



AAAS NEWS AND NOTES

edited by TIFFANY AYERS

HUMAN RIGHTS

AAAS Aids Guatemala in Human Rights Investigation

As nations around the world struggle to heal from histories of human rights abuses, one country is proving that science can play a crucial role in that fragile process. Scientific and technical support provided by AAAS is helping Guatemala in its investigation of human rights violations over the last three decades. New statistical techniques are enabling the Central American nation to collect and analyze a large amount of data in its search to discover the truth.

The Guatemala Commission for Historical Clarification is nearing completion on its study of human rights violations, and will submit its 2000-page report in January to the parties in the Guatemalan peace accords—the government and the former guerrillas—and the United Nations. The commission expects to eventually publish the report so that the information is available to the Guatemalan public and the international community.

“We are extremely grateful for the support of AAAS,” said Fernando Castañón, the commission’s executive secretary. “AAAS’s help has proven an assistance to the development of this idea of investigating the past and deciding how to deal with it.” Castañón met with Richard Nicholson, AAAS executive officer, in Washington, DC, on 16 November to thank AAAS for its support.

Patrick Ball, deputy director of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, helped the commission by inventing

and designing a new statistical technique to work with the data gathered through conducting 7000 interviews. Ball set up an information management system to collect, process, represent, and analyze the information. This four-stage process was supported by a variety of tools, including a database, statistical methods, and a strategy of analysis. In the final analytic phase, Ball was assisted by two top statisticians, Fritz Scheuren and Herbert Spirer, both AAAS members.

“On behalf of human rights in Guatemala, the scientific community has been mobilized in ways that no human rights project has before,” Ball said. AAAS has been involved in Guatemalan human rights issues since the early 1980s when it conducted casework for university students and scientific professionals who had been disappeared or murdered by the government. In the early 1990s, AAAS supported the organization and training of a forensic anthropology team that exhumed and identified hundreds of cadavers. Since 1993 AAAS staff have advised a small nongovernment organization (the International Center for Human Rights Research, the CIIDH) that collected information on over 37,000 extrajudicial executions and disappearances, as well as thousands of other gross human rights violations. AAAS and the CIIDH will publish the final report in English and Spanish on 14 January 1999.

AAAS hopes that the successful work of the Guatemalan commission will be seen as a model for other countries studying human rights violations. “There has been negative publicity regarding the work of the South African Truth Commission due to the political disputes,” said Audrey Chapman, director of the

AAAS Science and Human Rights Program. “It’s important for the world press to see Guatemala as a positive example.”

Castañón said that the eventual release of the commission’s study will help many people. “To make that information available is a service, not only for the witnesses, but for all Guatemalans as well as the international community,” Castañón said. “The commission must do all it can for these people, who have kept their suffering inside.”

AWARDS

Awards Benefit National Parks

Three more young scientists will now be able to conduct research in our national parks. On 13 November, the winners of the second annual Canon National Parks Science Scholars Program were announced at the AAAS headquarters in Washington, DC.

“The award stands as an affirmation that at the heart of our research is information that can help parks and make a difference,” said Karen Short, one of the student winners.

The program funds doctoral candidates to conduct research on scientific problems critical to the national parks. The winners receive \$25,000 per year, for up to 3 years, to conduct their research. Collaborating with Canon USA, Inc., are the National Park Service, which picks the annual list of topics, the National Park Foundation, which awards the scholarships, and AAAS, which convenes scientific experts who select the winners. Canon also announced that in 1999 its commitment will double in size to allow the program to offer awards to up to eight Ph.D. students.

The 1998 winners were: Short, University of Montana, who will focus on the effects of surface fire on understory birds in ponderosa pine forests in southeastern Arizona; Kurt Menning, University of California, Berkeley, who will use remote imagery and field data to examine the landscape-level effects of restoring fire to Sierra Nevada forests; and Elizabeth Barrie, Indiana University, who will analyze visitors’ accounts to develop a model of effective interpretive programs.

“The program is creating a cadre of vitally needed park researchers,” said Jim Maddy, president of the National Park Foundation. “We look forward to learning about your successes—and we actually promise to read your dissertations,” he told the winners.



Guatemala’s Fernando Castañón thanks AAAS’s Richard Nicholson for the association’s support in the investigation of human rights violations.

CREDIT: DAVID SCAVONE

HEALTH CARE

Computers Aid Patient Safety

Computers are playing an important role in enhancing patient safety, according to findings announced at the Enhancing Patient Safety and Reducing Errors in Health Care conference, held 8 to 10 November at the Annenberg Center in Rancho Mirage, California.

The Veterans Health Administration, the nation's largest integrated health care system, will use computers to order and track all medication in its 173 hospitals within the next year. Replacing handwritten medication orders with a computerized entry system at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston led to an 86% reduction in serious medication errors that could cause injury. And at the Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, implementing a computerized system for detecting

potentially dangerous drug combinations resulted in a 66% reduction in potentially unsafe combinations with cisapride, a gastrointestinal drug.

The conference was sponsored by AAAS, the Annenberg Center for Health Sciences, the National Patient Safety Foundation, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Visit the web site at <http://www.mederrors.org>.

Results of the 1998 Election of AAAS Officers

Following are the results of the 1998 election. The slate and vote count are given for the president-elect and board members; for other offices, successful candidates are listed. Terms begin on 27 January 1999.

General Offices

President-Elect: Mary Lowe Good (9,109); Gilbert S. Omenn (7,867). *Board of Directors:* Lewis M. Branscomb (10,526); Irwin Feller (5,485); Rodney W. Nichols (7,323); David E. Shaw (7,641). *Committee on Nominations:* Mary Ellen Avery, Sue V. Rosser, Larry R. Squire, Robert Watson.

Section on Agriculture, Food, and Renewable Resources

Chair-Elect: Carroll P. Vance. *Member-at-Large:* C. J. Weiser. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Peggy G. Lemaux, Max F. Rothschild.

Section on Anthropology

Chair-Elect: Eugenie C. Scott. *Member-at-Large:* Henry M. McHenry. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, Laurie R. Godfrey.

Section on Astronomy

Chair-Elect: Lee Anne Willson. *Member-at-Large:* Joseph A. Burns. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Michael G. Hauser, Catherine Pilachowski.

Section on Atmospheric and Hydrospheric Sciences

Chair-Elect: Stephen H. Schneider. *Member-at-Large:* Tom Wigley. *Council Delegate:* Richard T. Barber. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Kristina B. Katsaros, Alan Robock.

Section on Biological Sciences

Chair-Elect: May R. Berenbaum. *Member-at-Large:* Harry W. Greene. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Barbara S. Beltz, Donald C. Potts.

Section on Chemistry

Chair-Elect: Clayton H. Heathcock. *Member-at-Large:* Peter C. Jurs. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Fred C. Anson, Michael P. Doyle.

Section on Dentistry

Chair-Elect: Barry R. Rifkin. *Member-at-Large:* Sandy C. Marks Jr. *Council Delegate:* John J. Sauk. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Robert J. Collins Jr., Huw F. Thomas.

Section on Education

Chair-Elect: James P. Barufaldi. *Member-at-Large:* Vincent N. Lunetta. *Council Delegate:* Valerie C. Chase. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Julia V. Clark, John R. Staver.

Section on Engineering

Chair-Elect: Stuart L. Cooper. *Member-at-Large:* Richard J. Goldstein. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Cynthia J. Atman, Robert M. Gray.

Section on General Interest in Science and Engineering

Chair-Elect: John L. Safko. *Member-at-Large:* Ertle Thompson. *Council Delegate:* Sharon M. Friedman. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* David J. Fox, Elizabeth S. Ivey.

Section on Geology and Geography

Chair-Elect: W. Gary Ernst. *Member-at-Large:* Bruce F. Molnia. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Samuel M. Savin, Frederick J. Swanson.

Section on History and Philosophy of Science

Chair-Elect: Paul Forman. *Member-at-Large:* Valerie Gray Hardcastle. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* John W. Servos, Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis.

Section on Industrial Science and Technology

Chair-Elect: David Roessner. *Member-at-Large:* Tyrone D. Mitchell. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Patricia M. Mooney, Thomas P. Sheahan.

Section on Information, Computing, and Communication

Chair-Elect: Solomon W. Golomb. *Member-at-Large:* David Gries. *Council Delegate:* John E. Hopcroft. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Fernando J. Corbato, Susan K. Nutter.

Section on Linguistics and Language Science

Chair-Elect: Eve V. Clark. *Member-at-Large:* Susan Goldin-Meadow. *Council Delegate:* Barbara C. Lust. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Paul G. Chapin, Frederick J. Newmeyer.

Section on Mathematics

Chair-Elect: Gene H. Golub. *Member-at-Large:* James A. Donaldson. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Mary Ellen Bock, Robert M. Miura.

Section on Medical Sciences

Chair-Elect: Sondra Schlesinger. *Member-at-Large:* C. Thomas Caskey. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Janet D. Rowley, Flossie Wong-Staal.

Section on Neuroscience

Chair-Elect: Leslie G. Ungerleider. *Member-at-Large:* Corey S. Goodman. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Fred H. Gage, Thomas A. Woolsey.

Section on Pharmaceutical Sciences

Chair-Elect: Vincent H. L. Lee. *Member-at-Large:* Rodney L. Johnson. *Council Delegate:* Jeanette C. Roberts. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Jessie L.-S. Au, Glynn Wilson.

Section on Physics

Chair-Elect: Eugen Merzbacher. *Member-at-Large:* Richard D. Deslattes. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Sam M. Austin, Pierre C. Hohenberg.

Section on Psychology

Chair-Elect: Roberta L. Klatzky. *Member-at-Large:* Stephen M. Kosslyn. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Robyn M. Dawes, Miriam F. Keltz.

Section on Social, Economic, and Political Sciences

Chair-Elect: Robert E. Evenson. *Member-at-Large:* Roger E. Kasperson. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Paul D. Cleary, Gordon C. Rausser.

Section on Societal Impacts of Science and Engineering

Chair-Elect: Norine E. Noonan. *Member-at-Large:* Susan E. Cozzens. *Council Delegate:* Stephanie J. Bird. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Cheryl M. Corsaro, Caroline Whitbeck.

Section on Statistics

Chair-Elect: Judith D. Goldberg. *Member-at-Large:* Sallie Keller-McNulty. *Council Delegate:* Jon Kettenring. *Electorate Nominating Committee:* Peter McCullagh, Juliet Popper Shaffer.