

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AAAS SCIENCE & HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

In 1976, AAAS established a standing Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility with a mandate that included monitoring infringements of scientific freedom at home and abroad. At the time, the persecution and disappearance of numerous scientists, along with thousands of other citizens, in Argentina and the plight of dissidents in the Soviet Union brought urgency to the committee's mission. Members of the committee "recognized that human rights are universal, and that scientists possess no rights that do not also belong to others." Yet, when those rights are violated, Dr. John Edsall - the eminent Harvard biochemist and a leading figure in creating the committee - argued that scientific associations "have not only a right but a responsibility to concern themselves with the defense of human rights of scientists." The committee drew upon a 1976 report on *Scholarly Freedom and Human Rights*, prepared by the British Council for Science and Society, which provided an overview of international declarations and conventions on human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The report also noted the need for scientists to communicate freely, to travel and attend meetings, and to exchange ideas, all rights essential for scientists to contribute effectively to the integrity and growth of science.

Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights, 1977-1989

By late 1977, the committee created a Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights to receive and review claims of persecuted foreign scientists and to refer the cases to appropriate professional scientific societies affiliated with AAAS for action. Such action included persistent letter-writing to U.S. and foreign officials on behalf of an individual, gathering information on his/her condition, and publicizing the case where appropriate. The Clearinghouse sponsored workshops and symposia on science and human rights and invited foreign scientists who had been victims of persecution and incarceration to come to the U.S. to share their experiences. The Clearinghouse took on the task of monitoring proposed political restrictions on U.S. visa requirements that could affect freedom of travel, an issue of concern to AAAS since the 1950s. The early activities of the Clearinghouse were administered by AAAS Human Rights Coordinators Thomas Johnston (1977-1978) and Bruce Alan Kiernan (1978-1980), and by Rosemary Chalk, head of the Office of Scientific Freedom and Responsibility from 1977 to 1986.

After the appointment of Eric Stover (1980-1990) to Clearinghouse Project Director in 1980, AAAS took on fact-finding missions to troubled countries. In 1984, in the wake of Argentina's return to civilian rule, President Raul Alfonsín and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo - a nongovernmental human rights organization - requested technical assistance in exhuming mass graves of victims of the country's "dirty war" and in applying genetic screening techniques to determine grandpaternity of children born in detention or abducted from their parents and adopted by supporters of the previous regime. AAAS responded by sending a delegation of American forensic and genetic scientists to Argentina, including the renowned forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow. This mission fostered a major initiative to train young foreign scientists in forensic anthropology, as well as to train physicians, lawyers, archeologists and anthropologists to document and

assemble evidence of crime in order to provide such evidence to courts and special commissions of inquiry. AAAS-trained teams investigated human rights abuses in Argentina, Brazil (1990), Guatemala (1992), Haiti (1995), and the Philippines (1986). This initiative helped give birth to the independent organizations Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF) and the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG), which continue to wrestle with the human rights legacies of their own countries and provide technical assistance to others.

The Clearinghouse conducted fact-finding missions to the Philippines, Uruguay, Chile, and South Africa to analyze how health professionals may contribute to or resist the uses of torture and psychiatric abuse of citizens in countries with repressive governments. Related to this issue, the Clearinghouse also explored the problems and lack of resources faced by health professionals trying to provide services to treat refugees and survivors of torture and trauma. In 1989, AAAS representatives were part of a six-member delegation to South Africa to examine the role of South African health professionals with respect to human rights in that country and assess the effect that apartheid policies have had on the delivery of health care. Smaller missions, such as to Kenya (1988) to attend an inquest into the death of a man who had been tortured and document how the court applied the medical evidence, and to the Sudan (1990) to investigate the jailing of physicians and scientists, provided experiences for AAAS to contribute directly to individual human rights cases as well as learn lessons on the political and cultural complexities of human rights work. In the mid-1980s, the Clearinghouse, along with the American Statistical Association, began to explore how statistics might be used to measure human rights performance, an avenue of research that has taken on increasing importance.

Science and Human Rights Program (SHRP), 1989 to present

In 1990, as part of a reorganization of AAAS programs, the Office of Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, of which the Clearinghouse was a component, was merged into the newly-formed Directorate for Science and Policy Programs, headed by Albert Teich. Shortly thereafter, the Clearinghouse was transformed into the Science and Human Rights Program. In 1991, Audrey Chapman became Director, replacing Eric Stover, who left to serve as Executive Director of Physicians for Human Rights. In recognition of its pioneering work in science and human rights, the program received the first annual Human Rights Award from the American Psychiatric Association in May 1992.

Building on the tradition of letter-writing as a means of assisting scientists whose rights are violated by their governments, the program initiated the AAAS Human Rights Action Network (AAASHRAN) in 1993. AAASHRAN became one of the earliest efforts to use the Internet to inform AAAS members and other subscribers of cases and developments involving scientists whose circumstances required special attention, and to coordinate scientists' efforts to appeal to governments on behalf of their colleagues. SHRP maintains an online archive of AAASHRAN alerts issued on behalf of 322 scientists in 46 countries since 1996. Beginning in 2007, SHRP will dedicate the Action Alerts to publicizing actions and campaigns by scientific associations and human rights organizations on

behalf of scientists whose human rights are under threat, thereby providing them with a channel for reaching and engaging AAAS members.

Under Chapman, SHRP initiated efforts to contribute to the legal framing and monitoring of human rights internationally. In 1996, SHRP and the Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems International (HURIDOCS) - a global network of organizations concerned with information handling and documentation of human rights violations, began a three-year project to develop a "violations approach" to monitoring economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) as enumerated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The project offers a series of simple non-technical tools and resources, as well as a system that enables organizations to monitor ESCR violations. The scope and limitations of a right to health care and environmental protection are issues the program began to explore in the early 1990s. By 2000, SHRP designed a project on the relationship between environmental protection and the realization of many of the economic, social, and cultural rights enumerated in major international human rights accords. The project focused on the rights to health and to food, and the background research on the environmental factors affecting the realization of particular human rights became a resource for the human rights and environmental communities undertaking the development of standards, benchmarks, and indicators.

From 2002-2007, SHRP conducted a special project, Science and Intellectual Property in the Public Interest (SIPPI), that emphasized public interest approaches to ensure greater equity in access to scientific information and greater public participation in deliberating intellectual property policy. Article 15 of the ICESCR recognizes an intellectual property right of everyone to "benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he [or she] is the author." To support the rights of indigenous communities to assert more control over their environment and resources, SIPPI published a handbook in 2003 to help local peoples understand and identify mechanisms of the current intellectual property regime that might be advantageous or detrimental to the protection of their environments, biological resources, and traditional knowledge.

As human rights organizations and commissions increasingly undertake investigations that require accurate and robust documentation to understand large-scale human rights violations - such as mass killings, genocide, deportations, ethnic cleansing, and systematic detention and torture - SHRP has developed statistical methodologies for documenting and analyzing such violations. Since the mid-1990s, the program has provided technical assistance and training to truth commissions, tribunals, ombudsmen, and nongovernmental organizations in Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Argentina, South Africa, Cambodia, East Timor, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Colombia, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. In 1996, SHRP participated in an evaluation of human rights violations in the healthcare sector by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC). The program's long-standing commitment to the problems of human rights and the legacy of apartheid in South Africa led it to help found the African Transitional Justice Research Network (ATJRN) to assist local researchers and civil society organizations in African

countries to effectively evaluate transitional justice mechanisms and strengthen human rights advocacy on the African continent.

A dramatic example of the use of statistics in the service of human rights occurred in March 2002, when the SHRP Deputy Director Patrick Ball presented evidence for the prosecution in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Ball's testimony was based on a statistical study, which he had carried out in collaboration with other statisticians and SHRP staff. The analysis of refugee movement and political killings in Kosovo in 1999 supported claims that both were the result of coordinated Yugoslav government policy. The work involved adapting statistical methods, cryptography and open source tools to collect, store and analyze human rights violations data. In 2002, the Human Rights Data Analysis Group led by Ball spun off from AAAS to become an independent non-profit organization, The Martus Group.

Continuing the tradition of applying scientific technologies to human rights, in 2005 SHRP undertook a project to evaluate the application of high-resolution satellite imagery and related geospatial technologies to human rights abuses and violations. Analysis of geospatial data can show, for example, land use patterns, population movements, destruction of structures, and changes in the environment, and can increase the ability of international organizations, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations to rapidly gather, analyze, and disseminate authoritative information, especially during times of crisis. Geospatial data also can provide more compelling, visual proof to support or disprove what various groups or governments claim to be true. For the human rights community, geospatial technologies can provide documentation to strengthen human rights campaigns and legal cases. To date, SHRP has applied these technologies to document violations in Chad, Darfur, Lebanon, and Zimbabwe, and to monitor the human rights situations in Burma and Sudan; the latter in collaboration with Amnesty International-USA through "Eyes on Darfur."

One of the primary goals of SHRP is to forge linkages among the scientific and human rights communities. In 2005, SHRP began building a coalition between human rights groups, scientific societies, and academic associations working on domestic human rights issues in the United States in order to foster better communication among groups producing scientific data and those looking to use such data. By engaging scientists through their professional associations and societies, the Science and Human Rights Coalition seeks to benefit from the scientific sector's existing resources and to develop new resources to meet the needs of human rights advocates for scientific research and expertise on a range of issues.

As AAAS's science and human rights efforts enter into their fourth decade - now under the direction of Mona Younis - developing new scientific tools and providing technical assistance to the human rights community remain keys to the program's future. Launched in 2007, SHRP's new initiatives build on its long experience of applying science to human rights ends and the strengths of its institutional home - AAAS - to respond to the current needs of the human rights field.

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