

AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition: Planning Meeting II
September 11, 2007
Washington, DC

Meeting Report

Progress Review

Mona Younis (AAAS Science and Human Rights Program)

The meeting began with a brief overview of what had been accomplished since the first planning meeting in June. For the benefit of first-time attendees, Mona described the June meeting and participants' affirmation of the value of reviving the Coalition and discussion of what would be needed to proceed. She mentioned that in the months since that June meeting, AAAS staff and several coalition members had tackled some of the questions raised at the meeting regarding the current activities of scientific associations in relationship to human rights and human rights organizations in relationship to science. She explained further that in the months ahead, the work will be to gradually clarify the objectives of the coalition and develop recommendations to present to a larger convening of interested associations in 2008. She then described the objectives of the September meeting as follows:

The first part of the September meeting focused on report backs and recommendations. Presentations were made by Molly Brown and Josh Robbins on their initial forays into the scientific and human rights communities, respectively, and Rob Albro and Bahram Rajaei, who lead the Working Group on Outreach and Communication. The three presentations are summarized below.

The second half of the meeting looked at initial drafts of the Coalition's Mission, Activities, and Membership. The drafts were prepared as starting points for discussions that are expected to continue in the months leading up to the meeting in 2008. She concluded by thanking everyone who contributed to preparing materials and presentations for the meeting and urged attendees to consider setting up additional working groups.

Report on Scientific Associations and Human Rights

Molly Brown (Association of American Geographers)

Molly's presentation consisted of two parts. First, she summarized an informal e-mail survey taken in July by a AAAS intern. That survey provided a general overview of AAAS-affiliated associations that do human rights related activities and from whom she requested further information. Next, Molly shared some general comments from associations that responded that they *do not* have human rights sections and *do not* participate in human rights activities. Each of these is described below.

In July 2007, SHRP conducted a quick survey of 264 associations and societies affiliated with AAAS. The response rate was 24% (63), of which only 8 associations responded that they currently have a human rights section or working group.

In the survey, scientific organizations that have human rights activities were divided into two categories: those that were research orientated, and those that were orientated towards practice or education. Non-research scientific organizations with human rights activities included such organizations as the American Nurses Association and the Institute for Science in Society and the Center for World Indigenous Studies. For example, the Center for World Indigenous Studies is a nonprofit research and education organization dedicated to the understanding and appreciation of indigenous peoples and the social, economic and political realities of indigenous nations. It has a strong human rights section that defends indigenous peoples, educates its membership and addresses individual cases of human rights violations.

The following academic organizations affiliated with AAAS have sections or committees on human rights:

- American Mathematical Society
- American Statistical Association
- American Physical Society
- American Anthropological Association
- American Political Science Association
- American Chemical Society
- American Psychological Association
- Association of American Geographers
- Society for Applied Anthropology.

A review of the Web sites of two of the associations with human rights committees – the American Mathematical Society and the American Physical Society – revealed the following characteristics in common:

- active human rights committees;
- have developed an official position on human rights;
- primarily intervene on behalf of individual human rights cases involving members of their professions; and
- do not “proactively” promote human rights.

Where the two associations depart is in the following: Whereas the American Mathematical Society appears not to work on cases involving the U.S. (i.e., does not consider human rights a domestic issue), the American Physical Society has worked on several cases involving scientists in the U.S.

Other academic organizations study human rights but only have limited human rights activities. An example of an academic organization that studies human rights is the American Political Science Association, which has an organized Section on Human Rights that describes itself as being "established to encourage scholarship and facilitate exchange of data and research findings on all components of human rights (e.g., civil, political, economic, social, cultural, environmental), their relationship, determinants and consequences of human rights policies, structure and influence of human rights organizations, development, implementation, impact on international conventions, and changes in the international human rights regime." It acts on notifications from AAAS and other groups such as Scholars at Risk by writing letters of inquiry or protest from their elected leadership to key actors in each instance.

Of the academic science organizations that were involved in human rights, only the Applied Anthropology Associations had active education programs. These programs could be of interest to the Coalition as it attempts to explain what human rights are and what each organization can do in the context of the coalition. The Association has also developed a series of white papers on various topics which may be of interest.

Finally, the survey yielded interesting comments from associations without human rights sections. Some examples include:

- Mention of being a “small” association, implying that they do not have enough staff to become involved in human rights;
- Mention of the association being a part of a larger “international organization” (parent) and that “that would be the organization that would address this issue”;
- Used to have one, but no more, which could reflect end of human rights work carried out during Cold War;
- Sense of “fear” of treading there; view of human rights as “advocacy and direct confrontation of alleged abuses”;
- Limited understanding of human rights: “We treat all people and all members equally and well, and have no such section or group.”

Human Rights Organizations and Use of Science

Josh Robbins (AAAS Science and Human Rights Program)

Josh reported to the coalition on his informal survey of 78 human rights organizations and the extent to which they used science or an application of science in their work. He found that nearly every organization had some project or initiative that relied upon or was related to a scientific field of study. Some of those areas mentioned included: Communication Technology (Computer Science); Environmental Science, Forensics, Psychology, Medicine and HealthCare, Geography and Geospatial Science, Statistics, and Economics.

Josh reported that the most prevalent use of scientific expertise and technology was in the area of information technology and computer science but that other scientific fields were also making important contributions. He cited several examples, including (but not limited to): using hand-held digital recorders to create videos documenting human rights violations taking place in government run refugee camps; conducting environmental studies on the effects of mining on local drinking water to help local human rights organizations hold their governments responsible; forensic teams documenting suspected cases of torture and mass killings; psychologists identifying and documenting the trauma of refugees and displaced persons who were made homeless by their government’s action (or inaction); and geospatial science being developed to monitor government sponsored attacks on civilians as well as a host of other violations.

Josh noted that while there were many examples of science being used in the service of human rights, there was no organized effort to mobilize scientists more generally. Josh then proposed several ideas of how the coalition might bridge the scientific and human rights communities. These included: conducting a rigorous and comprehensive survey of the science and technology used in human rights work – past, present and planned; establishing a network of “on-call” scientists prepared to volunteer their time to assist human rights organizations who need their

particular expertise, a project that SHRP is planning to undertake; introducing human rights to Internal Review Boards; and convening conferences to identify and address the human rights implications of research and the assimilation of new technology.

Working Group on Outreach and Communication

Bahram Rajaei (American Political Association)

The Working Group's report follows:

To develop a coherent sense of the value of outreach efforts, the Coalition must clearly conceptualize how those activities and programs fit into its mission. The first step in that process is to think through a series of questions, including: (a) what exactly are the connections between the coalition's core *mission* and outreach; (b) what are the *goals* of specific outreach activities given those connections; and (c) *how* will these goals be accomplished? Once these responses have been formulated, we can begin to think about what forms and tools of communication (releases, web, events, etc.) to use and how best to measure their effectiveness.

1. Why are we doing this? (Or, given our purpose, what is the desired outcome?)

A clear linkage between outreach activities and the coalition's core goal hasn't been authoritatively articulated to date, nor have other related and outstanding issues been addressed. Those issues are intimately tied to the process of strategy formation for outreach activities, and can be summed up by asking: *What is the ultimate goal of the Coalition with regard to public outreach?*

This is clearly a difficult question to definitively resolve, or to distill the practical ramifications from. However, several pointed questions do warrant thought as we consider what the parameters of the coalition's outreach agenda are in the current context, including:

- What is the nature of the group's civic responsibility, and what are the practical and operational limits?
- Is the goal to inform policy makers or to actively shape public policy?
- Is the goal to inform the public or to actively shape public debate?
- Is the goal to work more collaboratively across associations?
- Is the goal to work more closely and effectively with human rights organizations?

Ultimately, these questions must be weighed against expected outcomes and operational realities. The recommendations made at the end of this document are offered in this spirit—with the aim of creating a foundation that will allow the group's outreach programs to be as effective as possible today while providing the required room for growth and effectiveness over time. Progress may well demand an expansion of these programs.

2. Exactly what are we promoting?

Just as the coalition has a broad set of interests related to human rights issues, it can also conceivably have multiple outputs, or "products," that can be employed to enhance its visibility to external audiences. These include: access to the cumulative expertise of its individual and institutional members; peer-reviewed research; public reports; or specialized knowledge and data

generated by ad hoc groups. Given resource restrictions, some prioritization must take place in developing programs that leverage outputs which are in higher demand—and which also are our comparative advantage over other organizations. Identifying those outputs is an essential part of the process.

3. Who is the audience?

Identifying the audiences that are the ultimate targets of the coalition’s outreach activities is the final step and a prelude to developing tailored communications programs in each area. A broad range of external audiences are interested in, or could be attracted to, our potential outputs. These include:

I. The media (domestic, but also international where appropriate):

- A. Print (newspapers, columnists, op-eds)
- B. Television (news, talk shows, feature programs)
- C. Radio (news, talk shows, feature programs)
- D. Web-based (news, blogs)

II. Other consumers of political science research:

- A. Research organizations (leadership, researchers)
- B. NGOs (leadership, researchers, staff)
- C. Advocacy groups

III. Policymakers (primary decision makers and their staffs):

- A. Federal
 - i. Executive (departments, agencies, officials, staff)
 - ii. Legislative (politicians, staff, committees)
- B. State
 - i. Executive (departments, agencies, officials, staff)
 - ii. Legislative (politicians, staff, committees)

IV. The public:

- A. The web-based community (bloggers)
- B. Community leaders and groups

Each audience presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges and requires the development of tailored outreach efforts.

Working Group Recommendations:

1. The Coalition should articulate a statement of purpose that conceives of outreach activities as part of its core objectives.
2. Based upon this statement we should define and realistically prioritize the strategic goals of our outreach efforts by selecting from the following, or other, priorities:
 - A. To generate increased media coverage of human rights issues and research

- B. To engage non-profit/civil society groups working on human rights issues and work more directly with them to raise awareness of the resources offered by our members and organizations
- C. To engage policymakers in order to expand their awareness of the public utility and policy-relevant aspects of such research
- D. To better coordinate among members of the Coalition and develop mechanisms through which we can focus the interests and efforts of our members in pursuit of our goals.

3. Once such a prioritization has been put in place, the Coalition should then focus on developing effective and sustainable efforts to achieve each goal. The working group can revisit the specifics of each such initiative once the first two recommendations have been implemented.

Discussion Document: “Working Together: What Scientists and Human Rights Practitioners Need to Know about Each Other”

Rob Albro (American Anthropological Association)

In April, SHRP held a meeting with representatives of five human rights organizations to solicit feedback on its new program. Meeting participants welcomed SHRP’s plans to expand the participation of scientists in human rights efforts. To assist in that endeavor, they recommended the drafting of a “primer” to facilitate communication between scientists and human rights practitioners, a kind of “translation” between the two different cultures. To that end, and based on the participants’ input during the meeting, SHRP drafted a preliminary inventory of what needed “translation” between the two communities. With the help of Judith Blau of Sociologists without Borders, the inventory was further expanded. Rob Albro of the American Anthropological Association led the discussion of the document during the September meeting. His comments follow:

“This outline of seventeen different points about the relationship between scientific and human rights (HR) practitioners offers a fascinating view of different assumptions, goals, and world views informing these distinct practitioner communities. This outline makes clear that, given a mutual desire for collaboration, an important part of this process is the task of better familiarizing themselves with each other’s signature ways of doing things and fundamental goals. As should be clear, relevant contexts, methods, and goals are not necessarily shared in common across these communities, even if a will to work together might be present, and even if there are many apparent shared commitments. Some of the shared commitments noted here include a concern with: the role of law, empirical fact-finding, and the collection of evidence, the presentation of information and results, and the universality of claims. But these shared commitments are not necessarily understood in the same ways or put to the same ends. This means that future successful collaboration will depend upon better mutual awareness of the kind of work in which each is engaged. It is also clear that at present we possess more information about what scientists need to know about HR than the other way around. One immediate task for our Science and HR Coalition, then, can be to think constructively about what should be conveyed to the HR community about science and scientists, so that HR should be mindful of them.”

Next Steps

Meeting participants reviewed three draft documents: “Areas of Activity,” “Mission,” and “Membership.” After some initial discussion it was decided that the Coalition’s “Mission Statement” needed to be tackled differently and ahead of “Areas of Activity.” Three participants – Wendy Rotz (Washington Statistical Association), Lee Herring (American Sociological Association), and Dinah Winnick (American Anthropological Association) – volunteered to draft a “Mission Statement,” which will be circulated ahead of the next meeting. It was understood that all three documents are works in progress and intended to be fleshed out and developed over the course of the planning meetings, with the aim of presenting documents for consideration by the full membership during the larger meeting in 2008.

Miscellaneous

The meeting concluded with the following items, decisions and information:

- **Membership Meeting in 2008:** Participants decided that we would use the AAAS Annual Meeting in February in Boston to invite larger numbers of attendees and use the time together to plan for the full membership meeting later in 2008.
- **Next planning meeting:** A December 10th date was adopted to coincide with Human Rights Day. The Coalition will meet in the morning in order to have the opportunity to attend the SHRP afternoon event commemorating Human Rights Day. Mona informed the Coalition of SHRP’s plans to bring a panel of representatives from scientific associations to discuss the relevance and value of human rights for their work. Another idea that was suggested was to organize an event that brings human rights organizations and professional societies together. This idea will be on the agenda for 2008.
- **Updating information on SHRP’s website:** Participants were urged to update their information on the AAAS website to provide visitors with the most up-to-date information about the ir associations’ human rights activities.
- **Coalition list-serv:** Participants were informed that the list-serv has been set up and urged to sign up via the website.
- **SHRP job announcements:** SHRP requested the assistance of associations in circulating its job announcements for two new Project Directors.