

Human Rights Council and International Criminal Court:

The New Challenges for Human Rights Communications

Conference

Geneva (Switzerland), 25 – 27 February 2009

Purpose

The purpose of this Conference is to reflect upon **how information about human rights** can be **communicated more effectively** by civil society to institutions such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and its **Universal Periodic Review** (UPR) and to the **International Criminal Court** (ICC).

There is a need to build effective **information chains** that ensure access to human rights information that is up to date, timely, reliable, and formatted in useful and actionable ways.

The Conference will explore how advances in **Information and Communication Technology** can be harnessed to benefit human rights communications.

Venue and Dates

The Conference will be held from **25 to 27 February 2009** at the International Conference Centre (CICG), located near the United Nations offices in Geneva, Switzerland. The Conference languages are English, French and Spanish.

The Conference will be followed on the morning of 28 February by the fifth **General Assembly** of the HURIDOCS network.

The Conference will be held just before the March session of the Human Rights Council, in order to maximise attendance and allow participants to attend both events.

Participants

The Conference will bring together representatives of human rights organisations that are concerned with the collection, management and communication of information on human rights and human rights violations, as well as human rights advocates.

Participation is open to all human rights organisations: international organisations, non-governmental organisations, national human rights institutions, and academic institutions.

It is expected that 120 persons will participate, about two thirds of whom will come from the South.

organised by

*HURIDOCS - Human Rights Information and
Documentation Systems, International*

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Registration

If you are interested to attend the Conference, you can send an email to conference@huridocs.org. Please indicate what work you are doing in the field of monitoring and documentation of human rights. We will then send you a registration form.

For more details, consult the HURIDOCS Website
<http://www.huridocs.org/involved/conference>

Background

The changes in the interactions among the increasing number of actors in human rights protection and promotion provide new and important challenges and opportunities.

On one hand, new procedures and platforms have emerged within the United Nations and various regional bodies in which human rights are discussed and defended. On the other, there have also been rapid evolutions in the availability and use of several information and communication tools.

The Conference will examine the following questions: **how can communications to and by these bodies become more effective**, and **how can Information and Communication Technology contribute to this end?** It will also provide a broader overview of effective and innovative use of ICT by the human rights community.

The Universal Periodic Review and the International Criminal Court

The Universal Periodic Review started in April 2008, and by March 2009 will have reviewed 48 States in the course of its first three sessions. The whole human rights community, including the United Nations itself, governments and civil society, has a unique opportunity for public international discussion on the human rights situation of each country. There are several ways for civil society to bring relevant information to the attention of the Council and exert a positive influence on this process.

The International Criminal Court, which has launched its prosecution procedures, is breaking new grounds for international justice. It requires specific information, not only to denounce human rights violations, but also to substantiate abuses committed by individuals. Civil society in a position to collect useful information, but this should be done in accordance with the Court's specific and demanding criteria.

Developing "information chains"

Human Rights NGOs have always worked with others to communicate on violations, seek first hand information, build coalitions, etc. It is obvious that very few organisations handle the whole information chain, from the grass-roots collection to the formatting for an international political or judicial body.

It is important to have a strategic and holistic vision of the information chain. Partnerships must now be established in a more explicit and systematic way, where each individual organisation understands the specificity and strength of its contribution. This will allow a flow of information that is timely, reliable, trustworthy, relevant, and formatted in such a way as to be actionable and useful to those who need it.

Programme

The Conference will be of interest to organisations concerned with human rights information handling and other human rights defenders. The speakers and panellists will be experts on the various topics, including representatives of respected international organisations as well as front-line human rights activists. The plenary sessions will as a rule consist of an address and a panel, followed by questions and answers. The active participation of all attendants is also ascertained through various workshops and market places.

Day 1 – Where are we now?

Plenary I: Civil society Participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The UPR started in April 2008, and during its first three sessions 48 countries were reviewed. A critical overview of the whole process, from country consultation to dialogue in Geneva, to follow-up at the national level will be made, illustrating the perspectives of governments, intergovernmental bodies and NGOs. What has worked well? What can be improved?

Plenary II: Civil society participation in the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The ICC is breaking new grounds for international justice. It requires specific information, not only to denounce human rights violations, but in particular to provide evidence of abuses committed by individuals. What role can civil society play in bringing perpetrators to justice and assisting victims of violations?

Plenary III: Drawing together the common information needs

The information needs of the ICC and the UPR and challenges for the various stake holders will be compared and explored. The “information chains” linking these actors and the grass-roots collection of information is a crucial part of the discussion since partnerships need to be established in a more explicit, strategic and systematic way. What information do stake holders need to provide? To whom?

Day 2 - What do we have, what can we use?

Plenary IV: Trends in information technology and human rights

Information to human rights mechanisms should be communicated collaboratively and efficiently. Information technology, web-based systems in particular, offer tremendous potential to build bridges between various actors. What are the most relevant trends in ICT developments, and how can the human rights community benefit from these?

Plenary V: Building Capacity of Civil Society in relation to the ICC and UPR

The quality and standardisation of informations received by the UPR and the ICC can be improved by strengthening capacities at all levels. Representatives of these bodies as well as local and international NGOs will explore achievements made and challenges with regard to capacity building. Who needs to be trained on what, by whom and how?

Labs and Workshops

Simultaneous workshops will allow a more in-depth exploration of information technology tools relevant to human rights including those presented in the fifth plenary. Participants will see relevant, practical tools which are applicable to their human rights work

Ideas and resources marketplace

Opportunities for organisations to informally present experiences, tools and techniques for monitoring, documenting or communicating human rights. Participants can engage in individual discussions, see demonstrations, build new relationships and evaluate possible uses for their work.

Regional group meetings

Regional group meetings will allow to exchange experiences and to explore needs for tools and techniques, capacity building and networking. Participants from Africa, Arab world, Asia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America can focus on the opportunities and challenges in their specific areas.

Day 3 – What do we do?

Plenary VI: Communicating economic, social and cultural rights

How are organisations in regions in transition promoting social change by collaborating and sharing information to their constituencies and other partners? Pioneer organisations will make presentations and present opportunities and challenges.

Workshops and Training

Simultaneous workshops will allow more depth exploration of information technology tools relevant to human rights work. Tools and techniques for Building Websites using meta tags will be explored, and there will also be an introduction to other resources.

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Closing Plenary

Keynote address on The future of human rights and Closing of the Conference.

Day 4 - 9:00 – 13:00 - HURIDOCS General Assembly

The Conference will be followed on morning of 28 February by the fifth General Assembly of HURIDOCS, during which the governance, general aims and activities of HURIDOCS for the coming years will be agreed upon.

About the Organisers

HURIDOCS, established in 1982, is a global capacity-building network of organisations that use documentation techniques, monitoring methods, information management systems and available technologies in the defence of human rights and the prevention of abuses.

HURIDOCS develops standards in information handling and tools and techniques for monitoring and documentation of violations. It offers training and advisory services on the establishment and strengthening of human rights information systems, on software and technological developments. HURIDOCS facilitates sharing of experience and knowledge.

More Information

For more details, consult the HURIDOCS Website

www.huridocs.org/Conference

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