

Science Serving Human Rights: Making It Happen

Thursday, October 23, 2008

3:00 - 5:30 pm

Team 1: Medical Epidemiologist and Human Rights Practitioner

In 2004, Chris Beyrer, MD, Professor of Epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, was approached by Phil Fornaci of the Washington DC Prisoners' Legal Services Project to work with him to investigate the health consequences of treatment interruption and delay for female inmates receiving HIV/AIDS therapy. Beyrer and Fornaci partnered in a collaborative epidemiological investigation of treatment interruptions and delays among incarcerated women which explored treatment access for infectious, chronic, and mental health conditions among the women inmates. The Johns Hopkins team trained lawyers and law students in how to conduct health interviews in the jails. Through these interviews, the investigating team found lengthy delays in inmates receiving needed medication for all three categories of illness. These findings led to legal action on the part of the Prisoners' Legal Services Project, and resulted in the implementation of policy changes in DC jails.

Team 2: Forensic Pathologist and Human Rights Practitioner

In 1996, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) recruited Yvonne Milewski, MD, a forensic pathologist at the New York medical examiner's office, to travel to Bosnia to participate in the largest forensic investigation of mass graves ever conducted. For Dr. Milewski, the work involved unprecedented scientific challenges. For PHR's Susannah Sirkin, who coordinated this massive effort from Boston, it entailed enormous logistical and political hurdles. Evidence gathered by Dr. Milewski and other scientists in and around Srebrenica, has contributed to arrests and convictions of individuals for war crimes. PHR and Dr. Milewski have continued to partner in training and human rights investigations. The experience gained by Dr. Milewski in her work with PHR also prepared her for the unexpected task of examining the remains at the World Trade Center.

Team 3: Geographer and Human Rights Practitioner

In 2007, Lars Bromley, Director of the AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project, and Ariela Blätter, director of the Crisis Prevention and Response Center at Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), teamed up to document human rights violations in Darfur, Sudan. Over the course of six months, Bromley, a geographer, secured and analyzed satellite images of villages that were reported to have been destroyed. By compiling and comparing "before" and "after" imagery, the AAAS project enabled AIUSA to better communicate the situation in Darfur to the world community, and raise awareness of villages threatened with attack. In June 2007, AIUSA released its Eyes On Darfur website, featuring the results of these image acquisitions and analysis.