

**Science and Human Rights Coalition  
Planning Meeting Notes**

June 12, 2007  
Washington, DC

Attendees: See attached list

**I. Is a Science and Human Rights Coalition needed?**

- Value-added for professional associations:
  - information sharing about new issues/cases and an opportunity to hear from colleagues in other associations regarding what is needed
  - burden sharing to compensate for associations' limited staffing:
    - opportunity to piggy-back on work other associations are doing (e.g., tracking legislation, media outreach); help with groundwork and staying on top of commitments
    - compensate for lack of or limited capacity to carry out "front-line advocacy"; learn how to do it effectively
  - expanded media outreach capabilities
  - expanded understanding of the way professional commitments are related to human rights
  - access to varied expertise (i.e., topical concerns and methods of data collection) across our disciplines; with our particular interest in safety and concerns of colleagues working in difficult environments, as well as the scholarly basis for conducting human rights assessments, there's a niche we can better address collectively
  - exchange information about each others' activities and events; possibility of joint local events
  - a way to conduct the advocacy that individual societies cannot do themselves
  - benefits of UN accreditation (through AAAS' Science and Human Rights Program (SHRP) or accredited member associations (e.g., APA))
  
- Value-added for individual members of professional associations:
  - evidence of activity in human rights, which is important to the associations' members; "they want evidence that their association is working on human rights"
  - meaningful benefit of being a member; members would like to hear about human rights activities.
  - sense of pride that engaged in a Coalition devoted to human rights
  - consistent with dialogues taking place internally within associations regarding the role of their disciplines "in the real world" and how to descend from disciplines' ivory towers to contribute
  - consistent with pluralistic understanding of engagement that combines "academic" and "applied" in the form "public" (e.g., public anthropology, public sociology)
  - overseas members will welcome the development (addressing human rights)
  
- Potential contributions to the human rights community:
  - evaluation of effectiveness of human rights programs and work
  - research and other scientific resources
  - better communication between scientists and human rights practitioners, to apprise each other of what is needed and what can contribute

## Questions:

- What are human rights? To what should we refer?
- What do we mean by domestic human rights? Relationship to other advocacy work inside the U.S.? What will be the scope of the Coalition's activities?
- What is a human rights practitioner? What do they do?
- Who is our audience(s)? What kinds of information do they need?
- What about lawmakers, bureaucrats?

It was noted that there are 262 scientific associations and professional societies affiliated with AAAS. Currently we know only of 26 with human rights sections or working groups. To determine how many of the 262 are involved in human rights in some way, it was recommended that we conduct a short on-line survey (5 questions) of all the associations (after identifying the best contact in each) to learn the following:

- how human rights is "situated" in each association; what are the "models" of engagement (sections, working groups, permeates entire association, etc.)?
- for those with formal sections/working groups, how were these formed? their history?
- how do they understand or define "human rights"? how do they formulate problems, see human rights? what kinds of rights do they include? (We will need to decide whether to provide definition or ask them for theirs in survey.)
- what does the discipline contribute to human rights?
- what does the association contribute to human rights?

## Suggestions to consider in designing the survey:

- prior to conducting the formal survey, an informal conversation with some contacts could provide quick accounts of how human rights are situated and why
- could ask for a "pre-listing" of areas within association that would have a possible interest
- if a definition is provided, it will have to fit with the organization; if there is no definition, people might dismiss the survey if they have a limited view of human rights (i.e., torture, only civil and political rights)
- rather than a definition, the description could focus on the expertise and skills we are looking for
- suggestion for the survey format: send an e-mail that first explains what we are trying to do, then gives information or reference point (i.e., UDHR), and finally asks a very short number of questions.
- people could be engaged by asking questions that interest academics or describing human rights concerns that are most appropriate and/or self-evidently relevant to the activities of different academic disciplines and associations

There are several possible ways in which professional associations might be involved in human rights:

- 1) traditional advocacy on behalf of their members
- 2) addressing human rights problems specific to the field/work they do (anthropologists on the right to culture; medical professionals on the right to health; etc.)
- 3) Specific ways the association could contribute to human rights activities

## Some "models" for engaging human rights organizations:

- developing network of "on call" scientists (SHRP will be doing this.)
- "critiques" by scientists: invite human rights groups to submit "problems" for consideration by scientists; 3-4 will be chosen and addressed

- meeting of human rights practitioners and scientists in which former are invited to present “problems” for discussion/exploration
- service learning (suggested in an e-mail after the meeting)

## II. How to proceed?

- Objectives in first year:

One recommendation so far: work toward a membership meeting in 2008, to be held either during AAAS’ Annual Meeting in February, or later in the year. Each has advantages/disadvantages. Will explore and consider other ideas in months ahead.

Some questions: What kinds of outcomes is the Coalition seeking? What kind of effectiveness and impact does the Coalition want to have?

- Buy-in from associations:
  - “Should be ridiculously easy” in terms of dues (none), little staff time, etc.
  - invitation letter from Alan Leshner requesting a contact would help; then a listserv of the contacts could be created
  - outcome/results oriented: because of their limited resources (staff and time), associations need to know that the Coalition is not another talking shop; need examples of what it can/will do

- Outreach:

Who are the audiences? With whom are we trying to connect?

A working group was formed that will present recommendations at the next meeting:

Working Group on Outreach and Communication:

Bahram Rajaei, Paul Nuti, and Rob Albro

- Communication:

Since dependent on audience, it was subsumed into Outreach.

For internal communication within the group, e-mail is best. In the future, a list-serv and calendar of events will be developed.

- Information:

In addition to a contact for and information about each of the 262 professional associations, which will be obtained via the online survey described above, a list of potential human rights practitioners and partners is needed. Another suggestion was something along the lines of “what we – scientists and human rights practitioners – need to know about each other.” (Post meeting, Judith Blau offered to draft something for our consideration.)

- Collaboration with human rights community:

Recommendation to begin with informal conversations with some human rights organizations about their current use of science and whether interest exists in making greater use. A more

“formal” survey may be conducted in the future. SHRP staff will conduct informal conversations and report back at the next Coalition meeting.

It was emphasized that it is important to approach the human rights community with humility. We should approach with the understanding that the benefits and learning will work in two directions: human rights work stands to benefit/learn from science, and scientists stand to benefit/learn from human rights.

- Processes for decisions, content, plans, etc.:

These issues gradually will emerge and will be explored and decided at future meetings. Participants urged to send any and all suggestions by e-mail for future discussion (and inclusion on meeting agendas).

### **III. Next meeting: when, where and agenda?**

Participants agreed to meet again in September (post-Labor Day). The next meeting will cover:

- Recommendations from the Outreach and Communications Working Group
- On-line survey of associations: update on progress (or outcome, if completed) from SHRP staff
- Human rights organizations’ use of and interest in science: report-back from SHRP staff

### **IV. Miscellaneous**

- Conference: “Human Rights and Sociology,” August 15 in New York, co-sponsored by Sociologists Without Borders and Columbia University Center for the Study of Human Rights
- SHRP staff will look for survey (model) conducted ahead of the 2005 meeting