



## Human Rights Archives and Documentation: Transforming Ideas into Practice Overview of Working Sessions and Outcomes

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On March 3-4, 2008, a group of human rights archivists, librarians, human rights practitioners, and information studies graduate students convened for a symposium at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center entitled, “Human Rights Archives and Documentation: Transforming Ideas into Practice.” The Center for Research Libraries Global Resources Network and the Center for Human Rights Documentation at Columbia University Libraries co-sponsored the event. Attendees included archivists working with human rights collections at Columbia, Yale, and Duke Universities, as well as archivists working for human rights organizations such as WITNESS and the International Center for Transitional Justice.

The symposium opened with the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Distinguished Lecture featuring the **Honorable Patricia Wald**. Wald, a former judge on the U.S Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and Chair of the Open Society Institute’s Criminal Justice Initiative, also served on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The second day of the symposium featured a full day of interactive working group sessions to share information and address issues specific to human rights documentation. **Trudy Huskamp Peterson**, former Acting Archivist of the United States and expert on preserving the records of truth commissions, provided an overview of the recordkeeping practices of truth commissions and tribunals, which address past crimes in order to assist societies in their transition from violence towards peace and justice. She noted that transitional justice institutions have two primary types of records—information gathered which bears witness to the violations that occurred within a society, and records that the commission or tribunal itself produces as a result of its inquiry.

Peterson also outlined the history of Iraqi records taken to the United States. Information regarding Iraqi records in the United States is available on her website, <http://www.trudypeterson.com/perspectives.html>. Patricia Wald provided insights regarding the types of records which were used as evidence in court at ICTY. She noted that many records from the massacre of Srebrenica (in which approximately 8,000 male Bosnian Muslims were killed) were handwritten notes in notepads with whimsical cartoon covers in stark contrast to the information they contained.

During the working sessions, archivists addressed ethical concerns in working with human rights collections, such as privacy and safety concerns for individuals mentioned in records. The question of access quickly arose as a key issue, as archivists discussed the need to have collections be open and accessible, yet affirmed the need for protocols to protect the privacy and rights of any individuals whose personal experiences are documented in those collections. Possible solutions included requiring patrons to apply for use and abide by certain restrictions in use and dissemination of information. Other procedures included restricting access to a

collection or series of records within a collection until a certain period of time has passed. The difficulty of even obtaining human rights collections precisely because of the type of information that they often contain was also addressed, as well as the potential for political pressures on the archives themselves which house controversial materials.

The symposium also addressed issues of funding and long term preservation of materials, and issues in preserving multimedia human rights documentation, such as digital photographs, cellular phone pictures and videos (such as those created to document abuses in Burma in September 2007), as well as current online social justice activism such as electronic newsletters, Facebook groups, and other forums created to advance the cause of human rights.

The second half of the working sessions focused on developing concrete steps to increase communication and collaboration with non-governmental organizations both within and outside the United States. Increasing collaboration among archival institutions and governments was also cited as a necessary step. After acknowledging the lack of an online information center for human rights archives, the **symposium participants began planning for the creation of an online human rights archives information portal** to serve as a resource for archivists, human rights practitioners, human rights scholars and students, governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals looking to preserve human rights materials.

The online **Human Rights Archives Information Portal** will be a joint project among universities with human rights archival collections, and the Center for Research Libraries. The portal will provide information about repositories collecting human rights materials, human rights organizations which have archival materials open to researchers, and where those archives are located. It will also contain information for organizations and activists looking to preserve or donate their own records. The portal will also include collection development policies, collection descriptions, and links to finding aids. Additionally, the portal will contain resources and best practices for non-governmental organizations to maintain their records, and as well as adapted archival practices for organizations and institutions in the developing world which often lack resources called for in standard archival literature, such as climate and humidity control. An additional feature of the portal will be a calendar of human rights archives events and training opportunities. Graduate students in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland are currently working on a prototype for the portal. The Human Rights Archives Information Portal is projected to be operational sometime in 2009.

To facilitate communication before the portal is operational, the University of Connecticut has created an [email listserv devoted to human rights archives](#), and the Dodd Research Center will sponsor a human rights lunch at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists being held in San Francisco in August 2008.

**The Thomas J. Dodd Research Center** has focused on human rights since its opening in 1995. The Dodd Center houses the papers of former Senator Thomas J. Dodd, who served as executive trial counsel at the Nuremberg Trials from 1945 to 1946. Other human rights collections at the Dodd Research Center include the library of Human Rights Internet, the records of the Coalition for International Justice, the Refugee Case Files of the International Rescue Committee, and the Malka Penn Children's Book Collection on Human Rights. Additional human rights materials

can be found in the Alternative Press Collection, which contains thousands of national and international newspapers, serials, books, pamphlets, ephemera and artifacts documenting activist themes and organizations, spanning from the 1800s to the present. Photographic collections, such as the Impact Visuals Photographic Collection and the Romano Human Rights Digital Photograph Collection, document international human rights violations and struggles for social justice. The Dodd Center also holds transcripts of interviews conducted by the Center for Oral History at the University of Connecticut, including interviews with Holocaust survivors in the Connecticut region and with American participants at the Nuremburg War Crimes Trials.

The Dodd Center has worked collaboratively with institutions in the United States and South Africa to preserve and make human rights collections accessible. The Center partnered with the African National Congress (ANC) to assist in arranging and describing the records it created during apartheid in South Africa. The project resulted in a gift of ANC books and pamphlets to the Center. Additionally, the Dodd Center houses more than 100 oral histories of ANC leaders created as part of that project, as well as microfilm copies of apartheid-era activists' papers.

In addition to its mission to collect, preserve, and provide access to human rights collections, the Dodd Center has initiated a number of programs emphasizing human rights and human rights education. **The Thomas J. Dodd Prize in International Justice and Human Rights** is awarded biennially to an individual or group who has made a significant effort to advance the cause of international justice and global human rights. Past recipients include *Taoiseach Bertie Ahern*, Prime Minister of Ireland; *Tony Blair*, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom; *Louise Arbour*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Justice *Richard J. Goldstone*; and the non-governmental organizations *Mental Disability Rights International* and *The Center for Justice and Accountability*. **The Raymond and Beverly Sackler Distinguished Lecture Series** brings internationally renowned speakers to the University campus to discuss human rights issues. Additionally, human rights archival collections are used extensively by students and faculty in the human rights academic programs on campus as well as attracting researchers nationally and internationally.

More information about the symposium, listserv, and human rights archives and programming is available on the Dodd Center's website, <http://www.doddcenter.uconn.edu>