

AAG Newsletter

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Geography and Human Rights

Nearly all geographers are concerned about human rights, and in their personal and professional lives seek meaningful ways to act on these concerns and values. For the past two years, several of us at the AAG have been working together with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to explore an array of issues, projects, and programs which engage science, geography, and human rights.

This collaborative work has resulted in interesting and substantive developments in three areas of human rights activity which intersect with geography: 1) the creation of a new Science and Human Rights Coalition, of which the AAG is a founding member and co-organizer; 2) cooperation around an AAAS project on Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights; and 3) the development of an AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse. I

am pleased to report on our progress to date on these new programs, and to invite the input and participation of all AAG members in them as they move forward.

Science and Human Rights Coalition

For the past two years, the AAG has worked closely with AAAS and a team of other scientific and scholarly associations to help develop the conceptual and organizational framework for a proposed new Science and Human Rights Coalition, to be hosted by AAAS. The Coalition is a network of scientific organizations that recognize a role for science and scientists in efforts to realize human rights. The working goals of the Coalition are to promote human rights

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awareness and programs within scientific associations, professional societies, and science academies; facilitate collaborative partnerships between the scientific and human rights communities to address human rights challenges; create opportunities for scientific associations to explore and contribute their discipline-specific skills and knowledge to human rights; and expand the knowledge base of human rights organizations regarding scientific methods, tools, and technologies that can be applied in human rights work. Scientific associations that share the goals of the Coalition are invited to participate as members. Individual scholars and scientists are encouraged to participate through their scientific organizations, but may also be involved as affiliated members.

The formal launch of the new Science and Human Rights Coalition will occur on January 14-16, 2009, in Washington, DC. Speakers will include Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and former President of Ireland. The AAG is a founding member of the new coalition, and also is playing an integral role in its launch. AAG council member Molly Brown also served as an early and effective supporter of the Coalition. Further information about the new Coalition is available at: www.aag.org or <http://shr.aaas.org/scisocs/>. AAG members are encouraged and welcome to attend the January launch of the Coalition.

Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project

The AAG also supports and provides input to the AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights project, which is part of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program. This project is funded

by the MacArthur and Oak Foundations to develop applications as well as human and information resources that improve the use of geospatial technologies and analysis by the non-governmental (NGO) human rights community. Working in partnership since 2006 with well-known groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as numerous small, locally based organizations, the project has engaged in several efforts to bring high-resolution satellite imagery, GPS units, and geographic analysis and methods into wider use by human rights organizations. While such tools and analyses were occa-



Richardson

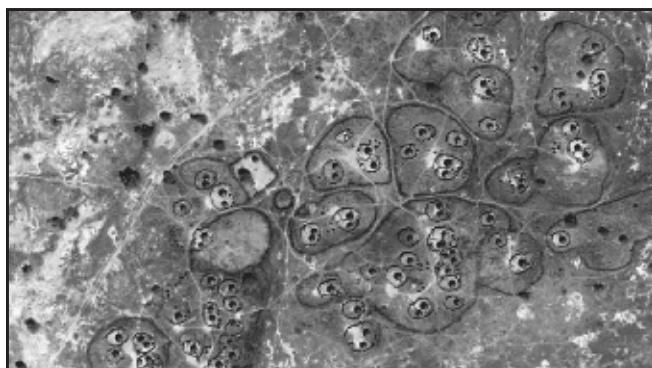
sionally used in the past, the project seeks to explore the potential for an integrated approach to monitoring, documenting, and preventing human rights abuses. Such a system would draw together numerous satellite imagery programs with the extensive network of on-the-ground NGO and other human rights observers to fully document, as objectively and as quickly as possible, atrocities ongoing around the world, so that interventions might occur.

Specific efforts to date include documentation and active monitoring of attacks on civilians in Darfur, presented on the Eyes on Darfur Web site (www.eyesondarfur.org), as well as documentation efforts in Burma and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. In such remote regions, governments often are able to commit atrocities against their citizens with near-impunity, and satellite observations can sometimes be the only method of authoritatively corroborating witness reporting for international NGO and governmental human rights organizations. To a more limited extent, such imagery can occasionally be effective as a

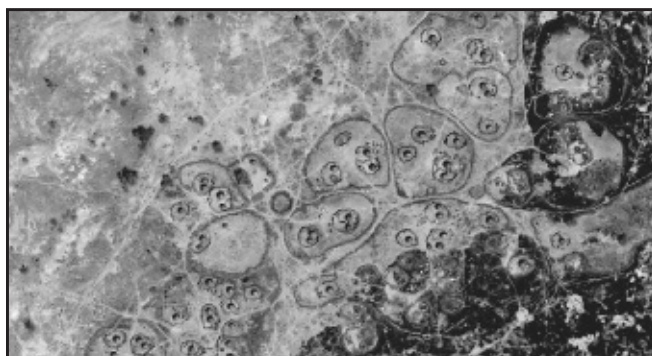
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pro-active protection and warning mechanism, allowing innocent people to escape out of harm's way, or to deter threatened attacks on monitored villages or sites. In addition, the project is currently engaged in efforts to support indigenous land rights in Guatemala, document adverse impacts of aerial defoliation in Colombia, and explore applications and needs of local human rights organizations in other regions.



The village of Bir Kedouas, on the Chad side of the Chad/Sudan border, in October of 2004. This QuickBird satellite image pictures the village before it suffered attack by the Janjawid. Copyright 2008 Digital Globe. Produced by AAAS.



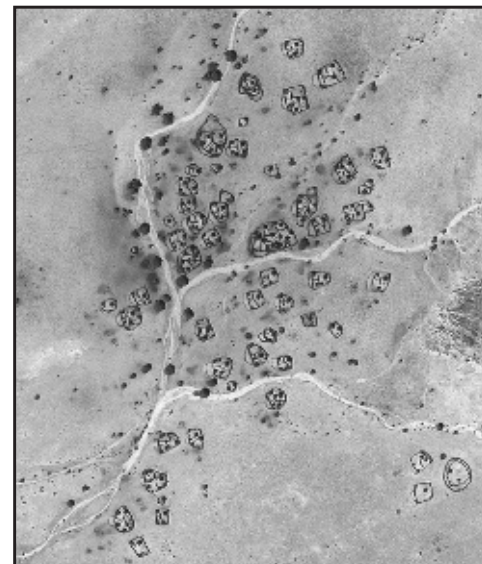
The village of Bir Kedouas following attacks by Janjawid fighters in January of 2006. Analysis indicates that burning destroyed 89 homes as well as crops and other structures. Copyright 2008 Digital Globe. Produced by AAAS.

AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse

The AAG and the AAAS also have recently entered into an agreement, supported by funding from the MacArthur

Foundation, to develop an inventory of geographic research and scholarship relating to human rights. This inventory and resultant detailed bibliography will form the foundation of a new AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse, which will be housed on the AAG website. We invite all AAG members, as well as others, to contribute to this Clearinghouse. Among numerous applications and uses of this body of research, the AAG and AAAS particularly seek to identify research that is substantive enough to be valuable as evidence or in support of expert testimony in international tribunals investigating human rights abuses. We encourage you to submit citations for any geographic research that you believe would be useful for inclusion in this Clearinghouse bibliography. Please email research project descriptions, bibliographic citations (preferably annotated with an abstract or brief summary of the work), and other relevant material to Megan Overbey (moverbey@aag.org) or Matthew Hamilton (mhamilton@aag.org) at the AAG.

Geographer and AAAS Human Rights Project Director Lars Bromley noted that, "Geographers obviously have a critical and longstanding role to play in such work. As such, AAAS is delighted to collaborate with the AAG in an effort to concisely identify relevant literature across a broad range of topics which could inform future activities of interest to the human rights



Malam al Hosh is currently featured as a "village at risk" on the Eyes on Darfur website, and is now one of the villages being publicly monitored by Amnesty International in an attempt to deter threatened attacks. Copyright 2008 Image Sat International. Produced by AAAS.

community." In addition to bibliographic, informational, and research resources, the AAG Clearinghouse will also provide links to other geography-related human rights programs, such as those of Amnesty International, the United Nations, and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Genocide Prevention Mapping Initiative, among others.

Regular updates on these AAG and AAAS human rights programs will be available at www.aag.org and www.aaas.org. Special joint AAG and AAAS sessions on this human rights work are also planned for the AAG Annual Meeting in Las Vegas. We hope to see you there, and invite your input and assistance on these important collaborative projects. ■

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AAG Honorary Geographer nomination deadline is September 15. www.aag.org/grantsawards/index.cfm.