Scientists Honored During the 1997 AAAS Annual Meeting

Each year, during the AAAS Annual Meeting, scientists and engineers are honored for their actions to promote and protect human rights, and for acting on behalf of scientific freedom and responsibility under difficult circumstances. During this year's annual meeting in Seattle, Washington, scientists from Syria, Burma, and China were recognized.

Salim Khairbeck, a Syrian engineer, received the AAAS Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award. The award is presented annually by the AAAS to honor scientists and engineers whose exemplary actions have served to foster scientific freedom and responsibility. Salim Khairbeck was recognized for his steadfast courage in defending the freedom of scientists and engineers, particularly their right to form independent professional societies. Mr. Khairbeck was imprisoned by the Syrian government for more than 12 years. His brother, who accepted the award on his behalf, shared a statement prepared by Mr. Khairbeck in which he stressed "the need to put more effort in order to push the governments, especially those in democratic countries, to use their influence for improving the record of human rights without any conditions, beginning with a pressure to enable the democratic people to form independent professional societies and committees for human rights observation."

The Science and Human Rights Program recognized two scientists during its annual Science and Human Rights Reception held in conjunction with the AAAS Annual Meeting. Burmese doctor Ma Thida and Chinese history student Wang Dan were recognized for their contributions both through action and example, to the promotion and protection of human rights in their home countries.

AAAS and HURIDOCS Launch Project to Develop a "Violations Approach" for Monitoring Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Despite a rhetorical commitment to the indivisibility of human rights, both the UN and a majority of governments around the world have consistently focused on civil and political rights. The lack of seriousness with which economic, social and cultural rights have been treated has resulted in their conceptual, underdevelopment, as well as widespread failures in implementation. Human rights organizations—especially mainstream groups in the "North"—have historically mirrored this pattern, often citing the lack of conceptual clarity as justification for ignoring these rights. The fact that the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter the Covenant) articulates a standard of progressive implementation, that is, the movement over time towards the full enjoyment of rights within the limits of available resources, has also complicated the monitoring of the rights and the evaluation of their implementation. Assessing progressive implementation requires the availability and analysis of comparable data over time. These data are rarely available.

In 1996, the Science and Human Rights Program initiated a joint project with the Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS) to develop a new paradigm for monitoring economic, social and cultural rights based on the identification of violations rather than solely addressing their progressive implementation. The three-year project to develop a "violations approach" is being funded through grants from DANIDA, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other sources.
The concern of specific economic, social, and cultural rights and the rights of women and children constitutes the content of the 1992 and subsequent conventions. The content of the 1992 and subsequent conventions focuses on the rights of children and women, and the rights of indigenous peoples. The content of the 1992 and subsequent conventions also mentions the right to education, and the right to self-determination for indigenous peoples.

In addition to these conventions, the 1992 and subsequent conventions also provide for the establishment of international organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO). These organizations work to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The 1992 and subsequent conventions also provide for the establishment of international courts, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ). These courts are responsible for interpreting and applying international law, and for resolving disputes between states.

The 1992 and subsequent conventions also provide for the establishment of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions provide financial assistance to countries in need, and work to promote economic development.

The 1992 and subsequent conventions also provide for the establishment of international human rights agencies, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). These agencies are responsible for monitoring and promoting human rights, and for promoting the implementation of international human rights law.
PROJECT UPDATES

Conclusion of Eight-Month Trial Against the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey

On 2 May 1997, the eighth trial in eight months against the Adana Torture Treatment Center of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey resulted in a verdict. Foundation representative, Tufan Kose, a physician, charged with “failure to notify the authorities of a crime,” referring to the crime of torture, was fined TL 12,000,525 (approx. US$100). Mustafa Cincilik, a lawyer, charged with “operating an unlicensed health center” was acquitted. The Foundation operates four centers for the treatment of torture survivors. The court’s decision, while allowing the Foundation’s center to remain open, jeopardizes its operation by demanding that its physicians report the names of survivors of torture seeking treatment to the very government responsible for inflicting their torture. In his defense, Tufan Kose invoked his privilege and obligation to maintain physician-patient confidentiality, a principle repeatedly ignored by the Adana Court. The case will be appealed to the Supreme Court. For additional information about the case against the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, please visit our web site.

Honduran Human Rights Commissioner’s Database

The Science and Human Rights Program continues to assist the Honduran Human Rights Commissioner with his efforts to create a comprehensive human rights database, including personal testimony from victims of human rights violations, press clippings, and Honduran legislation. Honduran citizens file roughly 3,000 formal complaints of human rights violations annually at the offices of the Commissioner, a process that dates back to the establishment of the Commission in 1992. Until now, all information (registrations, interviews, investigations, recommendations, etc.) was maintained only in paper format. AAAS has developed a computer system for the Commission with full text capabilities which collects, manages, and analyzes data on cases of human rights violations. The Commission has recently hired an information management specialist and a network engineer who will work with the Program’s specialist to maintain the database operations.

CUSHRID Net Develops Training Capabilities

The Canada-U.S. Human Rights Information and Documentation Network (CUSHRID Net), a loose-knit consortium of human rights organizations, legal aid groups, educational centers, government agencies, and individuals involved in human rights information and documentation for which the Program serves as the secretariat, continues to build its strengths as a training resource. In February and March, Program staff provided cryptographic training for Human Rights Watch staff in New York and Washington, Amnesty International’s Urgent Action Network, and participants in Columbia University’s Human Rights Monitors program. Further training in finding, using, and publishing human rights information online is currently being planned.

The Ever-growing Data Management Needs of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) is the largest and most ambitious truth commission in history. Its mandate spans the thirty years of Apartheid era human rights violations. Their information management needs are correspondingly complex. The Science and Human Rights Program has recently conducted the fourth in a series of missions to provide technical assistance to the TRC. Program staff taught social science quantitative research methods to TRC analysts to enable them to use the 9,300 victim interviews and 2,500 amnesty applications currently stored in the TRC’s database. The quantity of information is expected to expand by 50% before the TRC submits its final report to the State President in March 1998.