

Strasbourg 9 March 1983

DH/Inf-Co (83) 1

EUROPEAN CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE
ON HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION

4th meeting, 28 January 1983
Council of Europe headquarters, Strasbourg

Summary report

1. Introduction

The European Co-ordination Committee on Human Rights Documentation held its 4th meeting in Strasbourg (Council of Europe headquarters) on 28 January 1983. The meeting was opened by the Convenor, Mr Peter Leuprecht, Director of Human Rights, who welcomed participants and expressed the wish that the Committee would reach practical conclusions as to its future tasks. It was now some six months since HURIDOCs was formally established and the time had come for the Committee to make concrete progress in the execution of its mandate.

The agenda of the meeting is reproduced in Appendix I to this report; the list of participants is set out in Appendix II.

At the close of its meeting, the Committee in particular:

- agreed to hold a further meeting on Monday, 27 June 1983 in Strasbourg (Council of Europe headquarters);
- decided to ask whether the Council of Europe would be in a position to host a training course for European documentalists on human rights documentation towards the end of 1983 or early in 1984;
- noted with satisfaction that IDOC was planning to organise a similar training course for Third World Centres in Autumn 1983 or early 1984 and expressed the wish that adequate funds could be found from appropriate sources to organise the course and to develop a training manual on the subject;

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- decided to ask Mr Werner Lottje to draw up a blue print for the next meeting for a broad consultation at the European level (Eastern and Western) along the lines of the Conference held in Quito in June 1982, and to make proposals regarding the possible financing of such a meeting;
- decided to ask Mr Bjørn Stormorken to identify the needs as regards the issuing of a European Bulletin on human rights documentation and to elaborate a blue print for such a bulletin on the basis of the feedback from institutions and individuals to whom this report is circulated;
- took note with interest that SIM was investigating the possibility of producing a francophone Newsletter similar to Human Rights Internet Reporter and that consultations were being undertaken for that purpose;
- noted with satisfaction that Mr Janos Toth was in the process of up-dating the Directory of Western European Collections initially produced by the HURIDOCs working group and appealed to all concerned for addresses of additional institutions and individuals who ought to be contacted for this purpose;
- suggested that the Directory should be bilingual, should be expanded as regards systems of classification and should contain in an appendix the short thesaurus on human rights (see below);
- noted with satisfaction progress in the preparation of a survey of Eastern European Collections by Ms Katia Tomaševski and in the preparation of a draft bibliography of Human Rights Information Resources in Yugoslavia;
- noted with interest that the Norwegian Human Rights Project was about to produce an Intergovernmental Resource Guide as a companion to the recently produced Non-Governmental Resource Guide;
- noted with interest that Amnesty International had just produced an Arabic/English glossary of human rights terms;
- urgently requested that an abridged version of the Human Rights Thesaurus (covering some 150 basic terms) be made available as soon as possible to assist in particular small centres in organising their documentation;
- urged that progress should be made rapidly with the issuing of the full version of the Human Rights Thesaurus and suggested that the second draft version should be widely circulated for the purpose of obtaining additional terms;

- recommended that before the draft Thesaurus was in the final stages of development, certain organisations, in particular the UN and UNHCR should be formally invited to participate in the International Expert Group on the Human Rights Thesaurus.

2. Developments concerning HURIDOCS

The Committee was informed by Mr Hans Thoolen of progress regarding the establishment of the Permanent Unit of HURIDOCS. As SIM was developing it was trying to take account of HURIDOCS' needs but the Unit as such had not yet been established since some guaranteed funding was necessary which the HURIDOCS Council was attempting to obtain. SIM had recently acquired a mini-computer which could be time-shared with HURIDOCS and which had a potential for growth.

An account of developments in the Americas was given following the Quito Conference (June 1982). Firstly, a Latin American Directory of Collections was being developed with the assistance of UNESCO, based on the same lines as the Western European Directory. A meeting was held in September in Mexico for lower level and more intensive networking for Central America. There had also been quite an amount of private follow-up on an individual basis. An inter-Brazilian meeting was planned in the near future with observers from some other Latin American countries.

The Committee noted with some regret that very few Latin American participants in HURIDOCS had attended the First World Conference on Human Rights organised in December 1982 in Costa Rica since one of the themes had been human rights information and documentation.

Surveys were being carried out on human rights information and documentation resources in South East Asia and it was expected that a regional Conference could be organised shortly. Efforts were beginning to develop momentum in Africa as the compilation of information resources was getting off the ground.

An information leaflet on HURIDOCS had now been prepared and was being broadly distributed (see Appendix III), as was the report of the HURIDOCS Inaugural Conference of July 1982.

In the light of this brief review the Committee agreed that the time had come for an overall reassessment of its role in the system as a whole and to consider among other things whether a further regional consultation should be planned for Europe (including Eastern Europe) (see below 6).

3. The Human Rights Thesaurus

A first list of terms had been issued in an appendix to the report of the HURIDOCS Inaugural Conference. Since then Ms Friederike Knabe had been developing the terms further. The main problem at this stage was putting the Thesaurus into machine-readable form; an offer had been

been forthcoming, but still had to be confirmed, from the Institute of Juridical Documentation of the National Council for Research in Florence. The Institute would re-organise the terms so that work on a structure could be started.

The second version would then be established and presented to the International Expert Group on the Human Rights Thesaurus and would be widely distributed for the collection of new terms.

HURIDOCs had recently been approached by many third world activist groups who needed something simpler than the complex structure of the Thesaurus but which was nevertheless compatible with it. Plans were underway for an abridged 150 term thesaurus for classification purposes.

Finally IDOC was going to devote the spring issue of its Bulletin to human rights and documentation. It would discuss the problem of information handling and the role of documentation in human rights promotion.

After taking note of these developments, the Committee urged that progress should be made as soon as possible with the second version of the Thesaurus and that it should be circulated as widely as possible to all interested institutions and individuals with a view to obtaining new terms and testing it against the basic texts. It was emphasised that such circulation should not be limited to Western Europe.

The Committee was aware that for many small centres, including in Western Europe, the full Thesaurus would be too complex a structure for classification purposes since it would have to account for different kinds of needs. It accordingly requested that the abridged version referred to above should be urgently prepared and made available so that progress could already be made by such centres in classifying their documentation in a manner which was compatible with the full Thesaurus.

Reference was made to progress in computer technology in the UN Library in New York and Geneva, where direct links between the two had now been established. The fear was expressed by some members of the Committee that if the UN Centre for Human Rights was not also involved in this process parallel terminology might be developed which would make it even more difficult than hitherto to obtain relevant information. It was also felt the UN Centre should be invited to be associated more closely with the development of the Thesaurus, particularly as it was nearing the final stages of preparation. The same held good for UNHCR, in particular the Information and Documentation Centre on Refugee Law, which was developing rapidly and would in the long run head towards computer technology. The Committee agreed therefore that formal invitations should be sent to the UN Centre and UNHCR to participate in the International Expert Group on the Human Rights Thesaurus.

The Committee also agreed that, as the preparation of the Thesaurus proceeded, it would probably be necessary to appoint a person to assume the practical work involved. It recommended that this point should be looked into further.

Finally, the Committee noted with interest that Amnesty International had just produced an Arabic/English glossary of human rights terms. It was felt that this would be an invaluable tool both generally and in connection with the Thesaurus.

4. Developments in Documentation in Europe

i. The Committee was informed of progress in the establishment of the Human Rights Documentation Centre of the Council of Europe, particularly as regards the development of computerised information retrieval technology. So far the Centre had mainly been concerned with setting up an information retrieval system on the central computer of the Council of Europe and preparing a test data base to be used by the system. The system used was SIFT (Searching in Free Text) developed under the direction of the Norwegian Government Institution of Organisation and Management and made available to the Council. The first prototype version of SIFT had been operational since early 1982.

The main task of the Centre for the immediate future was to establish a computerised data base giving priority to documents being produced within the Organisation, in particular: basic human rights texts (Conventions, rules of procedure etc); judgments of the European Court of Human Rights; decisions and reports of the Commission of Human Rights; resolutions of the Committee of Ministers. It was also hoped in due course to include bibliographical information in the data base.

Now that the test data base had been established and once a number of policy decisions had been taken it should be possible to move rapidly ahead and to have an operational data base for judgments of the Court and some decisions and reports of the Commission in the forthcoming months.

The Committee was given a demonstration of SIFT on the basis of the test data base.

ii. Information was also given about the development of the Information and Documentation Centre on Refugee Law at UNHCR. The latter had already compiled and classified all internal documents on legal questions concerning refugees and a collection of international and national legislation on refugees. In 1983 the library should be able to supply specialist documentation on request; a bibliography of available materials should also be available and a mailing list established. The Centre was most interested in networking in the framework of HURIDOCS and in the development of computer technology.

The Committee also noted that PRIO, on behalf of the Norwegian Human Rights Project, was about to produce an Intergovernmental Resource Guide on Human Rights along the lines of the recently produced non-governmental resource guide.

It was informed of a recent meeting of some 15 Documentation Centres including the Ligue Internationale pour les Droits et la Libération des Peuples to discuss questions of networking. A study grant had been obtained from the French Government to study how networking could be achieved at the same time as maintaining the specificity of each Centre. The specialisation of the Centres was the right to development and peoples' liberation with an important human rights thrust. The study would include consideration of how the network could link up with HURIDOCs, INTERDOC and Human Rights Internet.

5. Current and future activities

i. The Committee reviewed progress regarding the eventual up-dating of the Directory of Western European Collections and noted with satisfaction that Mr Janos Toth of EIP was prepared to launch a circular letter for this purpose. Once the preparatory work was completed, SIM would take over the project and put the Directory in machine-readable form.

It was agreed that, in order to expand the Directory as much as possible, individual institutions should supply from their mailing lists addresses of institutions which potentially might be included in the up-date. These addresses should be sent as soon as possible, so that replies could be received by June 1983.

It was felt that the new Directory should be bilingual (English and French) and that the list of entries should be expanded, particularly as regards classification systems.

The Committee also recommended that the abridged 150 term version of the thesaurus should be appended to the Directory (see point 3 above).

ii. Mr Hans Thoolen reported on his proposal to produce a francophone newsletter along the lines of Human Rights Internet Reporter. Daniel Prémont, human rights consultant, had been instructed to make investigations as to the feasibility of and potential market for such a newsletter. Some 140 institutions and individuals had been contacted and replies had been requested for early February.

The Committee noted this development but some members suggested broadening the consultation and contacting a larger number of institutions. Addresses should be sent as soon as possible for this purpose.

It was also noted that the current investigation did not cover the crucial question of funding and that this matter would need looking into in the next phase.

iii. It was recalled that a first attempt had been made at issuing a European bulletin on developments in human rights documentation in 1982. The question arose whether there was still a need for such a bulletin if HURIDOCs was to produce a newsletter and, if so, how such a bulletin would fit into the HURIDOCs context. Several members felt that there was a need for the bulletin because of the particular character of developments and techniques in human rights documentation in Europe. Given the speed at which developments were occurring they felt there was a need for regular information on the subject. Some members wondered whether this need could not be met by issuing a regular feature in SIM's own newsletter. Hans Thoolen expressed some doubts as to material possibility of actually preparing such a feature but thought there would be no difficulty for SIM to ensure its distribution once it was prepared.

The Committee finally agreed it was too early to take a firm stand on the subject and asked Mr Bjørn Stormorken to prepare for the next meeting a blue print for such a bulletin. It was essential for him to have some feedback from members of the Committee and persons and institutions to whom this report was distributed. Accordingly an appeal was made to all concerned to inform Bjørn Stormorken of potential needs in this regard.

iv. In the absence of Ms Katia Tomaševski who was prevented by sickness from attending the meeting, Ms Friedericke Knabe gave information on progress in the preparation of a Directory of Eastern European Collections on Human Rights. If all went as planned the Directory should be ready in spring 1983. The Committee also noted with interest that Ms Katia Tomaševski was also working on a draft Bibliography of Human Rights Information Resources in Yugoslavia. It was expected that this could be used as a model for compiling public Human Rights Information Resources in Eastern Europe.

The Committee looked forward to seeing the two publications in the near future.

v. It was recalled that IDOC had been organising training courses for documentation centres from Third World countries for some years now. Consideration was being given to the possibility of organising a training course with a human rights focus in view of the increasing demand for assistance in this field.

IDOC therefore intended organising a trial training course in autumn 1983 or early 1984 and widening the course to cover both the OASIS system and computerised systems.

The Committee supported this initiative and expressed the wish that the necessary funding could be found from appropriate sources. It also suggested that a training manual might usefully be developed on the subject.

Since IDOC's course would be directed principally towards Third World Centres, the Committee wondered whether a similar course could not be organised for European documentalists. It accordingly decided to ask the Council of Europe whether it would be prepared to host such a training course at the end of 1983/early 1984.

In this connection some members of the Committee felt that the organisation of training courses on human rights documentation might be worthy of consideration in the framework of the UN Advisory Services sub-programme, particularly if linked with regional arrangements and seminars in the programme. This would be borne in mind for the future.

6. Further tasks

The Committee agreed that the time had come to reassess its role in the light of the formal institution of HURIDOCS. Most members felt that, to do so, it would be advisable to envisage a further consultation meeting at European level, inspired to a certain extent by the Quito Conference, which would bring together those who need and use human rights information and those who collect and classify such information. The point was made that the time had come to learn how to make human rights information and documentation a tool for the realisation of each organisation's or institution's objectives. This should be one of the tasks of the consultation meeting, in addition to drawing up a concrete programme of action.

It was agreed that, before looking into the detailed arrangements such as staffing, some preliminary investigations ought to be carried out. Mr Werner Lottje therefore agreed to produce a blue print for such a consultation meeting (programme, participants etc) and to investigate the extent to which it might meet with favour from a number of European-based fund-raising agencies. The blue print would be prepared in time for the next meeting of the Committee.

7. Other business

The Committee agreed to hold its next meeting on Monday, 27 June 1983 in Strasbourg (Council of Europe headquarters).

APPENDIX I

European Co-ordination Committee
on Human Rights Documentation

Friday 28 January 1983,
Council of Europe Headquarters,
Room 14, 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the Agenda and order of business.
2. Developments concerning HURIDOCs and the establishment of the Permanent Unit.
3. Report on the work of the International Expert Committee on the Human Rights Thesaurus
4. Developments in documentation in Europe
 - i. Council of Europe (Progress in the Human Rights Documentation Centre, including a demonstration of SIFT)
 - ii. Other institutions
5. Current and future activities
 - i. Up-date of the Directory of West European Collections
 - ii. Francophone Newsletter
 - iii. European Bulletin
 - iv. Directory of East European Collections
 - v. Training of documentalists
6. Further tasks to be undertaken within the framework of the Co-ordination Committee
7. Any other business.

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Mr Philip ALSTON, Research and Studies Unit, UN Centre for Human Rights, 1211 GENEVA 10, Switzerland

Mr Jean-Pierre COLOMBEY, Legal Officer, Head refugee law documentation centre, Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés, UNCHR Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Mr Martin ENNALS, Head of the Police Committee, Support Unit of the Greater London Council, 157 Southwood Lane LONDON N6

Mr José de Faria, Chief, Documentation and Publications Unit, United Nations Centre for Human Rights, 1211 GENEVA 10, Switzerland

Ms Friederike KNABE, Head, Information Systems, Amnesty International, 10 Southampton Street, LONDON WC2

Mr Werner LOTTJE, Secretary for Human Rights and Refugees, Diakonisches Werk Des Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Stafflenbergerstr, 76 7000 STUTTGART 1, Federal Republic of Germany.

Ms Anne-Lise PERRIER, Institut International des Droits de l'Homme, 1 Quai Lezay Marnésia, 67000 STRASBOURG

Mr Bjørn STORMORKEN, Project Collaborator, Norwegian Human Rights Project, c/O PRIO, Rådhusgt 4, OSLO 7, Norway

Mr Luc De Smet, IPIS (International Peace Information Service), Kerkstraat 150, 2008 ANTWERP, Belgium

Mr Nils Per Jonas TEGMO, International Co-ordinator, Defence for Children International, PO Box 92, 1226 GENEVA/THONEX, Switzerland

Mr Johannes Gerardus THOOLEN, Director Institute, SIM, Nuuwegracht 94 3512 UTRECHT

Mr Janos TOTH, Legal Counsellor, Ecole instrument de paix, 5-7 rue du Simplon, 1207 GENEVA

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HURIDOCs

Human Rights Information and Documentation System

HURIDOCs

is a universal network of non-governmental organizations, institutes, academics, activists and others concerned with information on and about human rights, economic social and cultural as well as civil and political.

HURIDOCs

does not undertake research, or evaluation of information.

HURIDOCs

facilitates the identification, location and free flow of public human rights information through the linking of the participants in the network.

HURIDOCs

is politically non-aligned, committed only to the promotion and protection of all human rights everywhere.

HURIDOCs

was inaugurated in July 1982 at a conference of representatives and individuals from all continents, which included governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and groups. An elected Council of individuals includes members from Asia, Africa, North and South America, East and Western Europe and the Middle East. The Chairperson is from India, the Vice Chairperson is Chilean, the Treasurer from the FRG and the Secretary from the Netherlands. All are volunteer(s) and there is no regular paid staff. The final report of the Strasbourg Conference has been published in three languages.

HURIDOCs

membership is open to non-governmental bodies and individuals but also provides a service to (inter)governmental organizations.

HURIDOCs

has established co-ordinating committees on HR information in Latin America and Europe and seeks to create similar networks elsewhere.

HURIDOCs

has prepared a preliminary thesaurus of Human Rights terminology to assist documentation centres and organizations to store trace and retrieve information.

HURIDOCs

has carried out surveys of existing information collections and centres in Western Europe and Latin America and is undertaking surveys in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

HURIDOCs

has published a first indexed bibliography of over 400 human rights publications by 40 non-governmental organizations in consultative status I or II with ECOSOC.

HURIDOCs

is establishing its own Permanent Unit at the Human Rights Institute in Utrecht (SIM) in order to advise and assist the participants and to encourage the use of common and compatible systems of information handling and the creation of specialized information centres. The Unit will have its own computer but will work with manual systems to meet the needs of the participants.

HURIDOCs

is a voluntary organization which needs the widest participation to be effective and hence seeks funds for its work from a variety of public and private sources.

HURIDOCs

has collaborated with the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European Commission and Parliament, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, the United Nations Library (Geneva) and has received financial help from the European Communities, the governments of the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden and from non-governmental sources such as the Ford foundation in its preparatory stages. All HURIDOCs accounts are public.

For further information write to:

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