



European
Coordination
Committee on
Human
Rights
Documentation

**Draft report of the 27th meeting of the
European Coordination Committee on Human Rights
Documentation
(ECCHRD)**

3-4 June 2004, Venice, Italy

Rapporteurs: Saskia Bal, Maaïke Hogenkamp (SIM)

The 27th meeting of the European Coordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation (ECCHRD) was organised by the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation, in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) in Utrecht, acting as Secretariat for the meeting. The meeting was held at the Monastery of San Nicoló, Lido, Venice.

Trainings

The meeting was preceded by a day of training on 2 June. Three training sessions were offered:

1. HURIDOCS tools, by Bert Verstappen (HURIDOCS)
2. Finding human rights information on the Internet, by Saskia Bal (SIM) and Patrick Müller (CPT)
3. Using XML in a human rights context: a working example, by James Lawson (Council of Europe)

Thursday 3 June 2004

1. Opening of the meeting

On behalf of the Secretariat Saskia Bal, from the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), welcomed the participants to the 27th ECCHRD meeting and thanked the local organiser, Stefania Saccarola, for arranging the meeting room and accommodation and organising the meeting. She regretted the fact that there

were not many participants from Central- and Eastern Europe, also due to visa problems, in spite of all the efforts made by Stefania.

2. Opening address

George Ulrich, Secretary General of the EIUC (European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation), welcomed the participants and gave a brief overview of the background and history of the European Master's Programme, an EU project in which eleven European universities are involved. He also mentioned the improvement of the EIUC Library in the last two years and the importance of supporting meetings like this.

3. Election of chairperson

James Lawson (Council of Europe) was elected chair. He welcomed the participants and expressed his appreciation for the good meeting place. He mentioned the fact that last year and this year both were organised by EU institutes, and that he was glad with the link between EU and human rights work. He also thanked the staff of EIUC and SIM for organising this meeting.

4. Adoption of the agenda

Items 3 (adoption of the agenda) and 4 (election of chairperson) were exchanged. A few more changes to the agenda were made: item 8, the presentation on XML by James Lawson was replaced by a presentation on the W3 Consortium and the Semantic Web, by Charles McCathieNevile (W3 Consortium). Two short items (10 and 11) were added: Wiebina Heesterman (University of Warwick) wanted to demonstrate a system of documenting the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and James Lawson was asked to give a short demonstration of the new HUDOC CD-ROM of the Council of Europe.

5. Presentation of participants and their organisations

All the participants gave a short presentation of themselves and their organisations.

6. Minutes of the 26th meeting

Jeff Howarth (Anti-Slavery International) missed his remark in the report on the fact that he had suggested that HURIDOCS should organise a training for trainers in Europe. After this correction the minutes were adopted.

7. Reporting on training

Bert Verstappen (HURIDOCS), Saskia Bal (SIM), Patrick Müller (CPT) and James Lawson (CoE) gave a brief overview of the trainings on the previous day:

Bert Verstappen gave an overview of the various HURIDOCS tools, like practical manuals, standard formats and micro-thesauri. He also demonstrated Win-Evsys, the software for documenting human rights violations. He also mentioned the new project HURISEARCH, a search engine for human rights websites. HURIDOCS also developed tools for monitoring economic, social and cultural rights.

Saskia Bal gave some tips for searching the Internet, and demonstrated some search engines, and the possibilities on how to use them. She showed also how to evaluate search engines and websites.

Patrick Müller presented two specific tools: 'shared bookmarks', which he uses within CPT, and 'Net2One', a news alert service.

James Lawson presented a project for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in which XML is used as a technique to get

different end products from one basic XML document. He also showed how RSS (Real Simple Syndication) works, an XML tool for distributing news.

The PowerPoint presentations will be made available on the website of the ECCHR in the week after the meeting.

(<http://www2.law.uu.nl/english/sim/library/ecchr/news.html>)

8. The W3 Consortium and the Semantic Web, by Charles McCathieNevile

Charles McCathieNevile (World Wide Web Consortium - W3 Consortium) explained the background and aims of the W3 Consortium and the meaning of the Semantic Web. His presentation will also be available on the ECCHR website.

(<http://www2.law.uu.nl/english/sim/library/ecchr/news.html>)

W3C is an international consortium with about 400 members, including companies, universities, governments, etc. It develops "standards" for the Web. The Semantic Web is a way of processing the Web with computers, using the Web as a database. RDF (Resource Description Framework) is a language for the Semantic Web, written in XML, for handling information. It can merge different "assertions" and encode hierarchies and relations. It is very applicable to bibliographic work (like bibliographic descriptions) e.g. thesauri.

9. Developments within HURIDOCS, by Bert Verstappen

Bert Verstappen gave a summary of the activities of HURIDOCS since the last ECCHR meeting. He mentioned that the HURIDOCS Continuation Committee (Board) and Secretariat had developed a Strategic and Action Plan for the period 2004 to 2006 which describes the objectives, strategy, working methods and planned activities of HURIDOCS. The plan was also based on the outcome of consultations with an external consultant and with other international NGOs.

James Lawson and Ion Iacos were resource persons for a training course in Georgia in June 2003. Further trainings took place in Haiti, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa, all with a focus on how to document cases of human rights violations. HURIDOCS is one of the partners in a project for strengthening the capacities of human rights organisations in Rwanda, Burundi and the DR Congo. In July, trainings will be held in Geneva, for representatives of indigenous peoples' organisations. Further trainings are planned among others in Albania (a regional course for Balkan countries), Uzbekistan, Nepal and Pakistan. For 2005, a training for trainers course is to be held in Latin America.

Two short, introductory manuals were published, 'What is monitoring' and 'What is documentation'. Two additional volumes, 'How to index' and 'How to set up a documentation centre' are almost ready. A new project on XML will be started in September. Several volunteers are working on translations of tools in French, Spanish and Russian. HURIDOCS also produces a CD-ROM called HURITOOLS.

10. Indexing the concluding observations of the CRC

Wiebina Heesterman (University of Warwick) demonstrated a way of indexing the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. She would like to have some feedback from the participants on the usefulness of the system. The index form shows in different colours with different meanings the seriousness of the situation with respect to children's rights in the member states reported on (session 31-35). The aim is to compare the situations in the various countries. It will be available on the Internet, but password protected, for people who are interested. (E-mail: w.heesterman@warwick.ac.uk).

11. HUDOC CD-ROM

James Lawson (CoE) demonstrated briefly the brand new HUDOC CD-ROM from the Council of Europe, containing the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. It provides more or less the same information as the HUDOC website, and will be of particular value to those without or with only limited access to the Internet. The CD-ROM comprises judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, resolutions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and decisions and reports of the former European Commission of Human Rights. It will cost 150 Euros for a yearly subscription of three issues. For further information and to find out how to place an order, see the Court's Internet site: <http://www.echr.coe.int/hudoccd>

12. Discussion and establishment of interest groups

Four subjects for interest groups were suggested:

- The future of HURIDOCS
- Torture documentation
- RSS
- Thesauri and indexing

Decided was to form the groups the next morning and do the separate meetings from 9.00-10.00 (HURIDOCS and Torture) and from 10.00-11.00 (RSS and Thesauri).

Friday 4 June 2004

13. Reporting of interest groups and discussions

Patrick Müller (Council of Europe: CPT) reported on the torture documentation group. The group held an exchange of views on current practice and possible developments in their respective documentation centres: Olga Sadovskaya (Nizhny Novgorod Committee Against Torture) gave a detailed description of their work. It was suggested that they might consider contacting the HRFT in Turkey for an exchange of practice on how to document torture cases. Sven-Erik Baun Christensen and Kirsten Reimer (IRCT) reported about their imminent structural changes (the documentation centre / library being moved from IRCT to RCT) and their plans for the future. Leyla Schön (BFZO) had recently a move of her organisation, including the library. She also reported on her experiences with CDS-ISIS. Finally, Patrick Müller reported about the CPT's experiences.

Ion Iacos reported on the HURIDOCS interest group. The action plan and the process behind it were discussed. HURIDOCS needs to improve its monitoring and evaluation procedures, and the visibility of its work. It is recommended that HURIDOCS secures financial support through partnerships with other like-minded organisations; therefore it should develop selection criteria for possible partners. Jo-Anne Bishop (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) suggested that ODIHR and HURIDOCS enter into a strategic partnership. Agnethe Olesen (member of the Continuation Committee) pointed out that HURIDOCS is looking for long-term (e.g. three years) partnership commitments, preferably with organisations involved in networks. A thorough needs assessment is required for that. Some new ways of funding were suggested, like a membership fee, but this idea was already rejected on the last General Assembly. Finally some suggestions for the future were made: more focus on bibliographic information and the possibility of a web interface for CDS-ISIS; a closer look at RSS and how this can be used by the HURIDOCS network (e.g. new entries in the HURILIST databases); improvement of the HURIDOCS website, e.g. by giving HURISEARCH (which can be used for access to human rights information) a more prominent position.

Saskia Bal reported on the RSS interest group. "Real Simple Syndication" is a new way of distributing news and is an example of how XML can be used. James Lawson demonstrated how to use RSS. By putting a simple script on your website you can make an RSS feed. News from e.g. Amnesty International is distributed through RSS software (RSS reader) to people who are interested. There are different kind of news feeds, a more advanced one and a simple one. Most RSS readers are free of charge. Dublin core tags can also be included.

Geneviève Bador and Leyla Schön reported on the thesauri interest group: The Refugee Thesaurus (published in English, French, Spanish and Russian) has been updated with new terms and entirely restructured. The Web edition of the English 3rd edition is now available on the Web:

<http://www.refugeethesaurus.org>. The update of the 4th English edition (with some 180 new terms) is planned for the end of the year. An international Task Force has been established with the following participating agencies: UNHCR, Refugee Studies Centre (Oxford, UK), Forced Migration Online (Oxford), Refugee Council Archive (University of East-London), etc. A discussion list has been created for facilitating communication between members. In autumn this year, a PDF English version of the Thesaurus will be launched which will be followed by the French and Spanish version. Translation of the Web menus and other on-line help tools in French and Spanish are also planned for the same period. The general human rights thesaurus group has not been active last year. Cathrin Larimian (EUMC) who could not join this years meeting was keen on developing a thesaurus on racism. The establishment of a thesaurus on torture is currently under discussion. Sharing experiences would be useful. Both thesauri would be complementary and it would be extremely useful to make them compatible. A meeting will be organized by IRCT on this project. Frederiek Eggink from ICODO shared her experience with the PILOTS Thesaurus created by Fred Lerner in the United States.

14. Human rights libraries: services for users (discussion)

A discussion took place on how RSS can be used by libraries. For example it could be used to announce new titles, maybe this could be done on the HURILIST website. The databases of Anne Sieberns of the German Institute for Human Rights can also become part of the HURILIST databases.

Several participants pointed out that they have online catalogues on their websites and some of them also lists of acquisitions and/or current contents of journals. This can be very useful for both intern and extern users. Also useful links (e.g. to newspapers or electronic journals) can be put on the website and basic texts e.g. on torture (the ICRT website) or other relevant subjects. Also special collections can be put on the website, e.g. the microfilm collection of Anti-Slavery International, mentioned by Jeff Howarth.

Conclusion is that the participants use especially the Internet for library services (online catalogues/databases, lists of acquisitions, current contents, useful links and documents on the websites), and that RSS can be a useful addition in the future.

15. Any other matters

There were no other matters to discuss.

16. Appointment of new ECCHR secretariat

Iris Reiss-Golumbeck and Fiona Bolt (Amnesty International, London) kindly offered to become the new ECCHR secretariat for the next meeting.

17. Date and place of the next meeting and closing

Jo-Anne Bishop (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) kindly offered to host the next meeting in Warsaw, probably in early spring next year.

After thanking the secretariat and the local organiser and emphasising the importance of meeting colleagues and keeping in contact, James Lawson closed the 27th ECCHR meeting. Saskia Bal thanked James for his input and for being again the chair of the meeting, which was very much appreciated.