edited by DIANA PABST

Making "Good Data" a Weapon for Human Rights

All human rights work begins at the local level, with individual accounts of abuse and persecution. Documenting these cases can be a painstaking process—and a way of making the world take notice. Accurate and reliable information is crucial.

When data has been soundly collected and interpreted, the findings hold greater clout. Patterns may emerge that can help in assigning responsibility for violations. "With hard, factual information, perpetrators can be brought to justice," said Judith Dueck, North American representative for Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International.

HURIDOCS and AAAS are active in a project to develop systematic methods for documenting human rights violations. Such methods will aid the collection and sharing of "good data" that can be used to shed light on past abuses and preclude future violations, according to Daniel Salcedo, a senior program associate in the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, part of the Directorate for Science and Policy Programs.

"Eventually only so much can be done on a case-by-case basis," he said. "That's when database techniques become useful—to manage thousands of cases and begin to see patterns."

HURIDOCS, a global network of human rights organizations, trains grassroots workers in data-management techniques for human rights casework. One documentation tool HURIDOCS developed is used to customize formats for data entry. It helps users convert narrative accounts of violations into discrete pieces of information that can be accessed for analysis.

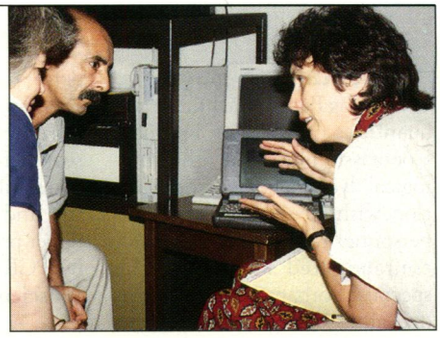
Ricardo Cifuentes of Chile has been integrating the HURIDOCS format into a "user-friendly" computer program. Last month he demonstrated it to a group of computer experts who met at AAAS to compare notes on their efforts to design compatible databases for human rights organizations. Groups represented ranged from the Asociacion Pro Derechos Humanos in Peru to Amnesty International in London.

The task is tougher than it sounds, said Patrick Ball, a consultant to AAAS. "Human rights is a hugely complex arena. For a database to be useful it has to be as complex and flexible as the data. But the more flexible the database, the more difficult it is to produce."

"No one thinks about where the data came from or how it was collected," he said. "But at the right moment, the use of that data can be powerfully explosive."

Salcedo cited an example from El Salvador. After the civil war, a U.N. –sponsored commission was set up to investigate human rights abuses, especially allegations of military involvement in deaths and "disappearances." But assigning responsibility for specific crimes to individual military personnel proved difficult. Human rights monitoring groups organized database records to show locations where bodies had been found. By correlating that data with a map indicating which officers had been in charge of various districts, certain individuals were implicated in a large share of the crimes. As a result, more than 100 high-ranking officers were purged.

Statistical analysis makes data



DIANA PABST

Better tools. Romilly Gregory designed a database for Amnesty International in London.

"We Urge You to Take Prompt Action"

The appeal went out from AAAS on 12 January. Russian chemist Vil Mirzayanov, who publicly revealed that new binary nerve gases were being produced and tested in Moscow in violation of international treaties, would be tried on criminal charges 26 January for revealing state secrets. "We urge you to take prompt action on his behalf," said the e-mail message to 500 scientists around the world. "Please send telegrams, faxes, or express delivery letters to the officials listed below."

Respondents were told to request that foreigners be allowed at the trial and to protest that a scientist was being persecuted for exercising his scientific and ethical responsibilities.

Three weeks later, another bulletin brought users of the AAAS Human Rights Action Network up to date. When Mirzayanov decided to boycott his prolonged trial, he was arrested and imprisoned. AAASHRAN urged stepped-up appeals. A note was added: Letters from U.S. scientific organizations were shown on Russian television, and an official said anonymously the case might be dropped.

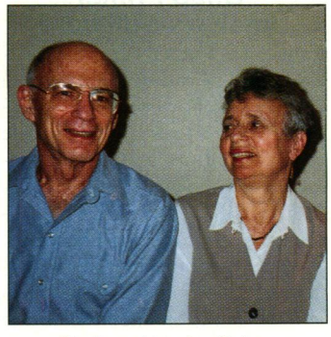
On 11 March, readers learned Mirzayanov had been released and the case dismissed.

The case "is one of the best examples of how the electronic alert system works," said Morton Sklar, who operates AAASHRAN. "It helped generate concerted action that resulted in his being freed. The scientific community as a whole was involved, but the network played a large role in mobilizing that effort."

Begun last October, AAASHRAN has alerted subscribers to 44 cases involving scientists in 30 countries. Issues covered by alerts have included violations of academic freedom, imprisonment for political activity, death threats, travel restrictions, misuse of psychiatric treatment for political purposes, and refusal to allow needed medical care. "Urgent actions" and updates are sent weekly.

AAASHRAN builds on traditional letter-writing campaigns. E-mail accelerates the process and extends the reach. "It makes an enormous difference," said Audrey Chapman, director of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program. Two factors shape how effective an appeal is, she said. "First is how quickly it's made relative to when the violation occurred. Second is how many people you can mobilize—how well it is shown that the case is of international concern." AAASHRAN coordinates appeals with groups such as Amnesty International to encourage simultaneous responses.

To join, send the message **subscribe aaashran e-mailname** to **listserv@gwuvm.gwu.edu** on the Internet. For more information, call Morton Sklar at 202-326-6799 or send an e-mail message via Internet to **msklar@aaas.org.**



Herb and Louise Spirer

"work." "It gets down to the question, 'How do they know how many?' " said Herbert Spirer, a pioneer in the use of quantitative methods in human rights work.

"Statistics is about dealing with uncertainty, measuring things that aren't exact or where counts may not be reliable," said Spirer, a professor emeritus in the University of Connecticut's business school and a consultant to AAAS. "When human rights groups make claims of violations that are unsubstantiated or unreliable, they lose a lot of credibility."

AAAS recently published *Analysis for Monitoring Human Rights*, written by Spirer and his wife, Louise. A training manual for human rights workers, it shows how statistical techniques can be used to interpret data and present the results in a convincing way to courts, monitoring agencies, the media, and the public. An editor, Louise Spirer simplified the language so the book could be used by those for whom English is a second language.

Examples use real data and true situations—some from Herb Spirer's human rights consulting. "Unfortunately," he said, "in this business you're never going to run out of work."

Resources Available

- *Directory of Persecuted Scientists, Engineers, and Health Professionals* describes 468 cases AAAS is addressing. Copies are $10 each from the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, 1333 H Street, N.W., Washington, DC, 20005; phone 202-326-6790.
- *Data Analysis for Monitoring Human Rights* is available for $15 from AAAS Distribution Center, P.O. Box 521, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701; phone 1-800-222-7809.
- A consulting service operated by AAAS with the American Statistical Association and the Electronic Privacy Information Center provides technical assistance for human rights work. For information, call 202-326-6790.

New Dues Rates Set for 1995

The AAAS Board of Directors approved a dues increase for 1995. The Board authorizes increases to cover two kinds of expenses: unavoidable costs associated with running AAAS and publishing ***Science***, and new expenses that add value to membership. Sharply higher postage, new accounting rules, and more research and news pages in ***Science*** are examples of the kinds of new expenses the Board anticipated in setting the 1995 dues rates.

The new rates, effective for membership or subscription terms beginning after 31 December 1994, are:

Regular members: $97
Postdocs and K–12 teachers: $72
Emeritus members who receive ***Science***: $53
Students: $50
Patrons: $200
Corporate: $1000
Spouses and supporting and emeritus members who do not receive ***Science***: $35
Libraries and institutions: $228

In addition, there will be an increase in airmail and international surface postage.

All members whose membership expires in 1995 will be advised of the new rates on their renewal notices.

Member dues and voluntary contributions form the critical financial base for a wide range of AAAS activities. For more information, contact the AAAS Membership Office at 202-326-6417.

BRIAN SMITH

On Capitol Hill. Senator Richard Lugar, center, met last month with national security experts from former Soviet countries and staff members of the AAAS Program on Science and International Security.

Lessons in U.S. Arms Control

"Senator, your name is very well known in my country," Ural Latypov of Belarus told Richard Lugar (R–IN) at a meeting on Capitol Hill last month. Latypov was in Washington with 11 other security analysts from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine for a 2-week orientation, organized by AAAS, on how U.S. policy on arms control and nonproliferation is developed. For many, a highlight was the breakfast session with Lugar, a chief architect of the Nunn-Lugar Act.

The legislation was forged in 1991 as a bipartisan alliance aimed at prompt dismantlement and conversion of the Soviet nuclear stockpile. It provides for $400 million in aid annually ($1.2 billion to date) to successor countries of the U.S.S.R. to help them dismantle nuclear weapons and convert relevant defense technologies.

Lugar said because START II has not been ratified by the United States or Russia and START I has not been fully implemented by all five parties, the Nunn-Lugar Act "is the primary way disarmament is being addressed at this point."

Latypov, expressing a sentiment conveyed by other participants in various sessions, told Lugar that Belarus has shown "more than enough goodwill" in adhering to disarmament agreements, but "to implement conversion we need more resources."

"There is a lack of understanding by the public as to why we should channel money into disablement of tanks instead of helping children who have been victims of Chernobyl," he said.

Lugar explained how political differences and the legislative process complicate the allocation of funds. Those delays and open bidding for contracts "means a lot of time passes" before money may reach targeted countries, he said.

While in Washington, the group was briefed on the U.S. constitutional framework and how relationships among various sectors contribute to the making of security policy in a democracy. "We don't expect these analysts to take the U.S. model home and adopt it unaltered, but the experience may be beneficial as they deal with security issues in their own countries," said Tom Wander, head of the AAAS Program on Science and International Security, part of the International Directorate.

Besides increasing knowledge, the program aims to encourage networking among the participants. In the post-Soviet transition, Wander noted, many of them are likely to help draft legislation or be called on to provide technical and analytical support for national and international security policies. A major task in 1995, for example, is extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The 2-week program was an outgrowth of a AAAS project on peace and security issues in the former Soviet Union begun in 1992. For more information, call 202-326-6490.