



"Crossing Borders"

A column by Doug Richardson,
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GIScience for Human Rights

Nearly all geographers and GIS specialists are concerned about human rights and in their personal and professional lives seek meaningful ways to act on these concerns and values. For the past two years, the AAG has been working together with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to explore an array of issues, projects, and programs that engage GIScience, geography, and human rights.

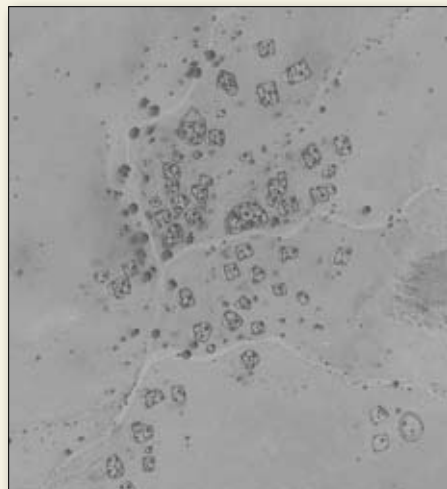
This collaborative work has resulted in substantive developments in three areas of human rights activity that intersect geography and GIS:

1. The creation of a new Science and Human Rights Coalition, of which the AAG is a founding member and co-organizer
2. Cooperation around an AAAS project on Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights
3. The development of an AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse

I am pleased to report on progress to date on these new programs and invite the ideas, input, and participation of the ESRI user community as we move forward.

Science and Human Rights Coalition

For the past two years, the AAG has worked closely with AAAS and a team of other scientific and professional associations to help develop the conceptual and organizational framework for a proposed new Science and



Malam al Hosh is currently featured as a "village at risk" on the Eyes on Darfur Web site, and is now one of the villages being publicly monitored by Amnesty International in an attempt to deter threatened attacks. (Copyright 2008 Image Sat International. Produced by AAAS.)

Human Rights Coalition, to be hosted by AAAS. The coalition is a network of individuals and scientific organizations that recognize a role for science and scientists in efforts to realize human rights. The working goals of the coalition are to promote human rights awareness and programs within scientific associations, professional societies, and science academies; facilitate collaborative partnerships between the scientific and human rights communities to address human rights challenges; create opportunities for sci-

entific associations to explore and contribute their discipline-specific skills and knowledge to human rights; and expand the knowledge base of human rights organizations regarding scientific methods, tools, and technologies that can be applied in human rights work. Scientific associations that share the goals of the coalition are invited to participate as members. Individual scholars and scientists are encouraged to participate through their scientific organizations but may also be involved as affiliated members.

The formal launch of the new Science and Human Rights Coalition will occur January 14–16, 2009, in Washington, D.C. Speakers will include Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the former president of Ireland. The AAG is a founding member of the new coalition and is also playing an integral role in its launch. Further information about the new coalition and its formal launch is available at www.aag.org or shr.aaas.org/scisocs.

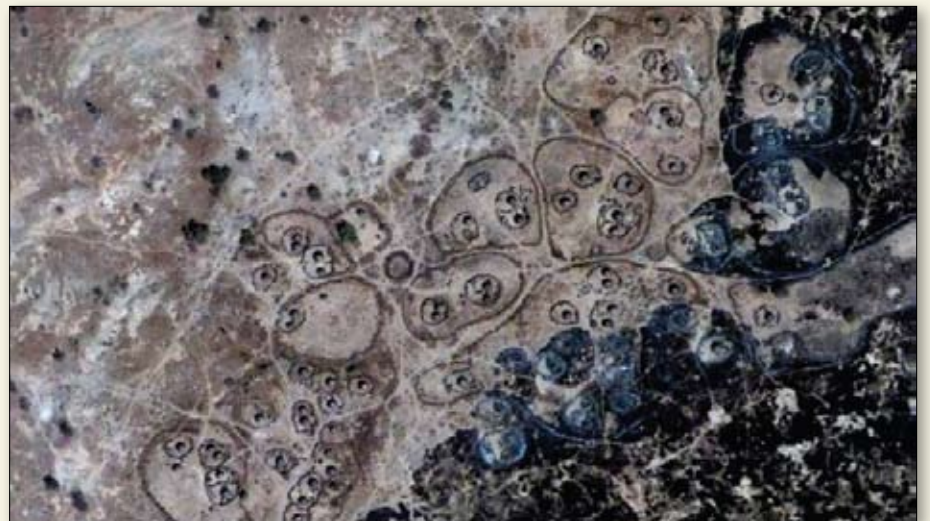
Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project

The AAG also supports and provides input to the AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights project, which is part of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition. This project is funded by the MacArthur and Oak Foundations to develop applications, as well as human and information resources that improve the use of geospatial technologies and analysis by the nongovernmental organizational (NGO) human rights community. Working in partnership since 2006 with well-known groups, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as numerous small, locally based organizations, the project has engaged in several efforts to bring high-resolution satellite imagery, GPS units, GIS, and geographic analysis and methods into wider use by human rights organizations. While such tools and analyses were occasionally used in the past, the project seeks to explore the potential for an integrated approach to monitoring, documenting, and preventing human rights abuses. Such a system would draw together numerous satellite imagery programs with the extensive network of on-the-ground NGOs and other human rights observers to fully document, as objectively and as quickly as possible, ongoing atrocities around the world so that interventions might occur. This project has also benefited from imagery analysis support and expertise from the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Geographer, headed by Lee Schwartz.

Specific efforts to date include documentation and active monitoring of attacks on civilians in Darfur, presented on the Eyes on Darfur Web site (www.eyesondarfur.org), as well as documentation efforts in Burma and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. In such remote regions, governments often are able to commit atrocities against their citizens with near impunity, and satellite observations can often be the only method of authoritatively corroborating witness reporting for international NGO and governmental human rights organizations. To a more limited extent, such imagery can occa-



The village of Bir Kedouas, on the Chad side of the Chad/Sudan border, in October 2004. This QuickBird satellite image pictures the village before it suffered attack by the Janjawid. (Copyright 2008 Digital Globe. Produced by AAAS.)



The village of Bir Kedouas following attacks by Janjawid fighters in January 2006. Analysis indicates that burning destroyed 89 homes as well as crops and other structures. (Copyright 2008 Digital Globe. Produced by AAAS.)

sionally be effective as a proactive protection and warning mechanism, allowing innocent people to escape from harm's way or deterring attacks on monitored villages or sites. In addition, the project is currently engaged in efforts to support indigenous land rights in Guatemala, document adverse impacts of aerial defoliation in Colombia, and explore applications and needs of local human rights organizations in other regions.

AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse

The AAG and the AAAS also recently entered into an agreement, supported by funding from the MacArthur Foundation, to develop an inventory of geographic research and scholarship relating to human rights. This inventory and resultant detailed bibliography will form the foundation of a new AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse, which will be housed on the AAG Web site. We invite all AAG members and ESRI users, as well as others, to contribute to this clearinghouse. Among numerous applications and uses of this body of research, the AAG and AAAS particularly seek to identify research and project work that is substantive enough to be valuable as evidence or in support of expert testimony in international tribunals investigating human rights abuses. We would very much appreciate it if you could send citations of any geographic research or GIS project work that you believe would be useful for inclusion in this clearinghouse bibliography. Please e-mail research or project descriptions, bibliographic citations (preferably annotated with an abstract or brief summary of the work), and other relevant material

to Megan Overbey (moverbey@aag.org) or Matthew Hamilton (mhamilton@aag.org) at the AAG.

Geographer and AAAS Human Rights Project director Lars Bromley noted that "Geographers and GIScientists obviously have critical and long-standing roles to play in human rights work. As such, AAAS is delighted to collaborate with the AAG in an effort to concisely identify relevant literature across a broad range of topics, which could inform future activities of interest to the human rights community." In addition to bibliographic, informational, and research resources, the AAG Clearinghouse will also provide links to other geography or GIS-related human rights programs, such as those of Amnesty International, the United Nations, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Genocide Prevention Mapping Initiative, among others.

Regular updates on these AAG and AAAS human rights programs will be available at www.aag.org and www.aaas.org. Special joint AAAS and AAG sessions on these human rights projects are also planned for the AAG's Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, March 22–27, 2009. We hope to see you there and invite your input and assistance on these important collaborative projects.

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