ANNUAL REPORT

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2023

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The history through which we are living needs defenders of human rights, justice, and truth more than ever before, and HURIDOCS is committed to the cause.
—Danna Ingleton,
Executive Director, HURIDOCS

Our mission

We strengthen the global human rights community
with documentation technology and strategies to secure justice.

Our vision

We strive for a world where information is the catalyst for positive change
and human rights are respected, equally.

Inside this report

Our focus

Our focus remains on providing tactical tech solutions and to strengthen the human rights community.

Information is the lifeblood of the human rights system — provided that it is used well. Researching violations and using documented evidence to demand justice has been the basic pattern of human rights advocacy and campaigning for decades.

The human rights sector has always grappled with how to collect, manage, and deploy information for maximum impact. Part of the challenge has been about engaging with transformations in the wider information ecosystem. In the past, organisations have had to adapt to digitisation, exploring its potential while also dealing with new threats to information security.

Today, the complexity has increased, bringing fresh challenges and opportunities — including how to respond to disinformation, how to adapt to increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks and surveillance, and how to make use of rapidly evolving machine learning.

HURIDOCS aims to provide tactical technology solutions to its partners, and to strengthen the strategic fabric of the human rights sector.

To do this, we deliver two complementary services: building essential technology which provide information infrastructure for human rights organisations and movements, and developing strategic standards and approaches to documentation for the sector.

Both services aim to strengthen how documentation can advance impactful human rights work.

Year in review

2023 was a watershed year for HURIDOCS, with exciting new developments and renewed strategic direction.

2023 has been a transformative year for HURIDOCS, characterised both by internal and external developments that welcome us to a new chapter in our history.

As we embraced new leadership, we bid welcomes and farewells to valued colleagues. We said goodbye to our beloved Executive Director, **Friedhelm Weinberg**, who began his journey at HURIDOCS as a communications intern in 2012 and contributed greatly to our organisation throughout his professional development. Nancy Yu, HURIDOCS' dedicated Project Manager, then Research and Product Lead and later Interim Executive Director, also parted. Additionally, we acknowledged the departure of Gisella Reina, a respected long-time board member and former chair of the HURIDOCS board.

Their leadership and hard work will always be remembered, and their valuable contributions to HURIDOCS' mission and global community of human rights defenders.

Meanwhile, Yolanda Booyzen stepped up as Interim Director of Programmes, as Matel Sow was on parental leave during 2023. HURIDOCS also welcomed Shilpa Mudiganti as its first Global

People and Culture Officer, and Alejandra Kaiser as Communications Officer, both contributing to our ongoing growth and development. Others who joined in 2023 include Álvaro Hernández (Software Developer) and Matt Huculak (Interim Documentalist), both bringing years of expertise and skills to the team.

These transitions reminded us of HURIDOCS' historical impact and legacy while marking a new and exciting chapter that lies ahead. We are delighted to announce that Danna Ingleton joined our team as the new Executive Director in July 2023. Danna brings with her a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective that will strategically guide us forward into the next phase.

A standout milestone was that HURIDOCS received one million dollars in grant funding and additional support from Google's philanthropic arm, Google.org, to integrate machine learning models and expand Uwazi. This partnership will significantly advance our mission of promoting human rights worldwide with the responsible development and deployment of open technology. We embrace the promise of AI and machine learning and are thankful to Google for their generous support of our work.

Similarly, HURIDOCS participated in several key events related to documentation technologies. A standout moment was when we shared the stage with the CEO of Google and Alphabet Sundar Pichai, and members of the European Parliament at a Google.org event in Brussels. Our Interim Executive Director, Nancy Yu, highlighted HURIDOCS' groundbreaking work in machine learning for human rights documentation, emphasising AI's potential to advance global human rights efforts.

HURIDOCS also took part in RightsCon, one of the biggest human rights and technology conferences on the calendar each year. The 2023 edition was held in Costa Rica, where HURIDOCS led one of the most popular sessions of the summit on *The Future/s of Human Rights Documentation*, among other equally relevant hybrid sessions.

▲ During 2023, we said goodbye to Friedhelm Weinberg, HURIDOCS' former Executive Director.

> *We remain staunch in our commitment to leveraging technology to empower human rights defenders globally.*

Danna Ingleton took the stage at *The Future of Speech Online* which was hosted by the Center for Democracy & Technology. During her talk, she exposed the key work of global human rights defenders and the vital role that AI can play in advancing human rights documentation.

HURIDOCS upheld its legacy in documentation practices by celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Events Standard Formats (ESF) with a series of roundtable discussions. These sessions convened experts to reflect on the evolution of this legendary methodology developed by HURIDOCS and discuss potential updates and future directions.

HURIDOCS remains committed to innovation in documentation methodologies. Our Documentalist Bono Olgado, with the support of our Asia Pacific Programme Manager Natasha Todi, collaborated with 12 organisations to develop the Rapid Response Documentation Methodology. This methodology is a cornerstone of timely, secure, and ethical human rights documentation in emerging violations during emergencies.

At the same time, we continued to support human rights defenders worldwide to promote human rights and help those affected by grave violations. Among them, we redesigned and launched the African Human Rights Case Law Analyser, a vital resource for the African human rights and legal community; our team in the Americas supported a project to document human rights violations against journalists in El Salvador; and our team in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) provided an in-depth workshop to Libyan human rights defenders on conceptualising and building a database in Uwazi for documenting human rights violations.

Additionally, we provided ongoing support to our Ukrainian partners on documenting war crimes in Ukraine; the Asia Pacific team worked in partnership to create a collective memorialisation of the decades of war in Afghanistan; and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia team supported the creation of a comprehensive database documenting human rights violations within immigration detention facilities in Greece. HURIDOCS also continued to enhance the CYRILLA Collaborative aiming to become a hub for digital rights developments and information globally.

We extend our deepest appreciation to our generous donors, invaluable partners, and steadfast allies. Your support has been fundamental in driving our mission forward and effecting positive change around the globe. Without your commitment and collaboration, the impact achieved by HURIDOCS would not have been possible, touching the lives of numerous organisations and individuals dedicated to advancing human rights worldwide.

As we embark on the journey into another year, we reaffirm our commitment to our vision of a world where human rights are safeguarded, and the voices of the marginalised are amplified. Our ongoing engagement with developing technology for human rights continues to evolve, empowering us to confront issues such as human rights abuses, misinformation, censorship, illegal shutdowns, impunity, and tyranny, with dedication, innovation and resilience. Despite the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, we remain staunch in our commitment to leveraging technology to empower human rights defenders globally. With your continued support, we are confident in our ability to persevere and make meaningful strides toward a more just and equitable world.

▲ Ximena Arrieta Borja, Programme Officer for the Americas region, at a community workshop in Mexico.

Looking ahead

A letter from our new Executive Director Danna Ingleton, on what lies ahead for HURIDOCS.

I am thrilled to be writing this letter as the new Executive Director of HURIDOCS. What a time to take the helm. While we celebrate 40 years of incredible work and partnership with human rights defenders and movements around the world, we look solemnly into the future. In the last year we only just started to recover from the global pandemic when we were hit with devastating conflicts, debilitating cost-of-living increases, the continued exposition of deep racism and intersectional oppression, continued criminalisation of human rights defence and the rise of misinformation. We are witnessing the revolutionary impacts of artificial intelligence in a regulatory vacuum where big tech companies grow more powerful than states. The history through which we are living needs defenders of human rights, justice, and truth more than ever before and HURIDOCS is committed to the cause.

For 40 years, HURIDOCS has quietly played a crucial role in putting information at the service of effective human rights work. HURIDOCS supported the human rights sector throughout the process of digitisation, and the accompanying wave of tech exploration, in the most disruptive and transformative period in the history of information. Today, HURIDOCS has matured into a seasoned and strategic organisation ready to strengthen the human rights ecosystem of the future.

Civil society faces a steep challenge ahead. Smaller organisations and grassroots movements often rely on basic systems for documentation which can be inefficient and vulnerable. Those working towards legal accountability must preserve the chain of custody in demonstrably secure and sophisticated ways for effective strategic litigation at courts of all levels. Those storing personal information on victims must ensure that data does not get into the hands of

hostile actors despite increasingly nefarious spyware capabilities. And all of us must strive to maintain our critical technical and digital literacy to stay effective and relevant in the face of the exponential growth in technology and artificial intelligence.

Looking to the future, HURIDOCS is poised to bring our wealth of experience, technical acumen, strategic advice on standards, and frontier methodologies for documentation. We will maintain our flagship software – Uwazi – further developing it to integrate machine learning tools that will unburden our partners of laboursome data processing and adopting the highest levels of data privacy and security practices; equipping them with contemporary tools to fight contemporary issues. We will do so in a way that is sensitive and tailored to the needs of our partners; that contributes to the ethical deployment of machine learning and artificial intelligence and is an affordable, open source and human rights-friendly alternative to commercially available solutions. At the same time, we are also exploring new partnerships in adjacent sectors such as the humanitarian and environmental justice fields, to broaden our impact and address interconnected challenges.

One of our founders once sagaciously said "…information is the key to human rights work. It is the only weapon we have. It underlies everything we do so we should be damn good at it." These words couldn't be truer today and my north star as Executive Director is to ensure we continue to excel; to focus on our value-add, and do it very well.

Danna Ingleton

Letter from the board

A letter from the Chair of HURIDOCS' board,
Lisa Reinsberg.

Dear HURIDOCS community and supporters,

I look back at 2023 as a year of remarkable transition. Not a renaissance but an evolution.

Over the decades that HURIDOCS has been engaged in developing tools for human rights documentation and information management, it has both helped shape and been shaped by advances in advocacy and technology, while finding its footing in an entirely new field. It was only in 2017 that HURIDOCS built its own tech team and, with it, the full capacity to design and develop software in-house. When I joined the board one year later, HURIDOCS was grappling with an existential question: What does it mean to be a tech nonprofit in the service of human rights?

As HURIDOCS has matured, particularly over this past year, the first word to come to my mind in answer to that question is: accountability. Not only is HURIDOCS accountable to individual partners — whether clients, collaborators, or funders — it has embraced its accountability to the human rights movement as a whole. As HURIDOCS Treasurer Georgios Damtsas puts it: "Throughout my professional life I have never witnessed such sense of belonging to an organisation, and belief in a higher purpose, as I have with HURIDOCS' staff. Protecting human rights is the north star for everyone at HURIDOCS."

This goes beyond committing to open-source development, providing quality support, and mitigating security risks. As Danna's letter reflects, HURIDOCS is committed to building tools that last, that can be relied on, that meet human rights organisations' evolving needs, and that serve the greater good. And, it means harnessing — and shaping — technological advances to better protect human rights.

This is echoed by the words of Oleksandra Matviichuk, member of the HURIDOCS board: "In many countries of the world, people are fighting for human rights and democracy with enormous opposing power. It is important that even in such difficult conditions, they can rely on HURIDOCS as a reliable partner."

As Grace Danciu, HURIDOCS Secretary, says: "It's been exciting to see the HURIDOCS team continue their work on using machine learning to organise human rights information. It's an inspiring use of technology and a powerful example of how AI, when implemented responsibly, can make a real positive impact."

It is prioritising community-based and under-resourced organisations, while continuing to expand access — to information, to advocacy opportunities, to audiences — through a partnership with larger institutional stakeholders.

For those of us on the board, the past year presented opportunities to make good on our own commitments to the organisation while navigating new terrain. The first half of 2023 was marked by change. As stewards of the organisation, we take seriously our responsibility for upholding HURIDOCS' values while ensuring its ongoing health.

With this in mind, in our search for a new Executive Director for HURIDOCS, we sought an effective, knowledgeable, and compassionate leader who would prioritise the organisation's long-term stability, including by reinforcing mutual accountability.

In Georgios' words, "My fellow Board members have impressed me with their commitment by leveraging their respective expertise and networks to help HURIDOCS achieve its mission through a tough 2023. I believe the organisation is now on a much stronger footing both operationally with an excellent new ED, but also with stronger processes in place to make it more financially sustainable."

With a new chapter underway, it is gratifying to see HURIDOCS healthier than ever. As this unique organisation enters its fifth decade, I am truly grateful to Danna, the HURIDOCS team, our supporters and partners, and my fellow board members.

Thank you for your kindness, creativity, and dedication to building a better world together.

Lisa Reinsberg

▲ Natasha Todi, Programme Manager for the Asia Pacific region, provides training and customisation at a partner workshop in Fiji.

> "
> *HURIDOCS supported 74 projects with 113 partner organisations in 49 countries.*

Countries worked in during 2023

Programmes and partnerships

Our resourceful Programmes Team provided strategic support and technical acumen to our partners.

Our resourceful Programmes Team helped our partners make crucial human rights information accessible while accompanying them to shine a light on human rights violations in every region of the world.

The Africa and MENA team supported 15 partner organisations with case management, complaints tracking and the documentation of a range of human rights violations on the ground. As part of our Documentation Fund, our team was able to provide pro bono support to three organisations in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tunisia to fast-track and implement their digital transformation, professionalisation, and documentation initiatives.

Our team working in the Americas continued to purposefully support and accompany a number of vibrant civil society communities working on extremism, forced displacement, internal displacement, enforced disappearances, migration, the protection of human rights defenders and the safety of journalists in Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and the United States.

The Asia Pacific team was resolute in working with our partners and networks to monitor and track human rights violations, mobilise efforts for transitional justice and memorialisation, and develop and implement rapid response documentation principles in 18 countries including Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, North Korea, Sri Lanka, and West Papua.

In addition to providing essential support services to our international portfolio, our skilful team working with partners in Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia collaborated with 46 partners in these regions combines working on projects dealing with border control, crimes of aggression, environmental case management, economic, social and cultural rights, digital rights, forced displacement, immigration detention, land grabbing, sexual and gender minority rights, and war crimes.

HURIDOCS is proud to be an essential service provider to our partners who do foundational human rights work to collect the truth, seek justice, advocate for accountability, build collective memories and make human rights information and data more accessible and usable.

Our mission is to strengthen the global human rights community and we thank our partners for trusting our team and using our technology to build and strive for a rights-respecting future.

> "
> HURIDOCS is proud to be an essential service provider to our partners who do foundational human rights work.

Project highlights

During 2023, HURIDOCS supported 74 projects in collaboration with 113 partner organisations in 49 countries.

Our dedicated Programmes Team consists of specialist teams working with partners in six regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East, and a team that handles international projects. The Director of Programmes, Programme Managers and Programme Officers work closely with our partners around the world to tailor bespoke solutions for their databases, support their understanding of Uwazi and enhance their documentation strategies.

Here we highlight some of the inspiring projects which are safe to talk about. Working on human rights can be sensitive, and to reduce security and other risks, we cannot mention every project or partnership.

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Our specialist teams worked across Africa, the Americas, Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

Africa
The Gambia

Project: African Human Rights Case Law Analyser
Partner: Institute of Human Rights Development in Africa

In response to the longstanding challenge of accessing legal resources related to the African human rights system, HURIDOCS and the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) launched the **African Human Rights Case Law Analyser** (CLA) in 2010. In 2023, HURIDOCS continued its collaboration with the IHRDA to launch version 2.0 of the CLA. The aim of this new version is to significantly enhance the accessibility, usability, and effectiveness of this vital resource within the African human rights and legal communities.

The development of version 2.0 resulted in a more user-friendly experience with an enhanced interface that ensures compatibility across different devices. Modernised interactive visualisations were incorporated and underlying code for Uwazi references was optimised for faster loading times.

The latest version of the CLA breaks down language barriers, offering the most comprehensive access to human rights decisions and laws from mechanisms in the African human rights system in English, French, and Portuguese, with Arabic support planned for the future. This directly addresses accessibility concerns for legal practitioners, scholars, and individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

By providing free access to this innovative and comprehensive database, the CLA empowers legal professionals to conduct thorough research, analyse legal trends, and monitor developments in human rights law.

The Case Law Analyser

Multilingual free-to-access collection of human rights decisions and laws from mechanisms in the African human rights system

Search database...

About the project

The Case Law Analyser is a multilingual, free-to-access collection of the human rights decisions of African supra-national mechanisms. It offers the most comprehensive access to African human rights law and case law in English, French and Portuguese. It does not simply list decisions and instruments, but presents them as interacting and interrelated texts to facilitate research friendliness and a better understanding of the web of textual and jurisprudential interaction in the African human rights system.

57	**814**	**1110**
Countries	Cases	Documents

> *Many users can now access more documents than before. A senior officer at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recently observed that the CLA probably has more information than they have on file. This is clearly thanks to the fact that with Uwazi it is quicker to upload new documents.*
> —Brice M. Djeugoue,
> Communications Manager, IHRDA

The Americas
El Salvador

Project: Documenting human rights violations against journalists
Partner: Asociación de Periodistas en El Salvador (APES)

HURIDOCS worked together with the Association of Journalists in El Salvador (APES) to effectively document events of aggression and human rights violations committed against journalists in El Salvador.

Based on an in-depth needs assessment, HURIDOCS developed a comprehensive database that catalogues incidents of attacks, threats, and other forms of harassment against journalists. By closely monitoring these incidents, APES are able to raise awareness about the dangers faced by journalists in El Salvador.

By compiling and analysing data over time, APES can identify patterns and trends in attacks on journalists, and inform advocacy efforts aimed at promoting press freedom, ensuring the safety of journalists, and holding perpetrators accountable.

A crucial part of this project was to facilitate effective communication and provide training to improve user proficiency and ensure seamless integration of the new system into the documentation process. This collaborative endeavour underscores HURIDOCS' commitment to advancing press freedom and the safety of journalists.

The main goal of this project is to leverage the collected data to advocate for policy changes and legal reforms that enhance the protection of journalists and uphold the freedom of the press in the country.

> *The fact that you could create various user profiles in Uwazi helped us give access to other people so they could support the systematisation of aggressions. During the elections, Uwazi greatly facilitated the work of documenting aggressions. The implementation helped us familiarise ourselves with the tool, and now we have a greater understanding of how to modify our documentation process.*
> **—Kattia Merlos,**
> **Monitoring Manager, IHRDA**

Asia Pacific
Afghanistan and diaspora

Project: Afghanistan Memory Home
Partner: Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation

Established by the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation (AHRDO), the **Afghanistan Memory Home** (AMH) serves as a sanctuary for victims and survivors to share their stories, fostering collective memorialisation and providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of war. AHRDO was forced to transition to a virtual platform after the closure of its physical museum in Kabul, and partnered with HURIDOCS to create an immersive online experience using the Uwazi platform.

Through a victim-centred approach, AMH prioritises the voices of those who have endured violence, ensuring their experiences are authentically represented. AHRDO's memorialisation specialist collaborated closely with HURIDOCS' team to transform extensive data into compelling narratives, navigating the complexities of Afghanistan's history with sensitivity and respect. The resulting virtual museum is marked by rich storytelling and thoughtful design, fostering a sense of community and honouring individual stories. AMH's commitment to memorialisation extends beyond digital archives to memory boxes, resembling altars and housing personal items of war victims crafted by survivors during workshops facilitated by AHRDO. By preserving stories and providing a platform for remembrance, AMH contributes to the healing process for victims and advocates for justice, truth, and accountability in Afghanistan.

> " *Collaborating with HURIDOCS has been an invaluable and empowering experience for our virtual museum project. Their expertise in developing tools for human rights information accessibility has empowered our vision, providing tailored solutions and creative strategies.*
>
> *HURIDOCS' commitment to responsiveness and helpfulness set them apart, making them the ideal partner. The decision to collaborate with them was strategic, driven by their proven track record and shared dedication to our mission. This partnership has not only enriched our project but also ensured a user-friendly and impactful virtual museum experience."*
> —Afghanistan Memory Home Team

Northern Africa and the Middle East
Libya

Project: Training for human rights defenders in Libya
Partner: International Center for Transitional Justice

Libyan human rights defenders are facing challenges in their work due to the deterioration of political and economic conditions in Libya and the wider region, such as constraints on civic space, unauthorised investigations, and arbitrary detention of defenders.

In 2023, HURIDOCS partnered with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to address some of these challenges by presenting a workshop to more than 15 partner organisations from Libya working on the defence of human rights.

This workshop was aimed at supporting the participating Libyan organisations with the know-how of building and managing efficient databases for monitoring and documentation purposes.

Our MENA team delivered in-depth training sessions on best practices for documenting human rights violations, the conceptualisation of a data model and the building of a database in Uwazi. The training provided participants with the tools and knowledge to lead their own database structuring.

During the two-day workshop in Tunis, participants were introduced to the practice of a victim-centred approach in human rights documentation and received in-depth training on building data structures, configuring Uwazi and managing their human rights data collections.

▲ Nael Georges, Programme Manager for the MENA and Africa regions, at the ICTJ training workshop in Tunis.

> " *The training was so insightful for all of us, and I personally have gained immensely. Your work is inspiring and motivated the participants to undertake innovative initiatives. The participants' feedback in the post-training evaluation form was very positive and they said we should have*
> —**Reem El Gantri, Head of Libya Programme, ICTJ**

Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Ukraine

Project: Documenting crimes of aggression and war crimes in Ukraine
Partner: Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY)

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, HURIDOCS has been working closely with the Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY) in the pursuit of justice amidst the conflict. This project serves as a private repository for documenting war crimes in Ukraine.

The ongoing collection and organisation of information pose significant challenges and HURIDOCS has played a crucial role in addressing these by responding swiftly to partner requests and providing support with database management. During this process, HURIDOCS facilitated a transition in information management strategies and aided in the successful implementation of the Preserve tool, which has proven instrumental in facilitating the open-source documentation efforts of our partners.

By leveraging data from various related databases in Uwazi, DIGNITY has produced impactful advocacy reports such as *__Nine circles of hell__*, documenting grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine. Looking ahead, DIGNITY and its partners remain committed to utilising and analysing the data stored in Uwazi databases to prepare evidence for various litigation endeavours aimed at achieving justice and accountability.

> " *It would not be an understatement to say that the Uwazi database has shaped the way we work.*
> —DIGNITY
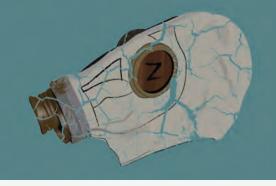
DIGNITY PUBLICATION SERIES ON TORTURE AND ORGANISED VIOLENCE
REPORT

#42
"NINE CIRCLES OF HELL":
PLACES OF DETENTION IN UKRAINE UNDER THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION
MARCH 2022 – DECEMBER 2022

Vadym Chovgan
Mykhailo Romanov
Vasyl Melnychuk

Europe
United Kingdom

Project: Detention Landscapes
Partner: Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford

In collaboration with the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford, HURIDOCS supported the implementation of the **Detention Landscapes** project, aimed at creating a comprehensive, interactive database documenting human rights violations within immigration detention facilities.

Initially focusing on Greece, the project endeavours to provide an evidence-based platform to support further research, legal proceedings, and advocacy efforts, ultimately striving for justice and accountability. Envisioned as an open-access resource, the database seeks to facilitate trans-regional learning and provide advocates and legal professionals worldwide with valuable information to bolster their work.

The online database and website focus on border criminologies, encompassing immigration detention, human rights, and border control issues. It serves as a repository for a diverse range of content, including first-hand testimonies, documents, photographs, NGO reports, investigative journalism, and academic research, all freely accessible to the public.

HURIDOCS facilitated brainstorming sessions to refine the project's design, ensuring alignment with the partner's vision for the final platform with a dark colour scheme that gives it a unique visual identity. Additionally, HURIDOCS provided continuous support throughout the project lifecycle, including data modelling and migration from the partner's previous website to Uwazi.

> "
> *Detention Landscapes illuminates the ingrained and pervasive nature of violence in the Greek immigration detention system. The helpful technical support, and the ongoing encouragement and motivation by the HURIDOCS team made the long-term process of building a database an invaluable learning experience.*
> **—Andriani Fili,
> Co-director, Border Criminologies,
> University of Oxford**

International
Various countries

Project: CYRILLA Phase II: Expanding the impact of digital rights legal data
Partner: The CYRILLA Collaborative

The CYRILLA Collaborative, a partnership between HURIDOCS and Data4Change, is committed to shaping the existing **CYRILLA database** into a pivotal resource for global digital rights information. The overarching aim is to establish CYRILLA as the go-to reference point for digital rights information, fostering a community of engaged users who actively contribute and collaborate to enhance its content and usability.

In 2023, the collaborative took significant steps towards realising this vision. Discovery sessions were organised to refine collaboration strategies and align efforts after the initial project phase.

These sessions, held in collaboration with CYRILLA project groups, facilitated discussions on redefining interactions and enhancing collaboration. Additionally, a data visualisation sprint convened in Nairobi aimed to leverage insights gathered from the database to create impactful visualisations and user-friendly tools. This collaborative effort underscores the commitment to effectively communicate important data insights and drive policy-making.

Furthermore, HURIDOCS initiated advancements in machine learning capabilities to streamline document organisation within the CYRILLA database.

By deploying machine learning technologies, we seek to optimise the efficiency of keyword assignment, thereby reducing researchers' time investment. This initiative underscores a commitment to continuously enhance the database's functionality and usability.

Since 2018, HURIDOCS has been instrumental in shaping the CYRILLA project, collaborating with partners to develop a unique information architecture.

Recognised for promoting internet freedom and human rights, CYRILLA stands as a testament to collaborative efforts aimed at advancing digital rights globally.

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In a rapidly shifting digital sphere, where digital rights remain under constant scrutiny, CYRILLA stands as a collaborative endeavour, committed to advancing the digital rights community. Leveraging the secure and reliable Uwazi platform, the CYRILLA database serves as an extensive repository of legal knowledge on digital rights. CYRILLA's potential goes beyond its current role. This collaborative effort can evolve into a leading hub for navigating the ever-changing legal landscape of digital rights."
**— Ibrahim Sabra,
Project Coordinator, CYRILLA**

Technical development

Our experienced Tech Team develops and maintains HURIDOCS' broad range of tools and infrastructure.

Tech Team

Our dedicated Tech Team consists of specialist teams dealing with front-end design, back-end design, product and UX design, infrastructure and machine learning. The developers, engineers and designers who make up these teams work in close collaboration using an agile methodology to maintain, enhance and strengthen Uwazi as well as other related network architecture, services and tools.

During 2023 our Tech Team consolidated the new Uwazi architecture, codenamed V2, for both front-end and back-end.

In the case of the front-end, some sections of Uwazi have already been deployed to production (mainly sections dealing with settings) based on new libraries and visual frameworks along with new user interface (UI) patterns to address known pain points of our users. We also introduced a new end-to-end (E2E) testing strategy based on newer and more reliable technologies.

 The Back-end Team completed the new data layer, awaiting the needed support from our Front-end Team to roll it out to production. This new data layer will better support our current paradigm where data is modelled as a graph, including graph queries such as shortest path or chain of command. We tested our new solution for stress to make sure it is fast and scalable.

Machine learning

In the area of machine learning, we have been focusing on document segmentation and information extraction. During 2023 we released several versions of our models as open source and they have been adopted by other organisations. We also developed our first prototype of a PDF to accessible HTML converter that will become an essential Uwazi feature in the future.

Our Infrastructure and Reliability Team did a great job during 2023 by ramping up the new team members, revamping and cleaning up our DevOps automation and adding better monitoring, alerting and mitigation measures for traffic peaks and disaster recovery.

Overall, this year we invested in building the foundation for great things to come during 2024, such as the release of all our integrations between Uwazi and machine learning, a complete revamp of the Uwazi user interface and a whole new data model.

> *We invested in building the foundation for great things to come.*

Security Working Group

In 2023, the Security Working Group continued to strengthen HURIDOCS' organisational security through collaborative and interdisciplinary work. One of the major goals in 2023 was strengthening HURIDOCS' data protection posture and legal compliance.

The team liaised with partner organisations to learn more about their data protection needs and requirements and worked to transform this knowledge into tangible and effective data protection policies and measures. This year, the team moved the majority of HURIDOCS' core infrastructure and services behind its own VPN.

The group also invested in exploring and building new partnerships with organisations and groups sharing similar goals and values. This included new collaborations with auditors and IT security consultants.
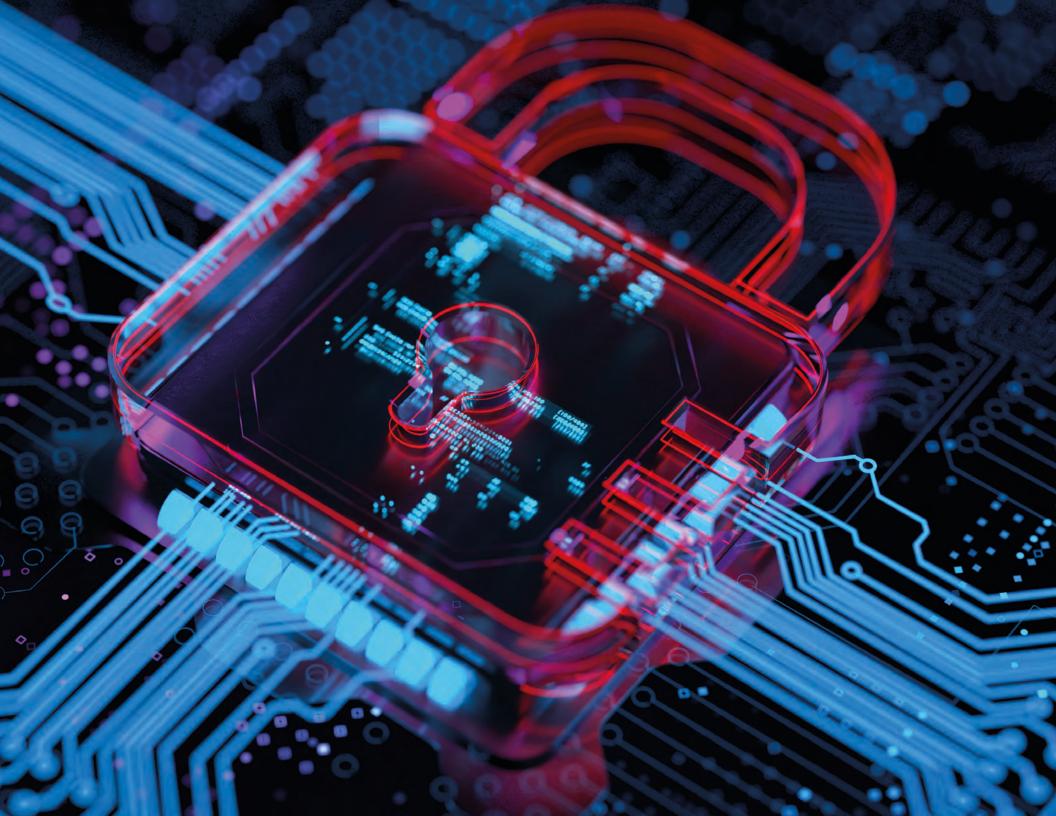
At the end of the year, we applied to the Open Technology Fund's Red TeamLab to request a security audit of our flagship tool Uwazi and we secured the audit shortly after.

The HURIDOCS team started exploring the implementation of well-being policies into organisational security policies and practices.

The team also continued to reinforce the digital security capacity of HURIDOCS staff, interns and consultants through regular mandatory training and improvement of existing policies.

Following a rapid expansion of staff, operations and programmes in 2022 and 2023, the team came to fully realise the importance of a holistic approach to organisational security. As such, the HURIDOCS team started exploring the implementation of well-being policies into organisational security policies and practices and has set related goals for 2024.

Research and collaboration

HURIDOCS both revisited trusted and introduced novel human rights-related documentation methodologies.

In 2023, HURIDOCS celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Events Standard Formats (ESF) with expert roundtable discussions on its evolution and future. Additionally, HURIDOCS introduced the Rapid Response Documentation principles to support human rights defenders in crisis situations, emphasising timely, systematic, and ethical documentation practices. These efforts highlight HURIDOCS' commitment to advancing human rights documentation through innovation and collaboration.

> *HURIDOCS is committed to advancing human rights documentation through innovation and collaboration.*

> **"** It is indeed an opportune time to revisit the events methodology and its iterations to explore their potential future directions, and more broadly, the future of human rights documentation.

Events Methodology: Pasts and Futures

In March, HURIDOCS organised a series of **roundtable discussions** to mark the 30th anniversary of the Events Standard Formats (ESF), a legendary methodology developed by HURIDOCS used for human rights documentation.

The sessions brought together experts to reflect on the methodology's evolution over three decades and discuss its potential updates and future directions.

Session 1 focused on the methodology's history, featuring former task force members and co-authors of the ESF, including Judith Dueck, Bert Verstappen, Aida Maria Noval, and moderated by Bono Olgado.

Session 2 examined practical applications and future possibilities, with speakers from various fields discussing the methodology's impact and potential developments. Speakers included Ken MacLean from the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, Jöran Lindeberg from the Department of Computer and Systems Sciences at Stockholm University, Patrick Ball from the Human Rights Data Analysis Group, and Sara Torsner from the Department of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield.

Overall, the discussions provided insights into the evolving landscape of human rights documentation and the role of technology in shaping its future.

Principles of Rapid Response Documentation

> " *Rapid response documentation can counter, prevent, or minimise human rights abuses before they further develop.*

Facing shrinking and precarious civic spaces and battling a culture of impunity emboldened by authoritarian regimes, human rights defenders are often called to respond to both ongoing and emerging violations at a moment's notice.

From violent crackdowns during mobilisations to abuses during humanitarian emergencies, sudden onset crises and quickly deteriorating human rights situations call for rapid, systematised, and secure responses from defenders. On the ground documentation of human rights violations in such circumstances of evolving uncertainty is a key component of short-term interventions and long-term mechanisms of justice.

Documentation must be done systematically, safely, and ethically as a time-critical intervention. Established human rights documentation practices, however, tend to be slow. This slowness invariably leads to both under- and over-documentation. This dual crisis of documentation risks exposing victims and survivors to re-traumatisation, while failing to support their immediate needs and their often lengthy pursuit for justice.

Current human rights documentation guidelines do not actively consider time as a key element. These guidelines often focus on what needs to be documented. Centring time — timing and timeliness — acknowledges that what can be documented and how to go about documenting them can (and at times, must) differ based on when the documentation is being done. In line with this, we put forward the concept of rapid response documentation.

Rapid response documentation (RRD) is the timely, systematic, secure, and ethical recording, collection, and preservation of information on human rights violations during crisis emergencies. Human rights defenders, particularly those on the ground, have already been doing RRD. While a lot of recent focus has been on open source investigations, we name RRD as a practice to give attention and provide support to on-the-ground documenters who ---often at great risk with limited resources---do the integral though invisible work of first response documentation. As one of the first responders, these documenters and documentalists enable the work of various actors across the human rights ecosystem.

Rapid response documentation can counter, prevent, or minimise human rights abuses before they further develop. RRD can help in quickly drawing attention to the crisis, securing support from various parties, and enacting strategic interventions. In addition, RRD lays down a strong foundation for various long-term justice mechanisms including providing leads for criminal investigations, data for reparations, and narratives for memorialisation.

We at HURIDOCS, together with 12 partner community organisations across South and Southeast Asia, came together to share and discuss our experiences in doing rapid response documentation. In addition to acknowledging and drawing from each other's expertise (community-grounded epistemology), we also looked into and studied practices in other fields engaged in rapid response work. We derived concepts and approaches from the fields of humanitarianism, emergency medicine, risk management, disaster planning, and archives & records management.
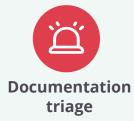
The result of this exchange, supported by the Digital Defenders Partnership, is an articulation of **a set of principles** and concepts that can guide the development of context-specific tools and methodologies in doing rapid response documentation. Below we share these principles.

These principles were co-developed by HURIDOCS with documenters and documentalists from the following organisations:

- Asia Justice and Rights, Indonesia Team (AJAR)
- Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (Philippines)
- Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
- Families of the Disappeared (Sri Lanka)
- KontraS (Indonesia)
- National Council of the Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)
- Odhikar (Bangladesh)
- SAVE (Bangladesh)
- Suriya Women's Development Centre (Sri Lanka)
- TAPOL
- WITNESS
- Women's League of Burma (WLB)

RRD Principles

Victim/survivor centered documentation

Emergencies place people in heightened precarity. Centre the needs, safety, and dignity of victims/survivors especially during times of uncertainty. Approach rapid response documentation with care for the person above all. Listen, do no harm, and attend to their immediate needs.

Documentation triage

Not everything can and should be documented. Not every circumstance is equal in terms of urgency and precarity. The degree and depth of rapid response documentation will vary between cases. Assess the situation and prioritise based on vulnerability and need of victims/survivors.

Minimum viable documentation

Time and resources are even more limited during crisis situations. There is a need to act quickly and strategically to cover as much ground as possible. Rapid response documentation should focus on getting more information with less process. Don't strive for perfection but rather, pursue what is 'good enough for now.' Acquire and organise information that will help address immediate needs while also providing a foundation for follow up documentation down the line. Practice minimalism that focuses on usability.

Predictive, responsive, and mitigating documentation

Often documentation is seen as a primary tool in support of formal mechanisms after the fact. Many established practices and principles of documentation are based on legal logics and requirements. Rapid response documentation practices, however, can be used as a proactive mechanism to prepare for and avert or lessen violations. Draw from principles and practices of first responders, activists, and journalists, and work with them to support each other in responding to emergent crises.

Network documentation

Though well meaning, several actors and multiple documentation initiatives that lack coordination between each other can lead to both under- and over-documentation. Collaboration and network building can improve efficiency, support security, and ensure care. Establish a central hub that will coordinate documentation efforts on the ground and will facilitate information exchange, provision, and analysis between various stakeholders. Reduce redundancies and the likelihood of retraumatisation by supporting and building upon initial and on-the-ground documentation efforts. Consolidate for efficiency and effectiveness by constantly taking stock and strategically planning initiatives.

Documentation as shared stewardship

Human rights documentation is an ongoing process. Like the pursuit of justice, documentation is never done nor will it ever be perfect. Rapid response documentation is a series of short-term actions that will enable other stakeholders to continue the shared work. Shared stewardship acknowledges that no one is alone, and that the goal is to enable and entrust others to continue the work of documentation. Documentation as shared stewardship is an act of solidarity and hope.

Events

We participated in a number of private and public events during the course of the year. Some of these events include the Martin Ennals Awards, RightsCon 2023, Team Community's Global Gathering, the Expert Roundtable on digital human rights tracking tools and databases, the 'Future of Speech Online' event, and more.

Martin Ennals Awards 2023: Recognising defenders

In February, the 2023 Martin Ennals Laureates were recognised and celebrated at the annual Martin Ennals Award Ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland. The three Laureates have dedicated their lives to human rights advocacy in Chad, Venezuela, and Jahmmu and Kashmir.

The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders is given to individuals who have made extraordinary and selfless contributions to human rights and are consequently under threat.

HURIDOCS is a longtime jury member of this initiative that helps to mobilise support for the finalists and enhance their protection.

This award is named after Martin Ennals (1927-1991), a human rights activist who served as the first Secretary General of Amnesty International and co-founded HURIDOCS, as well as ARTICLE 19 and International Alert.

We salute the **2023 Martin Ennals Laureates** who dedicate their lives to the human rights movement:

Delphine Djiraibé (Chad)
One of the first female lawyers in her country, she is recognised as a trailblazer of the human rights movement in Chad. She is a passionate advocate for the rights of women and girls and works actively to combat gender-based violence. Delphine is determined to fight against impunity and inequality in Chad, most lately with the registration and denunciation of human rights violations of the current government towards its population.

Feliciano Reyna (Venezuela)
Architect Feliciano Reyna founded Acción Solidaria in 1995, to promote the rights to healthcare, equality and non-discrimination of Venezuelans living with HIV/AIDS that is now a nationwide operating network. Today he is committed to creating a better nation, raising awareness about human rights violations and the widespread suffering of the Venezuelan people in the country's unprecedented humanitarian crisis.
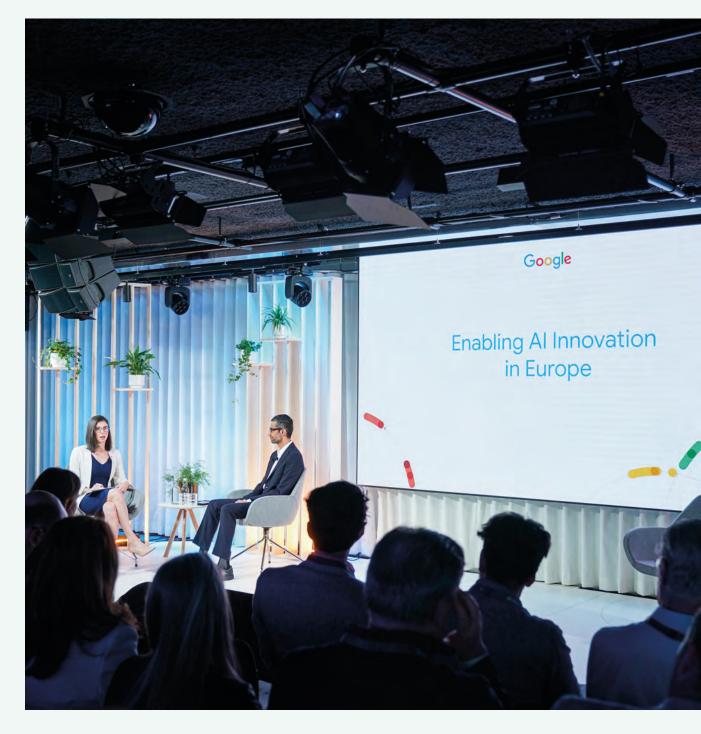
Khurram Parvez (Jammu and Kashmir)
For the last 20 years, Khurram has played a frontline role in the human rights movement in Kashmir. Through the documentation of unmarked mass graves in the region, he is recognised for his evidence-based advocacy work and campaigns. Throughout the years, Khurram was repeatedly harassed and attacked by authorities in India. Unfortunately, he was arbitrarily detained under politically motivated charges in 2016 as a clear attempt to stop him from denouncing human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Enabling AI innovation in the EU

In May, HURIDOCS' Interim Executive Director, Nancy Yu, shared the stage with Google and Alphabet CEO, Sundar Pichai, and European Parliament members **at an event** in Brussels organised by Google.org.

She highlighted HURIDOCS' groundbreaking work in machine learning for human rights documentation, emphasising AI's potential to advance global human rights efforts.

This spotlight underscores HURIDOCS' leadership in leveraging technology for social good, alongside other participants like Naja Von Schmude from Peregrine and Manuel Marina Breysse from Idoven, with Alina Polyakova moderating.

Alina Polyakova and Sundar Pichai at the event on 'Enabling AI innovation in Europe'. ▶.

HURIDOCS at RightsCon Costa Rica 2023

In June, HURIDOCS was prominently featured at one of the biggest and important human rights conferences — RightsCon Costa Rica 2023.

HURIDOCS led one of the most popular sessions of the summit titled ***The Future/s of Human Rights Documentation***.

This hybrid session convened experts in the field, Oleksandra Romantsova from the Center for Civil Liberties, Sam Gregory from WITNESS, Carlos Alberto Guadamuz Hernández from Colectivo Nicaragua Nunca Más, and Beth Van Schaack, US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice at the US Department of State.

The session explored the evolving landscape and challenges of human rights documentation, exploring topics such as machine learning, big data, and social media's role in investigations while considering legal, ethical, and technological dimensions.

HURIDOCS also hosted an online workshop *Developing Data Models for Human Rights Documentation* designed to equip human rights activists with practical skills in building data models for documentation-focused databases. Participants engaged in breakout sessions focused on specific issues, collaborating to develop domain-specific data models using HURIDOCS' tools and methodologies.

In addition, HURIDOCS offered support and further inquiries both online and in-person at the Community Village booths, furthering its commitment to advancing human rights documentation efforts globally.

Welcomes and farewells

In July, HURIDOCS warmly welcomed Danna Ingleton as our new Executive Director and bid farewell to Friedhelm Weinberg, our former Executive Director, and Gisella Reina, a respected long-time member and former Chair of the HURIDOCS board.

We extend our gratitude to Friedhelm and Gisella for their significant and long-time contributions to HURIDOCS. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the friends and members of the human rights community who joined us in celebrating this significant occasion in Geneva.

The apéro served as an occasion to express our appreciation to both the departing leaders and to welcome our new Executive Director.

Team Community's Global Gathering

In September, HURIDOCS attended Team Community's Global Gathering in Estoril, Portugal. HURIDOCS' Security Lead participated in a variety of meet-ups and workshops and hosted a booth where she shared about the organisation's mission and our human rights documentation tools.

HURIDOCS embraced this opportunity to reconnect with the global digital rights community in a meaningful and intentional way, while also sharing the roadmap for our flagship tool Uwazi and making new friends and allies in the digital rights space.

Expert Roundtable on Digital Human Rights Tracking Tools and Databases

In September, HURIDOCS participated in the two-day **Expert Roundtable** on Digital Human Rights Tracking Tools and Databases (DHRTTDs), a collaborative effort between the Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The event gathered over 30 DHRTTD developers and users from various sectors, including permanent missions, national ministries, international and regional organisations, national human rights institutions, civil society, and academia.

Yolanda Booyzen, our Interim Director of Programmes, participated in panels on web accessibility and linguistic diversity, navigating the role of AI and machine learning, and interoperability as a cornerstone for modern digital initiatives.Lisa Reinsberg, Executive Director of the International Justice Resource Center (IJRC) and Chair of the HURIDOCS board, led a thought-provoking panel on investment, funding opportunities and political strategies.

Participants engaged in insightful discussions on the evolution and sustainability of digital human rights tracking initiatives, highlighting the transformative impact of digital tools.

Key takeaways included prioritising web accessibility, synergising efforts for greater impact, harnessing AI responsibly, and urging states to take proactive steps.

The Geneva Academy subsequently published an academic briefing, *The Human Rights Data Revolution*, exploring the issues discussed and the evolving landscape of digital human rights tracking tools and databases.

Participants at the 2023 Expert Roundtable on Digital Human Rights Tracking Tools and Databases, held in Geneva. ►.

HURIDOCS at the 'Future of Speech Online'

In October, our Executive Director Danna Ingleton was a featured speaker at ***The Future of Speech Online*** hosted by the Center for Democracy & Technology.

In her presentation, she explored the vital role of AI in advancing human rights documentation and the crucial work of human rights defenders around the globe.

She also highlighted that HURIDOCS is committed to responsibly harnessing AI's potential while considering its long-term implications.

CYRILLA Data Visualisation Workshop

In October, HURIDOCS, Data4Change, and our CYRILLA partners, including SMEX, Association for Progressive Communications, Columbia Freedom of Expression, Derechos Digitales, and the Center for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law from Strathmore University, gathered for a multi-day data visualisation workshop in Nairobi, Kenya.

The dynamic discussions focused on prioritising, conceptualising, and developing functional prototypes of up to five data visualisation widgets that connect with the CYRILLA API.

◄ The HURIDOCS team at the CYRILLA Data Visualisation Workshop, held in Nairobi.

Workshop on advancing ESC rights in Türkiye

In December, HURIDOCS and the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (AMER) held a comprehensive **two-day workshop** in Ankara as part of the two-year European Union-funded project *Strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships to advance economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights of disadvantaged groups.*

The project's overall focus is on equipping civil society to advance human rights in Türkiye and the workshop brought together 17 participants, including local municipalities, project staff and the three selected sub-grantees announced earlier in October 2023.

During the two-day event, participants engaged in conversations on the reality of ESC rights and delved into the world of documentation and monitoring of human rights violations, actively participated in group work and addressing the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups in the country.

◄ Participants at the workshop to strengthen civil society to advance economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights of disadvantaged groups, held in Ankara.

Google.org

We have been thrilled to bolster HURIDOCS' work to advance human rights over the past 5 years, most recently with grant funding to integrate machine learning models and expand Uwazi. HURIDOCS' commitment to scale responsibly and organise vast sums of data aligns with Google's mission of making the world's information accessible. We look forward to following the organisation into this next chapter of providing better access to publicly available information.

—Brigitte Hoyer Gosselink,
Director: Product Impact, Google.org

Patrick J McGovern
FOUNDATION

The use of machine learning to organise, understand, and disseminate human rights information is more than just an innovative use of technology — it is a vital intervention to accelerate advocacy and equip the quest for justice worldwide. HURIDOCS' work realises the promise of using advanced technologies to shed light on injustice and build pathways to accountability and change.

—Vilas Dhar,
President, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation

Irene M. Staehelin Stiftung

We support HURIDOCS because they enable civil society organisations to collect data on human rights violations in a structured and effective way. Monitoring human rights at grassroot level is essential for a free and equal society.

—Tiseke Kasambala,
Head of Programme: Human Rights,
Irene M. Staehelin Foundation

Finance and funders

In 2023, HURIDOCS had a budget of 2.29 million USD, representing growth compared to 2022, when it was at 2.05 million USD.

As the landscape of human rights funding evolves, we are committed to adapting our funding approaches while staying true to our organisational mission and strategy.

The trust and partnership of our donors and allies inspire us to uphold our role as pillars of support, vigilance, guidance, and counsel in their endeavours.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following donors for their invaluable support, which significantly contributed to advancing HURIDOCS' mission and empowering the work of our partners:

- Capital Group
- City of Geneva
- Däster-Schild Stiftung
- European Commission
- Google.org
- Hivos
- Irene M. Staehelin Stiftung
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein
- Oak Foundation
- Okta for Good
- Patrick J. McGovern Foundation
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation
- Temenos AG
- The Sigrid Rausing Trust

Over the last decade, Oak has watched HURIDOCS's gradual transformation into an essential service provider for human rights organisations across the world. Its unique next-generation database application, Uwazi, is the only of its kind. Our partners around the world, both emerging start-ups and established organisations, rely on it to preserve evidence of human rights violations, organise libraries of human rights laws, build collective memories in the pursuit of transitional justice, and more. HURIDOCS has proved to be dynamic, agile and adaptable to the ever-shifting landscape of challenges and threats. It is constantly developing a robust toolkit to best support its human rights partners. HURIDOCS forms part of the backbone of the human rights movement and we are proud to be able to continue supporting this incredible team.

**—Adrian Arena,
Director: International Human Rights Programme,
Oak Foundation**

HURIDOCS is in a unique position to strengthen the increasingly decentralised and diverse human rights movement of the future by creating sophisticated open-source technology that supports information infrastructure and providing strategic advice on how documentation can contribute to human rights work

HURIDOCS stands as a success story of the past 40 years. As we continue to lead in human rights documentation and evidence, and as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reached its 75th anniversary, the human rights sector looks ahead to the next 25 years. HURIDOCS will remain a vital contributor to supporting and underpinning the work of a dynamic and ambitious human rights ecosystem.

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