

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

## Documents and Confronting the Past Affinity Group

### Quarterly Report: July-September 2006

The main activity for the Affinity Group this quarter was its meeting in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. Held from May 3 through 8, 2006, the meeting was hosted by the Iraq Memory Foundation. Attending were:

Organization	Representative(s)
Iraq Memory Foundation (IMF)	Hassan Mneimneh and eight other IMF staff, who traveled to Sulaymaniyah from Baghdad and the United States Haidar (digital assets manager) Abu Inas (archiving for oral history work) Sa'ad and Raji (documentation and conversion of oral history formats) Dia (documentation project, IT) Amir and Vahal (logistics) Khalid (writer)
Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)	Youk Chhang and Wynne Cougill
The Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB)	Patrick Pierce and Khin Maung Shwe
Humanitarian Law Center (HLC, Serbia)	Natasa Lambic and Marijana Tomic
International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)	Louis Bickford
Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG)	Fredy Peccerelli
US Institute of Peace	Patricia Karam (observer)

The meeting focused on memorialization and was divided into three sections:

- A general meeting of the group, focusing on recent activities and future direction
- A meeting between Affinity Group members and Iraqi organizations

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- A meeting of Iraqi NGOs on networking and capacity building, with the Affinity Group members attending as observers.

**May 3, 2006**

**Opening Session and Announcement of an Invitation from the Human Rights Ombudsman of Guatemala**

After a welcoming address by Mr. Mneimneh, Dr. Basil Abdulwahab, head of the Iraqi Commission for Civil Society Enterprise, addressed the Affinity Group. He spoke on the status of civil society in Iraq, the country's NGOs, how the sector is affected by money, and documenting the Saddam regime. One of Dr. Abdulwahab's concerns was the future structure of NGOs in Iraq – whether they would follow the top-down Egyptian model that is being increasingly adopted in the Arab world, or a more democratic model that is free from foreign and religious pressure and intervention. In addition to citing some of the problems facing Iraqi NGOs today, he spoke of several advancements, including organizing many workshops on human rights and the desire to build a new, democratic Iraq through a proposed shadow parliament to monitor functioning of the government. Dr. Abdulwahab also noted the role of the Internet in bringing NGOs together, the benefits of sharing international experience, and the need to develop a transparent registration system for Iraq's NGOs.

In the evening session, the topics discussed included a donor's suggestion to change the mission of the Iraq Memory Foundation from documenting atrocities committed by the regime and the suffering Iraqi society between 1968 and 2003 to one of dealing with the present as well.

In addition, Fredy Peccerelli of FAFG brought an invitation to the Affinity Group's members from the Human Rights Ombudsman of Guatemala, who wanted the Group to form part of an international advisory board on what to do with the National Police Archives Project. (The advisory board meeting, which was originally scheduled for October 2006, has been re-scheduled for January 2007 and will also be the venue for the next Affinity Group meeting; most of the expenses would be borne by the Ombudsman.) Mr. Peccerelli also said that through the Affinity Group, FAFG sent Fredy Cumes to Thailand for training; this staff member may become the point person between the archives and national reparations program.

**May 4, 2006**

**Kurdistan Case Study and Site Visits**

This session led off with an address by Kurdistan Deloy of the Iraq History Project of Depaul University's International Human Rights Law Institute. She spoke on the Kurdish experience to date in dealing with past crimes, including the opening of mass graves, building memorials, and a conference on dealing with the past. In the area of

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memorialization, Ms. Deloy noted activities by artists, NGOs, and government departments (e.g., Ministry of Human Rights), such as the Halabja memorial, a site in Sulaymaniyah that was a torture and detention center, and memorials being built, one just outside Erbil for all Kurdish victims and one for Barzani victims.

The next speaker was Dr. Fatah Zakholi, the Minister of Culture for the Kurdistan Regional Government from 2001-2005 and currently media manager for the Kurdistan Party. He spoke of the Red Security building in Sulaymaniyah, which the Kurdish authorities turned it into a memorial/museum in 1991. He also addressed the inadequate way in which Kurdish authorities have documented genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the Saddam regime, citing the lack of official staff, research and a study center for this. He then went on to discuss what has been done to date, mainly by individuals:

- Books containing primary materials, documents, and studies of documents
- Films and photographic documentation of crimes against the Kurdish people
- Magazines specializing in memorialization and documentation
- Kurdish media: print, radio, and television
- Artwork (paintings, poems, novels, sculpture, documentary films). Projects in this category have focused on Anfal, chemical bombardment, and the Arabization of Kurdistan.

Dr. Zakholi passed out several copies of books from his private library for the Affinity Group to view.

Dr. Muhammad Ihsan, Erbil's Minister of Human Rights, spoke next. He noted that May 4, 2006 was his last day in office, but that he would be continuing to work in the field of human rights. After giving the Group an introduction on the 1963-1991 genocide of the Kurds, he cast his community as pro-forgiveness and pro-reconciliation, but not pro-forgetting, and noted that the Ministry has been actively documenting the Kurdish experience for 20 years. The Ministry's goals are to show the international community and all Iraqis what the Kurdish people experienced (he stated that many people in the country are not aware of what was happening in other parts of the country).

In 1991, the Ministry captured nearly 13 tons of documents and handed them over to the Iraq Memory Foundation; a part of this collection is now at Colombia University and some are at Harvard. 1996 marked a turning point in its documentation policy when Kurdistan began focusing on institution building and handed the documentation process over to NGOs. The Ministry is now interviewing families of victims while documenting what Kurdistan has been through and searching for missing people. As an example, he noted the search for 8,000 missing Barzanis, which began in 1983 with only 6 pages of documents. The Ministry was able to find 512 bodies, which they documented and filmed, and used to make a convincing case of genocide committed in Iraq.

In the afternoon, the group visited two sites:

**Red Security Building in Sulaymaniyah.** This building was the headquarters of internal security forces of the Saddam regime, the Directorate of General Security. It was known as “Red Security,” with red representing the color of the building (now faded) as well as the blood of the people who were killed. Now a museum, the various displays commemorate the victims of the Anfal campaign. In one hall, 182,000 shards of glass, the number of Anfal victims, form a mosaic. 5,000 light bulbs represent the number of villages destroyed. Other exhibits contain photos of the chemical attacks and other atrocities carried out in Halabja, as well as marking the Kurdish resistance to the Saddam regime. Additional exhibits demonstrate the equipment and methods used to torture the victims

**The Halabja Memorial.** This memorial was built to commemorate the victims of the 1988 chemical attacks that instantly killed at least 5,000 people in the village. Many more have endured ongoing injuries and long-term illnesses.

In 2003, the 30-meter high memorial was opened at an official ceremony attended by dignitaries including representatives of the PUK, the KDP, CPA head Paul Bremmer, and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. The structure consists of 16 columns, with 3 digits on top of each column, representing the 16<sup>th</sup> of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, March – the date of the massacre. Inside the hall are two sections. One depicts the history of Halabja, and the second shows the bombardment, including photos, murals, artifacts from the graves of victims, and a list of victims’ names.

Because of the high profile of the memorial and the international visitors that it received – over 60,000 people visited between September 2003 and February 2006, most of them from outside Iraq – villagers’ perceptions were that a significant amount of money was coming to the Kurdish Regional Government, but little of that money was being used to help the victims and survivors. In March 2006, demonstrators gathered in front of the memorial, protesting the government priorities that did not include compensation for Halabja victims. They set the memorial on fire and, while the structure is still standing, much of it was destroyed. 95% of the artifacts and art pieces were burnt. A committee of experts and artists will be formed to develop a plan to repair the damage.

During the Affinity Group’s visit to the memorial, a number of issues related to memorialization were discussed, including:

- Community involvement in the design of the memorial – representatives of the memorial committee and local officials consider the memorial as artistic and doubt that locals have the capacity to contribute to discussions about its design. Artists from Sulaymaniyah were consulted in the design. Affinity group

members tended to support involvement of “stakeholders,” a broader category than “experts.”

- Doubts about the identity of the demonstrators – local officials believe that the demonstrations turned violent because some non-local saboteurs incited the crowd. Some demonstrators tried to prevent the memorial from being torched.
- The memorial is located not on the site of the killings but outside the city of Halabja, and there were some questions about the (dis)connection between the community and the memorial.

### **May 5, 2006**

#### **Affinity Group Presentations to Iraqi Attendees**

About 200 people attended this day’s session, including:

- NGOs representing political prisoners, women and children, and victims/martyrs, as well as NGOs specializing in human rights
- High Commission for Civil Society Unions in Iraq
- Local and international media (e.g., television, magazines) and writers
- National and local government (e.g., Iraqi President for Women’s Affairs, head of the Iraqi High Tribunal in Sulaymaniyah, provincial legal departments and councils)
- Heads of documentation centers and memorial sites
- Professors from local universities
- Representatives of political parties
- Iraqi organizations and individual activists involved in documentation and human rights.

Each member of the Affinity Group gave a brief presentation to those attending. Each presentation was followed by a question and answer period and discussion.

Louis Bickford of ICTJ spoke on transitional justice mechanisms: prosecutions, truth-telling, reparations, institutional reform (guarantees of non-repetition), and memorialization. Fredy Peccerelli of FAFG talked about mass graves as memorial sites and sites of exhumations, using Guatemala as his case study. Several participants discussed the need for forensic anthropology training and exhumations in Iraq. Youk Chhang of DC-Cam then spoke about the Cambodian genocide, his personal experiences during Democratic Kampuchea, how the country is coping with genocide after 31 years (including the roles of international bodies, the government, local communities, and civil society), and how DC-Cam is dealing with the past, the present, and plans for the future.

**May 6, 2006**

**Affinity Group and Iraqi Presentations, Panel Discussions**

Presentations by the remaining members of the group were made at this session. The first presentation was by Marijana Tomic (HLC) on the methodology, reliability, uses, and constraints of oral history, citing many examples from the Balkans.

Next, Kurdistan Deloy gave a talk on the Iraq History Project of the International Human Rights Law Institute. The Institute works with NGOs and government ministries, and its activities include training, institutional reform, gender justice, and legal rights. The project gathers and analyzes the testimonies of victims of Saddam Hussein's regime, has established a qualitative methodology to receive testimonies and store them safely in a specially designed database, analyzes the information, and develops strategies to encourage the continuation of initiatives.

Next, a panel discussion was held on oral history. Moderated by Marijana Tomic, the discussants were Fredy Peccerelli, Khin Maung Shwe, Natasa Lambic, and Wynne Cougill. This was followed by a question-and-answer session with the Iraqi representatives.

**May 7, 2006**

**Strategy Session and**

The early part of this day was a closed session for the Affinity Group. The members discussed several ideas for the Group's "final product," and determined they would produce a handbook. Each member would contribute a case study that captured an area of thematic expertise:

- Documentation systems / knowledge management: IMF
- Security: HREIB
- Forensics: FAFG
- Oral history: HLC
- Memorialization: ICTJ
- Management of Documentation Efforts: DC-Cam.

In the ensuing group session, Louis Bickford gave a Powerpoint presentation on memorials, focusing on why they are built, why they can cause problems, and how they can achieve their potential. This was followed by Hassan Mneimneh's PowerPoint presentation on the IMF's work, then presentations by other IMF staff on their work.

**May 8, 2006**

**Planning for an Iraqi Network and Closing Session**

This session focused on the support the Iraqi organizations needed for their documentation efforts in order to reach the goal of developing a nationwide network on documentation. The discussion was led off by Vahal Abdulrahman, who spoke about the challenges the IMF faced when establishing its network. He explained the need to build a foundation for making cases of grave human rights abuses, standardizing documentation techniques, and capacity building.

In the discussion that followed, several topics were covered, including protecting the security of both people and documents, procedures, and meeting the needs of each of the contributing organizations. Various methods of communicating among the group's members were also discussed, including newsletters and the Internet.

Hassan Mneimneh led a discussion on the network structure he proposed. He asked each organization 1) to specify what documents it has, 2) to delineate what it needs, and 3) to lay out its procedures, proposed activities, and what it wants to achieve. He then suggested establishing a database about what happened in Iraq and cooperating to expand it, and then solicited suggestions.

In response to one participant, Mr. Mneimneh stressed that it was not necessary for individuals or organizations to turn over the documents in their possession; the IMF only needed to know what the documents are, what the contents are, what the organization wants to do with them, and the document's chain of command (the procedures used to acquire them). He also noted that the goal of the network would be documentation, not defending, providing aid, or advocacy for victims. Mr. Mneimneh also stated that it was not important to employ uniform procedures in this network. What was more important was that organizations contributing documents include information about where they acquired them to ensure that the material was trustworthy.

After a break, Mr. Mneimneh invited members of the Affinity Group to comment on the network discussion. Most of the comments centered on ways such a network could help overcome the apparent mistrust within Iraq's civil society and the final disposition of documents. A number of models for how such a network might be established and function were also discussed. The meeting closed with Mr. Mneimneh suggesting that interested participants e-mail him about the documents each organization possesses, as well as their needs, procedures, activities, and objectives.

### **Activities for Next Quarter**

The Documentation Center of Cambodia plans two activities for the period October through December 2006. The first is the completion of its “useful product”: a documentary film of interviews with two men who survived the notorious central-level Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, and one of that facility’s former guards. The film will be produced in both English and Khmer, and be shown at venues across Cambodia and North America.

The second is the writing of DC-Cam’s contribution to the Affinity Group’s “final product,” the handbook described above. DC-Cam will contribute a 15 to 30-page chapter on documentation to the handbook.

End.