

**AAA Committee for Human Rights
Annual 2008 and Five-Year Report
December 2003 through December 2008
by Peter Van Arsdale, CfHR Member
and
Victoria Sanford, CfHR Chair**

This report highlights the past five years of CfHR activity, with emphasis on those of Calendar Year 2008. It is not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather, illustrative of key committee accomplishments and concerns.

Introduction: Committee Background, Mission, and Objectives

The AAA's permanent Committee for Human Rights (CfHR) was established in 1995. It was preceded by the Commission for Human Rights. The CfHR consists of 10 members, 8 of whom are elected by the association's membership and serve three-year terms. The AAA President and President-Elect serve as *ex officio* members. The committee's internal mission is to stimulate informed involvement in the human rights area among professional anthropologists through publications, panels, and network building. The committee's proposed Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights, the white papers of its task groups, and AAA-hosted web pages are among the products of these efforts. The external mission is to gather information on selected, anthropologically relevant, cases of human rights abuse and to propose action in the name of the American Anthropological Association to the Association's leadership. The committee's briefing documents, prepared in order to inform the Association's leadership on particular cases of human rights abuse, are one product of the external mission. CfHR efforts occur at the annual meetings and throughout the year through task groups and case-specific actions.

Part One: 2008 Review

CfHR Restructuring and Operational Activities

As excerpted from the November, 2008, edition of *Anthropology News*, Victoria Sanford stressed that this was a busy year for the CfHR: "We have restructured the committee and established new institutional and topical standing task groups in order to carry out our mandate to (1) promote and protect human rights; (2) expand the definition of human rights within an anthropological perspective; (3) educate anthropologists and mobilize their support for human rights work; (4) work with international colleagues, concerned populations and human rights organizations to develop an anthropological perspective on human rights; (5) influence and educate the media, policy makers and NGOs on human rights issues and (6) encourage research on all aspects of human rights, from conceptual to applied. Our standing institutional task groups are: CfHR Capacity Building and Materials Development, Education/Outreach, Human Rights Curricula, *Anthropology News* CfHR Forum, and the AAA Meeting. Topical task groups include: Language and Social Justice, Reparations and Human Rights, Iraqi Refugees, Indigenous Rights, Forensic Anthropology and China/Tibet (ad hoc). Topical task group members

[presented in San Francisco] their human rights work at the CfHR invited session 'Advocacy at the Frontlines.'

As was also mentioned in the November issue of *Anthropology News*, the committee welcomed Shannon Speed after AAA President Setha Low appointed her to fill the vacancy left by Meg Davis' resignation in the spring. Davis also briefly had served as our committee chair. The committee said goodbye to Rob Albro and Susan Slyomovics whose elected terms ended this year. A resolution was passed at the committee meeting thanking Albro for his dedicated leadership. Slyomovics' new co-edited book (with Barbara Rose Johnston), *Waging War, Making Peace: Reparations and Human Rights* (Left Coast Press), was favorably noted. The committee also welcomed newly elected members Deborah Poole, Gretchen Schafft, and Robin Root. Damon Dozier is providing solid support and creative insights as the AAA staff member assigned to assist the committee. Brian Estes' technical expertise also is greatly appreciated.

To facilitate robust lines of communication among committee members, four conference calls were held during the year. Despite Richard Wilson's generous offer to co-host a special meeting of the committee in Connecticut during October, it was not possible to secure a quorum of participants, so this meeting was not held.

Rob Albro has generously agreed to continue to serve as the AAA CfHR liaison to the American Academy of Sciences Human Rights Coalition. Brian Estes and Damon Dozier have also been working to ensure AAA representation in this important coalition.

The following list identifies CfHR Standing Institutional Task Groups and Topical Task Groups 2008 (this list does not include newly elected members):

CfHR Standing Institutional Task Groups through Nov. 2008

CfHR Capacity Building and Materials Development

Rob Albro
Shannon Speed
Victoria Sanford
Richard Wilson

Education/Outreach

Peter Van Arsdale
Richard Wilson

Human Rights Curricula

Susan Slyomovics
Richard Wilson

Anthropology News CfHR Forum

Ellen Lutz
Victoria Sanford

AAA Meeting

Victoria Sanford
Ellen Lutz
Shannon Speed
Peter Redfield

CfHR Topical Task Groups through Nov. 2008**Indigenous Rights**

Ellen Lutz
Shannon Speed
Rob Albro

Reparations

Susan Szymovics
Richard Wilson

Language and Social Justice

Laurie Graham
Ana Celia Zentella
Bonnie Urciuoli
Victoria Sanford

Forensic Anthropology

Victoria Sanford
Heather Walsh-Haney

Iraqi Refugees

Kathy Libal
Scott Harding
Richard Wilson
Daniel Rothenberg

Post 2008 AAA CfHR Standing Institutional Task Groups**CfHR Capacity Building and Materials Development**

Shannon Speed
Victoria Sanford
Richard Wilson

Education/Outreach

Peter Van Arsdale
Richard Wilson

Human Rights Curricula

Gretchen Schaaft
Peter Van Arsdale

Anthropology News CfHR Forum

Shannon Speed

Victoria Sanford

AAA Meeting

Victoria Sanford
Deborah Poole
Robin Root

Post 2008 AAA CfHR Topical Task Groups

Indigenous Rights

Ellen Lutz
Shannon Speed

Reparations

Richard Wilson

Language and Social Justice

Laurie Graham
Ana Celia Zentella
Bonnie Urciuoli
Victoria Sanford

Forensic Anthropology

Victoria Sanford
Heather Walsh-Haney

Iraqi Refugees

Kathy Libal
Scott Harding
Richard Wilson
Daniel Rothenberg

Health and Human Rights

Robin Root
Peter Redfield

CfHR activities at AAA San Francisco

CfHR activities at AAA San Francisco were very well-attended. Despite the CfHR invited session being scheduled for noon on Wednesday, the first day of the meetings, we had more than 60 people attend the panel. At times, there was not enough room to accommodate AAA members who waited in the hallway. For AAA 2009, we hope to have a larger venue for our invited session. The Advocacy Training led by Ellen Lutz and Shannon Speed was also well-attended and very productive for the CfHR and 25 AAA members who attended. We shared strategies and experiences about advocacy in the field: how to effectively handle stressful situations; how to be safe and ensure the safety of communities in which we work; how to help communities represent their issues to international groups, etc. CfHR Chair has continued to have contact with many AAA members who attended the Training session. The CfHR Open Forum was a great success with some 42 AAA members in attendance, CfHR chair opened the forum with an

overview of CfHR activities over the past year which was followed by a Q&A from AAA members about CfHR possible future activities and procedures for member involvement as well as recommendation for expanding CfHR activities. Our co-sponsored presidential sessions were a huge success and point to the great interest of AAA members in learning more about pressing human rights issues and becoming involved in finding solutions.

CfHR Responses to AAA Member Requests and Requests from International Colleagues

In the past year the CfHR and AAA have responded to the calls of colleagues for action on human rights crises. We have initiated statements and letters to national and international leaders, lending our anthropological expertise to critical human rights issues, including: (1) Thailand's war on drugs, (2) US Census linguistic classification, (3) death threats to Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation members, (4) reinstatement of Fulbright grants to Palestinian students in Gaza and (5) spring 2008 protests in Tibet [see www.aaanet.org/cmtes/cfhr postings for details]. The following is a list of CfHR letters generated in 2008 that can be reviewed at the CfHR <http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/cfhr/index.cfm>:

- **CfHR/MESA letter to Iran concerning the arrest of Esha Momeni (11/5/08)**
- **CfHR letter to Rep. Clay and Turner regarding the US Census Bureau's linguistic classification practices (10/1/08)**
- **CfHR letter to Rep. Dingell and Barton regarding the US Census Bureau's linguistic classification practices (9/24/08)**
- **Follow-up CfHR letter to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala concerning death threats against members of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (9/16/08)**
- **CfHR letter to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala concerning death threats against members of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (7/7/2008)**
- **CfHR Statement on the protests in Tibet (6/20/2008)**
- **AAA Letter to the Secretary of State regarding Gaza Fulbright recipients (6/2/2008)**
- **AAA Letter to the US Census Bureau regarding its linguistic classification practices (4/28/2008)**
- **AAA Letter to Thailand Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej concerning the war on drugs (3/14/2008)**

In response to a request from the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman, Forensic Anthropologist and CfHR Forensic Task Group member Dr. Heather Walsh Haney traveled to Guatemala to conduct a *pro bono* assessment of Guatemalan morgue practices. Her report MORGUE REVIEW 1.1: OVERVIEW OF MORGUE OPERATIONS has been posted to the CfHR Documents section of our website. A direct link to this important assessment is <http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/cfhr/upload/Morgue-Overview-Memo-Guatemala-Nov-2007.pdf>. Her report is being used by the newly instituted National Institute of Forensic Sciences to improve forensic investigations in Guatemala.

Part Two: Internal Activities, December 2003 – December 2008

During the period December 2003 – December 2008, certain CfHR threads remained constant or changed minimally. Among the most obvious was the way potential committee members are nominated, voted upon, and seated. With three-year terms, elected members rotate on and rotate off such that at least three persons overlap in two-year increments. Institutional memory is always a challenge on such committees, but this increases the likelihood that riveting debates and critical decisions – as well as more tedious but necessary discussions – are not forgotten.

Also remaining constant has been the committee's prioritization of prompt identification and careful analysis of critically important human rights issues world-wide. In several instances (e.g., indigenous rights abuses in Brazil), the broader membership first learned of an issue through alerts distributed by committee members, past and present.

Human Rights Fund: As former CfHR chair Samuel Martínez emphasized in his 2004 annual report, the committee's work has long been hampered by inadequate funding. Budget cuts date to 2002, with only modest restorations since. One notion for budget enhancement involved an endowment, the idea being put forward by Martínez and Barbara Rose Johnston. This was revised in 2005 by then-chair Laura Graham and complemented by a Charles Briggs proposal for a Human Rights Award. Discussions carried into 2006, and included the AAA executive secretary and section liaison. A re-drafted proposal, authored by the next chair (Rob Albro) and the next liaison (Paul Nuti), resulted in a Human Rights Fund concept. Finance committee concerns subsequently were raised, and successfully addressed, through mid-2007. The concept was formally approved. External sources are to be sought; no internal AAA funds are to be used. Nonetheless, through 2008 few resource leads had yet materialized.

At various times, external resources in support of CfHR activities have been received, such as from the University of Connecticut's Human Rights Institute.

Task Forces and Task Groups: During this five-year period, a number of task forces and task groups were continued or formed. Most were intended to be self-limiting time-wise. These bridge internal and external activities/interests, and include the following:

- Task Force on Human Rights and Violent Conflict (2002 through 2003)
- Task Force on Sexual and Gender Minorities (2003 through 2004)
- Task Force on Migrants' Rights (2003 through 2004)
- Task Force on the Andean Countries/Andes (2003 through 2004)
- Task Force on Migrants' Rights (2003 through 2004)
- Task Group on Africa/Darfur (2004 through 2005)
- Task Group on Health and Human Rights (2005 through 2007)
- Task Group on Language and Social Justice (2004 through present)
- Task Group on Reparations (2005 through present)

Standing Institutional and Topical Task Groups: On May 21, 2008, a working paper for organizational restructuring was issued by Rob Albro and Victoria Sanford. Standing institutional task groups were identified, as follows:

- CfHR Capacity Building and Materials Development
- Education/Outreach
- Human Rights Curricula
- *Anthropology News* CfHR Forum
- AAA Meeting

Topical task groups were identified as follows, with two directly continuing the work of earlier task groups:

- Indigenous Rights
- Reparations
- Language and Social Justice
- Iraqi Refugees
- Forensic Anthropology

In addition, an *ad hoc* task group on China and Tibet was formed. AAA President Setha Low asked that this group develop a statement for the association.

Key Reports: During the period 2003 – 2008, several special reports were authored. Among the most important were that of the CfHR Analytic History Project (2004), condensing views of a wide variety of AAA members on the aims, achievements, constraints, and future opportunities facing the committee. This was complemented by the CfHR Document Inventory, and a workshop, “Charting Scholar/Advocate Strategies.” Thomas Greaves and Samuel Martínez were among those leading this three-pronged effort.

Many key documents rest in the hands of former and current CfHR committee chairs, at the office of the AAA, and in the amorphous “gray literature.” Some have been cross-referenced in AnthroSource, while others have appeared in *Anthropology News*. The issue of what to do with unsolicited reports, or those solicited before the committee mandate changed, remained problematic through early 2008.

Publications: The CfHR does not sponsor the publication of books or journal articles *per se*. However, it lends its support to prospective authors through the sharing of information, the identification of sources (many in the “gray literature”), and discussions held at meetings. Individual committee members often are called upon to lend their expertise regarding particular issues.

During the period December 2003 – December 2008, a regular series of short articles/briefs dealing with human rights issues has been published in *Anthropology News* as part of the “Human Rights Forum.” Series editors have included Stacy Lathrop (AN staff member, 2003 – 2004), David Valentine (2005 – 2006), Susan Slyomovics (2006 – 2007), and Ellen Lutz (2008 – present).

During 2008 the articles included:

- “Claiming Citizenship: Collective Reparations in Post-TRC Peru,” by Lisa LaPlante and Kimberly Theidon (January)
- “A Tradition of Synergy: Introducing the New Human Rights Forum,” by Ellen Lutz (February)
- “Responding to Gender Violence in Papua New Guinea,” by Martha MacIntyre (March)
- “Wayuu and Xavante Meet in Xavante Protest over Destructive Soy Cultivation,” by Laura Graham (April)
- “Indigenous Peoples Take Action against Climate Change,” by Mark Cherrington (September)
- “Can a Right-to-Food Approach Help?,” by Ellen Messer (October)
- “Notes from the CfHR Chair,” by Victoria Sanford (November)
- “Human Rights and the Border Wall,” by Shannon Speed (December)

Internal Communications: The interactive involvement of (and communication among) current committee members, past committee members, other AAA members, and AAA staff representatives has been both promising and problematic. Part of this has been due to the inevitable transitions of personnel, bringing different skills and perspectives; some of this has been due to differing interpretations of which objectives the committee should be emphasizing. During 2008 in particular, concerted efforts were made to clarify objectives (including the role of advocacy) and link the best-qualified people with tasks most suited to them. The special report co-authored by Rob Albro and Victoria Sanford (referenced earlier) was, in part, aimed at addressing these concerns.

Part Three: External Activities, December 2003 – December 2008

General Themes: It is difficult to summarize and encapsulate the many critical human rights themes that the committee and its constituents dealt with during this five-year period. At the broadest levels, they included the following:

- Genocide, ethnocide, and ethnic cleansing
- Environmental rights and ecological change
- Labor rights, including those affecting children
- Indigenous rights, including intellectual property rights and agro-forestry rights
- The workings of courts, tribunals, and international adjudication committees
- Military, security, and intelligence issues, at the intersection with anthropology
- Refugee and other migrants’ rights
- The death penalty, in the U.S. and elsewhere

Among the many nations where efforts were focused, Guatemala, Brazil, Colombia, Nepal, Tibet, and East Timor are illustrative.

During 2007 and 2008, in particular, certain targeted discussions centered on the extent to which the committee should emphasize advocacy/activism vs. education/outreach. Current and former CfHR members joined the debate. By mid-2008, adjustments had been made such that advocacy/activism again was being given a stronger thrust.

External Communications: Utilizing the AAA's upgraded internet-hosted capability (aaa_cfhr@binhost.com), communications among committee members, other AAA members, and a greater public were enhanced during this period. (The listserv first had been established in 2000.) Former committee members such as Leslie Sponsel and Barbara Rose Johnston proved especially active in sharing information of importance. The website itself was most recently updated in 2005; additional upgrades now are in the works. The Website and Database Task Group, created in 2007, reviewed its functionality and made recommendations about incremental changes (given overall constraints within the AAA budget).

In late 2005, the position of "first responder" was created by the committee. The intent was to help CfHR achieve a better balance between reactive and pro-active work. Among key responsibilities was that of determining the CfHR's initial response to unsolicited proposals for action. However, this position has not consistently been "in play." By way of contrast, pro-active work has been enhanced by connections made with such organizations as Cultural Survival, Human Rights Watch, and the Society for Applied Anthropology's Human Rights and Social Justice Committee.

In November, 2004, the CfHR approved inviting its emeriti members to an informal annual meeting, to be held in conjunction with the AAA annual meeting. This has continued to the present, with as many as 20 emeriti in attendance.

Panels, Presentations, and Workshops: A number of professional panels and presentations, as well as a few workshops, were held during this five-year period at the behest of the CfHR. Some were presented as "invited sessions." Most occurred at the annual AAA meetings. Examples included:

- "Advocacy on the Frontlines: Reflections from Activist Scholars Working for Human Rights and Social Change," organized by Victoria Sanford and Rob Albro (2008 AAA meeting)
- "Gaining Traction: Anthropology's Engagement with Human Rights Policy," organized by Rob Albro, Meg Davis, and Paula Goldman (2007 AAA meeting)
- "Debating Anthropological Practice and National Security: Past, Present, and Across Borders," organized by Laura Graham (2006 AAA meeting)
- "Anthropology and Human Rights: Challenges and Prospects," organized by Samuel Martínez (2005 AAA meeting, Presidential Session)
- "Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights: A Global Perspective on the Development and Future Challenges to the Indigenous Peoples Movement," organized by Søren Hvalkof (2003 AAA meeting, Presidential Session)

Note that because of a late change of venue, all CfHR-related panels were cancelled for the 2004 AAA meeting. It was moved from San Francisco to Atlanta in response to labor issues in the former city.

CfHR Fellows: The CfHR Fellows Program was initiated in 2002. During the first portion of the present five-year period, several persons were selected as fellows. The position of CfHR Research Fellow was held by Erin Kimmerle and J.C. Salyer,

respectively. The position of CfHR Liaison Fellow was held by María Weir, María Amelia Viteri, and Jennie Pasquarella, respectively. However, concerns about the relative lack of supervision of the fellows, in concert with needs for task clarification for them (as discussed in 2005 by the committee), resulted in a restructuring. The AAA's liaison to the CfHR (at that time, Paul Nuti) was placed in a supervisory position and a single category of fellow was created. Paula Goldman served as the 2006 fellow. Nonetheless, concerns about the program's relative lack of integration into the larger array of CfHR activities caused it to be shelved in 2007.

Actions Taken Independently: During the period December 2003 – December 2008, a large number of actions were taken independently of the CfHR's task groups and task forces, nonetheless being supported by (or vetted through) the committee. Illustrative examples include the following:

Fallujah, Iraq: Samuel Martínez and Daniel Varisco (AAA Middle East Section President) jointly signed letters to members of the U.S. Senate and House, expressing the concern of a range of experts on the dire humanitarian situation in Fallujah (2004).

Dra. Niède Guidon, Brazil: Michael Heckenberger, in collaboration with Laura Graham, researched and drafted a letter of concern (sent to the Brazilian president), over death threats leveled against Niède Guidon, director of a key World Heritage Site (2005).

Guarani, Brazil: Linda Rabben drafted a letter urging the Brazilian president to object to the expulsion of the Guarani peoples from their ancestral lands. It was redrafted by Laura Graham, on the basis of additional research, and signed by the AAA's president (2006).

AIDS, China: The CfHR signed an open letter by Human Rights Watch, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and Asia Catalyst, to Peter Piot, the director of UNAIDS. It called on the latter group to speak more openly regarding China's AIDS issues (2007).

Ms. Esha Momeni, Iran: In concert with the Committee on Academic Freedom of MESA, the committee co-signed a letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of Iran regarding the inappropriate arrest of Esha Momeni, a CSU-Northridge graduate student (2008).

Conclusion

As 2008 came to an end, CfHR-related activities actively continued. In late December, using the committee's internet-hosted function, AAA members were asked to join other concerned citizens regarding the latest Israel – Gaza crisis. A petition was circulated, via the Avaaz Team, asking for signatures supporting a Gaza ceasefire.

2008 Committee Roster

Current Members

Victoria Sanford (08-10), Chair
Ellen Lutz (07-09)
Peter Redfield (08-10)
Shannon Speed (08-10)
Peter Van Arsdale (07-09)
Richard Wilson (08-10)

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Retiring Members

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New Members

Gretchen Schafft (09-11)
Robin Root (09-11)
Deborah Poole (09-11)

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AAA Staff Liaisons

Damon Dozier (general)
Brian Estes (web, electronic)

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NOTE: Detailed annual reports, covering CfHR activities and accomplishments during this five-year period, are available at the AAA website.