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Geneva-based HURIDOCS is a Google AI Impact Grantee

HURIDOCS will apply Artificial Intelligence to Human Rights Documentation

[Geneva, 7/05/2019] Google announced today that the Geneva-based NGO HURIDOCS is one of 20 organizations that will share 25 million US dollars in grants from the Google Artificial Intelligence Impact Challenge. The Google Artificial Intelligence Impact Challenge was an open call to nonprofits, social enterprises, and research institutions to submit their ideas to use artificial intelligence (AI) to help address societal challenges. Over 2600 organizations from around the world applied.

Geneva-based HURIDOCS will receive a grant of 1 million US dollars to develop and use machine learning methods to extract, explore and connect relevant information in laws, jurisprudence, victim testimonies, and resolutions. Thanks to these, the NGO will work with partners to make documents better and freely accessible. This will benefit anyone interested in using human rights precedents and laws, for example to lawyers representing victims of human rights violations or students researching non-discrimination.

The machine learning work to liberate information from documents is grounded in more than a decade of work that HURIDOCS has done to provide free access to information. Through pioneering partnerships with the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) and the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), HURIDOCS has co-created some of the most used public human rights databases. A key challenge in creating these databases has been the time-consuming and error-prone manual adding of information – a challenge the machine learning techniques will be used to overcome.

“We have been experimenting with machine learning techniques for more than two years”, said Natalie Widmann, Artificial Intelligence Specialist at HURIDOCS. “We have changed our approach countless times, but we see a clear path to how they can be leveraged in groundbreaking ways to democratise access to information.” HURIDOCS will use the grant from Google to work with partners to co-create the solutions, carefully weighing ethical concerns of automation and focusing on social impact. All the work will be done in the open, including all code being released publicly.

“We are truly excited by the opportunity to use these technologies to address a problem that has been holding the human rights movement back”, said Friedhelm Weinberg, Executive Director of HURIDOCS. “We are thankful to Google for the support and look forward to be working with their experts and what will be a fantastic cohort of co-grantees.”

“We received thousands of applications to the Google AI Impact Challenge and are excited that HURIDOCS was selected to receive funding and expertise from Google. AI is at a nascent stage when it comes to the value it can have for the social impact sector,

and we look forward to seeing the outcomes of this work and considering where there is potential for use to do even more.”

- Jacquelline Fuller, President of Google.org

Next week, the HURIDOCS team will travel to San Francisco to work with the other grantees, Google AI experts, Project Managers and the startup specialists from Google's Launchpad Accelerator for a program that will last six months, from May to November 2019. Each organization will be paired a Google expert who will meet with them regularly for coaching sessions, and will also have access to other Google resources and expert mentorship.

About HURIDOCS: Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS) is deeply rooted in the human rights movement, with decades of field experience and a high level of expertise in using information and technology. A global group of human rights researchers, documentation experts, information security specialists and software developers HURIDOCS aims to empower defenders to act strategically on human rights information. Founded in 1982, HURIDOCS is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and the project team for artificial intelligence is based across Berlin, Valencia and Nairobi.

About Google.org: Google.org, Google's philanthropy, supports nonprofits that address humanitarian issues worldwide and apply radical, data-driven innovation to solving the world's biggest challenges.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Friedhelm Weinberg in English, French or German at +41787925973, or email friedhelm@huridocs.org. We can also arrange interviews with members of the project team that are based in Valencia, Spain, and Berlin, Germany.