AMASSING EVIDENCE
Applying Information Technology and Forensic Science in Human Rights Documentation
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International Conference and Workshop
25-27 July 2017
Seoul, Republic of Korea

ORGANIZER
Transitional Justice Working Group, as part of the Access Accountability initiative
ABOUT TJWG

The Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) is a Seoul-based NGO founded by experienced human rights advocates and researchers from five countries in 2014. TJWG aims to create advanced methods for addressing massive human rights violations and advocating justice for victims and pre- and post-transition societies. It aims to build bridges between individuals and groups sharing a common commitment to the principles of democracy and self-determination, of peaceful and consensual conflict resolution, and of justice in post-transition societies. We collaborate and share our practices with other organizations and individuals concerned with the pursuit of accountability for mass atrocities and human rights abuses.

ABOUT ACCESS ACCOUNTABILITY

Access Accountability is an initiative of the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) based in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Access Accountability arose from TJWG’s experience as a start-up NGO seeking resources and expertise to guide the development of our structure, projects and systems. We provide training and resources for human rights documentation groups globally by identifying areas of need and matching them with the expertise required to achieve their goals. Our aim is to assist groups involved in monitoring and documenting human rights abuses in any region, but particularly those who may be looking ahead to a transitional justice process in their local context.

Website

The Access Accountability website (accessaccountability.org) is a resource for human rights groups globally to access information on a range of aspects of conducting human rights documentation work. It includes technical information useful for setting up new documentation projects, as well as information on storing and protecting your data. It also profiles documentation projects and supports initiatives in a range of contexts internationally, showcasing the range of approaches, technologies and applications of work in...
this field. Through online articles, videos and podcasts, the site aims to provide information and external resources in an accessible format.

**Training**

Access Accountability offers training to human rights documentation groups with shared concerns and needs. These needs may be around a particular type of violation in a specific geographical location, or related to a specific type of technology, such as satellite mapping or database design. The process of planning a training workshop involves identifying participant groups via their specific needs and matching them with experienced trainers and resources. We also offer workshop follow-up opportunities such as in-country site visits with consultant experts. We welcome expressions of interest around training themes via the Access Accountability website.
Recommended Citation

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CONTENTS

Introduction 8
Background 10

Conference Summary 13
Human Rights and the Law 15
   The International criminal justice system
   Complementarity between professional lawyers and lay actors
   Legal considerations
   Evidence-gathering and presentation
   Victim engagement
   Context and history
   Key lessons

Human Rights Documentation Methods 23
   External challenges to documentation efforts
   Common mistakes and misconceptions in HRD practice
   Best practices
   Key lessons

Human Rights Documentation and Forensic Science 31
   What is forensic science and why does it matter?
   Managing victim expectations
   Forensic process
   International vs. grassroots approaches
   Key challenges in forensics
   Technology and methodology
   Key lessons

Human Rights Documentation and Information Technology 39
   Goal setting
   Risk management
   Key lessons

Presenters 43

Appendix: Resources 49
   Tools
   Manuals
   Risk Modeling
   Other Resources
INTRODUCTION

This report presents content from the conference and workshop entitled “Amassing Evidence: Applying Information Technology and Forensic Science in Human Rights Documentation,” held on 25-27 July 2017 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. The three-day event was designed to facilitate knowledge-sharing between human rights documentation practitioners and invited experts in the fields of law, information technology, data analysis and forensic science.

The conference and workshop was the first of its kind to be organized by the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG), as well as the first in Korea to cover those specific themes. The event was run in partnership with the United Nations Human Rights Office in Seoul, and received sponsorship and logistical support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Amnesty International South Korea, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and Korea University Human Rights Center.

The event was designed in response to the growing need of human rights documentation groups for access to advanced methodologies, tools, and legal knowledge that enhances the effectiveness of their documentation and advocacy efforts. It gave a thorough overview of several key aspects of human rights documentation practice via the presentations invited experts: Dr. Nevenka Tromp, Executive Director of the Geoffrey Nice Foundation; Friedhelm Weinberg of Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems (HURIDOCS); Dr. Patrick Ball of the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG); Youk Chhang from the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam); and Stefan Schmitt, formerly of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). Further details regarding the backgrounds of the presenters are found in this report.

In the two days following the conference, a workshop took place to offer a more in-depth, structured training program to the invited human rights documentation practitioners and advocates. The practitioner participants came...
from around 10 different country-groups, including from South East Asia, South America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. During the workshop, trainers discussed case studies, examples of best practice, and technological innovations with practical applicability to the documentation process.

The geographical diversity of the groups represented brought many unique insights drawn from the contexts they operate in. The workshop provided a safe space in which participants could exchange their experience and expertise, reflecting on their existing activities and ways to improve their operating procedures with newly learned tools and methods.
BACKGROUND

Globally, there is a disparity between those human rights documentation groups with expertise and concrete experience using advanced technological methods, and those groups that lack experience and knowledge, but who see the need to adopt international best practices for human rights documentation. Many groups have collected evidence of human rights abuses, and yet struggle to find a voice for the data in the structured environment of national or international legal proceedings. This conference and training workshop facilitated knowledge-sharing between human rights documentation practitioners and invited experts in the fields of law, documentation, data analysis and forensic science, to ensure data collected on human rights abuses supports legal proceedings and serves the purpose for which it is intended.

The three-day event had four key aims:

1. To expose human rights activists, human rights documentation practitioners and researchers to knowledge and expertise from other geographical settings, regarding investigating mass atrocities and holding perpetrators accountable (conference and workshop focus).

2. To provide practical training in consideration of the methodologies, tools and legal remedies applicable to situations where human rights abuses have occurred and are being investigated (workshop focus).

3. To improve public awareness of the possibilities offered by transitional justice, as well as to provide knowledge on the challenges of pursuing accountability for human rights abuses (conference and workshop focus).
4. To serve as a launch-pad for a human rights documentation resource hub for future capacity-building and information-sharing initiatives among Asia-based civil society documentation groups dealing with situations of human rights abuses. This will allow the possibility of holding future, similar events and workshops in the locales of participating organisations.

The conference and workshops were not intended to be a comprehensive training programme in all aspects of the themes covered, but rather a thorough introduction, with key takeaways for participants to apply in their work. Selected international human rights documentation practitioners from across the globe brought both experience and complementarity, drawn from the diverse settings in which they work. This conference also served as the first of a series of targeted training events to take place in other parts of Asia in the future. Through selected case studies, examples of best practice, innovations, and insights on what not to do, participants were able to reflect on their existing activities, and have the opportunity to improve systems, develop/apply new tools and explore more effective methods in their day-to-day activities.

The conference and workshop consisted of both public and closed-door information and training sessions. As a result, some of the content was duplicated across the two types of presentations. The content summary which follows is thus organized by theme, containing the combined insights of the various presenters and their areas of expertise. This is not a detailed record of every aspect of their training sessions, but rather a presentation of the key points, followed by a list of available resources that human rights documentation groups may access in order to learn more about the topics covered.
Welcoming remarks at the conference were given by O-Gon Kwon, who currently serves as President of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. He previously served as a permanent judge of the UN’s International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) from November 2001 until March 2016, and as Vice-President of the ICTY from 2008-2011. During his mandate at the ICTY, Kwon presided over the trial of former Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic and was one of three judges in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic.
CONFERENCE SUMMARY

"We often do not recognize what we do not know." - Dr. Patrick Ball
HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE LAW

Over the last two decades, the increase in the number of legal processes applied globally to pursue justice for mass human rights abuses in post conflict or former authoritarian settings has highlighted the key role of human rights documentation (HRD) groups in supporting and working within such processes. While expert knowledge of international human rights law is by no means a requirement for conducting documentation work, knowledge on the use of documentation data in judicial procedures, methods employed in legal investigations, and managing victim expectations of what can be achieved via legal redress, can benefit the work of HRD practitioners in a number of ways.

Dr. Nevenka Tromp and Dr. Patrick Ball – the two presenters on the topic of human rights and the law – both have extensive experience working with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). While Dr. Tromp served as a researcher for the prosecution team, Dr. Ball served as an expert witness.

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

For many situations dealing with past atrocities via a legal mechanism, the type and location of the mechanism is an important question, and no one type of court can satisfy all societies. In the case of the ICTY, the distance between the court in the Hague and the victims in the Balkans raised difficult questions about the efficacy of international criminal justice. However, a domestic court would not have been able to access the various government archives that were crucial for preparing the case against Slobodan Milosevic and other defendants.
COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LAWYERS AND LAY ACTORS

Dr. Tromp stated that the job of non-lawyers is to relay facts to lawyers and to persuade them of their relevance. In turn, the job of lawyers is to make a case from such facts and deliver it to the judges in the language of international jurisprudence. Within this is a crucial role for technical experts (expert witnesses), whose relationship with the jurists is influenced by differing legal systems. Dr. Ball stated that he had satisfactory interaction with most judges and prosecutors throughout his long experience working in large trials, where he generally experienced interest in the use of his statistical methods. He also shared his experience of having only limited opportunities to discuss with prosecution lawyers in one case, while he had much more input with others. He also described how some judges could be less interested in dealing with difficult statistical analysis; however, in the case of the ICTY, the judges were reported to have asked valid and challenging questions, engaging effectively with the science, which supported good outcomes.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Tromp’s account of her involvement with the ICTY began with a description of the basis for proving responsibility for criminal acts. The first is actus reus (the criminal act) and the second is mens rea (state of mind, or intent). The main challenge of the ICTY was proving the mens rea of political and military leaders, far removed from the actual crime scenes, who were responsible for the commission of atrocities beyond a reasonable doubt under the relevant legal standards. This required a range of witnesses including:

- Policy witnesses (insiders, internationals, such as peacekeepers, diplomats, humanitarian workers)
- Factual witnesses (journalists, human right activists)
- Character witnesses (insiders, fellow politicians, internationals)
- Expert witnesses (with knowledge on the history, politics, demography, and anthropology of the genocide/mass atrocities)
In the case of the ICTY, the collection of *mens rea* evidence was undertaken by investigators, lawyers, and the prosecution’s leadership research and military analysis teams. The evidence used to prove *mens rea* came from a wide range of sources, including state archives, international archives, human rights organizations and non-governmental organization archives, open sources such as media and social media, defence witnesses and private archives.

In the case of Slobodan Milosevic, the ICTY dealt with three separate indictments based on 66 counts of atrocities, and each count consisted of more than 20 charges. Identification and classification of the perpetrators of human rights crimes during the Yugoslav conflict was challenging. Key questions the prosecution had to address included:

- Whom do you concentrate on over the course of a long conflict?
- How do you prioritize or distinguish between on-the-ground perpetrators, linkage perpetrators, and high-level perpetrators?
- How do you prove the chain of command between the perpetrators?

Dr. Tromp described the way the investigation began with basic questions relating to the nature, time, location and responsibility assigned to the event in question. Investigators at the ICTY were mostly police, who were described as essential to the process, as the investigation needed to be as thorough as possible, while adhering strictly to established procedures to avoid the types of mistakes that could jeopardise the admissibility of the evidence.

**EVIDENCE-GATHERING AND PRESENTATION**

Dr. Tromp also provided insights regarding dealing with witnesses. Her advice included always ensuring you are accompanied when carrying out investigations and gathering evidence, as having someone to corroborate what you have been told is essential. She also emphasized the need to be in constant communication with a lawyer, as it is important to be aware of how witnesses may be used from a legal perspective. In the case of the ICTY, policy witnesses could assist with proving the delivery structure of orders,
while character witnesses helped the prosecution team understand Milosevic’s role in his own downfall.

As a non-lawyer, Dr. Tromp has ample experience of the strategies necessary for researchers and other information-holders to communicate effectively with lawyers. She spoke of the importance of the lawyer being able to transfer the information in the right terms to the judge when in the courtroom.

As one of the key themes of the conference was that of use of evidence in legal proceedings, key challenges to this process were also discussed. These included judges putting limits of the number of witnesses, and the amount of evidence that could be presented to the court. This can make it difficult to, for example, prove the systematic and genocidal nature of atrocities committed. In the case of dealing with technical evidence, Dr. Ball described the challenges presented by the preferences of judges, as well as problems that can arise when judges are unfamiliar with statistical analysis, especially when a particular piece of statistical evidence could determine the entire outcome of a trial. Cultural differences and the distinctions presented by the different judicial models (adversarial vs. continental) also present difficulties. Dr. Ball further described the challenge of engaging with the defense when that defense deviates from the logical language of science, introducing
“nonsensical” questions and assertions that are tolerated by the judge. This can leave little meaningful way in which to respond.

There were additional challenges to gathering evidence. As international courts have no law enforcement arm, they cannot force the state to submit the evidence they wish to see. For example, the Serbian Government stored documents that could potentially connect the atrocities committed by the Serbs to Belgrade authorities, and ultimately to Milosevic. However, Serbia stated its “vital state interest” as a reason to deny the Office of the Prosecutor’s request for these documents. In addition, in certain instances, documents themselves are not sufficient: when making use of the handwritten diaries of General Obrad Stevanovic in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic, these diaries needed to be corroborated by the man himself in the witness stand.

Dr. Ball also spoke on the use of statistical analysis in legal proceedings, emphasising that the role of the statistician is to understand what question the relevant parties are trying to answer, and what they need to know. Crucially, he stressed that statistics can be more useful in disproving rather than proving certain possibilities to “narrow the range of permissible lies” to quote Harvard Professor Michael Ignatieff. Dr. Tromp reflected on the use of statistical science in a number of international legal proceedings over the years, in addition to the ICTY, by noting that this field has gained traction as a valuable means of presenting evidence for prosecution teams.

VICTIM ENGAGEMENT

Given the public nature of international criminal proceedings, the court of public opinion is also a significant factor in how the success of such proceedings is evaluated by the victims and their families. According to Dr. Tromp, in the case of the ICTY, the public had high expectations, thanks in part to the ICTY’s own grandiose promise to deliver justice and “end impunity”. In the instances where individuals were acquitted over procedural issues, the victims demanded that they be punished nonetheless with little regard for the legal process. Moreover, as is often the case in such long, complicated trials, “slow justice might not be justice at all”.

As a result, it was emphasized that building reasonable expectations, in cooperation with the media, NGOs and victims’ groups is an essential part of
setting the stage for a criminal justice process. Dr. Tromp shared her view that having a strong outreach program, reflecting the work of every group engaged in the process – prosecution, judges and defence – should be part of the agenda of any such proceedings, to help victims feel engaged and informed.

An additional issue that arose in regard to victim engagement was that of the location of the ICTY in the Hague. When it came to victims participating in the trial process as witnesses, the distant location of the ICTY – far from the victims of the war and the abuses that took place – resulted in the “mental, emotional, physical isolation of its largest constituency”. Proceedings were also held in English – a further source of isolation for victims.1

CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Dr. Tromp served as a member of the Leadership Research Team in the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) and is an academic, not a lawyer. Within the team, many academic fields were represented, including history, politics, anthropology, legal studies and military analysis. The military analysis experts were found to be particularly important at the ICTY, given the need to discern collateral damage caused by war, which is not illegal. Determining where criminality started was central to the process. In the case of the ICTY, a sound knowledge of the historical context, particularly in relation to the Serbian nationalist agenda, was also important. To prove that killings had been widespread and systematic, as well as committed with intent, it was necessary to prove that the violence was a premeditated plan comprised of multiple charges and counts, across three conflicts that were part of a broader political agenda. Sound, local historical and political knowledge was therefore essential.

KEY LESSONS

The presenters provided a range of empirical examples of the challenges that were posed in the process of proving *mens rea* at the ICTY, and some of the key practices and strategies observed by the prosecution team in order to make a strong case against the accused. Human rights groups and NGOs were important fact witnesses in the case of the ICTY, and assisted with investigations. In addition, reports published by organisations such as Human Rights Watch served a key purpose in providing “notice” to the state leaders who were sent copies of these reports, demonstrating that these leaders had been informed that their actions constituted breaches of international law. Dr. Tromp emphasized the importance of documentation groups not being overly concerned with the legal admissibility of their work: she stressed that they should document as much about the events as they can, to the best of their technical ability. Ultimately, it will be the role of the prosecutorial team to use civil society data in a way which is legally admissible. However, Dr. Ball mentioned that the appropriateness of research methods for documentation work would come under scrutiny during the trial process and so it is important for documentation groups to take this into consideration. He also suggested that such groups pay attention to ‘sensitivity analysis’ or analysis that considers what percentage of testimonies would have to be inaccurate or untrue to change the results of the findings that form the basis of the claims they wish to make.

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**About the Geoffrey Nice Foundation** [www.geoffreynicefoundation.com](http://www.geoffreynicefoundation.com)

The Geoffrey Nice Foundation was created by Sir Geoffrey Nice, QC and Dr. Nevenka Tromp, both of whom were involved in the prosecution team at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The Foundation was established to “advance multidisciplinary understanding of International Criminal Justice delivered by courts, truth commissions and in other ways.” The Foundation runs training and education programmes in cooperation with students, researchers and academics in a range of disciplines - legal, historical, political and sociological - from different countries. Each year the Foundation runs a Masterclass in Dubrovnik, Croatia, on legal, political, diplomatic and military responses to mass atrocities. It also publishes research on these themes.

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**About the ICTY** [www.icty.org](http://www.icty.org)

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was the first international war crimes tribunal since the Nuremberg Trials, having been established in 1993 in response to reports of atrocities being committed during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Although no party was innocent, the majority of the crimes, including massacres, mass rape, torture and displacement, were committed by Bosnian-Serb forces, together with the Yugoslav army, in conflict with local ethnic minorities. The United Nations created the ICTY to hold national leaders responsible for grave violations committed after 1991 and to restore peace. The Tribunal ran until 2017 and processed 161 defendants, handing down six life sentences and making many milestone decisions regarding genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. It successfully indicted high-level politicians and military personnel for some of the worst wartime atrocities since WWII.
AMASSING EVIDENCE

Youk Chhang
The second theme of the conference and workshops looked at the practical aspects of human rights documentation work day to day. The main presenter on this theme was Dr. Patrick Ball, of HRDAG, while the conference day also featured a presentation by Mr. Youk Chhang, Executive Director of the Documentation Center for Cambodia (DC-Cam). Mr. Chhang has over 20 years’ experience documenting the mass atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge during the Cambodian genocide from 1975-79, and his organization supported the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) established in 1997. Dr. Ball gave a second, more detailed presentation during the workshop. While Dr. Ball’s focus was on the technical aspects of human rights documentation, with emphasis on how that information may be used in future accountability processes, Mr. Chhang focused on some of the big-picture challenges to conducting documentation work, with reference to the Cambodian experience.

External Challenges to documentation efforts

Mr. Chhang provided a personal introduction to his presentation, tracing the historical background to his work with DC-Cam. The organization was founded in 1995 as a branch of Yale University’s Cambodian Genocide Program after the passage of the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act of 1994 in the U.S. Congress, which authorized funding to the university to conduct research, training and documentation on the Khmer Rouge regime. DC-Cam then became an independent Cambodian research institute in January 1997, conducting extensive documentation activities as a local non-profit organisation. DC-Cam holds the belief that without justice, reconciliation is not possible, and this was a key motivator for DC-Cam’s call for a tribunal to deal
with Cambodia’s experiences under the Khmer Rouge. Mr. Chhang reminded the audience that documentation is a political act, so it is important to always have in mind the intentions behind doing documentation. He also reminded participants that the gathering of information about human rights abuses comes from stories – very personal, human stories – which demand respect from those collecting them and using them to further a particular end. Mr. Chhang also stated that it is important to recognize that there is a limit to what human rights documentation can achieve in recording mass atrocities.

Drawing on his 20 years of work in the field, Mr. Chhang pointed to three areas of challenge arising in the process of documenting genocide and other atrocities:

**Political:** It is impossible to avoid politics in the process of human rights documentation. In the Cambodian case, European countries such as Germany did not support or get involved in the process of human rights documentation, whereas the United States did become involved as a result of the passage of the 1994 Cambodian Genocide Justice Act.

**Networking:** It is difficult to forge a credible network of support for human rights documentation. Different NGOs in post-conflict societies
have differing interpretations of human rights violations. In addition, ongoing corruption and human rights violations should not be seen as distinct from past violations. Finding and working together with the right partners who share your commitment is important.

**Resources:** It is very expensive to have proper data management, systems and technology, and funding to support documentation efforts, especially those that cannot demonstrate immediate impact, is difficult to secure early on. As genocide and crimes against humanity are political acts, it is difficult to avoid exclusion from some sources of funding.

Mr. Chhang emphasized that these three areas of challenge – as experienced in the Cambodian case – will be repeated wherever human rights violations and mass atrocities occur.

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**Common mistakes and misconceptions in HRD practice**

During Dr. Ball's first presentation, he gave a summary of his core message as a data scientist with long experience in the application of his work to domestic and international criminal justice proceedings against perpetrators of human rights abuses. Dr. Ball emphasized that the statistics used by human rights groups in their reporting, publicity and legal proceedings should be accurate to avoid misleading the public or making unsubstantiated claims. He stated that in human rights data collection, “we often do not recognize what we do not know”. In the case of post-2003 Iraq, for example, the terror attacks, perpetrated mostly by Sunnis against Shiite targets and claiming dozens of lives, grabbed headlines even though the total death toll from the sectarian killings of Sunni residents by Shiite forces outnumbered the former when totaled. The common problem of naive statistics reinforces cognitive bias and fails to paint an accurate picture. We should always ask ourselves “What is the data that is hidden from us?” Three main points were made during his presentation:

- Only a formal, probability-based model can bridge the gap between what is observed (the sample) and what is true (the population).
• When raising a big question about a case, try to reverse the question and ask whether we can reject the hypotheses. This can help determine a selection bias.

• Regardless of its scale, raw data does not provide a reliable basis for understanding patterns, neither does it become a foundation for models in counting data points in a map.

Dr. Ball then addressed some of the common fallacies of statistics. He said that statistics can easily be distracting or misleading if employed without care. In addition, contrary to popular belief, the sampling process is more important than the sample size. Moreover, comparing disparate data sets prepared independently by different human rights groups is preferable to the same groups collecting the data together as this latter approach could strengthen the existing bias in favor of the already overrepresented victim categories. Dr. Ball cautioned against the common tendency to have blind faith in statistical data, and noted that figures are often widely misused and that high quality qualitative research is better than a misleading graph. He pointed to examples throughout the global body of human rights documentation reporting, where statistics have been seized upon by the media and misrepresented, despite having been accompanied by explanations or caveats.
that seek to contextualize the data. The reader has a tendency to see every statistic as a parameter of the overall universe, and will rarely take proper note of accompanying explanations. Ideally, HRD group data should only be applied and published when it is precise enough to support the argument being made. Moreover, statistics should play a secondary role to the human story of the victims.

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**Best practices**

Dr. Ball explained that the point of rigorous statistics is to be right or to have a sense of how imprecise the measures are. Key points which human rights documenters should be aware of regarding statistics include:

- Statistics is about populations, not individuals
- Statistics is mainly about comparisons: changes over time, comparisons among regions
- With only some of the data, generalizing to the population is necessary

As partial data means uncertain estimates, statistics is sometimes referred to as the science of uncertainty.

Dr. Ball presented three ways in which it is possible to have rigorous statistics:

1. A perfect census, a circumstance with all the data you need. Although it is possible to have all the data, doing so is very expensive and is rarely achieved.

2. A random sample of the population, otherwise known as a probability sample. However, it is hard to know what the population is because human rights violations are inherently hard to know.

3. Posterior modelling of the sampling process (capture-recapture, raking).
He also discussed network sampling, recognizing that this method is commonly used by human rights documentation groups. This method involves determining the size of the population through network referrals. However, this method is prone to biases as well and, in some cases, the lack of genuine networks among a pool of possible interviewees (for example, the surviving family members of “disappeared” radical students may not know each other), makes its use less than ideal.

**Key lessons**

Dr. Ball concluded his workshop presentation with some key pieces of advice for human rights groups and practitioners engaged in documentation efforts:

1. Write everything down and do not lose it.
2. Record personal narratives, not the numbers.
3. Get copies of photos, videos, medical records, border and immigration records, satellite images, news reports – whatever circumstantial and other information is available.
4. Get stories: text and video. Stories are how people remember and are a crucial method of ensuring victim’s voices are prioritized.
5. Rather than being obsessed with admissible evidence, focus on not forgetting what you have.

The only format of documentation that is invulnerable to change in technology is text-based records. Further, in order to deal with lack of collaboration among NGOs due to possible concerns about credibility, Dr. Ball recommended that NGOs find institutions that might serve as a trustworthy archive source.

**About the ECCC** [www.eccc.gov.kh](http://www.eccc.gov.kh)

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (2006-present), were established when the Cambodian government requested the help of the United Nations to prosecute leaders of the Khmer Rouge deemed “most responsible” for the events that occurred during the regime’s four-year rule from 1975-79. Under the leadership of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge period saw the death of around 2 million people from mass executions, starvation, disease and torture. The ECCC was established as a hybrid court in Phnom Penh, and included both Cambodian and foreign prosecutors and judges. Four cases were opened and three of those have resulted in sentences to date; however, the many years between the end of the Khmer Rouge regime and the commencement of the ECCC meant that many alleged perpetrators, including Pol Pot, had passed away before they could be tried. The Tribunal faced criticism for both its cost and length, as well as the interference of the Cambodian government. However, it has nevertheless been a landmark institution for its structure, focus, and methods of victim engagement.
About DC-Cam  www.dccam.org

The Documentation Center of Cambodia was established by Yale University’s Cambodia Genocide Program under the leadership of Prof. Ben Kieman in 1995. DC-Cam became an independent Cambodian research institute in 1997. DC-Cam continues to serve as a major source of information about this tragic period of human history for academics, lawyers, activists and the general public. DC-Cam has two main objectives. The first is to record and preserve the history of the Khmer Rouge regime for future generations. The second is to compile and organise information that can serve as potential evidence in a legal accounting for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. DC-Cam has been a key resource for the work of the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia, and it also runs nationwide outreach and education programs.

About HRDAG  hrdag.org

The Human Rights Data Analysis Group began in 1991 when its founder, Patrick Ball, began creating databases for human rights groups in El Salvador. Since then, he has joined numerous projects worldwide. HRDAG became a non-profit project of Community Partners in 2013. HRDAG provides technical expertise to international and local human rights groups. It examines and identifies statistical patterns in the conflicts being investigated. HRDAG works with a project’s strategic leadership, listening to their debates and focusing analysis on their questions. From time to time, HRDAG issues its own scientific reports focused on the statistical aspects of the analysis.
The third theme of the conference focused on the forensic science aspect of human rights documentation work. This is an important area for human rights documenters to build knowledge in, even though they may not be involved in the forensic investigation of incidents and sites where incidents are believed to have occurred. The reason for this is that human rights documenters are, at times, 'first responders' to locations containing evidence, and it is therefore important that they gather information from the perspective of a crime scene investigator. This ensures that any information they gather and/or record will be as useful as possible to any future legal process.

What is forensic science and why does it matter?

Mr. Schmitt noted that the key difference between forensic scientists and academic scientists is that forensic scientists cannot afford to make mistakes, because compromised materials cannot be resuscitated as admissible evidence in a court of law. Forensic science involves the application of science in legal settings to resolve legal issues. For example, in order to prove crimes against humanity, those crimes must be proven to be systematic or widespread. The answer from a scientific perspective is thus defined by the law, and there are many different levels of definitions. When presenting forensic findings in court, everything about how the science was done needs to be presented, from handwritten notes to laboratory results. Although a court will usually organize its own investigations, at times HRD groups may encounter sites first. In order to treat such sites appropriately and protect the evidence, it is important to have standard ways of going about the science. This is where 'chain of custody' becomes important.
Managing victim expectations

Mr. Schmitt began his presentation by stating, “justice is never about the truth”. He stressed that this fact is important for people who work with victims: as human rights documentation practitioners, we must be able to express that justice is about determining whether someone is guilty of a specific crime that is defined by the law. All the court has to do is prove that a crime was committed, and ultimately it is the court that is responsible for determining the punishment. Oftentimes, that means that the court does not have to look at all the circumstances under which a crime occurred. From the perspective of many victims, the punishment that the perpetrators receive is not just, particularly as different legal systems, governed by their respective national settings and cultures, may have varying views about what constitutes fair punishment. It is important that victims who come forward with hopes of justice have their expectations adequately managed.

Forensic process

Mr Schmitt then turned to the practical aspects of his work as a forensic investigator, beginning with jurisdiction as a prerequisite for any investigation, obtained by the specialists prior to undertaking their work, from the appropriate (legal) authority. He then defined what constitutes a ‘crime scene’, by describing its various components, as follows:

- A crime scene has temporal and geographical elements, as well as a legal context which defines the nature of the crime. Oftentimes you have to go to a scene first to determine whether a crime happened or not.
- It contains evidence: usually someone is designated to determine if something is evidence. ‘Evidence’ is a term that is loosely used, especially in the press; however, in a court of law, evidence is decided by the court.

A second important factor in evidence collection is ‘chain of custody’. Mr Schmitt stated that chain of custody is often misunderstood as being a
bundle of receipts tracing the movement of information and evidence. However, it is in fact tied closely to forensics (applying science to answer a legal question or a question within a legal framework). Those people featured within the chain of custody must fall within the jurisdiction of the investigation: the crime scene investigator, the laboratory that handles any evidence, and those who undertake analysis, for example. Typically, a legal custodian is responsible for determining if the information, and the person at each stage of the chain, are both legal and credible.

The evidence gathered during forensic investigations can be used in a range of settings, including in the court of public opinion (press and advocacy); in truth commissions and commissions of inquiry; or in the court of law, where standards of evidence can vary. Chain of custody records ensure that evidence comes back to the person who analyzes it. This ensures that the information is credible, while also protecting the person who provided the information. This requires authenticating the evidence through identification of the point of origin, and the person who handled the evidence at a given point in time. For example, handwritten notes can be clearly tied back to an individual, because handwritten notes are individual.

Mr. Schmitt has done forensic assessments in Libya and Afghanistan, both of which presented significant challenges related to knowledge and organization. He described the process of setting up a forensic assessment as beginning with looking at needs assessments and gap analysis from the perspective of management consulting. This principally involves looking at the current state of affairs, the desired future state (ideally where all missing people are identified), and realistic steps to achieve those goals. He pointed to the management of family expectations as a key starting point in planning for a forensic investigation. Identification of the remains of victims can take a long time, often years, and so victims and the groups supporting them should understand clearly what the process involves.

**International vs. grassroots approaches**

Mr. Schmitt then discussed his experience working on two types of forensic investigations pertaining to mass graves: a grassroots-organized investigation in Guatemala, and an international investigation in Rwanda. The investigation
of mass graves in Guatemala arose during what was known as the “Time of Violence”. Mass killings and burials from the late 1970s resulted from a US-backed counterinsurgency campaign involving wholesale destruction of rural villages that might harbor communist guerrillas. Villagers, including women and children, were massacred and buried in mass graves.

The civilian population suffered 36 years of “oppressive justice”, consisting of social cleansing by the military and police, secret detentions and disappearances. However, as in the case of most incidences of this kind of violence, mass graves are very rarely secret. Mr. Schmitt emphasized that when mass graves exist and the families of victims are prohibited from honouring the dead as they see fit, those families and communities will live with the fear of the existence of those graves, which therefore serve as a powerful reminder of who is in charge.

Mr Schmitt’s involvement in Guatemala was via a grassroots approach. The two key considerations he and his team began with were first, gaining support and trust from the families, surviving victims and witnesses. Second, it was essential to have local officials grant jurisdiction. They then needed to build a local team of qualified forensic investigators. With support from the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Physicians for Human Rights, The Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team was established in 1992.

Mr. Schmitt highlighted a number of crucial aspects of collecting evidence. First, he described how to ensure exhumed evidence is properly catalogued and preserved. Circumstantial or conditional evidence is of great importance at this stage, and human remains, for example, should be documented in place: as soon as a body is exhumed, the context is gone. It is also essential to have photographs, complementary sketches and notes from the investigator to cross-reference with each other, and to record the chain of custody.

He also discussed the need to make space for victims, especially in places where there is deep distrust of judicial system. This can take the form of allowing victims to observe the proceedings, to gain their permission to access lands and sites, and, where necessary to ensure religious and/or spiritual ceremonies for dealing with dead are recognized and included. For example, the Catholic Church in Guatemala allowed Mayan priests to bless sites prior to exhumations. In the Guatemalan case, it became clear that justice
does not happen quickly. Some perpetrators have been convicted in court, but these were mainly lower tiered people.

Some of the main features of the local approach adopted in the Guatemalan investigations were as follows:

- Forensic investigators were dealing with skeletal remains and not flesh remains;
- They relied on little resources with few staff and reliance on local support with victims' families involved;
- Jurisdiction was evolutionary because the jurisdiction shifted from its original basis to become part of a larger administration;
- The investigation was the first to produce a report much like that of a truth commission. They also went on to write a comic book version for people who could not read on an academic level. This was followed by actual truth commissions.

Mr Schmitt contrasted his experience during the Guatemalan investigations with the international approach he encountered in Rwanda, investigating for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). He described the ICTR as completely different, principally because it had much more funding and resources. The ICTR was initially focused on evidence collection and forensic analysis rather than victim identifications, but came to include the latter when faced with the growing discontent of the surviving families. Unfortunately, identification was impossible for the remains that had been disassociated as a result of being randomly dumped in large piles during the initial period.

**Key challenges in forensics**

The presentation then turned to some reflections on dealing with mass grave sites in another, very different setting – Afghanistan. Mr. Schmitt described the implications of Afghanistan’s oral tradition, which meant that ascertaining information from actual witnesses to killings and burials was difficult, as narratives of events tend to be an “agreed upon” version, passed from person to person. He described how it could take 20 minutes to discern whether an individual had actually seen the events or locations he or she was describing,
or whether they were relaying information second-hand. Mr. Schmitt explained that even though oral history has a political function in the same way as it does in many places, in Afghanistan it also guarantees people’s survival. Bearing witness is a social responsibility, as long as you do so according to the narrative decided by the elders. This made finding actual witnesses to testify very difficult. This challenge was compounded by the lack of a legal space in which to address past violations.

In terms of processing the mass graves themselves, the international investigators were unable to gain access to the sites before local people, who took it upon themselves to shovel piles of bones together and use jewelry to identify victims. Although local people had, in their own way, tried to give the sites the respect needed, due to lack of forensic knowledge, they ended up doing an exhumation and reburial that recounted only an agreed upon history, and prevented effective forensic analysis of the sites.

### Technology and methodology

The final part of the presentation discussed some additional considerations based on Mr. Schmitt’s experience with evolving investigative methodologies and technology. For example, satellite imagery has proven vital in situations where the availability of images across multiple years allowed the identification of mass graves that had been exhumed and the remains moved. He also mentioned the importance of proving to victims that the investigation team has done their best to find what they are looking for. This may sometimes mean digging trenches to prove that a grave is not where local people believe it to be. He emphasised continually the importance of recording data in multiple ways, including hand sketches, written notes, photographs, physical evidence and satellite imagery, where appropriate.

### Key lessons

Mr. Schmitt discussed some of the central aspects of HRD methods. He stated, for example, that sketches are important to show where any photographs taken are located within the entire scene. It is important not to rename photo files, and to ensure to maintain the metadata attached to them. Cross referencing yourself as
an investigator by writing down on sketches where you stop to take photos is also helpful. Notes should also include estimated distances or lengths, a North-pointing arrow and/or a scale where appropriate, as well as the name, date and case number of the investigator. Taking photos of the entire scene, as well as medium-range and close-up photos, overlapping and from different angles, helps with later analysis and better recording. Having a meaningful case numbering system is also important, while enabling a feature for adding electronic signatures to documents may help with the chain of custody. Keeping an inventory of paper archives to make all files easy to locate for the future is essential.

**About Physicians for Human Rights**  [phr.org](http://phr.org)

Physicians for human rights investigates and documents human rights violations, and engages in advocacy to give voice to survivors and witnesses. It aims to support reconciliation processes by ensuring that perpetrators can be held accountable for their crimes. Its core disciplines of science, medicine, forensics and public health are used to inform research and strengthen the skills of frontline human rights defenders. Physicians for Human Rights works in a large number of countries globally, on a range of focus areas including killings and mass atrocities, sexual violence, weapons, and attacks on health care.

**About the “Time of Violence” in Guatemala**

Guatemala experienced a decades-long civil war between the early 1960s and the late 1990s, which ended in a peace accord facilitated by the United Nations. The violence was characterized by state repression against citizens in response to unrest generated by different militia groups. In 1997 the Commission for Historical Clarification commenced activities to look into the past with “objectivity, equity and impartiality.” The commission revealed that over 200,000 people were killed or disappeared during the conflict and of the violations committed, 93% were attributed to state forces and related paramilitary groups.

**About the ICTR**  [unictr.imct.org](http://unictr.imct.org)

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was established to address the events of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, when extremist members of the Hutu tribe began the organized killing of members of the Tutsi tribe. The violence escalated when ordinary Hutu citizens joined the genocide, and within 100 days, over 800,000 people had died. Many others were raped or otherwise injured. The ICTR was established as a complementary mechanism alongside the Rwandan National Courts and the Gacaca (“grassroots”) courts. The ICTR intended to prosecute the leaders responsible for the genocide, and was established in Tanzania, running from 1995-2015. It prosecuted and sentenced a number of high-ranked military and civilian leaders, and was the first international tribunal to issue genocide-related verdicts and to recognise sexual violence as acts of genocide.
START WITH GO

- Begin by stating your goal.
- Examples:
  - Gather evidence on individual cases.
  - Reconstruct events where human rights abuses occurred.
  - Does the population encompass different regions?
  - National advocacy for human rights.

Friedhelm Weinberg
The final part of this event was a workshop dedicated to the application of information technology to human rights documentation work. Human rights documenters work with a range of digital tools and to record, store, manage and protect their data. Some contexts only allow for relatively primitive methods, whereas others offer the ability to adopt more sophisticated tools. Equally, some contexts of human rights work present much greater security threats (both to the data and the people involved) than others. In order to account for these disparities, this workshop focused on goal setting and risk management, and how this should inform the design of the technologies adopted by human rights documentation practitioners. This workshop session was led by Friedhelm Weinberg, Executive Director of HURIDOCS, and his colleague, Project Manager for Asia, Hyeong-sik Yoo.

Goal setting

The presenters began by advising human rights defenders to begin reviewing their technological infrastructure by looking at their goals: What do we need and for what purpose? Key questions posed to the participants included:

- Is more information always better?
- Is managing risk more important than achieving advocacy goals?
- Is technology essential to your work?

When thinking about the goals of the organization, it is important to be specific and clear about current needs, and to take care not to get lost in considering future possibilities. However, it is also important to consider how the environment and the goals related to them may change over time. Also useful to
think about is who the other organizations are that are doing this work, and how might knowledge of their methods and technologies improve the overall effort?

In an ideal world, planning of this nature would be done before work commences; however, this is rarely possible, and resources have a large impact on how the process unfolds and what it finds. The presenters clarified key terms related to the type of work that human rights documentation groups may be involved in:

**Monitoring**: the close observation of a situation or individual case carried out so as to determine what further action needs to be taken.

**Fact-finding**: identifying the violations in one event, and establishing the facts relevant to these violations. Fact-finding and investigation are terms that are used interchangeably.

**Documentation**: the systematic recording of the results of the investigation of one or several events.

They also described two complementary approaches and two methodologies to this kind of work. Approaches may be related to “violations” or to “progressive realization”. The two complementary methodologies are “events-based” methodologies (acts and events) and “indicator-based methodologies”. With this in mind, those involved in documentation should verify what types of information they are working on, and the quality of the information. They should also consider how much time is available to gather the information, whether there is direct access, the possibility or desirability of collaboration with other groups, how to best organize resources, as well as the necessary training needs, collaborators and technologies.

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**Risk management**

Once the goals of the organization have been situated within the above considerations, risk assessment is an important next step. The digital, physical and psychosocial aspects of undertaking this work are often linked to each other. This is where risk assessments can be immensely beneficial to help
prioritize, prepare and react to the information-gathering environment. In addition, risk assessment is an ongoing process that should continue for the lifespan of the organization.

Although the groups present at the workshop operate in very different geographical and political contexts, the presenters emphasized the importance of having a stable software platform. Challenges and threats can come from an array of directions, including finance, human resources, and process, as well as threats to the well-being of people or psycho-social risks. The table below shows some examples of features of a typical risk assessment in human rights work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Adversary</th>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Testimony, finance info, strategy, DNA profiles, contracts, smartphone information, paper documents?</td>
<td>Who may want the information? Law enforcement, an unreliable IT department, competitor, government, military?</td>
<td>What can adversaries do? A threat is the link between our assets and adversaries. i.e. Not a fear of hacking, but a fear of someone accessing our data.</td>
<td>Based on what we know, is it high or low?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key lessons**

Prioritize those threats that are likely and of the most serious consequences, and then identify measures to prevent or limit impact. This may mean reconsidering whether the goals of the organization are still achievable within the existing environment. It is essential to understand goals, realities and work flows, to assess risks and take action. Identifying resources and technology needs can be helpful to find solutions. The presenters suggested a number of online resources to assist in the processes they described (see appendix).

**About HURIDOCS**  [www.huridocs.org](http://www.huridocs.org)

Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems based in Geneva, was founded in 1982 as a global network of human rights organisations to pool expertise on how to organise, manage and use information effectively to promote and protect human rights. HURIDOCS supports human rights defenders using information technologies and documentation methods to organise and present data about violations. Its team working in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe understands the specific challenges of each of these contexts. HURIDOCS also aims to strengthen international and regional human rights mechanisms by making their datasets – case law, reports, communications or resolutions – openly accessible, leading to more effective advocacy and litigation.
PRESENTERS
Patrick Ball, Ph.D.
Director of Research, Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG)

Patrick Ball has spent more than twenty years conducting quantitative analysis for truth commissions, non-governmental organizations, international criminal tribunals, and United Nations missions in El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, South Africa, Chad, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Liberia, Perú, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Syria. From 2013 through 2015, Patrick was Executive Director of HRDAG; on December 1, 2015, he became the Director of Research. Patrick provided testimony in two cases at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the first in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic, the former President of Serbia. He also provided expert testimony in Guatemala’s Supreme Court in the trial of General José Efraín Ríos Montt, the de-facto president of Guatemala in 1982-1983. In September 2015, Patrick provided expert testimony in the trial of former President of Chad, Hissène Habré. Patrick received his bachelor of arts degree from Columbia University, and his doctorate from the University of Michigan.
Youk Chhang
Executive Director, Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)
Youk Chhang is the Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), founder of Sleuk Rith Institute and a survivor of the Khmer Rouge's “killing fields.” He has testified before the Khmer Rouge tribunal as a living witness to genocide, developed and established the Anlong Veng Peace Center to facilitate research and foster reconciliation. He currently leads DC-Cam's development of the Sleuk Rith Institute and works to advance DC-Cam's vision of a Legacy of Justice, Legacy of Memory and Education, and Legacy of Healing. Chhang has authored several articles and book chapters on justice and reconciliation and co-edited the book Cambodia's Hidden Scars: Trauma Psychology in the Wake of the Khmer Rouge (2011). He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights at Rutgers University-Newark. He was named one of TIME magazine’s “60 Asian heroes” in 2006 and one of the “Time 100” most influential people in the world in 2007 for his stand against impunity in Cambodia and elsewhere. He received the Center For Justice and Accountability's Judith Lee Stronach Human Rights Award in 2017 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2018.
Stefan Schmitt, M.S.
Former Director of the International Forensic Program, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)
Stefan Schmitt directed PHR’s International Forensic Program. Schmitt documented a massacre by Qaddafi forces in Tripoli for Libyan authorities and the International Criminal Court. Subsequently, the authorities asked him to assemble a team of forensic and legal experts to conduct a human identification needs assessment and gap analysis to advise on identifying the dead from Libya’s revolution. Internationally, Schmitt has worked for the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and as a forensic consultant to the UN in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Liberia, among others. He has also consulted for human rights groups around the world on cases where forensic science documents human rights abuses. Schmitt holds a BA in anthropology from Universidad del Valle, Guatemala, as well as an MS in criminology and criminal justice from Florida State University.
Nevenka Tromp, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Geoffrey Nice Foundation and Former Principle Researcher for the ICTY’s team prosecuting Slodoban Milosevic, former President of Serbia

Dr. Nevenka tromp studied Political Science at the University of Zagreb and Russian Studies at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. She has been working in the Department of European studies at the University of Amsterdam since 1992. She worked as a Researcher on the Leadership Research Team in the Office of Prosecutor (OTP) at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where she was principal researcher on history and politics in the trial of Slodoban Milosevic. She also worked on other key cases, most notably that of Radovan Karadzic. Tromp received her PhD from the University of Amsterdam’s Center for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in spring 2015. She is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Geoffrey Nice Foundation on Law, History, Politics, and Society in the Context of Mass Atrocities, which supports and provides cross-national educational opportunities for students, researchers, and academics in the field of International Criminal Justice. Tromp’s book “Prosecuting Slodoban Milosevic: The Unfinished trial” was published by Routledge Publishers in 2016.
Friedhelm Weinberg

Executive Director, HURIDOCS

HURIDOCS was founded in 1982 as a global network of human rights organisations to pool expertise on how to organise, manage and use information effectively to promote and protect human rights. Friedhelm Weinberg has overseen HURIDOCS’ projects and partnerships around the globe since he first joined HURIDOCS in 2012. Over the years, he has taken on a variety of roles, including communications and project management and most recently as Deputy Director. Previously, he worked as a journalist in his native Germany.
APPENDIX: RESOURCES
**Tools**

- **Access Accountability**
  accessaccountability.org
- **HURIDOCS Collaboratory**
  collaboratory.huridocs.org
- **OpenEvsys**
  www.openevsys.org
- **Uwazi**
  www.uwazi.io
- **Corroborator**
  equalit.ie/portfolio/corroborator

**Manuals**

- “What is Documentation?”, HURIDOCS
  www.huridocs.org/resource/what-is-documentation
- “What is Monitoring?”, HURIDOCS
  www.huridocs.org/resource/what-is-monitoring
- “Events Standard Formats”, HURIDOCS
  www.huridocs.org/resource/huridocs-events-standard-formats
- “Micro-Thesauri”, HURIDOCS
  www.huridocs.org/resource/micro-thesauri
- “Human Rights Documentation Toolkit”, PILPG et. al.
  www.hrdtoolkit.org

**Risk Modeling**

- **Organisational Security**
  orgsec.community/display/OS
- **Holistic Security**
  holistic-security.tacticaltech.org
• SAFETAG  
safetag.org  
• Level Up  
www.level-up.cc  

Other Resources

“The Victims’ Court: A Study of 622 Victim Participants at the International Criminal Court”, Berkeley Law Human Rights Center report library  
www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/  

www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/  

www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/  

“Bearing Witness at the International Criminal Court”, Berkeley Law Human Rights Center report library  
www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/  

www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/  

“Safe Haven: Sheltering Displaced Persons from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence; Comparative Report”, Berkeley Law Human Rights Center report library  
www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/
www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/

www.law.berkeley.edu/research/human-rights-center/publications/reports/