SPECIAL ISSUE

"Human Rights Violations and Standard Formats:

Towards Compatibility in Recording and Transferring Information"

"Another factor of importance is that allegations tend to become more detailed and therefore lend themselves more easily to submission to Governments. In previous years no action could be taken on a considerable number of allegations as they did not contain sufficient information about the identity of the victim, the date on which the victim was arrested or tortured, the place where he was allegedly subjected to torture or the type of torture which was inflicted. The Special Rapporteur has learnt that steps were being taken by Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS) to bring into use a standardized format for allegations submitted by non-governmental organizations. The Special Rapporteur welcomes this development since it can contribute to a greater effectiveness of his and other mandates."

quoted from: "Question of the human rights of all persons subjected to any form of detention or imprisonment, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: report of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. P. Kooijmans, pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1989/33". Geneva: Commission on Human Rights: forty-sixth session, 1990. doc.no. E/CN.4/1990/17 (18 December 1989), p. 2.

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of "HURIDOCS News" is a special issue devoted to one of HURIDOCS' major activities over the last two years, namely the development of standard formats for recording human rights violations.

One of the purposes of the HURIDOCS network is to promote the protection of human rights through the wider dissemination of public information on human rights. It aims to facilitate the recording and flow of human rights information through the linking of the participants in the network.

A very important component in fulfilling this aim is to bring about the establishment of common or compatible information systems. A high degree of compatibility can only be achieved if the formats used in the recording and exchange of human rights information are coherent and standard throughout the network.

The HURIDOCS network in first instance developed forms and guidelines for recording information regarding documents on human rights and human rights organizations. The "HURIDOCS Standard Formats for the Recording and Exchange of Information on Human Rights", by Bjørn Stormorken, were published in 1985. The formats are based on international library standards, but have been adapted in order to meet the needs of human rights organizations engaging in "documentation for action". They are being used by a growing number of human rights and like-minded organizations all over the world.

A large number of human rights organizations in developing countries, which have concrete experience in responding to violations of human rights, requested HURIDOCS to also develop forms which would facilitate the recording and exchange of information on violations.

The use of **standard** formats will simplify the work of organizations concerned with human rights violations, since information can then be transferred to several international non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations for action including interventions.

The use of standard formats also brings advantages for the internal structure of organizations, as it allows the building up of a database on cases, and the generation of statistics and trends. It also assists in the development of primary information gathering techniques, since the formats can serve as reminders of the type of information needed for communication purposes.

HURIDOCS established a Task Force for "Standard Formats on Events", which consists mainly of representatives of non-governmental organizations in developing countries which have already for their own internal purposes developed formats for recording human rights violations, under the leadership of Ms. Judith Dueck.

The Task Force held its first meeting in November 1988 in Manila, where all members agreed that it was desirable and possible to develop such formats. The second meeting of the Task Force took place in July 1989 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, alongside the Conference "Human Rights Violations and Standard Formats: Towards Compatibility in Recording and Transferring Information". Various experts and representatives of intergovernmental organizations participated in this Conference, during which the development of the Standard Formats and the work of the Task Force were discussed within a broader framework.

This special issue of "HURIDOCS News" contains an introduction to the various issues involved in the recording and the communication of information on human rights violations, the report of the Conference and three of the papers presented at the Conference. This issue was edited by Kofi Kumado and Berth Verstappen, who also took care of the lay-out.

Human Rights Violations and Standard Formats: an Introduction

Judith Dueck, *Task Force leader*

Human rights organizations in many countries are now actively documenting human rights violations. The underlying assumption behind all of their nitty gritty work is that by increasing access to often suppressed or hidden information about inhumanity, those whose humanity is threatened or attacked can be empowered. Information is power. Accurate information of facts, of rights, of laws, of process, of situations allows individuals, groups and organizations to take action.

One of the purposes of the HURIDOCS network is to promote the protection of human rights through **the wider dissemination of public information on human rights.** It aims to facilitate the recording and flow of human rights information through the linking of participants in the network. A very important component in fulfilling this aim is to bring about the establishment of **common or compatible information systems.** A high degree of compatibility between information systems can only be achieved if the formats used in the recording and exchange of human rights information are coherent and standard throughout the network.

This issue of "HURIDOCS News" is a special issue devoted to one of HURIDOCS major activities over the last two years, namely the **development of standard formats for recording human rights violations.**

These standard formats1 are intended to assist human rights organizations to record and communicate information related to human rights violations. They were created in response to direct requests from human rights organizations and are based on existing forms, stated requirements, extensive discussion within the HURIDOCS Task Force and network as well as input from other experts in the field of human rights documentation. It is hoped that they will function as a general tool which will facilitate efficient recording and communication of information about many **types of violations.** A particular emphasis has been placed on those types of human rights violations which have become worldwide phenomena, and for which action abroad (by international non-governmental organizations and within the United Nations and regional systems) is possible. This concerns in particular torture, arrests and detention; deaths and killings; displacements and destruction of property; disappearances; as well as deportations, external exile and banishments. But the formats can also be used to record information concerning many other violations.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1985, HURIDOCS published the HURIDOCS Standard Formats for the Recording and Exchange of Information on Human Rights.2 This book contains forms and guidelines for recording information on **bibliographical** documents and human rights organizations. The formats are based on international library standards, but have been adapted to meet the needs of non-governmental human rights organizations engaging in "documentation for action". They are being used for documentation work by a growing number of human rights and like-minded organizations all over the world.

A large number of organizations in developing countries that have concrete experience in responding to violations of human rights, requested HURIDOCS to also develop forms to facilitate the recording and exchange of **event** information on human rights violations. At the Second General Assembly of HURIDOCS (Rome, April 1986), a Task Force leader was appointed. A draft paper prepared by her, based on actual formats used by human rights organizations in their documentation systems, was presented at a preliminary meeting organized by HURIDOCS during the 19th World Conference of the Society for International Development (New Delhi, March 1988).

A **HURIDOCS Task Force** was subsequently established, consisting mainly of representatives of non-governmental organizations in developing countries which have already for their own internal purposes developed formats for recording human rights violations. These organizations include the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines; the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe; CODEHUCA, Costa Rica and CELS, Argentina. The Task Force also includes users of human rights information, such as Amnesty International and SOS Torture. The Task Force leader is Judith Dueck, who gained experience during her work with Law in the Service of Man / Al Haq (Ramallah, West Bank) and is currently involved in human rights education in Canada.

The Task Force had its **first meeting** from 16 to 20 November 1988 in Manila, the Philippines . Both conceptual and technical matters relating to standard formats for events were discussed in depth. All participants were convinced that it is possible to develop standard formats for recording this type of information, and that there is need for a universal standard for exchanging non-confidential information.

The Task Force developed a system of using **several formats for different types of material** (Event Information, Victim Information, Alleged Perpetrator Information, Intervention Information, Additional Event Details) and combining them in different ways. This would allow organizations to combine the formats in a variety of ways to meet the particular documentation requirements of different situations.

On the basis of discussions during the meeting and contributions by members of the Task Force, the paper containing the draft formats was revised. Subsequently, it was distributed to a large number of human rights organizations collecting information on violations, who were requested to test the formats within their own environments. This process was intended to ensure that the formats would fulfil the requirements of involved organizations.

In July 1989, a **second Task Force meeting** was held in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Various members of the Task Force had tested the formats in their own environments, and their experiences were discussed and evaluated. Also, various details concerning the recording of specific types of information were dealt with.

At that time, an additional HURIDOCS Conference brought together approximately 25 participants from different intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. The meeting assessed the progress made by the Task Force. Strong support and encouragement was afforded the Task Force with direction to continue to test and refine the formats. The Conference also expressed its conviction that formats should be comprehensive and achieve a broad coverage of the variety of needs in the global human rights community.

The Task Force is now in the process of more extensive testing, refining and ultimately publishing standard formats. A complementary computer program is being

simultaneously developed although the formats are designed to be used in both manual and computerized systems. The formats are currently being translated in Spanish in preparation for a HURIDOCS training session to be held in Latin America in May. A wide variety of organizations and individuals have had input into the formats, and for this reason they carry an obvious integrity and validity.

II. THE ISSUES

Given the strong nature of the requests and arguments for standard formats, HURIDOCS accepted the challenge. But, where does one begin? What were some of the impediments to constructing the formats? What were some of the issues which immediately faced anyone attempting to standardize formats on which to record information about a variety of human rights violations? A great many issues have been discussed in the Task Force meetings, the Conference, informal dialogue and written correspondence. Only a selection of the various interesting and important issues are presented here. Many of the issues are not peculiar to the matter of standard formats but are highlighted as certain definitive, practical decisions have to be made concerning the design of formats.

First, **organizations emphasize different aspects of documentation on human rights**. The focus might be on
-gathering information;
-assisting victims;
-coding, recording, organizing, and analyzing information;
-using the information for research;
-actively working toward stopping violations within the local or international setting;
-communicating information about violations.

Secondly, **organizations have different orientations**, eg. legal, political, humanitarian etc. The focus could be on a particular group of people, on a particular country or

on the situation internationally. This can have an impact on the type of information required, the type of action to be taken and, obviously, the method of recording information.

Thirdly, **some organizations** such as the International Labour Organization; the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); the Organisation of African Unity; or the International Committee of the Red Cross **require particular information** before action is possible[3]. These requirements may include, for example, information about which local remedies have been tried or proof that the national laws or norms are in contradiction with the conventions ratified at international levels. However, as Eric Sottas[4] points out, these requirements vary. A format that includes all the possible questions becomes a very weighty document requiring significant amounts of personnel and time to complete. In addition, organizations may not have the expertise to report both on the simple facts of a situation as well as to identify, for example, relevant articles in international human rights law.

At the same time, the use of **standard** formats facilitates human rights documentation since **information transfer** to a variety of organizations can occur simultaneously. The transmission of information is faster and cheaper. Organizations are not bogged down with the paper work of filling out different forms to send to different organizations. Simplicity is essential, but the formats must be comprehensive enough to meet the many requirements adequately.

The **types of violations** vary. For example, different information is required about deportations than about torture. The formats must reflect the varying kinds of information needed. In addition, it may be difficult or perhaps impossible to make provisions for recording information about situations where systematic harassment does not directly involve specific well-defined human rights violations.

The types of victims vary. Violations might be against individuals (eg.- torture), families (eg.- house demolitions), communities (eg.- mass killings), minority groups (eg.- employment discrimination), arbitrary groupings of people (eg.- group arrests), organizations (eg.- limitations on freedom of assembly), or society as a whole (eg.- censorship). Sometimes the victims are unknown. In some cases, only a relatively simple list of victims may be needed; at other times, a detailed description of each victim is required.

The structure of the human rights situation varies. One event can involve many victims. One victim can experience many violations. One or many sources of information can contribute to the "event picture". One or many perpetrators can be involved. One event can have many "sub-events". Event Records, Victim Records and other records can be linked by using document numbers.

Some attributes of victims (eg. sex and age) may be easy to classify but are not necessarily the most relevant. Other attributes which may be relevant, especially to establish patterns of group violations, may vary from situation to situation. For example, in Northern Ireland, religion may be most relevant; in the Sudan, it may be tribe membership; in Guatemala or Sri Lanka, ethnicity; in South Africa, race. The format must allow the reporter to identify the variables which are most pertinent to the pattern of violations and the social divisions in each situation.

The manner in which data is recorded on a format poses particular problems. The issue of using codes, thesauri, controlled vocabulary, vocabulary lists or free text for entry of information· is complex. There are many difficulties in establishing any kind of controlled vocabulary. Even entering something so seemingly straightforward as a name can be problematic when one considers different cultural conventions, nicknames, difficulties in transliteration etc. These issues immedi-

ately jump to the fore in creating working standard formats. This whole issue is addressed in considerable depth by Frontalini5.

Formats must facilitate analysis. Frontalini states that controlled entries in standard formats are much preferred to free text entries, which may seem easier and more natural, exactly because controlled entries allow users to sort data, compare information and generate statistics. The formats must facilitate analysis of the situation of the moment, assessment over time and recognition of changing situations.

Sottas in the paper mentioned above also points to the possible confining nature of standard formats. He gives the example of the abuse of psychiatry for political ends in certain Eastern European countries and the process by which such abuse came to be included in the now accepted definition of torture. If a rigid standard format had been used, it might have inhibited this process. Forms of repression undergo constant changes and therefore formats need to be structured in a way that permits documentation of these changes.

Language varies. Defining concepts in a uniform way is difficult even in a single language. Building common definitions over several languages is far more difficult. Even if a common language is used, usage and knowledge varies strongly from place to place. Translation of formats can cause problems, as legal structures, conventions and procedures vary from country to country. Finding the equivalent terms in different languages and in different countries at times may be impossible. On the other hand, using translations as a device to test the reliability and eliminate cultural bias may, in fact, be quite useful.

The relationship between rights and violations and the issue of indexing of both rights and violations are very complex. This becomes an issue as soon as one attempts to find appropriate index

terms for an event. The relationship is a "many-to-many" association: i.e. one act can violate various rights and on the other hand one right can be violated in many ways. Although the vocabulary related to rights6 may seem technical and legal, building a controlled vocabulary for violations may not be possible since terminology is not standard. Because of the difficulty in developing a global human rights thesaurus, there has been a lack of progress in this area. One solution may be to pool various human rights vocabulary lists such as the Tesauro Centroamericano7, Human Rights Internet Subject Indexing Terms8, the HURIDOCS List of Index-terms, and others, to create a human rights vocabulary list rather than attempt to create a structured thesaurus approach.

Each organization has developed its own internal way of operating. Some, such as CODEHUCA (Central America), Al-Haq (West Bank), CELS (Argentina) and Task Force Detainees (Philippines) have already developed formats for their own purposes. Adopting international standard formats has to have a significant internal advantage before many organizations will be willing to adopt them. Some organizations may use the formats simply as an output format while others may use them for internal follow-up, administration and recording.

New organizations require record keeping systems as well as a communications system. Therefore the formats must include fields of practical interest to individual organizations, even if there is no "communication" value. One must also consider such practical matters as filing methods, etc., in designing formats. In other words, the implementation of standard formats can affect the organization to a major degree. Therefore, in designing them, one must think in terms of larger organizational needs rather than of the formats in isolation.

Organizations have attained different levels of sophistication in terms of internal organization of

information. Some use simple or complex manual methods, others have simple or complex computerized systems. The forms must be adaptable to varying levels of sophistication between organizations and they must allow for increasing sophistication within organizations. The use of standard formats immediately assumes that a training plan will be formulated.

The level of **expertise** varies between human rights organizations. Some employ highly trained lawyers and researchers, others rely on volunteers who have had no formal training in human rights or related subjects. The formats must be useable not only in a variety of organizations but also in a variety of societies with significant differences in development.

Organizations have a variety of **confidentiality requirements** based on possible repercussions for victims, sources, the organization itself or its strategies of operation. The records themselves will be of varying levels of confidentiality as will the fields within the records. The questions of who records what, who has access to what and who uses the information and for what, all center on the confidentiality issue and, in fact, are not strictly a standard formats issue9. Yet standard formats bring the issue to the fore, since confidentiality of information must be protected and this seemingly runs counter to many attempts at international standardization for communication purposes. Clearly there can be a conflict between the need for confidentiality and protection on the one hand, and the need for dissemination and sharing of information on the other.

Since organized information is more accessible than unorganized information, any discussion of standard formats must address the issue of **information security**. Some years ago, the Uruguyan police broke into one of the most important documentation centers in Latin America10. The archives of many movements linked to the

Catholic Church and lay student organisations over several decades contained lists of names, minutes of meetings, and other material stored in traditional form. It was therefore an enormous task to sift through all the material. Had the material been thoroughly organized on standard formats, it may have been much easier for the authorities to obtain what they were looking for. Organized information can be more vulnerable, and extra security precautions are necessary. On the other hand, reconstruction of a well- organized system is significantly easier. For example11, in 1979 CELS was not automated and did not yet have standard formats. On one occasion, the police took its files and returned them only seven or eight years later. Today, the police could take all papers, but CELS would still be able to reconstruct 90% of the files on the basis of its computerized records.

Technological advances must also be considered with regard to **data security**. This may relate to good office procedures in handling data, illicit access to data, and deliberate destruction of data12. While data security is not a new concept, nor one which applies strictly to standard formats, increased handling of organized data increases the need for data security.

The **reliability of information** is, of course, crucial when one is expecting action in response to a particular situation. Questions of who establishes the reliability level, what are reliability criteria, what is the credibility of the source, what is the probability that the source is reliable generated considerable discussion both at the Utrecht Conference and within the Task Force itself. Although this is not an issue exclusive to standard formats, it very quickly surfaces when one is dealing with standardization.

The **"truth" of an event** is relative, and varies depending on whether the source of information is emanating from police systems, legal systems, mass media, victims, wit-

nesses, relatives of the victim, etc. The task of human rights organizations is to put these "pictures of truth" into one cohesive report which is as objective as possible, reflecting the actual events. The reality of the situation can then be understood in terms of a set of rights involving international instruments, national legislation and other related material. The formats must allow for the recording of information from particular sources as well as for the recording and communicating of the composite picture created by the human rights organizations on behalf of the victim.

As stated at the beginning of this section, only some of the many issues confronted within the Task Force have been presented. Even considering only these topics, people might see ground for skepticism about the possibilities of developing a standard format, arguing that the variety and complexity of events involving human rights violations cannot be covered. However, the need for this type of format has been stated so strongly by non-governmental organizations that a serious effort is needed to be made to develop them.

The key appears to be **adaptibility**. Recognizing the many needs and requirements, and the fact that needs and requirements change is essential. Developing standard formats is an ongoing process, because the nature of events is ever changing. Therefore, the usefulness of the formats depends on the extent to which human rights organizations not only glean what is valuable from the information available to them, but also take the time to evaluate and improve information handling procedures. For that reason critical comments are not only welcomed, they are required. The results will be invaluable not only for newer small organizations, but also for expanding organizations and for those in whose quantity of information has reached a stage where sheer mass makes it difficult to retrieve exactly what is needed.

III. THE FORMATS

It should be stated quite clearly that these formats will not meet all documentation needs of all human rights organizations. They do not specifically address the issues of information gathering (methods, use of questionnaires etc.), internal organization of materials, methods of dissemination or techniques for analysis. The approach has been to produce a flexible, adaptable resource tool which has the components to meet the recording and communicating needs of many organizations, and can be tailored to meet specific needs. To attempt even the seemingly restricted task of formats for recording and communicating is highly complex. The value of the formats is, of course, directly related to careful gathering of data, good questioning techniques, accurate recording of information and subsequent thorough analysis.

Recognizing that the general purpose of human rights work is to bring an end to human rights violations, these standard formats are intended to provide one tool to assist with one part of that process. Specifically, the formats are designed to:
-provide a practical aid to organizations which require a tool for the recording or collating of event information for communication or internal purposes;
-ensure a coherent and compatible system for recording information;
-meet the requirements for rapid, effective and precise retrieval;
-provide basic information which can be used at a later stage for action and analysis.
-interface with both manual and computerized systems;
-reduce the amount of paperwork required by those who wish to communicate with a variety of different organizations;
-enhance networking and facilitate the exchange of information between systems through standardization.

The HURIDOCS Standard Formats provide an integrated and standardized but adaptable system for
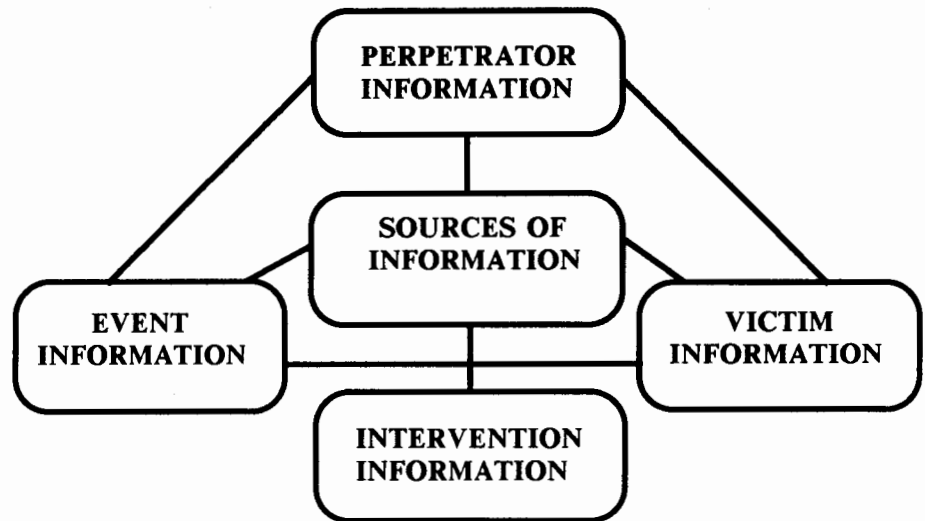

Figure 1. Relationships between Formats

the following areas of documentation of information related to human rights violations:
-Event Information
-Victim Information
-Source Information
-Alleged Perpetrator Information
-Intervention Information
-Additional Record Details for particular events or victims if this is needed.

By using a variety of formats which reflect the different types of information needed, one can combine them in a variety of ways to meet the particular documentation requirements of different situations. Figure 1 outlines how the individual formats relate to each other.

The basic concept is to define a number of fields in several formats within an overall structure which can be used in both computerized and manual systems. Since organizations can also add fields to suit their individual purposes, uniformity of language and field format is achieved with regard to **basic** information while leaving some flexibility for each organization to communicate or record **additional** information in fields which suit their own purposes.

The formats are flexible in that they can be combined in different ways. They are adaptable in that fields can be added to the Short Format, or longer formats can be used adjusting them for specific needs by adding or subtracting fields.

It is very important to **determine** at the outset **the purpose** for using the formats. This will vary from organization to organization. Examples:
-An organization may want a very detailed summary in English or Spanish of information in another language, i.e., the formats are used as a translation tool eliminating the need for translation of entire source documents.
-An organization which has a huge number of cases may wish to record only coded information, to be used for statistical analysis and examination of trends.
-An organization may be sending information to receiving agencies with particular information requirements which must be met before action can be taken, i.e., the organization adapts the form to meet particular information needs.

The formats can be used:
-to describe a single incident based on one source;
-to describe a larger event including a chronology of a number of smaller incidents;
-to summarize an event for internal or communication purposes using a number of sources;
-to interview a witness or victim (to be completed by the interviewer, not the interviewee);
-to update a record;
-to provide an overview based on documents in other languages.
-to assist in analysis and the compilating of statistical data.

9

The various **components** of the set of formats are listed below.

Short Format. The Short Format serves various purposes:
-to provide a starting point for the systematic recording of information.
-to summarize information for organizations who do not wish or need to complete the full set of formats.
-to record basic essential information for communication.

The Short Format consists mainly of fields from the long Event Information Format and the Victim Information Format. Organizations may wish to start with the Short Format and then tailor it specifically to their needs by adding fields from other formats.

Analytical Format. The Analytical Format is basically a subset of the Short Format. It provides basic coded information which may be particularly useful as a starting point in analyzing and providing statistics about a given situation. All fields except one are restricted to controlled entries.

Event Information Format. The Event Information Format records the main details of the event. An event may be a single isolated incident or a grouping of incidents. For example, the event information about an army raid on a refugee camp includes the date of the raid, the name of the camp, identification of the army unit etc. Incidents occurring during the raid (shootings, arrests, restrictions, etc.) could be recorded on separate Event Information Formats but filed or cross-referenced with the larger event. The Event Information Format provides references to other relevant documents held by the organization. The Event Record can be used in conjunction with other records. It can also be used alone as long as there is an indication of the type of source material.

Victim Information Format. This format is used to record detailed information about individual victims. If detailed information about individual victims is not required or known, the Event Information Format may be adequate. A number of Event Records can refer to the same Victim Record. A number of Victim Records can refer to the same Event Record.

Source Information Format. Since the first criterium for an information system is the validity of input, it is essential that reporters identify the indicators of reliability of sources. Often the source of information is highly confidential. If this is the case, the source's name etc. should not be entered into a computerized system or communicated between systems. Codes or direct comments on credibility or reliability might be provided in this case.

Alleged Perpetrator Information Format. This format contains information regarding alleged perpetrators of human rights violations. The term "alleged" is included since initially the form may be completed before it is "proved" that the "alleged" perpetrator is, in fact, the perpetrator.

Intervention Information Format. This format is designed to keep track of actions taken in response to the violation. It also records assistance provided to a victim from relevant sources. Intervention information may be recorded on this separate format or alternatively recorded directly in the Event Information Format or Victim Information Format.

Additional Record Details. Additional details may have to be provided for particular types of events or victims. This information may be required for internal purposes or for use by organizations to whom information is sent. Guidelines for a number of specific types of events have been included in the complete document. Guidelines for other types of events can be developed as individual organizations require them.

CONCLUSION

The HURIDOCS Task Force has made significant progress on a difficult and complex project. A number of human rights organizations have demonstrated expertise and skill in developing standard formats for their particular settings. Many of these organizations have generously shared their experience, time and resources. Others have indicated the need for formats, are testing the formats and are making suggestions for revision to ensure that a wide range of needs will be met. This report is an attempt to share both the project itself as well as the process with the broader human rights community. It is significant that many people who are concerned about life and death issues in their own countries have taken the time and effort to work on this project in a variety of ways. Human rights organizations all over the world have a stake in protecting the dignity of humanity, in general and specifically. The development of appropriate standard formats provides the human rights community with one more tool needed to build a solid foundation. With a solid foundation of knowledge and information, people and organizations can say with professional certainty and confidence "specific violations of human rights are occuring and they must stop." If information is indeed power, the effective use of standard formats is a source of strength against oppression.

This issue of "HURIDOCS News" contains:
-the report of the Conference, including recommendations and conclusions;
-the text of three papers delivered at the Conference;
-the list of participants.

The preliminary version of the Standard Formats has taken into account the various issues raised by the participants in the Conference.

The preliminary version is ready for testing by non-governmental organizations, and can be obtained from the HURIDOCS Secretariat.

NOTES

1. The term "format" refers to the empty form on which information can be recorded. The term "record" refers to a completed format. The term "standard format" as used in this paper refers to a set of fields in a prescribed order with prescribed scope notes. Standard does not imply that all organizations will use all formats and all fields for all situations. It does mean that this structure and listing of fields with prescribed scope notes can be used as an instrument in the process of developing global standardized methods in the area of human rights.

2. Bjørn Stormorken, *HURIDOCS Standard Formats for the Recording and Exchange of Information on Human Rights.* Dordrecht etc.: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers on behalf of HURIDOCS, 1985.

3. See for example the procedures outlined in *Practical Guide to the International Procedures Relative to Complaint and Appeals Against Acts of Torture, Disappearances and other Inhuman or Degrading Treatment* by Laurence Boisson de Chazournes et. al. Geneva: World Organisation Against Torture, 1988.

4. "The Dangers Posed by Standard Formats for the Transmission of Cases of Serious Human Rights Violations" presented by Eric Sottas at the Conference and published here as from page 26.

5. "Advantages in the use of Standard Formats" by Julio Daniel Frontalini presented at the Conference and published here as from page 20.

6. An example of a "rights" classification system is Bjørn Stormorken and Leo Zwaak, *Human Rights Terminology in International Law: a thesaurus.* Dordrecht etc.: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers; Council of Europe, 1988.

7. Gabriela Carbonetto and Ricardo Cifuentes, *Tesauro Centroamericano sobre Derechos Humanos*. San José: Programa de Defensa de la Autonomía y Solidaridad con las Universidades Centroamericanas; Confederación Universitaria Centroamericana – CSUCA, 1987. This thesaurus is bilingual Spanish – English.

8. Human Rights Internet, *Subject Indexing Terms.* in: *Master list* volume 12, Fall 1987. Cambridge: MA: Human Rights Internet, 1987. pp. 70-100.

9. This issue is addressed by Hubert Chaves in "Confidentiality of Information", a paper presented at the Conference.

10. This example is quoted in "The Dangers Posed by Standard Formats for the Transmission of Cases of Serious Human Rights Violations", by Eric Sottas.

11. This example was provided by Julio Frontalini in the discussions at the HURIDOCS Conference in July 1989.

12. "Data Security", a paper presented by Agneta Pallinder at the HURIDOCS Conference and published here as from page 30.
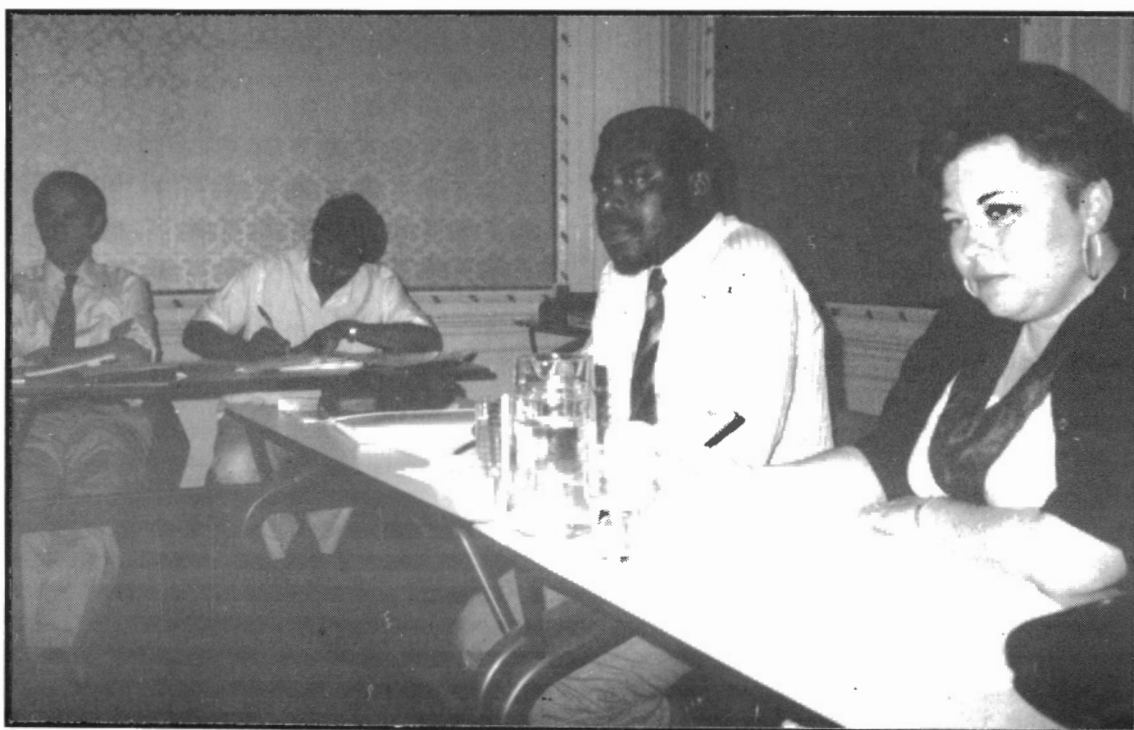
From left to right: Mark Neville, Kumar Rupesinghe, Kofi Kumado and Judith Dueck.

"Human Rights Violations and Standard Formats: Towards Compatibility in Recording and Transferring Information" Conference Report

Elizabeth Lapham and
Berth Verstappen

TUESDAY 4. JULY

Introduction

The Conference was opened on Tuesday 4. July. The participants and observers were welcomed by Dr. Manfred Nowak, Director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM). After introducing the observers, he gave background information regarding HURIDOCS efforts to standardize the recording and exchange of human rights information. He noted that the "HURIDOCS Standard Formats for Recording and Exchange of Information on Human Rights" was published in 1985. The book contains formats for recording bibliographical information and information on organizations. Especially in the last two years, the number of users of the bibliographical standard formats has greatly increased.

Dr. Nowak pointed out that standardization would create **greater possibilities for exchange of information** and would facilitate a better division of labour among human rights organizations. This was in line with the change in emphasis of human rights work from promotion and standard-setting to protection and implementation. The United Nations was sending special observers to various countries, and human rights researchers needed to be acquainted with patterns of human rights violations. Many human rights organizations, particularly in developing countries, collected and recorded information on human rights violations, using manual or computerized systems. The need to have **compatible systems** prompted the HURIDOCS Second General Assembly (Rome, 1986) to set up a Task Force on Standard Formats for the Recording of Human Rights Events.

Dr. Nowak then introduced the members of the **Task Force** and the others present, identifying in particular those who had made valuable contributions to the Task Force's work. He also thanked the SIM staff, and especially Berth Verstappen of the HURIDOCS Secretariat, for the work done in preparing the conference.

Dr. Kumar Rupesinghe, Chairperson of HURIDOCS, on behalf of HURIDOCS also welcomed the distinguished observers and participants. He said that the meeting constituted an exciting phase in the development of the HURIDOCS network, which was exploring a new area. He pointed out that during the last twenty years it had been shown that the human rights movement has been able to use "solidarity power" and "guilt power"; but now there was also the need for using **professional working methods**. We were all aware of the information explosion, and the uneven flow of information in North-South perspective. HURIDOCS was seeking to promote communication among non-governmental organizations on an equal basis, without creating a large centralized database. The HURIDOCS approach was based on **networking**, because the network realized that information was power. Information must be shared, and those who produce the information must also control it. What was required was coalition building and networking at different levels, involving United Nations organs, governments and non-governmental organizations.

Dr. Rupesinghe stressed that **training** of human rights documentalists was the key to information handling in a decentralized approach, and a main activity of HURIDOCS. For this reason, it co-sponsored a large training program in Manila, where 25 human rights information workers strengthened their knowl-

edge of human rights theory and also gained insight and skills in human rights information handling. Over the last three years, there have also been shorter courses to discuss networking and exchange of information within the human rights community and to learn basic skills. One such course was recently held in Harare, Zimbabwe. Future plans include additional national and regional courses, as well as large courses in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Dr. Rupesinghe said that HURIDOCS first developed bibliographical Standard Formats by building on the experience gained in library sciences. About 80.000 to 100.000 documents have been registered according to the HURIDOCS Standard Formats.

According to him, the Standard Formats for Recording and Communicating **Events** were being developed in particular for human rights organizations in the Third World, and should fulfil their needs for recording information. It was important to establish written records of human rights violations, as a basis for action and also because the historical memory of past human rights violations deserved to be preserved in writing. It was vital to capture the totality of events. The Task Force under the leadership of Ms. Judith Dueck had worked in a very dedicated way, and was supported by those who have actually worked with formats. The Standard Formats for Events would be discussed during the next few days. It was necessary to build a consensus and understanding among the international community that these Standard Formats were a useful tool. This would involve testing and training on how to use the Standard Formats for Events.

Dr. Rupesinghe concluded by drawing attention to another area of human rights work, namely prevention. He said that it would be necessary to develop early warning systems, and thereby prevent violations. He thanked the donors who had made this conference possible: the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, Canada, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) as co-organizer of the conference.

Ms. Judith Dueck, Task Force leader, began her introduction with a quotation from George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four", making the point that **information is power**; the assumption behind all the Task Force's work was that by increasing access to suppressed or hidden information about human rights violations, we would contribute to empowering those whose humanity was attacked. She mentioned some of the issues relating to the question of access to information, such as confidentiality, reliability etc., which would be covered later during the Conference.

Ms. Dueck then used transparencies to demonstrate the relationship between the occurrence of an event and the information arising from it. She also demonstrated sample configurations of the formats. She described some of the difficulties involved in **standardization of information**, such as the classification of types of violations, types of victims, language and terminology problems, and the differing needs and levels of sophistication of human rights organizations.

Referring to the draft Standard Formats for Events, Ms. Dueck explained what the Standard Formats were designed to do. She gave a general overview of the Formats and described some of the underlying concepts. She pointed out that much information might be unknown, but when comprehensive documentation was possible, the detail could be overwhelming. At first sight, the full set of formats appeared complicated. However,

the need for simplicity had been met by designing the Short Format which was contained in the draft formats. She disclosed that a second Short Format had been drafted by the Task Force during its working sessions.

Ms. Dueck thanked all organizations and individuals which had worked on the design, testing and translation of the formats. She ended her presentation by reading two poems which powerfully reminded the delegates of the suffering which made such work necessary.

After this, Mr. Ricardo Cifuentes provided a demonstration of recording information related to human rights violations according to the HURIDOCS standards in a **computerized environment**, and introduced his paper entitled "Notes on a Supporting Computer System".

WEDNESDAY 5. JULY
Chair: Ms. Judith Dueck

1. Advantages and Abuses of Using Standard Formats

a) Mr. Julio Daniel Frontalini introduced his paper "Advantages in the Use of Standard Formats", which was based on the experience accumulated since 1981 in the Documentation, Research and Publications Department of his organization, the **Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)** in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He pointed out that the main line in the paper was on reasons why recording and communication of information through **standard formats** was preferable to using free-text descriptions which at first sight seemed more natural and easier. He noted that free-text information contained subjective elements, and users would find it hard to understand the operative information. It was not suitable for performing systematic sorting, to compare information, or to generate statistics. In CELS, the decision to adopt standard formats was determined,

on the one hand, by the amount of information processed and, on the other, by the possibilities given by the standard formats for sorting and comparing information as well as for producing generalized interpretations of data. The paper included a description of the **files created at CELS** (press clippings, personal testimonies and documents files) and sample cases which illustrated the advantages of using standard formats, namely CELS's work on perpetrators and on extra-judicial executions. It asserted that standard formats were necessary for recording as well as communication of information related to human rights violations. He concluded: "Therefore, it is my belief that HURIDOCS work on the Standard Formats for Events deserved the highest attention and interest of all those who work in documentation handling in the field of human rights."

Mr. Frontalini at the end of his paper invited a discussion on the question whether standard formats could be used only for recording past events, or whether they could also be used for prevention of violations.

b) Mr. Eric Sottas (**World Organization Against Torture - OMCT/ SOS Torture**) next provided an introduction on "The Dangers Imposed by Standard Formats for the Transmission of Cases of Serious Human Rights Violations". He started by stating that he was in favour of the use of standard formats. He briefly described the work of his organization, which receives and quickly disseminates information on cases of human rights violations. The information received is not checked by OMCT/ SOS Torture, because the sending organizations were considered reliable. Its distribution list included over 600 organizations.

Mr. Sottas mentioned the following **disadvantages**:
-Most NGOs were not able to use Standard Formats because the quickest way for them to pass on information was by telephone, not in writing.

-United Nations organs required references to relevant articles in international human rights law; this could be problematic for many NGOs which lacked knowledge with regard to the various instruments and procedures.

-Different actors had different requirements for receiving information which could not be solved by one Standard Format.

-On basis of the experience of SOS Torture, there was reason to believe that there was a certain evolution in the processes of repression eg. there appeared to be less cases of torture, but more extrajudicial executions. The question was whether the formats would become so acceptable and rigid that they would not allow for recording these sorts of changes or patterns of evolution and change in human rights abuse practice.

-There were no provisions for recording situations of systematic harassment not directly involving specific, well-defined human rights violations, as those that often occur, for example, in Eastern Europe.

-Computerization of information on human rights violations might make it easier for violators to get access to sensitive information; this constituted a danger for sources.

-In general, the receivers of information should not put pressure on their sources by requiring them to fill out complicated forms.

General Discussion

The Chairperson opened the general discussion by posing the question whether the advantages of using Standard Formats outweighed the disadvantages.

In the discussion that followed it was pointed out that the work done by CELS illustrated clearly the advantages of standard formats for systematizing and using a large amount of information. Amnesty International had also been using the database formats developed for some researchers for seven years. There was no doubt that some types of Standard Formats were necessary for **recording** information, even if different formats might be required for different purposes. It would be a great advantage if HURIDOCS could develop a model Standard format. The major dichotomy lay in the use of Standard Formats for communication between different organizations: could we **exchange** information by using Standard formats? The Task Force had developed two types of Formats: a) a composite set of formats; b) a short format with mainly coded information, which for exchange purposes might need a number of accompanying documents.

It was said that Mr. Frontalini's paper raised **the question of whether structured information was preferable to free text**. The paper of Mr. Sottas was on the dangers of transmission of information, whether in standardized form or free text. To some extent, Mr. Frontalini's paper answered some of Mr. Sottas' questions. CELS managed to systematically collect data in a very repressive situation. In principle, inefficiency of the organization was not a good method of protecting its sources. Organizations which collected primary information knew the immediate dangers, and would not be easily pressurized by a receiving organization to undertake dangerous extra tasks.

Mr. Sottas pointed out that fast transfer of information was essential for efficient action. He felt that if we developed standard formats, the receivers would decide on the kind of information they want to be included and thereby exercise control.

Mr. Frontalini said that in 1979 CELS work was not automated and did not yet have Standard Formats. On one occasion, the police took its files and returned some of them only seven or eight years later. Today, the police could take all papers, but CELS would be able to reconstruct 90% of the files on the basis of its computerized records. There were two different levels of use of Standard Formats: the internal recording level for NGO's and the level of communication. The two levels should be developed as complementary but separate.

It was pointed out that some organizations start collecting information and then recognize the need for standardization. Non-governmental organizations in developing countries tried to make an impression on the situation, and then discover that the international community was interested and could provide help; standardized information made this easier. The problem was not one of Standard Formats but of the **lack of information**. Many NGO's had simple formats which did not fulfil the requirements of relevant international procedures for protection of human rights. The fact that information could be transferred by different media (telephone, electronic mail, letter) did not decrease the need for structured information.

2. Terminology and Controlled Vocabulary

Mr. Hans Thoolen, Chief of the **Centre for Documentation on Refugees of the UNHCR**, next introduced "Terminology and Controlled Vocabulary in the Field of Human Rights". He pointed out that this was a very complex subject, for which there was no easy solution available for a number of reasons. Anyone who had worked on or used a thesaurus would realize the difficulty in agreeing on terms; where there was agreement, the result might be so complex that it could not be used in a decentralized system. HURIDOCS had tried to address the problem and organized meetings with interesting discussions, but only limited progress had been made. The best efforts had been achieved in thesauri which deal with particular geographical areas (such as the Tesauro Centroamericana), or tackle particular issues (such as refugees). The most relevant recent publication in the field was "Human Rights Terminology in International Law: a Thesaurus", developed for the Council of Europe by Bjørn Stormorken and Leo Zwaak. This thesaurus was rather complex for application by NGOs in developing countries, and covered only rights and not the (more complex)

violations. A thesaurus covering all types of human rights violations would be too complex and unmanageable.

With regard to the Standard Formats for Events, the question which needed to be solved was whether as a compromise, the Standard Formats should be based on a combination of **controlled vocabulary** and free text, or whether controlled vocabulary should be used in all fields. Coded information may be numerical or alphanumerical, and agreement among the users of the codes was needed to enable exchange of information. There were a number of advantages to the system of coded information, but mistakes were more difficult to detect. Mr. Thoolen asked the Task Force what its position was with regard to the use of codes or free text.

It was pointed out that the Short Format contained only one free text field, whilst all other fields were coded. There was a difference between codes and controlled vocabulary; an organization such as Amnesty International more or less spontaneously developed a controlled vocabulary to control the internal information flow. The Standard Formats have been developed to answer basic questions about an event, and were coded, but the Task Force had added the "Remarks" field in recognition of the inability to cover all needs. In the more extensive formats, almost every field contained a kind of code and space for free text.

Another participant pointed out that the problems were not so great with regard to the official international languages, as much experience has been accumulated within the UN system. The problem lay often more with local languages.

It was also said that there was a contradiction between the concepts of codes and free text. Standard formats were developed because of the need for a controlled vocabulary, for example geographical terms. There were different levels of generalization, and therefore it was essential to develop a con-

trolled vocabulary to work efficiently with standard formats.

It was said that standard formats were urgently needed because the persons collecting information needed to get an idea of what information was necessary. On the other hand, the receiver had to be sure that what was transmitted had a specific meaning. It was also important that people were not kept out of the system because of a lack of understanding of the terminology.

3. Reliability of Information

Mr. Julio Daniel Frontalini presented his second paper on "Reliability of Information Sources". He pointed out that the question of the necessity to communicate the level of reliability had been raised by the Task Force. If we agreed, we must communicate information regarding reliability, and we must find ways and means on how to do it.

In the discussion, Mr. Jürgen Dedring (Office for Research and the Collection of Information, UN) said that the issue of reliability was crucial to action by the United Nations. Mr. Gianni Magazzeni (UN Centre for Human Rights) said that in the UN machinery certain procedures had to be followed, but that, for example, information sent on postcards would be taken into account if it illustrated a consistent pattern of human rights violations.

It was said that it was important that all information should be transmitted. Even if it was not considered reliable at the time it was sent, it could be acted upon after it had been checked, and would have alerted the receiver to the possibility of necessity for action. The questions were:
1) Should "Reliability" be a field?
2) Should this field be communicated?

The general feeling was that "Reliability" should be a separate field, but that it should not be communicated. The receivers of information had to assess its veracity on the basis of additional details provided

by other sources. It was very important to discuss common criteria for the evaluation of reliability as well as to allow dissemination to different users.

4. Data Security and Confidentiality of Information

a) Ms. Agneta Pallinder, then Head of the Information Services Department of **Amnesty International**, presented her paper on "Data Security". She said that it was a resource paper on ways in which security issues influenced information handling, rather than a discussion paper. The discussion points she outlined were:
1. "Data security" was not new, but simply a broader concept of information handling.
2. The various threats to data security.
3. The deliberate destruction or damage of data.
4. Illicit access to data.

In the general discussion which followed her presentation, the participants agreed that the paper was a valuable resource for those using data in offices.

b) Mr. Hubert Chaves (**Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America – CODEHUCA**) presented his paper "Confidentiality of information". He said that confidentiality was needed:
1. To protect the physical and moral integrity of sources.
2. To guarantee the right course of action, and to safeguard the evidence of those who hold it.

It was necessary to take very strong measures to safeguard both physical evidence as well as actual identity. Mr. Chaves made a number of recommendations, one of them being that the system to be used (for example the Short Formats) must be considered in relation to confidentiality, especially at the time of the transmission of information.

Mr. Chaves discussed the **dissemination of information in Central America**. He noted that sometimes

publicity and identification of witnesses could protect them, but this was not always the case. The risks involved in computerizing information should not be the overriding consideration in deciding whether or not to adopt the Standard Formats system. Long before the development of Standard Formats, there were searches and confiscation of files. One must accept the risks, and take the necessary precautions as suggested in Ms. Pallinder's paper. The ongoing process which could not be stopped was the increasing awareness among human rights NGOs of the necessity to record detailed information about events, for which standard formats were of great help. In conclusion, Mr. Chaves said he believed that the battle between information and disinformation was an integral part of the struggle for human rights.

There followed a discussion about the lifespan of paper records and electronic media, the advantages of encripting information, data security using electronic mail, and data protection legislation. The necessity for humanitarian organizations to be able to deny access to their data was discussed.

The participants felt that confidentiality of information was a question of **responsibility**; the more information, the greater the responsibility for the use of information and its protection. Local NGOs collecting sensitive information needed to make the basic decisions with regard to its dissemination in relation to confidentiality.

5. Training, Dissemination and Promotion

Dr. Kumar Rupesinghe provided an introduction on "Training, Dissemination and Promotion". As many organizations involved in training were present at the conference, he suggested holding a **brainstorming session**. He started by giving an overview of recent and future training activities of HURIDOCS, including courses in different Asian countries, a large training program in Manila and a

recent course in Harare; a training workshop for Latin American organizations was envisaged for the end of 1989. At the end of the HURIDOCS five-year program, 400-500 documentation workers would have been trained in human rights information handling. The course curricula have included: general theory and practice of human rights, information sciences, computer handling and communication skills. HURIDOCS recognized the need to build up a pool of trainers from the different regions who share the same language and culture through organizing training for trainers.

With regard to the Standard Formats for Events, Dr. Rupesinghe emphasized that the existing response system would be strengthened by the use of standard formats. At the same time, there was the need for further dissemination of information regarding procedures to be followed in contacting relevant international organizations. The formats needed to be promoted through distribution to relevant organizations as well as in training courses to be organized in co-operation with local counterparts. Unlike the bibliographical standard formats, which are also used by organizations and networks not concerned with human rights, the Standard Formats for Events were intended specifically for the human rights community.

Many human rights organizations would be interested in participating in training courses for both the bibliographical standard formats and the Standard Formats for Events. HURIDOCS could provide the conceptual basis and framework for training courses and workshops, but it preferred to hold these in cooperation with other organizations working at the national, regional and international levels.

With regard to the dissemination and promotion of the Standard Formats, this process had already started, but the various organizations represented could use their own journals to sell the idea of standard formats. The computer

program would be further developed, and Mr. Ricardo Cifuentes would work on the presentation of the Standard Formats for Events at the Latin-American workshop which would be held in March 1990 as well as during other training programs.

Mr. Mark Neville (Human Rights Documentation Centre, Council of Europe) said that the training programs on human rights information handling held at the Council of Europe have included the use of the bibliographical Standard Formats and the BIBSYS program. It might be possible to have a special training course on Standard Formats for Events.

There was a discussion on the possibility of expanding human rights training courses to include training on Standard Formats Events. Cooperation between NGOs and UN agencies with regard to training was considered feasible. Mr. Gianni Magazzeni (Centre for Human Rights, United Nations) said that there was great potential for further cooperation between the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and research institutions. The Centre for Human Rights had started a **public information campaign** on human rights, and was willing to publicize information on HURIDOCS activities in its periodical. It was also interested in cooperating in the further development of a thesaurus of human rights terminology. Mr. Magazzeni mentioned the possibility of HURIDOCS participating in meetings and training sessions related to information activities to be organized by the Centre.

Mr. Janusz Symonides (Head, Human Rights and Peace Division, Unesco) also saw possibilities for close cooperation between the Division and the HURIDOCS network, and indicated that he would seek to include more human rights and more information handling activities within the Division's program. Information on HURIDOCS activities such as the development of Standard Formats for Events could be included in the

Unesco periodical "Human Rights Teaching", and HURIDOCS would be invited to participate in meetings to be organized by Unesco in the area of information and documentation.

Mr. Janek Kuczkiewicz (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) said that his organization had a broad membership worldwide, but was not solely concerned with human rights; he was eager to be informed on ways of cooperating with HURIDOCS. Mr. Kuczkiewicz pointed out that the ICFTU has an extensive training program, but that it focused on ways and means of setting up trade unions. He recognized however the need to include "human rights" within these programs, and would be interested in co-operation with HURIDOCS in this. The ICFTU could publish and disseminate information about HURIDOCS, and its translation section might be able to assist HURIDOCS with selected translations.

With regard to the Standard Formats for Events, Mr. Kuczkiewicz said that testing and training may be problematic, as the formats would appear to be quite complex for many persons in the member organizations. Human rights training would have to start at the very basic level by introducing the concept of Standard Formats, and then decide on whether organizations would use the Short Formats or their own very short questionnaire for generating reliable information for statistics.

The participants felt that the Standard Formats for Events were not yet ready for publication in a final version. It was preferred that after the conference a **period of controlled testing** would start. A preliminary release of the Formats would be sent to a varied but selected group of users, who would try out the forms in their own environments. At the same time, a number of organizations interested in receiving information on human rights violations could start exchanging information using the Standard Formats for Events.

During training courses on human rights information handling to be organized by HURIDOCS and others in the coming years, considerable attention would have to be paid to the Standard Formats for Events. After a period of about one year, the time would be ripe to review the Formats on the basis of the various suggestions to be received from different users. The Task Force should take the responsibility for maintaining the compatibility of the Formats when changes were made.

It was pointed out that intergovernmental organizations received a very **large number of communications** regarding human rights violations. The UN Centre for Human Rights received approximately 200,000 communications during the first three months of 1989. Most of this information was provided by individuals, but various non-governmental organizations also contacted the United Nations to seek redress for violations. The interest of intergovernmental organizations in receiving this kind of information in a structured way was recognized.

THURSDAY 6. JULY
Chair: Mr. Kofi Kumado (member HURIDOCS Continuation Committee)

The Chair asked for a general discussion on the Standard Formats. He introduced a new participant, Dr. Alex Schmidt, Research Director of the PIOOM project, an interdisciplinary research project investigating root causes of human rights violations based at Leyden University, the Netherlands.

Ms. Judith Dueck explained the relationship between the draft formats for information related to events, victims, sources, perpetrators and interventions, and the so-called **Short Format**. This format was introduced by her in the draft formats of June 1989, and a new version had been elaborated by the Task Force during the Conference. She said that the Short Format contained the fields most suitable

for communication, and that it could be used independently of the other formats. Most organizations would probably opt for starting with the simpler Short Formats. According to their specific requirements, they could then add fields from other formats or start using the complete formats. Almost all fields in the Short Formats could be filled out with the help of codes, which facilitated the work of those recording information as well as that of the receivers of information. Additional information could be recorded in one free text field. The fields in the Short Formats matched those in the full set of Standard Formats, and therefore both types of forms were compatible.

There was a discussion on whether "nationality", "citizenship", "origins" and/or "place of residence" should be recorded when providing victim characteristics. The first objective was to get as much general information about the victim as possible. This was important also because there were specific international instruments which deal with specific groups, such as refugees and prisoners. There was also solidarity between members of the same profession, for example trade unionists or health professions.

The reason for having a "Victim Characteristics" field was to show why the person concerned had been victimized. Victim characteristics should be filled in if the information was relevant to the event. If more information on the victim was available, the Short Format could be accompanied by a Victim Information Format which would include details such as "nationality" and "sex".

It was said that it would be important to indicate whether the victims of violations were armed or not. This could be specified under Field 216 "Organizational Affiliation".

Some participants pointed out that the Short Format fulfilled a number of requirements for internal use, but did not contain sufficient information for external communication.

Two distinct points of view emerged; that of the sending agencies (NGOs) facing the problem of recording information, and that of the receiving agencies expected to take action. Some representatives of the latter type of organizations felt that the information provided was too sketchy, and therefore, perhaps we needed to narrow the gap between the more extensive formats and the Short Formats.

After some discussion, it was decided that two additional short formats should be developed by the Task Force:
1) a "Short Format" for recording and communication purposes, consisting mainly of fields from the long Event Information Format and the Victim Information Format.
2) an "Analytical Format" which would provide for possibilities to extract quantitative and statistical information regarding patterns of human rights violations.

Participants also pointed to the advantages of using the complete formats, especially when it came to the recording of information. Using the complete formats also would facilitate communication of specific information according to the interests of specific receivers.

It was suggested that the requirements of the different procedures available within the United Nations system should be included as an Appendix in the final publication of the Standard Formats for Events.

Implications and Effects of Using Standard Formats

Dr. Kumar Rupesinghe provided an introduction to the subject of "Implications and Effects of Using Standard Formats". He pointed out that four years after the publication of the bibliographical Standard Formats, there were at least 50 organizations which use these formats, and it could be estimated that a total of more than 100,000 records described according to the HURIDOCS Standard Formats had been entered into various data-bases. These figures would increase considerably in the years to come. A division of labour was emerging among the various organizations within the HURIDOCS network.

The use of Standard Formats for Events would lead to increasing professionalization among human rights organizations. It might be preferred to concentrate in the first instance on formats for specific types of human rights violations. In this regard, one could think, in particular, of detention, torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, as these types of events could be most easily described in a standard format. It was also important that considerable efforts have been made with regard to the definition and standard-setting of these rights, and there were now international mechanisms available for protection against these violations. In the next stage, formats would have to be developed for recording information on more complex types of violations, including violations of group rights.

He said that, on the other hand, account has to be taken of the fact that there was an uneven development in reporting on human rights violations in different regions and countries, depending on the local communications infrastructure and the presence of competent non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, there could be an overload of information regarding specific countries, since there were also limitations to the capability of the international community to respond.

It was very clear that the development of new communication systems and the emergence of various networks would have considerable consequences for the protection of human rights. There had already been some instances where quick dissemination of information to alert the international community prevented human rights violations. The use of standard formats would also contribute to the development of an early warning system, the need for which had been recognized by various United Nations agencies.

Mr. Alex Schmidt (PIOOM) pointed to the need among researchers to have more detailed information with regard to categories of perpetrators of human rights violations. Another participant added that the need to identify individual perpetrators and to discover who provided logistical support to them should be reflected upon in the finalization of the formats.

Other participants said that the development of the Standard Formats for different areas was a process which would take a number of years. At present, the focus was on the individual, the victim, because suffering was always individual, and remedies for individual suffering had to be individual. If succesful, the different tools could also be introduced in other areas.

A "Final Statement" containing conclusions and recommendations of the conference was adopted by the plenary session (see next page).

Concluding Session

In his closing remarks, Dr. Manfred Nowak (Director, SIM) said that the Conference had brought together the Task Force and other organizations, both non-governmental and inter-governmental, thereby expanding the network of organizations concerned with the Standard Formats for Events. The Conference had not achieved the aim set at the first Task Force meeting in Manila, namely the adoption of a final version of the Standard Formats. However, a general agreement had been reached by the broad range of organizations present on the need for standard formats for recording and communicating information regarding human rights violations. Concrete plans had been made with regard to ways of disseminating and promoting the use of the formats as well as for training programs intended to familiarize organizations with their use. During the Task Force meeting which preceded the conference, the draft formats had been considerably improved and refined, and a new Short Format had been developed.

The closing address to the conference was made by <u>Ms. Aída María Noval</u>, member of the HURIDOCS Continuation Committee. She pointed out that in the general and particular discussions which had been held over the past three days, the HURIDOCS perspective towards the development of a system for recording and exchanging information on human rights violations had been confirmed.

She said that the Standard Formats for Events could be further developed in **joint projects** between intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and also at the regional level. The organizations present had made a moral commitment to test and work on the formats as well as to disseminate information on them. She requested that the various organizations in the HURIDOCS network keep each other informed concerning further developments.

Ms. Noval thanked the various contributors to the meeting, and in particular the Task Force, which under the capable leadership of Ms. Judith Dueck had made great strides which would allow for a qualitative step forward. She expressed to the representatives of intergovernmental organizations and other experts who attended the Conference the gratitude and appreciation of HURIDOCS for their constructive participation and support. Finally, Ms. Noval sincerely thanked the Director and staff of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) for their assistance and hospitality.

Final Statement

1. The Conference on Standard Formats for the Recording of Human Rights Violations, held in Utrecht from 4 to 6 July 1989, was attended by over 25 participants from different intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
The aim of the Conference was to assess the progress made by the Task Force for Standard Formats on "Events" of the HURIDOCS network. This Task Force was established in 1986 by the Second General Assembly of HURIDOCS in Rome and had met previously in Manila in 1988.

2. The Conference expressed its greatest appreciation for the excellent work done by the Task Force in preparing these Draft Standard Formats.

3. The Conference expressed its conviction that the comprehensiveness of the Draft Standard Formats (as revised in June 1989) achieves a broad coverage of a variety of needs in the global human rights community.

4. The Conference recognized that the very comprehensiveness of these Draft Formats is an indication of the complexity involved in reporting on human rights violations. This may hinder the quick introduction of these formats in the working methods of some organizations.

5. Therefore, the Conference called upon the HURIDOCS Task Force to accelerate the process of testing the complete set of formats and continue developing one or more "short formats", which:

-could serve as a starting point for the systematic recording of information by organizations for which the full set of formats appears complicated;
-could serve as a 'summary sheet' to be used in a manual system as the top form of the collection of documents or records which make up a case;
-contain the basic essential information for communication, which would enable or improve upon action and intervention by non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations; and
-permit information to be recorded in a structure which allows for statistical analysis of human rights events.

6. In this context the Conference expressed its hope that HURIDOCS would promote the simultaneous development of a computerized version of these Formats, able to run on a microcomputer, if possible by the completion of the existing demonstration package.

7. The Conference also stressed the importance of making the standard formats, supporting documents and computerized versions available in several languages.

8. Finally, the participants thanked the staff of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), who had assisted the Conference in a competent and devoted manner.

Utrecht, 6 July 1989

Advantages of Using Standard Formats

Julio Daniel Frontalini

"In relation to the general organization of data, standard formats are reliable and have no substitute... The use of standard formats is advisable when the volume of information to be handled is large and/or when the data are required for communication or integration into larger data bases."

This paper is based upon the experience accumulated since 1981 in the Documentation, Research and Publications Department of the **Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)** in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

THE SITUATION IN ARGENTINA

In Argentina, the armed forces took over power in the 1976 coup d'etat, thus institutionalizing dictatorship with the alleged purpose of eliminating "terrorism". In fact, after all these years, it is possible to confirm that mass murder was perpetrated to eliminate opposition to the military power, particularly social organizations, through state terrorism. According to the judges who tried and convicted some members of the successive military "juntas", this criminal exercise of state sovereignty was carried out based upon a **"General Criminal Plan"**. This plan included everything from the explicit prohibition of political participation and trade union activities, to the detention and disappearance of 30,000 members of the opposition; from the designation of a "military commissary" in every governmental office, to the murder of thousands of people in alleged armed confrontations. All this bore great similarities with Nazism - for example, with the "Nacht und Nebel" decree - since thousands of prisoners disappeared in the "night and mist", buried in clandestine graves under an "NN" inscription, which has no logical relation to Spanish. This

General Criminal Plan implied a secret and parallel organization of the armed forces geared to the repression of their own compatriots, an organization that still exists.

DOCUMENTATION AT CELS

In 1979, what would later become CELS began to operate with the objective of fostering more effective actions against the dictatorships, through judicial demands. There was a **great need for reliable information**, both in the form of basic documentation and in the form of generalizations which could provide an overall account of what had happened. On certain issues, opinion was divided amongst human rights organizations. One such issue was the nature and characterization of the repression. The Relatives of Political Detainees and "Disappeared" and CELS upheld that responsibility rested on the State. Other organizations believed hat it lay with the para-police and para-military elements, without involving the State institutionally. The presentation of thousands of writs of habeas corpus became a crucial task to document the systematic pattern that could only have been implemented by the State apparatus as such.

The coordination and responsibility for the **creation of CELS' documentation centre** was undertaken by a person a background in anthropology. Her contributions to the overall view and to the idea of the systematization of information were very important, but not as important as her constant reminders about the dangers of losing sight of the singularity and importance of each case amongst the thousands handled. An analysis of the vast quantity of information being handled, of the expected increase in the number of records that would enter the system and the acknowledgement of the real difficulty of working directly with the

source documents, brought CELS to the conclusion that a referential classification system was necessary. It was also considered necessary to undertake research that enabled general conclusions, for example, to help in resolving the debate on the role of the State in the repression.

FREE TEXT OR STANDARD FORMATS?

The dilemma was then whether to go for free text, or particular standardized formats. But, what are the differences?

The most common way to access information is through **free text**. The habit and the ease with which we handle free text accounts for it being used as a recording and retrieval technique. An example of free text - which I personally would describe as "disorganized" - is a victim's personal account (testimony) where the operative information, defined as the minimum required in order to make a decision and act against a violation, may be ordered in various ways. The description of the crime committed may appear at the beginning or at the end of the text, or even be only implied in the narrative. Additionally, the identification of those involved in the event may be stated only as a name, a nickname or as a generic term, for example a "woman", a "man". A personal account usually presents information in a disorganized, ambiguous, incomplete and redundant way, because it is frequently conditioned by emotions, by the implicit assumptions made by the narrator, by political and cultural biases as well as by other factors that go beyond the operative information required. A free text abstract or a full-text account does not overcome these **limitations**, because abstracting necessarily reflects the selection criteria and interpretation of the information by the abstrac-

tor. These individual criteria result, amongst others, in multiple terms being used (synonyms, quasi-synonyms, etc.), professional bias, conceptual differences and other problems which make it more difficult for users to understand the operative information. This method also results in the inclusion of redundant information and inconsistencies. A shortcoming is that it is not suitable for performing systematic sorting to compare information or to generate statistics.

The other system - **standardized formats** - is also frequently used. We meet it when information is required from us in our daily activities, when we fill out forms for bank deposits, customs control, etc. This is a system with a **built-in order related to quantity, type and sequence of the information to be provided**, and it operates on the basis of fairly controlled answers. For these and other reasons, it is a fast and concise system.

In the CELS case, the information to be processed and communicated has four **basic requirements** which in fact are two dichotomies: pertinence - comprehensiveness and consistence - relevance. To have **comprehensiveness** (recall ratio) is to retrieve all records included in the subtotal required. However, access to the total must be achieved with the greatest possible **pertinence** (precision ratio): i.e. to reduce to the minimum the number of retrieved records that do not answer the query satisfactorily. If, for example, a search is made on all those records reporting on the activity of "vocero" (speaker), it is important that all those records about individuals with the surname "Vocero" (Speaker) are not retrieved.

Consistency in information is achieved only if every record includes data required for action. On the other hand, it is undesirable that a record includes data which are not **relevant** for the users. For example, in every bibliographic reference it is necessary to include the date of publication or, in its

absence, to establish a standard code to indicate that the date is unknown and make it clear that its exclusion is not a typing mistake. However, relevance of information also has to do with the function that the information serves. For example: for storage purposes, the size of a book will have a particular importance to the Library of Congress; however, this information is irrelevant for CELS.

To summarize: a system can be considered effective when it allows users to retrieve information that does not fall short of or exeed the requirements of the query, both in relation to the complete set of records as well as to the data within each individual record. Therefore, the question is: to what extent does the format fulfil these requirements? **In relation to the general organization of data, standard formats are reliable and have no substitute.** Pertinence and comprehensiveness (precision and recall) are highly deficient in free text, due to its intrinsic characteristics.

In relation to consistency and relevance, formats are also advantageous, with the exception that the format cannot be a substitute for the source document - nor is this intended. Whether a format provides consistency and relevance depends more on the correctness and accuracy of its design than on the standard formats option in itself. The first step towards designing a standard format is to determine the characteristics of the potential average user. **The objective is to develop a format that reduces to the minimum the need to resort to the source document.** This means a compromise relationship between redundancy for the average user, and inconsistency for the more demanding.

In CELS, the decision to adopt standard formats was determined, on the one hand, by the amount of information processed and, on the other, by the possibilities of sorting and comparing information as well as for producing generalized interpretations of data.

"NATURALNESS" VERSUS "SYSTEMATIZATION"

Our decision did meet several **criticisms**, among others the following:

-It is not possible to reduce the content of information to formats;
-A format is too "cold", detached and impersonal for human rights activities;
-Formats are not comprehensible for ordinary people;
-Formats are rigid.

Those advocating the use of formats maintained that, in absolute terms, there are similar limitations related to comprehensiveness in both systems. It was also believed that the "human aspect" depends on the people who carry out the work and on the fact that, very often, we process information on persons whom we know personally, and that these people would never become just members in a system but will always be fellow human beings. To what extent lay people can understand is really a matter to be considered in relation to the final product, and not related to the tool. Finally, the rigidity of a system using formats was considered a positive aspect, not a negative attribute.

There were thus two distinct views: those who preferred "naturalness", and those who advocated "systematization". It is worth asking whether one of the systems is substantially better than the other.

THE USE OF FORMATS AT CELS

Let us first look at what was actually done with the use of formats at CELS. Basically, **three files** were created:

-The Press clippings file contains information from 1975 to date. Material is selected and ordered according to relevance for human rights, with particular emphasis on violations of basic non-derogable human rights and on interventions related to the promotion of such rights. The information up to 1987

is organized in a manual file arranged by subject and source of information. After 1987, the file was automated, we are currently in the process of micro filming and entering the entire file into the automated system.

-The Personal testimony file contains nearly 500 personal accounts by people released from concentration camps. Some accounts were taken during the military dictatorship, both by international organizations such as CADHU and Amnesty International, or in Argentina by CELS. Information was processed with the objective of finding patterns and possible generalizations about the victims, the alleged perpetrators, methods of repression and concentration camps.

-The Documents file includes all documentation related to repression which does not fit into either of the two other files. The **diversity** of the type of material is great: it includes official documents, unpublished works by CELS or by other NGOs, confidential decrees and orders for repression, lists of victims produced by political exiles, etc. A very important part of the file is a collection of over 4000 photographs of detainees or disappeared (half of those recognized by the government). This collection will be edited by CELS so that we can continue our research work, since all other possibilities to do so in the government are closed and too many cases remain unanswered. The main purpose of the file is to provide complementary information to that contained in other files and for specific tasks.

In order to systematize the three files adequately, successive formats were developed, always based on a ranking of priorities. The first formats developed were those for the Press clippings and Personal testimony files.

RESULTS OF SYSTEMATIC DOCUMENTATION WORK

It was not long before this systematization bore fruits. In April 1983, under military rule, it was for the first time possible for CELS to report the **existence of 47 clandestine concentration camps** (later, a governmental commission further extended this number to over 300) and denounce that over 800 victims, each one identified by name, had been detained there. The accuracy and reliability of each and every piece of information reported was vital for the survival of the organization, since CELS's office had already been searched, its files confiscated and most of its directors and workers had suffered imprisonment. Any mistake would have meant loss of legitimacy and credibility, and with the media under the control of the military, any subsequent intervention on behalf of the victims would be seriously endangered.

All this information was the result of years of research work in the press, analysis of personal accounts and of processing and comparing figures and data, at the time, in manual formats. Research results were further developed, thus providing reliable information to prove a **systematic pattern of extra-judicial executions**, as opposed to what the government presented as armed confrontations. By comparing information on such "armed confrontations" retrieved from the Press clippings file, with information from personal accounts by victims detained in concentration camps, we could demonstrate in dozens of cases that "armed confrontations" never occurred and that the killings were systematic. This action proved highly effective in discrediting the often-used official argument that violations are due to individual excesses of the alleged perpetrators.

From these achievements onwards, **various other formats** were developed, from a mailing list right through to an analysis of the transcriptions of a tapped telephone (official transcripts) of a grandmother who eventually was able to

recover her grandchild, taken away from the mother when she was kidnapped, and later adopted by a perpetrator. Other developments included a format to compare and correct data concerning over 4000 photographs and a relational data base for the Press clippings file. This data base permitted the processing of over 100,000 records in a PC with a hard disk. This system is in the process of being converted into a general referential system for the entire office.

In order to show the advantages of using standard formats, two sample cases have been selected here: CELS's work on perpetrators, and on extra-judicial killings.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PERPETRATORS

The phrase "Peace is possible only through justice" ("La paz solo es posible con la justicia") sums up the underlying motives of our struggle to bring criminals to trial. Trial, conviction and sentence is the one combination that enables constitutional rule to prevail.

Just before the country returned to democratic rule, a **Non-governmental Technical Commission** was formed, with representatives from every organization that collected information on repression generally and on the alleged perpetrators in particular. CELS supplied most of the information and the methodology for its systematization. In the course of this joint undertaking, agreement was reached on the importance of adopting standard formats for recording information within each organization.

Standardization is essential in order to understand formats. If formats attempt to achieve maximum efficiency through speed and precision, thus fulfilling the requirement of reduction of information, then standardization enormously enhances the universe of possible users by allowing us to know precisely and unambiguously where to look for particular data within a format. In order to achieve comprehensiveness, it is necessary

to know that a particular date corresponds to the beginning of an event and not to the date when the report was produced, or that a Mr. XX is a relative of the victim and not the alleged perpetrator. And, the victim's identification document number (ID) is a vital piece of information which must not be missing from a legal demand presented to the government office or the judiciary, but the ID number must not be confused with the number of the judicial file. To summarize, then, the proper understanding of a format depends on each operative piece of data being in the right place or field, defined as one of the attributes of each record, so that the information is put in its proper context, making it intelligible.

All the systematization done with the use of standard formats resulted in the **presentation of the information at the National Congress.** This information demonstrated the magnitude of the killings, and constituted the basis for a petition for the formation of a parliamentary commission composed of representatives of both Chambers, with wide investigatory powers. The government opposed this petition, but it formed the governmental commission **CONADEP**, Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparicion de Personas; the results of CONADEP's work were disseminated in the book entitled Nunca mas (Never again). The previous work conducted by CELS constituted a source of great value to CONADEP, and it was also a very important input for the trial of members of the military "juntas" that were to come later. When this trial was over, there remained thousands more to be pursued, since CELS has enough reliable information on victims, alleged perpetrators and concentration camps.

At the end of 1986, because of pressure from the military and due to the governmental intention to put an end to the trials through bureaucratic red tape, the government put through Parliament the so-called "Ley de punto final". This law stipulated a **time limit of 60 days to present any further accusations.** After this time, any punitive action against those incriminated would cease, thus eliminating all possibilities to pursue investigations on the whereabouts and situation of the detainees and disappeared. The joint response to this by all human rights organizations was the presentation of a work which CELS had been developing for years, using standard formats, where perpetrators were identified in terms of time, place, roles and official posts. A **thorough analysis made possible the statement that the General Criminal Plan had assigned individual responsibilities.** One level of responsibility was for the direct perpetrators of kidnappings, torture and killings. A second level involved the indirect responsibilities of those civilian or military officers in charge of government property, through the use of governmental installations like concentration camps, while the third was based on the General Plan's own assertion of the "impossibility of delegating responsibility", by the chiefs of "security zones" (geographical areas organized hierarchically as in a state of military occupation since it subordinates civil servants to military rule).

This pinpointing of personal responsibility was possible because of the **use of formats for each perpetrator and the subsequent recording of relevant information** - taken from testimonies of victims in the case of direct responsibility and from newspaper clippings in the case of indirect responsibility. The names of army men appeared in press accounts of ceremonies and press conferences. It was found that the hierarchical formal and public functions ran parallel to the clandestine functions of the military. The magnitude of the task is illustrated by the number of legal demands presented, which first came to 692 perpetrators identified by name, and was later increased to over 1000. By the end of the 60-day deadline, there were 450 cases processed, which represented an important part of those cases reported in the publication 692 Responsables del Terrorismo de Estado (692 Responsible for State Terrorism), a publication widely used by lawyers all over the country for hundreds of judicial demands.

As a result of increasingly stronger military pressures and of an incorrect policy from the government, impunity continued to be extended by further legislation. One of these laws is based on the concept of "due obedience" (Ley de obediencia debida) of the subordinates to their chiefs; this principle constitutes an absurd argument, discarded as exculpatory even by Joseph Goebbels. To date only six perpetrators have been convicted and sentenced, and only about twenty are still undergoing trial. Pressures from the armed forces have increased.

The same formats used before now constitute the basis for producing **publications** aimed for social, political and local municipal organizations, so that they continue to exert pressure by rejecting the presence in their communities of those perpetrators who have benefitted by the laws of impunity. The reported information also states that the perpetrators' freedom is legal, but not legitimate. The publication entitled Culpables para la sociedad, libres por la ley (Guilty in the eyes of society, freed by law), used by NGOs all over the country, contains the names of those freed by the laws of impunity, as well as a brief account of their record as perpetrators. There are also photographs of about one hundred of them.

Obviously, handling thousands of records (one record being the sum total of the abstracted attributes of one individual) would not have been possible with free text. It would have been quite useless to have hundreds of personal accounts (testimonies) and nearly one hundred thousand press clippings without an adequate processing methodology that makes it unnecessary to review thousands of pages several times in order to compare names or dates but which also ensured us that we were reviewing all the information available.

Now, let us turn to two examples which illustrate our argument.

Once the **parallel formal and clandestine structures of the armed forces** had been reconstructed, every piece of information collected on the official position held by an army man allowed us to assess and assign the implicit responsibilities he carried in the parallel clandestine structure. By this process we were able to put together in one record information which would otherwise never have been related in the original sources: his real name and ranking and the nickname used in the concentration camps. The formats also permitted proper **identification of perpetrators**: when a victim reported of having seen a perpetrator known by nickname so-and-so in a concentration camp, or of having seen the chief of that concentration camp, at a particular point of time, this information constituted another attribute in one single record.

On the other hand, because of the heterogeneity and complexity of available information in testimonies, in newspaper reports of official communiques from the armed forces concerning their military and social activities, and in the information collected from judicial cases, processing of the data in one single free-text record would have been practically impossible, because verification of contradiction would have been exceedingly difficult.

PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES OF USING FORMATS

This example about perpetrators illustrates that using formats is absolutely necessary when precise and speedy references are required from a great amount of information, or when generalizations based upon similar attributes found in different files and source documents need to be drawn. There were also many **advantages at the recording stage**, due to the reduction in amount and therefore the speed with which the operative data could be entered. In many cases, this was further facilitated

by the coding. Standard formats were valuable in correction and verification, due to the possibility to compare and perform systematic sorting, particularly in the case where there were contradictory data. This would simply not have been possible in a free-text system.

An additional advantage was that, once the information had been processed in a format, **repetitive work** required for other purposes was **reduced to the minimum** - this is an absolute priority in a long-term strategy. In our case, formats enhanced dissemination of information for action by eliminating ambiguities, since even if all recorded documents on a perpetrator were sent to every organization, they would have had to process the information again following a format so as to eliminate mistakes and contradictions. However, NGOs had information for judicial action, and now have a quick reference guide to identify each and every perpetrator and thus ensure the identification of a perpetrator in relation to particular violations. It is also clear that **joint activities** would have been extremely difficult without standardization. To agree amongst NGOs on standard formats for recording was far from easy, but reliable processing in free text would have been impossible.

FREE TEXT VERSUS STANDARD FORMATS: AN EVALUATION

Now is the time to address the question posed earlier: is one system better than the other? No, neither system is in itself better than the other, in the same way that a hammer is no "better" than a screwdriver. Both tools are good, as long as they are used and applied to achieve the objectives pursued. For example, nobody would ever think of creating a format to cover a situation where two or three extra-judicial executions take place in a year. However, it would be justified to adopt a pre-existing format to integrate those two or three cases into a regional or worldwide data base. A situation where a format would be absolutely essential

would be where the participation of the judiciary in the repression needs to be demonstrated: in order to do this, it would be necessary to handle, verify, compare and sort a great number of records and of data within each record. Thus, **the use of standard formats is advisable when the volume of information to be handled is large and/or when the data are required for communication or integration into larger data bases.**

The example presented may give the impression that standard formats are useful only to process information about the past or to provide accurate data. This is far from being true.

EXTRA-JUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

In early 1986, CELS began to receive information from social workers about what amounted to rival executions of criminals for reasons that were essentially social. CELS's lawyers followed up a couple of cases with enough elements to demonstrate that extra-judicial executions were taking place. As a result, some judges began to state publicly their doubts about the legitimacy of police actions in a number of alleged armed confrontations. In colloquial language, this was known as "Policia de gatillo facil" ("Fast-trigger police").

However, these individual actions lacked sufficient legitimacy to allow us to question, now under a constitutional government, police activities and the political control that the government must keep over institutions that guard law and order. Informal conversations with the relatives of victims provided no conclusive proof either. Neither would one or two convictions and sentences in the domestic judicial system bear important influence on the "fast trigger police". Only by **demonstrating the existence of a systematic pattern** could we draw the attention and interest of the civil servants responsible for these actions and motivate them to consider a change in policy. As op-

posed to homicide for political motives, socially motivated homicides are publicized as a demonstration of efficiency.

CELS began to **collect information** from newspapers, based on the premise that, although in some cases the circumstances were false, we could rely on confirmed data such as the number of civilians dead, injured, detained and escaped as well as numbers of dead and injured policemen. The object of analysis was defined and delimited in time and space (police jurisdictions), following the criterion of including particular news so as to be able to map a universe of data for comparison. After a year, this research revealed without any doubt that extra-judicial executions were being implemented in at least two police jurisdictions. It was found that over 20% of the executions took place in one jurisdiction, which represents only 2% of the total of jurisdictions analyzed, all which are based in the Federal Capital. Furthermore, there were no witnesses, except for police officers, as there were no injured or detainees reported; nor were there any dead or injured among the police forces. There was other information that allowed us to warn civil authorities of this situation: the high number of deaths, their disparity in time, the significant relation between the high number of civilians dead and the small number of policemen dead, the relationship between on the one hand, five civilians dead for every one injured and, on the other, five injured policemen for every one dead. **Our arguments were not based on opinions, but were backed up by figures and analyzed data.** CELS did not make indiscriminate accusations, but it could point to the responsibilities of particular civil servants. As a consequence of our research work and interventions, the number of deaths was reduced.

The formats and operational criteria developed by CELS were adopted in 1988 by a research team directed by Dr. Raul Zaffaroni, in an undertaking sponsored by the **Inter-American Institute of Human Rights**. Their objective was to conduct the same investigation in two cities in each of five Latin American countries. CELS continues to conduct follow-up research on the situation with an "epidemiological" approach. This example clearly illustrates that there is no substitute for standardization and formats in the task of monitoring human rights violations.

CONCLUSION

Thus if we agree that, to demonstrate the existence of a human rights violation, we must often concentrate on establishing the systematic occurrence of a crime, then standard formats are the only solution. Additionally, if we seek to be understood in coordinating and communicating our information, standardization again has no substitute. Therefore, it is my belief that the HURIDOCS work on the Standard Formats for Events deserves the highest attention and interest of all those working in documentation handling in the field of human rights.

From left to right:: Judith Dueck, Kumar Rupesinghe and Aida María Noval

Dangers Posed by Standard Formats for the Transmission of Cases of Serious Human Rights Violations

Eric Sottas

"The standard formats, which are destined to help systematize the information and, failing this, to complement it, must not become hefty questionnaires which must be filled in at all costs in order for action to be taken. Otherwise, we run the risk of discouraging the small, unstructured NGOs which are nevertheless those most often directly confronted with the reality of human rights violations."

The dangers which systematization of the use of standard formats for the communication of information may present for an NGO network are directly linked to the advantages of such a system.

Standard formats, which are intended to facilitate, accelerate and universalize elements of information in order to allow action on an international level as well as on a local level, can, in certain circumstances, have the opposite effect, particularly when the information is exchanged between NGOs with little structure and international organizations.

Here we give some **examples of the dangers which the use of standard formats may represent.** We do not claim to be exhaustive but base our comments more on some of the difficulties which have arisen in the communications between the SOS-Torture secretariat and the NGO network with which we work.

The introduction of standard formats leads NGOs to be much more systematic in the description of a case, and to take into consideration all the elements necessary for effective action on a national as well as on an international level. Nevertheless, it implies a supplementary search for information which, as we shall see, is translated into a slowing down of the transmission.

THE OBSTACLES CREATED BY STANDARD FORMATS TO THE RAPID DIFFUSION OF INFORMATION

SOS-Torture essentially has the task of transmitting as rapidly as possible the information on cases of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, disappearances and summary executions which are brought to the attention of the international secretariat by an **NGO network**, selected on the basis of reliability and independence, to the organs concerned. In practice, we receive daily a large number of messages by telex, fax and (less often) by electronic mail or telephone. On receipt of a message, we rapidly ensure the identity of the author and the conformity of the message with our mandate, and then communicate it in four languages - French, English, Spanish and Japanese - to the relevant international bodies, the diplomatic missions accredited to the United Nations in Geneva, the large press agencies and a group of NGOs, with a view to exerting international pressure. All information received is therefore disseminated the same day in the form of an **urgent appeal** in the name of the group which alerted us.

The dissemination of this information has two aims. The first is to **inform the intergovernmental bodies** (Special Rapporteurs Against Torture and Against Extrajudicial Killings, Working Group on Disappearances, Human Rights Committee, Committee Against Torture, Special Rapporteurs on country situations, ILO Division of Trade Union Freedom or Norms Division, as the case may be - UNESCO, African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights or, failing these, the technical bodies most likely to be able to exert the necessary pressure, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Community, European Parliament etc.) in the shortest possible space of time. The second is to **generate a response by**

several hundred NGOs which we ask to put pressure both on the government of the country concerned and on the intergovernmental bodies concerned with the case. In turn, these NGOs intervene on the basis of the information which we transmit to them.

Ideally, it would therefore be useful to have all the pertinent information available immediately so that the bodies which we alert and on which we exert pressure through the campaign of NGO intervention, can act in the shortest possible space of time.

We notice, however, that **important differences in procedure** exist between the different implementation mechanisms of the conventions for the protection of human rights.

For certain procedures, for example, the body concerned asks that internal remedies must first be exhausted or, at the very least, that they be shown to be impracticable. For other prodedures, the determining factor is not the presentation of the facts themselves but proof that the national norms are in contradiction with the conventions ratified at the international level. Because the capacity for action is not the same for each body, for each case a whole series of extremely complex pieces of information may be needed.

Under such conditions, we find ourselves confronted with the difficulty of whether to ask the NGO supplying the information to give us all the elements necessary to approach the ten or so bodies which we intend to address. The result is **a very weighty questionnaire** which most local NGOs are not able to complete or which obliges them to undertake research which considerably slows down the sending of information. We have often found ourselves faced with this difficulty. Local NGOs have informed us either that they have delayed the transmission of information whilst

waiting to be able to complete the questionnaire submitted, or else that they have given up transmitting information since they were not able, for practical or security reasons, to complete the information in the way requested.

This poses a very basic problem. Standard formats are generally intended to allow action to be taken by the most effective means possible within the framework established under the various international mechanisms. Often, however, for political or legal reasons, these **mechanisms do not necessarily respond to conditions in reality.** Most of the time, for example, the NGO is not able to determine which is the international legal instrument which has been violated, or to answer such questions as in which capacity the alleged perpetrators of the violation acted, etc.

We have noticed that these questions have, in many cases, a **two-sided effect** on cases in which we intervened. The first, as has already been mentioned, is that it **slows down or even impedes the communication of serious violations** on which the NGO has only fragmented information. But it **also discourages the pressure campaigns undertaken by the other NGOs** which we ask to intervene.

We are currently inundated by letters from NGO members of our network telling that, following their intervention in support of a denunciation to an international or regional intergovernmental organization, they have received questionnaires, sometimes of several pages, to be filled in and returned to the organizations which they have alerted. As will be seen later on, this is due to the fact that the intergovernmental organizations themselves expect the NGOs to respond to information in such a format.

Under such conditions, it seems to me that there is a confusion of tasks. We expect an NGO which informs us of a serious violation (a summary execution, for example) to tell us the victim's name and first name, the place and date on which

the incident occurred, and a very brief description of what happened. In my opinion, these elements can be sent in any form – letter, telephone, telex etc. - to the intergovernmental bodies. If these bodies need supplementary information in order to act, it is up to them to find it, but in no case should they use this as an argument to justify a delay in taking action. The standard formats, which are destined to help systematize the information and, failing this, to complement it, must not become hefty questionnaires which must be filled in at all costs in order for action to be taken. Otherwise, we run the risk of discouraging the small, unstructured NGOs which are nevertheless those most often directly confronted with the reality of human rights violations.

STANDARD FORMATS AS AN OBSTACLE TO A TRUE UN-DERSTANDING OF THE REAL-ITY

Repression, as well as the fight for the respect of human rights, is in constant evolution. By way of example I recall the fact that, according to the statistics established by our organization, over the last three years we have recorded a **radical change in the means of repression used in many countries.** Thus, in 1986, 70% of the cases which we dealt with corresponded to the internationally recognized definition of torture, the remaining 30% was split between disappearances, summary executions or other serious violations. In 1988, disappearances and/or summary executions represented 64% of the cases. Torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and abuse of psychiatry for political purposes constituted only 36%.

Such an evolution has led our organization to undertake research on the activity of paramilitary groups and the spread of the phenomenon of impunity in certain countries. But this also poses certain problems with regard to standard formats devised according to our experience. For example, when a person is arrested and later suffers torture it is relatively easy to identify in

the denunciation if not those directly responsible, at least those formally responsible. If, for example, a detainee was arrested by the police or a particular army corps, it is these bodies which are responsible for what happened later. In the case of disappearances, however, it is much **more difficult to identify the supposed authors of the act in a denunciation.** We can always stress the passivity of the security organs as an indication of their involvement, but then the pieces of information which have to be supplied are much more substantial. All the steps which have been taken to try to find the person and the reasons why it is alleged that the police have not correctly fulfilled their tasks need to be explained.

In such a case the standard formats intended for cases of torture can, without too many problems, be applied to cases of disappearances. On the other hand, when the repression reaches a higher level of sophistication, we have noticed that these formats prove themselves to be a straightjacket for the transmission of information.

We have noticed this in particular for the **Eastern European countries.** The mechanisms established by certain totalitarian regimes are intended to hinder the dissident or the opponent without ever formally violating the international instruments for the protection of human rights. The **resort to psychiatry,** which is now considered to be a form of torture, has for a long time posed a problem of definition. The victim is not subjected to ill-treatment, but to medical care. The perpetrators are doctors acting within the framework of their profession, and the places where the violations are committed are hospitals. The fundamental problem is to demonstrate that the medical treatment is deliberately implemented to break down a dissident. This practically presupposes a new form of standard format, making reference to the person's medical situation and the discrepancy between the medical treatment and the person's actual state of health.

Thanks to year-long campaigns, the abuse of psychiatry for political ends has become recognized as a form of torture. The Soviet Union has not been able to oppose Kooijmans' report sanctioning this recognition on the international level.

But before a format for such violations is established, the organizations transmitting the information and those receiving it will find themselves confronted with a serious problem of definition: **under what heading should a case of psychiatric abuse be placed?**

Some will opt for torture, others for another type of violation. With regard to the perpetrator of the violation, some will mention the doctor, which, for the organization receiving the information, will immediately raise the question of whether the doctor can be considered as an agent of the State in the sense of Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture. Others will hold the police or political authorities directly responsible, which will again pose communication problems: how is the police implicated in an affair which seems to indicate medical responsibility only?

Now that the mechanisms established by the KGB leaders for submitting dissidents to abusive psychiatric treatment are known, it is clear to all that such cases must be classified as torture. Once the problem of definition has been solved, we can, without too much difficulty, find a common approach which can be translated into the framework of the standard format for torture.

However, **repressive States are continually updating their methods.** Currently, SOS-Torture receives many cases, notably from Eastern European countries, showing that the repressive forces have established a particularly elaborate pattern of **systematic harassment.** For example, a dissident may be dismissed from his or her work, officially for professional reasons but in reality for political motives. These highly qualified individuals find no opportunity to work, not from lack of posts in the region where they live, but because it has been planned that they will be obliged to go several hundred kilometres from their homes and forced to undertake work for which they are completely ill-qualified. According to the system, the person has to "freely" accept this new job, since legislation in most socialist countries contains articles condemning "social parasitism", in other words not working. An engineer can then find him or herself obliged to accept work far away from the place where his or her family lives. Since the State also controls housing, it can deliberately prevent the person from finding sufficient housing for the rest of the family to be able to join them whilst at the same time creating similar difficulties for the spouse at his/her work, also forcing the husband or wife to have to go far away from their previous place of residence, often in another direction. On top of this, other measures are added: for example, "spontaneous" demonstrations by neighbours asking for their departure from the place where they live; or "spontaneous" protests by colleagues at work, criticizing their performance or a poor working spirit. Simultaneously, the children find themselves subject to harassment at school by the heads of the establishment, teachers, or even other pupils, which can lead to them being classed as "maladjusted". People submitted to such a campaign end up by rebelling, which in turn justifies the intervention of a psychiatrist to care for their "maladjustment".

When we try to use standard formats for such cases, we find ourselves confronted with the **difficulty of the definition of the violation committed.** Some victims of these practices place them within the category of torture, whilst others talk of a discriminatory attitude towards political opponents, even if the person is finally imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience. The problem is not one of an academic definition, but of determining the means of action to be established as a function of the violation committed.

In order that standard formats can take this reality into account, these factors must be taken into consideration by their authors. If a standard format has been conceived of to record a traditional case, usually taking place over a relatively short period of time and referring to an extremely serious violation against a particular person, it would be difficult to incorporate a series of planned measures taking place over several years, using all sectors of the State apparatus and apparently stemming from a mild attack on various rights - right to work, right to housing etc. - but devised in such a way as to destroy the person targeted.

The standard formats therefore risk being inadequate to take into account the most modern strategies of repression.

STANDARD FORMATS AND SECURITY

Since Agneta Pallinder has written a paper on this question, I shall limit myself here to two remarks. The first concerns the fact that **all information which is systematized and accumulated in one place is much more vulnerable than information which is not organized or systematized.**

On the other hand, **information which has already systematized and put into a computer can be pirated in a very short space of time.**

It is often claimed that the information is, in any case, largely public and that the security forces are generally aware of the content of the computers' memories. Such reasoning does not seem to take into account the fact that information known by all, but fragmented and dispersed between various sources, normally cannot ber used. From the moment at which the information is systematized, assembled and analyzed, it allows not only that the case and victims mentioned can be discovered, but also for that the authors of this information can be quickly identified. This problem seems to be

particularly crucial for the organizations sending information.

There is another indirect element which must be taken into consideration. As I mentioned above, several intergovernmental bodies send questionnaires to local NGOs which can cause them to take **measures which are dangerous for the security** of their members. I will give two examples here: questions related to the identification of the perpetrators of violations, and questions related to the exhaustion of internal remedies.

As explained above, the formats are often conceived of as a function of a particular type of offence (torture, for example). Since torture is, according to the definition in the international convention, a violation committed by an agent of the authorities or with their consent, it is logical that the format should contain a certain number of **questions concerning the perpetrators of the violation.** Nevertheless, when torture is committed by non-identified paramilitary-type groups, it becomes very difficult to respond to these questions. The authors of the communication find themselves confronted by the problem of having either to carry out the enquiry themselves, or else

to pin the responsibility on a particular sector of the police or army which it suspects to be behind the paramilitary groups without being able to offer the necessary proof. Under such circumstances, they run the risk of being accused of propaganda, libel and other offences, or even of being threatened should they try to substantiate their evidence.

When the format takes into account a question on the exhaustion of internal remedies it can lead people, especially if they know that it is a <u>sine qua non</u> for the case to be considered, to present a formal declaration to the authorities asking them to fulfil the conditions demanded. It may then happen, and we have several examples of this type, that those who make the denunciation - relatives or friends of the victim - are in turn subjected to serious sanctions.

These two last points cannot be directly attributed to the formats themselves, since the conditions are created by the rules of procedure of the instruments used. However, it seems that by including such questions in the formats, we are in fact increasing in the confusion which I have described above. In other words, of over-extending the

number of pieces of information required in order to carry out urgent action, which may lead to the author of the communication being denounced. The formats must, on this point, contain **two types of questions:** those which the author of the denunciation should be able to supply, which should remain very limited; and and other pieces of information relevant to the action which should, in my opinion, be collected by other bodies which run less risks than the author of the communication.

CONCLUSION

The standard formats are precious instruments for facilitating communication, but they present various dangers, one of which has been relatively little studied to date. This concerns a tendency to attach more importance to the accuracy, even the sophistication of the information as a condition for the effectiveness of the action, rather than on the creation of a political will to act. NGOs, particularly those in the field, are organizations which work under difficult conditions and cannot transform themselves into a research office to answer all the needs stemming from the legalism of the international intergovernmental organizations.
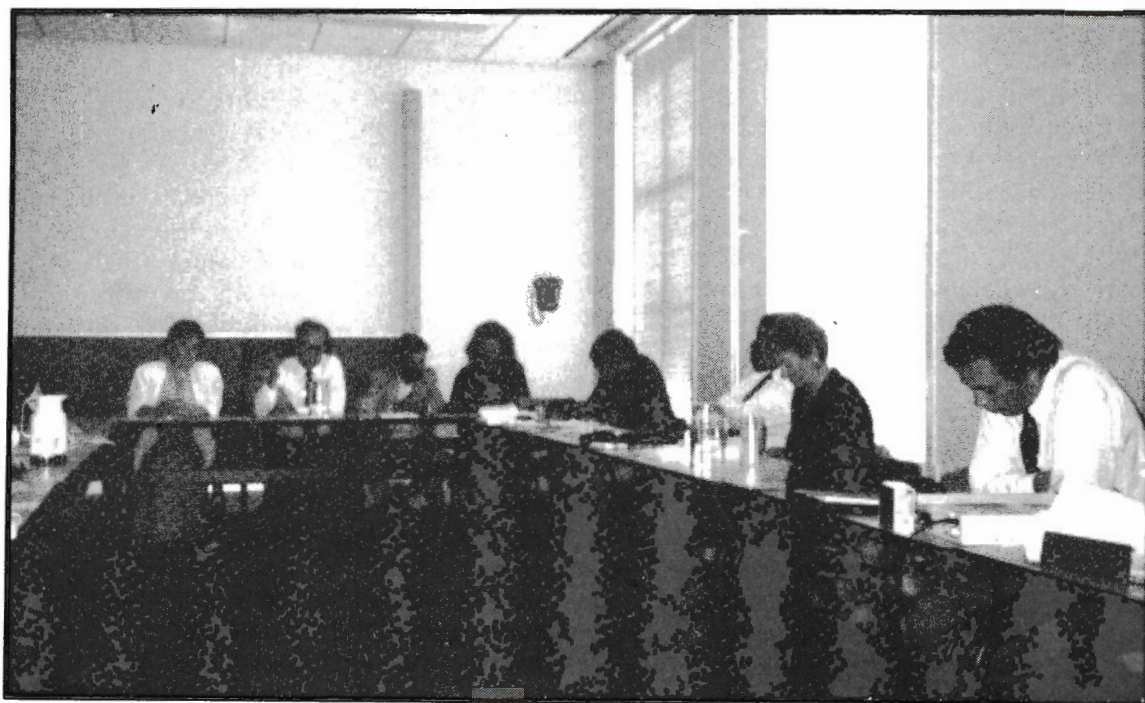
Eric Sottas introducing his Conference paper.

Data Security

Agneta Pallinder

"A good, clearly understood and systematically enforced system of responsible handling of information is a necessary prerequisite for data security in any context.
The adequate training and not least motivation of the data users and data creators is at least as important as access to sophisticated software incorporating security features such as passwords and encryption."

INTRODUCTION: RESPONSIBLE HANDLING OF INFORMATION

Although the phrase data security makes my topic sound as if it only belongs in the computer age the concern is as old as the existence of written documents. What we are talking about is the **need to make sure that information that has been acquired and systematized does not get lost and does not get divulged to somebody who should not know it.** Perhaps the concern goes even further back, to preliterate times, when the only archives consisted of living memories of tribal elders, oral historians, experts in law, medicine, agriculture etc.

Whether the medium holding the information is the trained mind of the griot or herbalist, the ink and paper of written, typed or printed documents or the magnetic digital codes on computer disk or tape, the basic concerns of responsible handling of information are the same.

We want to preserve what should be preserved for the length of time it should be preserved. We want to make sure that the information is available to those who should have it in a form they can access. We want to ensure that the information is not divulged to those from whom it should be kept.

The beauty of this approach to "data security" is that it removes from it the aura of space age mystery that too often surrounds anything to do with computers, and puts it right where all of us have plenty of competence - in the plain and everyday area of common sense.

Having said that I do not for a moment want to suggest that data security in the computer age does not present its own special problems. Otherwise there would hardly be any point at all in devoting a paper at this conference to it. But underlying everything that follows in the course of this paper is the assumption that what is being treated is simply the **variation on the basic concept of responsible handling of information that is appropriate to computerized creation, storing and communication of information.**

The paper will deal first with **security against accidents,** and only secondly with **security against maliciousness.** This is deliberate. I believe that because of the peculiar ease with which computer records can be both created and deleted, and because of the fact that so far most of us who use computers in information handling have been trained in ink and paper based information handling, data security is mote at risk of accidental damage than of malicious damage even in the vulnerable context of human rights documentation.

SECURITY AGAINST ACCIDENTAL LOSS OF OR DAMAGE TO DATA

a) Training of users and file management

From what I have already said it follows that the proper training of the users of any computer system is the most important of all data security precautions. Often it is tempting to limit training to what the user most urgently requires in order to be able to write and edit text, to input data or to produce standard output from a database, for instance a batch of labels from a mailing list.

Not least is this the case when the user is none other than the owner, or at least person in charge, of the computer as will be the case in many small human rights organizations when computerization is first introduced. But unless **all aspects of data and file management become familiar,** there is a real risk that the very ease with which files and data collections can be created and manipulated will make the information in them irretrievable by anybody other than the original creator. Perhaps the data will not be retrievable even by him or her, once the information mass has grown large enough.

I recently heard - from a person who had been approached in order to recruit somebody to sort out the mess - a real horror story of a voluntary organization somewhere in the United States, which had an office of half a dozen people all of them using PC's. The PC's were all of the same make, having been acquired as a gift from a company. That was about the limit of standardization achieved in this office. Each person used their own PC as if it had been a typewriter, creating and naming their own documents, setting up little databases, and keeping their floppy disks in desk drawers, labelled in whatever way the originator found convenient. By the time the person who told me the story had been called in they had had some turnover of staff, and had a board of disks containing data and documents that they had no means of retrieving, because the databases were un-documented and the text files were named according to a variety of idiosyncratic systems.

What they had was the equivalent of a paper archive consisting of documents in piles all over the floor. Order could possibly be created, but it would take somebody an awful lot of time, and in an organization such as a human rights organization where all attention is on the present and the immediate future, it never seems right to devote time and energy to organize an archive, even if it is known that it contains a great deal of information that is still current and of use to the organization. The data on the disks of the voluntary organization I mentioned were secure enough, I suppose one might say, but totally irretrievable and therefore useless. They might as well have been accidentally erased, for all the benefit derived from them.

b) Disk management

This phrase is used here to indicate the **organization of data and free space on a computer disk**, whether a diskette or a hard disk. In the case of diskettes care should be given to the likely future growth of files or documents of a particular type, say letters to members or letters to government bodies, so that material that belongs together and is likely to be using the same layout occurs together on the disk. Different wordprocessing programs differ greatly in how easy they make good practice in disk and file management.

When a disk becomes full and it contains several types of files or documents, it makes sense not just to continue the mixture as before on a new disk, but to copy the documents of different types to different disks, each containing perhaps only one category, and end up with let's say three disks, none of them full, containing all documents of a particular type. In an office utilizing more than one PC, but all of them standalone, this type of **disk management needs to be carried out in a co-ordinated way** by all those who produce documents of a similar type, eg. correspondence. In other words, there needs to be a pre-existing system of document classification which can then be applied to the organization of documents on disks or diskettes.

In principle the organization of files on a hard disk follows the same ground rules - the structure of the disk should mirror appropriate parts of the structure or a pre-designed archival structure for the organization. In many cases this archival structure could be identical to the structure of the organizations paper archive of documentation produced. If the paper archive is a pile of dusty folders on the floor or in unlabelled drawers the choice lies between perpetuating chaos or creating a system for classifying and ordering documentary output.

In talking about disk management, I have dwelt at length on wordprocessing files and not mentioned **data collections in databases** at all. The reason is that database management systems usually impose their own overall order on the way data are divided and manipulated. Where disk management comes in it is more in the management of empty space on disks and in the assessment of space requirements for a growing database. There are software programs in existence that help the user in the identification and consolidation of unused space on database disks.

c) Disk labelling

I should start by saying that this applies to diskettes on the whole. Similar considerations must however also be given to computer tapes, and to removable hard disks, which are now becoming more common. The disk manufacturers seem to believe that disks are never erased and re-used, and that moreover they contain only a small number of files. In other words, they provide labels that are too small, and too well stuck to the tape casing. Who is not familiar with the spectacle of diskette labels impossible to read as generations of file names have been scratched out and written over.

Using a pencil is one solution. Better is to have a **good disk and file management system**, i.e. a good archives structure in the first place. This should make it possible to label the disks only with the broad category of documents contained in it. Government correspondence 1988 should identify sufficiently. By December there might be four disks, one for each quarter, but the label only needed amplifying, not rewriting.

d) Disk copying (backups)

This really is the most elementary of precautions as far as data security is concerned. A magnetic disk can become unreadable with the total loss of all data held on it considerably more easily than the corresponding amount of text on paper. Fortunately, it is a great deal easier and more convenient to make sure that everything, but everything, exists in at least two copies when the medium is computer disk or tape than when the medium is ink and paper.

The PC user who manages his or her own diskettes should always finish each session at the computer by copying any new or amended files created onto a duplicate disk or set of disks, in effect creating **two identical sets of disks**. The arrangement and labelling of the copy disks should follow that of the original, and the word "copy" be added to the names of files or file categories on the disk label.

In the case of hard disks, whether on PC, networked fileserver or mini computer disk drive, programs are available that make possible the **daily incremental copying only of files that have been modified**. In such cases one should ensure that the whole of the disk is also regularly copied to tape or removable disk, so that an uncorrupted copy of the whole disk is always available in case of damage to the disk currently in use. A common pattern of ensuring this as far as possible is one of having three disks or disk/tape combinations in circulation, with copying taking place from one to the next in a fixed order.

e) Disk storage (system disks, file disks, originals and backups)

The principle should be there to **keep all disks in storage conditions that ensure their continued good condition**, i.e. as far as possible in the recommended temperature range and reasonably dust free. There are excellent diskette and computer tape storage cabinets on the market and it makes sense to invest in such equipment both from the point of view of greater ease in keeping order among the diskettes or tapes and from the point of view of avoiding physical damage. The back up copies should of course be stored separately from the working originals, and under additional safety precautions. It does not make much sense to store the originals on bookshelves on one side of the room, and the back-up copies on the other side as I once saw being done. In case of for instance a fire they would all be gone. A good system would be to keep one set of back-ups in a **fireproof safe**, perhaps in a different room to the one in which the originals are kept. The second set of back-ups should then be stored off site, perhaps in a deposit box in a bank.

SECURITY AGAINST DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION OF OR DAMAGE TO DATA

It might be a good idea here to distinguish first of all between the **possible sources of deliberate damage to or destruction of data**, and between **possible motives of the perpetrator**, since this helps to some extent to decide both the extent and the nature of precautionary measures. In the business world, the possible culprits are usually believed to belong to one of the following categories:
-disaffected or venal employees;
-competitors;
-mischievous outsiders.

A similar categorization applied to human rights organizations might be:
-disaffected, vulnerable or bogus staff and volunteers;

-military, police, other government or opposition group or foreign government;
-mischievous outsiders.

To start with the last category, common to both lists: the **"mischievous outsiders"**. Here I refer to the oh so clever computer programmers and hackers who create and disseminate so called **computer viruses**.

Of course we are not talking about a virus here. It is not a mysterious micro-organism that gradually destroys disks and data. Rather it is a small addition to a computer program which contains instructions for a subroutine added to the program which at some point in the running of the program, or, in some cases at some particular date in the future - triggered by the automatic data calculator common to most modern computers - will set off a series of operations of a destructive nature, such as for instance overwriting every character on the disk with a blank space, or as in one well-known case, at midnight on Christmas Eve overwriting the entire hard disk of the permanently running computer with a series of Christmas tree representations.

Many other so called viruses have been created and disseminated, often with delayed action which makes the potential destructiveness much greater. The very basic data security operation of creating backup copies of data can in this way in itself be the source of the destruction of data.

The only measures against computer viruses are preventative. The so-called viruses are computer programs. Therefore follows that they are imported into a computer system as part of computer programs. It is necessary to ensure that only absolutely clean and safe computer programs are allowed to be loaded. Suspect sources include second hand copies of commercially available programs, programs downloaded from other computers, programs in the public domain freely copied, programs of

uncertain origin (even if they seem to offer a brilliant and cheap solution to an office requirement).

As in the case of any real virus the surest way to avoid contamination is to **avoid all potential sources of contamination**. Failing that there are now on the market computer programs that claim to discover and eliminate "virus" programs inserted in other software. I don't know - nor I suspect does anybody - how effective these cleansing programs are, nor how likely it is that the ingenious mischief makers - malicious or thoughtless - will find ways of outwitting any new cleansing program. Personally I would never allow the use of downloaded or informally copied software on any computer for which I had responsibility.

In the case of an outside agency attempting to gain access to a human rights organization's files in order to sabotage them in one way or another the defence is essentially the same as that taken against any other type of malicious vandalism or break-in, i.e. as far as possible ensuring the physical security of computer and disks through **the installation of door and window locks**. Diskettes should never be left in the computer, nor should they be left in unlocked filing cabinets or desk drawers. The hard disk is a different matter. It cannot on the whole be destroyed or damaged except by the same violent means that can destroy the computer itself, and such vandalism is of course far more noticeable than tampering with diskettes, particularly the soft 5 1/4 called "floppies".

Security against sabotage committed by an outsider is often so disagreeable to contemplate that an organization makes no attempt to develop explicit counter measures. This is hardly a sensible attitude though. Clearly the first step is to be careful at the stage of **recruitment** so that as far as possible only individuals with good antecedents and a high likelihood of loyalty to the organization are employed or welcomed as volunteers.

Additionally, however, it makes sense to maintain **security precautions** directly designed to minimize the risk and opportunity of an individual causing damage to computer files. System administration should therefore perhaps not be the responsibility of one single individual, but be shared between a small number, not necessarily full time computer staff.

Both in order to remove the risk of overdependence on one person and to minimize the risk of exposure to temptation or blackmail the organization should ensure that routines such as disk management, security back-ups and, in the case of mini-computer or centralized networked systems loading of software, administration of user space etc. are randomly shared between at least two people - nobody should in the invidious position of having a monopoly on any part of the administration of a computer system.

Further, **access to document files and databases** - as well as to the system itself - should only be available through a log-in process that includes the use of a **password**, regularly changed, and unique and known only to the individual user. The security system of the software should be such that only the authorized user, equipped with the appropriate password can access a file or a database. In the case of databases it is also common standard to have two levels of password regulated access - one simply for reading and taking reports from the database, another for modifying, adding or deleting data. Software with these security features is considerably more expensive than standard software for PC's, and is on the whole only to be considered for multi-user applications, whether micro or mini-based. For the standalone PC with one user, certainly one with removable disks only, the physical locking away of the diskettes might be adequate protection.

No matter how good prevention and malicious damage to computers, disks or data the organization

has achieved it is of course essential also from this point of view that prevention is combined with an adequate system of security back-ups so that in case of loss of data the affected files or databases can be reconstructed.

SECURITY AGAINST ILLICIT ACCESS TO DATA

In many respects the sources of the risk and the precautions that should be taken are the same in the case of illicit access to data as in the case of deliberate damage to or destruction of data. But as the aim of the perpetrator is more subtle so it is also a lot harder to discover. At the same time, security measures that would be of no avail against damage to data will prevent illicit access to data.

In addition to ensuring the physical security of the data medium, whether magnetic tape, diskette or hard disk, and ensuring as far as possible that files are protected by passwords which are kept secret, and which are not easy to guess, a further method of ensuring against illicit access is the use of **encryption techniques** whereby the data are stored in a coded form which cannot be understood except by formal de-encryption.

Encryption of computerized data, which replaces text or other characteristics by a seemingly meaningless jumble of signs of various kinds, is reportedly impossible to de-code by any code-breaking methods - essentially because no code is used.

Hardware additions (additional boards) or software programs providing encryption with varying degrees of security in access to the de-encrypted text, are available at relatively modest cost. They are fairly straightforward to use, and rely essentially on passwords which set in motion the computer manipulation that replaces the meaningful characters and spaces with meaningless ones, and subsequently, when authorized by another password, perhaps one which

can only be used on one particular computer, goes through the same process and produces meaningful text or data from a random - truly random - collection of signs.

The routine use of encryption can probably not be justified except in situations of great risk of danger to the organization or to individuals if information becomes available to the wrong people, and also situations where perhaps the certainty of adequate physical protection of the computer and the tapes or disks against illicit access is not sufficiently great. Undoubtedly a number of human rights organizations are active in circumstances when both of these criteria apply.

DATA SECURITY AND COMPUTER COMMUNICATIONS

The security of computerized data in the process of transfer is really only a subset of the previous considerations. Data in transfer is naturally **particularly vulnerable** both to interference and damage or destruction, and to interception. At the same time, the possibility of communicating data in computerized form, from one computer to another, is particularly attractive, both because of the speed of transfer that can be achieved and because of the convenience of transferring text, perhaps in large quantities, in a form that can easily be further manipulated by the recipient - edited, perhaps translated using computer aided translation techniques, printed and multiplied.

a) Mailing of disks

This is the simplest form of computer communication, no faster of course than the postal or courier service that conveys the letter containing the floppy disk or disks. In itself the mailing of a disk puts the data at no greater or lesser risk than any letter or parcel sent in the same way. Perhaps in fact an envelope containing one or two floppy disks is in fact at considerably less risk of damage or loss than a bulky parcel containing the same information in printed form.

However, a letter can certainly be intercepted, and if this is considered to be a risk **encryption** should be used in order to ensure that no illicit access is possible. The ideal form of encryption would perhaps include a small virus program which erased the characters on the disk unless the correct password was input within a certain time of loading the data.

No matter what the risks of damage or interception in transit, any text or data file transmitted in this way should of course also have been copied to **back-up disk** or disks by the sender, so that if necessary a second disk can be dispatched.

Considerations other than those of data security do of course also enter the picture - the operating systems of the writing and the reading computer must be **compatible**. Ideally the same wordprocessing program should be used by sender and receiver, otherwise the text will have to be sent in the restrictive ASCII format, which usually precludes the use of diacritics and other niceties.

b) Networks

The perhaps best known, and for many voluntary organizations most attractive method of transferring computerized data, particularly documents of modest length, from computer to computer in widely separated locations, is through the use of a so-called computer network, which utilizes the public international data and telephone system known as IPSN, the International Packet Switching Network.

Each computer network is centred on a host computer, which runs software which provides for user space, a so-called **mailbox** for all members of the network. Such a network may be private and administered by and available to only one company or organization in its various locations, or it may be public, and run on more or less commercial or more or less ideological lines, which would be re-flected in pricing structures and in recruitment of users. An example of a purely commercial network is the British telecommunication company's Telecom Gold; examples of more ideologically based ones are Peacenet, Greennet and Geonet.

From a data security point of view the electronic mail networks are not secure. Even when the user has a private mailbox, protected by a password, the system administrator can of course achieve access - or at least this must be assumed.

Likewise networks have proved notoriously accessible to so-called hackers, computer enthusiasts who make a hobby of entering other persons' or organizations' user areas and reading their documents, sometimes leaving tell-tale messages of the type of "Kilroy was here". The hacker's art is of course also available to security and surveillance agencies of thus minded governments.

On the whole it would be healthiest to regard data transfer via electronic mail network as an excellent way of speeding up the distribution of essentially public information, but not a vehicle for the transfer of sensitive data.

c) Computer to computer modem links

In this case the contact between the two computers, both of which must of course be connected to the telephone network via a modem, and both of which must be running suitable communications software, is established only for the duration of the transfer of data, very much in the same way as for a conventional telephone call. Data security is certainly greater than in the case of the use of electronic mailbox on a network's host computer, and the risk is mainly one of telephone tapping.

There are modems in existence which **scramble and unscramble** the data signals in transit, so that tapping of the line would only reveal garbage. Likewise it is pos-sible to use **encryption** of the files before transmission and de-encryption after reception in the manner described above in the context of the security of data files in one location. However, international conventions forbid the international transmission of encrypted data over the IPSN.

DATA PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Some reference should be made to the special requirements imposed on organizations using computers to record data about individuals, by national legislation based on international legal instruments (Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data; OECD Guidelines governing the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data). **Data protection legislation contains many elements which are supportive of the principles expressed in this paper,** e.g. in requiring that computerized personal data are secured against accidental or unauthorized destruction or accidental loss as well as against unauthorized access, alteration or dissemination. But in some countries data protection legislation is so **restrictive** that it might rule out computerizing for instance data about victims of human rights violations, unless these have given their prior consent to the information being held. Attempts have been made - in some cases successfully, resulting in modification to national legislation - to get recognition that the humanitarian purpose of the collection of data about a person should override such restrictions. However, for the time being the advice must be that organizations operating in countries - mainly in Western Europe - with data protection legislation, should familiarize themselves with the requirements and restrictions of the law, and collaborate with other human rights organizations in their country in exploring ways of achieving the necessary adjustments to the legal provisions.

CONCLUSION

Data security is a space age expression, redolent of high technology and sophistication. However, it should be clear from what has been said above that although computerization of information handling creates many new twists to the problem of keeping data and information secure, in its principles data security is the same whether the data are computerized or paper based.

The aim is to protect the data against illicit access and against damage, while at the same time ensuring that it is easily retrievable for the legitimate user, whether the creator of the data or a later user in the same or in a different location.

A good, clearly understood and systematically enforced system of responsible handling of information is a necessary prerequisite for data security in any context.

The adequate training and not least motivation of the data users and data creators is at least as important as access to sophisticated software incorporating security features such as passwords and encryption.

But while undoubtedly the greatest risk to the integrity of computerized data is the user's own carelessness or incompetence, it would nevertheless not be safe, particularly not for an organization active in a field as sensitive as that of human rights, to ignore the possibility of deliberate sabotage or unauthorized access. Therefore **it is also necessary to ensure that no unnecessary loopholes are left in the security against malicious interference.** In this context the various hardware or software based data security systems could be of particular interest.

From left to right:: Agneta Pallinder, Judith Dueck, Hubert Chavews and Aida Maria Noval.

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ASSASSINATION ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER DR. SEGUNDO MONTES

The HURIDOCS Continuation Committee was informed of the assassination of Dr. Segundo Montes Mozo, a member of the HURIDOCS International Advisory Council since the Second General Assembly in Rome, 1986.

Dr. Montes was one of the six Jesuit priests who were assassinated on 16 November, 2.30 a.m. by members of a heavily armed death squad at a garden in the campus of the University.

Dr. Segundo Montes was a Spanish Jesuit who moved to El Salvador in 1951 and obtained the Salvadorean nationality in 1970. He was Head of the Department of Sociology and Political Sciences of the "José Simeon Cañas" University of Central America (UCA) and Director of the Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la UCA (IDHUCA). Dr. Montes has published various books and articles on different aspects of the situation of human rights in El Salvador, and always advocated a peaceful solution to the ongoing violence in his country. Dr. Montes was very much aware of the importance of human rights information handling, and established a documentation centre at the Institute which systematically collected data in particular with regard to the situation of human rights in El Salvador.

We are all shocked and deeply saddened by this horrible news. It constitutes a tragic loss for the University of Central America and the Central American human rights movement as a whole.

COURS FRANCOPHONE DE FORMATION ET DE PERFECTIONNEMENT DU MANIEMENT DES TECHNIQUES D'INFORMATION SUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET LES RÉFUGIÉS

Le réseau HURIDOCS organisera en Juin 1990 un cours d'enseignement et de perfectionnement, de 10 jours, destiné aux documentalistes francophones d'Europe, d'Afrique noire, du Maghreb, du Canada, et de Haïti, travaillant dans des organismes de droits de l'homme et/ou réfugiés.

Sont les co-organisateurs de ce séminaire: le Conseil de l'Europe, le Réseau International de Documentation sur les Réfugiés (qui constitue un project de HCR), ECRE (European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles), Documentation Réfugiés à Paris, et le Centre Africain pour la Démocratie et les Etudes de Droits de l'Homme de Banjul. Ce cours se tiendra à Strasbourg (France) de 11 Juin au 22 Juin 1990.

Les critères de sélection des candidats et d'attribution de bourses donneront la priorité aux candidats provenant des pays du tiers monde et à ceux qui ont des responsabilités continues dans la domaine de l'information et de la documentation. La formulaire d'inscription ainsi que le programme peuvent être obtenus auprès du secrétariat de HURIDOCS:
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