

News from the ICA Human Rights Working Group

December 2009

Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Chair

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sixty-one years ago this month the Third General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by a vote of 48 to 0 with 8 abstentions. The drafters were clear: this was a *universal* declaration, not a *United Nations* declaration. The Preamble of the Declaration begins by proclaiming that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” As archivists know, records are essential to protecting these rights and to obtaining recourse when these rights are violated. The nexus between human rights and archives is strong and complex, and over the next issues of the newsletter we will look at the Articles of the Declaration and some of the records that are essential to them. I encourage anyone with specific examples to share them with the Working Group.

HRWG and ICA. As some members of the Working Group will remember, the HRWG had difficulty finding a place on the program of the ICA Congress in Kuala Lumpur and even finding a meeting room. In the wake of that meeting, the HRWG petitioned the Executive Board of ICA to be recognized as an official constituent part of ICA. This has now happened, and the HRWG is now a recognized body, with a site on the ICA’s forthcoming website and a small sum of money appropriated to carry out our work. I thank especially Jens Boel and Christine Martinez, who urged the Executive Board to take these actions.

Changes in HRWG organization. Anna Svenson, who has been leading the HRWG, has stepped down as chair and, as vice-chair, I have agreed to lead the group until a new chair is selected. I know that all of us in the HRWG are grateful to Anna, in particular for organizing the conference on archives and human rights last spring in Malmo.

Upcoming events. Two major conferences in 2010 will have sessions relating to archives and human rights.

*On August 30-31, 2010, the Royal Dutch Society of Archivists and the Flemish (Belgian) Association of Archivists (V.V.B.A.D.) will host a conference marking 100 years since the first international archives conference, which was held in Belgium in 1910. The conference theme is *Archives without Borders*; the sessions will be held in the Peace Palace in The Hague. A call for papers will go out shortly, and an article about the conference will be in the next newsletter of the ICA’s Section of Professional Associations.

*Two weeks later, between September 13 and 18, 2010, the CITRA conference will be held in Oslo, Norway. Several sessions will relate to topics on archives and human rights. More information will be available soon on the website of the National Archival Services of Norway <http://www.arkivverket.no/english/news/newsarchive/4071.html>,

Archives in the news

*Paraguay. On 14 October, human rights activists were given the archives of the Ministry of Defense in Paraguay, dating the 1930s through the 1980s. Press reports say the records will likely shed light on the victims of Operation Condor, a coordinated campaign by South American governments in the 1970s and 1980s that targeted leftists and dissidents.

Photographs of the basement archives can be seen at
<http://www.daylife.com/photo/0cce4eo0dG9NB>

*Guatemala. 359 pages of original planning documents, directives, telegrams, maps, and hand-written patrol reports from the records of the Guatemalan military intelligence service were introduced in December in a Spanish court hearing a genocide case against former Guatemalan president Gen. Efraim Rios Montt and others. The submission is significant because the Ministry of Defense, in a previous case in Guatemala, had claimed it could not locate the documents. The documents may be seen at
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB297/index.htm>

*Argentina. In another court case, this one in Argentina, is reviewing documents from Paraguay's Archivo del Terror, an archives of police records that is managed by the Paraguayan Center on Documentation and Archive for the Defense of Human Rights (CDyA). The case uses documents from Paraguay to illuminate the working of an Argentine program to kidnap leaders of an opposition group living in exile in Mexico, showing the international importance of archival documents. For further information on the Archivo del Terror, see
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/CDyA/index.htm>