact dates to be decided between the HURIDOCS Secretariat and the new ECCHR secretariat.

For the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting it was suggested to profit from the presence in Geneva of many organisations of relevance to the ECCHR's work, and arrange visits, and other interactions, with some of these in connection with the meeting.

Leonid Lvov, on behalf of the host organisations, gave a closing address to the meeting, thanking all the participants, and emphasising his hope for the future of the HURIDOCS work in the region, and for all relevant tools to be available in Russian before long.

Sven-Erik Baun, on behalf of the retiring secretariat, expressed his warm thanks for the many years of enjoyable collaboration with the ECCHR community. He extended his thanks to Bert Verstappen, James Lawson and all the participants, especially the new friends from the east, who he hoped would become permanent additions to the group. He thanked the two interpreters, for several days of untiring and very professional work in a, for them, previously unfamiliar field. Last but not least he, and all the participants, applauded Leonid Lvov, as representative of the local organisers, for the enormous effort put into fundraising for and arranging this very successful meeting.