

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

SECTION ON ARCHIVES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Looking ahead: Priority actions for ICA/SAHR, 2021-2024

1. At the General Assembly of SAHR, held on 26 January 2021, objectives for 2021 were defined. This means that the Section members have agreed on what should be the main focus for our activities this year. At the same time, the SAHR Executive Board also feels that it would make sense to identify priority areas for the Section's work in the coming years. Therefore, the EB decided at its meeting on 7 January 2021 to prepare a working paper in that sense to be submitted for discussion at the General Assembly of SAHR, which will take place on 28 October 2021. The idea is to develop an orientation and a broader perspective for our work. By doing so, we aim at giving our activities as much impact as possible in a wider societal and international context. The purpose of these lines is to open a discussion on which key questions and issues we should address. The timeframe indicated (2021-2024) is determined by the cycle of ICA congresses
2. The United Nations' Agenda 2030, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, may function as an overall vision framework for our activities: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". The selected projects and actions in the below list would all support SDG 16 and, in particular, the following targets: **16.3** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all; **16.6** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; and **16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
3. The projects and activities of ICA/SAHR are guided by the Basic Principles of the Role of Archivists and Record Managers in Support of Human Rights (endorsed as a working document by the ICA Programme Commission in 2016). They are based on the values of solidarity, inclusiveness and transnational cooperation
4. In addition to projects and initiatives explicitly mentioned below, ICA/SAHR will work with stakeholders within the ICA and beyond to enhance work on archives in support of human rights, when appropriate through partnerships and joint projects. An example could be cooperation with the ICA Expert Group on Indigenous Matters for better preservation of and access to records and archives of indigenous populations
5. The list provides an overview of strategic areas where SAHR initiatives and projects in the coming years could have added value. For easier overview, the activities are

grouped in three major categories: Advocacy, Archives at Risk and Education. For each topic a distinction is made between ongoing activities and possible new projects and actions. Many activities are of course overlapping – advocacy may well include aspects of education and so forth. Some “new” initiatives may well build on work that is already being done, and “ongoing” activities may include new ways of acting.

Advocacy

Ongoing activities

6. Continue efforts to create mechanisms that will enable victims of human rights violations and other citizens to hold businesses accountable through adequate preservation, organization and access to records. This could possibly be done through the establishment of international rules and guidelines, ideally in a UN framework. Participation in the UN annual forum on Business and Human Rights, held each year in Geneva, has been identified as a relevant way of enhancing our objectives. ICA SAHR should have a formal role at the forum to ensure that we are regularly invited to participate and comment on documentation. One specific objective is to get the need to preserve records and archives included in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (SDG **16.6** and **16.10**)
7. A pilot project on extractive industries is in progress. The objective is to see how difficult it is to locate the archives of multinational businesses, using as a sample the archives of the major extractive industries. A report of the research will be made, both as a pilot for use with other types of businesses and to advocate for transparency in industry.
8. Translations and publications – including the Newsletter, the preparation of a special edition of the ICA’s journal COMMA on archives and human rights, and promotion activities (such as webinars) related to SAHR’s Routledge publication, Archives and Human Rights, and the translation and publication of this book in French and Spanish, as well as possible translations of the special Comma issue. An important aspect is translation and dissemination of relevant ICA documents, such as the Basic Principles and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: an archival commentary
9. Monitor and develop ICA positions on draft documents from international organizations, such as the UN, UNESCO, OHCHR, ICRC, on matters that involve archives and human rights

New initiatives

10. Encourage, support and inspire proactive work on documenting ongoing gross human rights violations – obvious current examples are the repression of the

Rohingyas in Myanmar and of the Uighurs in China. This could possibly be done by assuming the function of alert launcher or observatory of developments that could, at least in part, be addressed through initiatives in the field of archives and human rights (SDG **16.3** and **16.10**)

11. Reflect, communicate and take initiatives in relation to documenting gross human rights violations committed by non-state actors, such as the current project on digitizing ISIS documents in Mosul. A similar example could be Boko Haram in Nigeria (SDG **16.3** and **16.10**)
12. **Contribute to develop work on the preservation of and access to identity papers, with a special emphasis on children's rights. Such activities would support SDG target 16.9: "By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration"**
13. Dialogue with filmmakers (creators of documentaries in particular) and with scholars and professionals from a wide spectrum of scientific fields, including historians, museum curators, political scientists, lawyers, anthropologists and many others. The purpose will be to mainstream use of archives and enhance both awareness and knowledge on how archives can be used in support of human rights
14. Create, or contribute to create, a prize / an award for outstanding work in promoting archives in support of human rights. This is an idea that came up in the early years of the Working Group on Archives and Human Rights but a new approach could be considered, namely to aim at convincing a major UN body (like the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) or a major international NGO (like Transparency International) to create such an award. ICA/SAHR could help in different ways, fx contribute to establish the short list of candidates. The prize could be awarded to an institution or an individual every two or four years

Archives at Risk

Ongoing activities

15. Climate Change and Archives at Risk Pilot Project (Brazil). The objective of the project is to develop a model for identifying risks to archives by climate change factors. It will map the location of archival repositories and then overlay that map with a map of climate change projection, such as sea level rise and temperature variation. The pilot is using Rio de Janeiro as a test case. The idea is to work out which archive repositories are at risk due to climate change
16. Cooperation with swisspeace on a safe havens program on the basis of the Guiding Principles for Safe Havens for Archives at Risk, endorsed by the ICA

New initiatives

17. Promote work on preserving endangered websites and other digital information of groups and individuals defending human rights, in particular minority rights, such as indigenous populations, LGTB groups and dissidents in countries with authoritarian or repressive regimes. We could explore how we can best support and enhance existing activities in this area and, more generally, how we can contribute to efforts to ensure long-term digital preservation of records with a potential of supporting human rights
18. Draft, possibly in cooperation with concerned stakeholders within the ICA, a position paper on archives left behind by displaced communities
19. Actions to enhance preservation of records of NGOs that are working in the field of human rights or whose archives have particular relevance for the defence of human rights. Some major international organizations have taken appropriate steps at a central level but often not at a national or local level. Many small NGOs have no archival policies in place at all. We have previously, as a working group, had projects in this area and the guide created by Armelle Le Goff and ICA/ SIO (<https://www.ica.org/en/records-ngos-memory-be-shared>) is still useful. However, a lot more needs to be done. One possible action could be an updated version of this guide which would, in particular, take into consideration developments of technologies and related work practices

Education

Ongoing activities

20. ICA/SAHR is planning to develop a training programme on archives and human rights, as part of the ICA program for distance learning
21. Directory of human rights archives, such as Truth Commission archives, and of archives holding human rights collections – continue the project as decided by the SAHR General Assembly on 26 January 2021
22. A series of talks on issues of archives and human rights entitled The First Tuesday Talks and which are held as webinars, as of 1 June 2021, on the first Tuesday, every second month

New initiatives

23. Project on teaching materials on archives and human rights. The idea is to develop teaching materials on archives and human rights, including a bibliography on archives and human rights, which might be disseminated through the ICA digital training platform
24. Develop knowledge and expertise in dealing with forged, fake or manipulated documents. Possibly develop guidelines, or a manual, on how best to establish and provide knowledge about the authenticity of records in the field of human rights, especially in the interconnected and digital environment (SDG **16.6** and **16.10**)
25. Take steps to include the use of archives documenting gross human rights violations in curricula, textbooks and in the world of education, in general. Many initiatives have already been taken; one option could be to gather and publicize best examples – as references and for inspiration
26. Study, discuss and define how new information and communication technologies, including social media, can enhance work on archives in defence of human rights
27. Carry out a study across UN agencies to determine to what extent and how archives are considered in the context of defending human rights. On that basis make proposals on how to further enhance such use, possibly in the context of SDG 16