

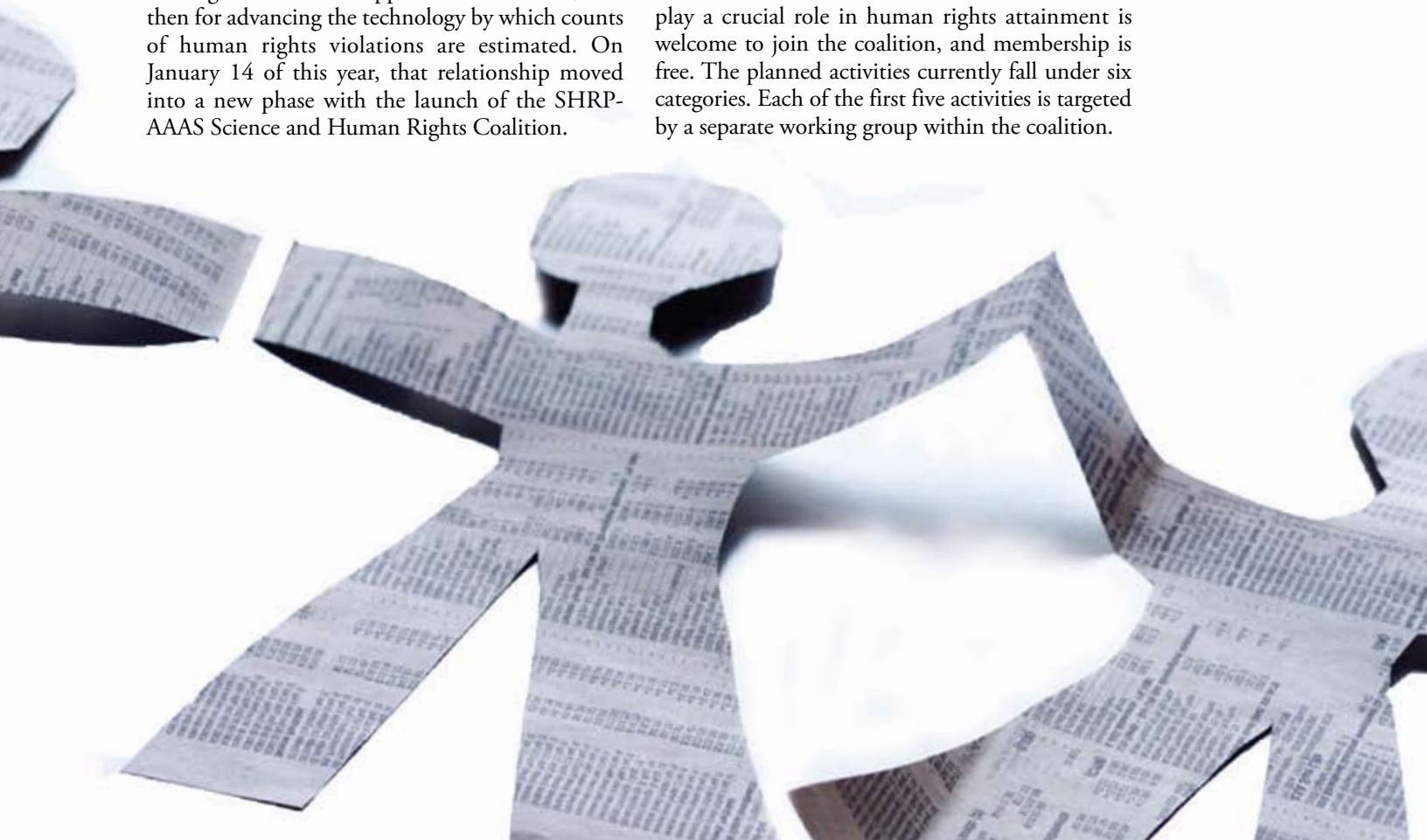


Statisticians Seen, Heard at Human Rights Coalition Launch

Jana Asher

Statisticians have been involved in projects related to human rights for decades, and since the late 1970s, the American Statistical Association has officially sanctioned those activities via its Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights (CSFHR). For most of that time, there has been a working relationship between the Science and Human Rights Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (SHRP-AAAS) and CSFHR, first during investigations into “disappeared” statisticians, and then for advancing the technology by which counts of human rights violations are estimated. On January 14 of this year, that relationship moved into a new phase with the launch of the SHRP-AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition.

The product of more than two years of planning and hard work, the Science and Human Rights Coalition is a network of scientific professional societies united in their dedication to human rights. The aim of the coalition is to encourage the development of human rights awareness within scientific organizations, foster partnerships for human rights goals between those organizations, and facilitate and strengthen communication between the scientific and human rights communities. Any scientific association or individual scientist who believes scientists play a crucial role in human rights attainment is welcome to join the coalition, and membership is free. The planned activities currently fall under six categories. Each of the first five activities is targeted by a separate working group within the coalition.



Welfare of Scientists

One of the oldest roles of human rights committees within scientific organizations, including the ASA, has been to pursue justice for scientists who have been denied their basic human rights. In the case of the ASA, such work has included investigating the “disappearances” of statisticians in Argentina who did not alter their statistics as desired by the ruling military party and fighting the revocation of academic degrees of Jewish statisticians by the Soviet Union. The coalition aims to increase the number of scientific organizations involved in these types of efforts, circulate information about persecuted scientists, and determine best practices for advocating for those scientists.

Science Ethics and Human Rights

This working group strives to link international human rights principles with ethics codes across scientific disciplines. Its planned activities include reviewing the ethics codes of member scientific societies to determine which best incorporate human rights principles into scientific ethics and practice, developing a list of exemplar ethics codes based on that review, and encouraging internal review board processes and human research practices that are grounded in a human rights framework.

Service to the Scientific Community

Although the ASA and many other professional societies have long-standing committees or working groups on human rights, other scientific organizations do not and are interested in helping to establish human rights as a priority. Many organizations do not have knowledge of the existing human rights community or how practitioners of their scientific discipline can contribute to human rights attainment. This working group focuses on outreach to scientific organizations via mentoring activities and training and compiles resources for introducing human rights into discipline-specific curriculum and practice.

Service to the Human Rights Community

Many, if not all, scientific disciplines can be used to advance human rights. In the case of statistics, random sample surveys have been used to document human rights abuses or gather information to assist in human rights attainment. Statistical

modeling and other analysis techniques have been used to prosecute war criminals or disprove arguments about the value of dictatorial governments. It is therefore not surprising that the organizing core of this working group included three statisticians and ASA members: Susan Hinkins of the National Opinion Research Center, Hormuzd Katki of the National Institutes of Health, and Jana Asher of Carnegie Mellon University.

Activities in this category include identifying scientific techniques and practices that have been used to enhance human rights attainment, determining further scientific methods that could be used to enable or improve human rights work, encouraging scientific pro bono work for human rights purposes (such as that pursued by the ASA Special Interest Group on Volunteerism), and fostering links between interested scientists and the human rights community.

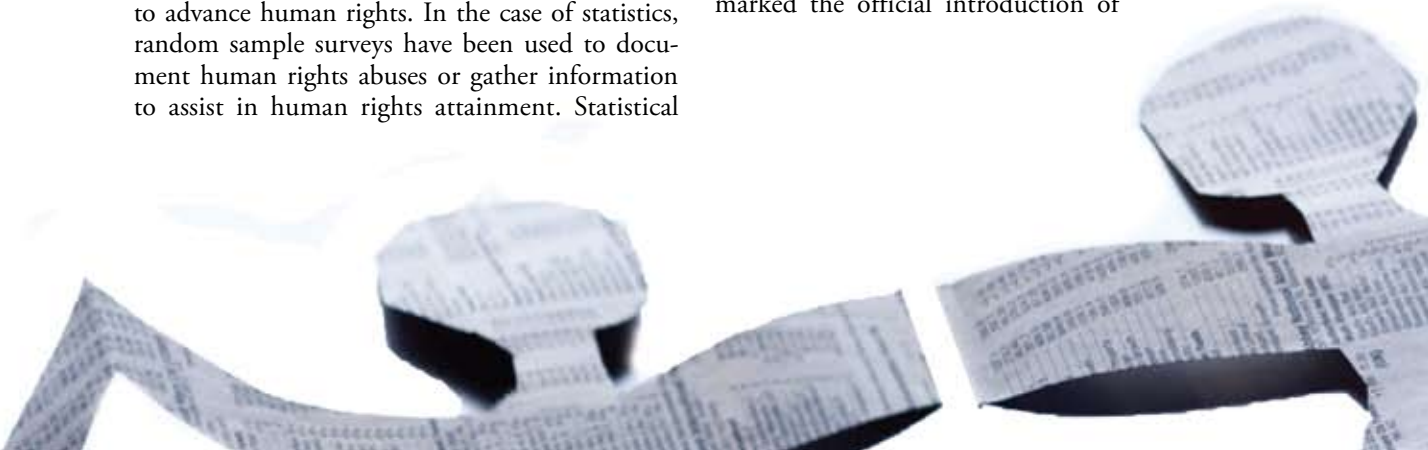
Education and Information Resources

Each of the above activity areas relies on informed communication between scientists and the human rights community. This working group pursues the development of resources for education and outreach, including but not limited to, written case studies, PowerPoint presentations, and informational pamphlets.

Article 15

Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recognizes the human right to “the benefits of scientific progress,” but practical advances in the attainment of that right across all populations have been scarce. The coalition hopes to work across scientific disciplines to tackle this long-neglected human right. The coalition, as a whole, plans to engage in activities that educate both the scientific community and the human rights community about the meaning and potential applications of Article 15. Individual working groups also leverage Article 15 to accomplish their goals.

Although these priority areas have been developed over the past two years, the ‘launch’ of the Science and Human Rights Coalition marked the official introduction of



the coalition to a broad audience of scientific associations, professional societies, academies, and individual scientists. It provided an opportunity to learn about the mission and structure of the coalition, its areas of activity, and how scientific associations and individual scientists can become a part of this important new initiative.

During the evening of the 14th, a panel of distinguished speakers, including former Irish President and United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, gave plenary remarks that focused on the need for a scientific coalition dedicated to human rights principles. Early speakers on the 15th outlined the nuts and bolts of the coalition, including methods by which organizations and individual scientists may participate in its activities. Those remarks were followed by concurrent sessions outlining different ways in which scientists have contributed to human rights attainment in the past. Statisticians participated in two of the three panels: Gary Shapiro of Westat, Inc., discussed the activities of the American Statistical Association within the human rights community and Asher described specific projects in which she collected data for use by the human rights community to document abuses.

The remainder of the 15th and the morning of the 16th were devoted to planning activities among each of the working groups. The launch concluded with an overview of upcoming activities, including the next meeting of the coalition on July 24 at the AAAS headquarters in Washington, DC.

The strong presence of statisticians active in the coalition and attending the launch was acknowledged at various sessions and commented on by participants. Steve Pierson, the ASA's director of science policy, represented the ASA, and he and Susan Hinkins will serve as the ASA's first official representatives to the coalition. Other statisticians



Photo courtesy of SHRP-AAAS

A working group meeting at the launch of the Science and Human Rights Coalition of SHRP-AAAS.

who attended include Fritz Scheuren, Mary Gray, Art Kendall, Michael P. Cohen, Safaa Amer, John S. Gardenier, and Turkan (Teri) Gardenier.

Although the real work of the coalition is just beginning, it is already a vibrant and active group, united in its belief in the value of the scientific community in global fulfillment of human rights. If any of the activities described here appeal to you, the coalition welcomes your involvement. Further information can be found at <http://sbr.aaas.org/coalition/index.shtml> or by contacting AAAS Science and Human Rights Program Director Mona Younis at myounis@aaas.org. ■

