

Archives

and

A joint project of the
Political Affairs Division IV, Human Security
of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)
the Swiss Federal Archives (SFA)
and swisspeace

Dealing with the Past

Why this project

In the aftermath of gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, a series of initiatives are undertaken to deal with these past violations. The importance of preserving archives and records concerning human rights violations in these periods is often underestimated and forgotten. Technical issues such as the preservation and management of archives are as important as policy questions related to the access, ownership and location of these archives and records. The aim of the project "Archives and Dealing with the Past" is to provide a support to governments, international organizations and NGOs related to the protection of archives which document human rights violations.

The project is conceived as a hub; it offers a platform of contact between actors who need support and experts in this field, as well as a platform of exchange of best practices and lessons learned, for practitioners and experts in both archival and dealing with the past / transitional justice fields.

Our goals

- To make a significant contribution to preserving, securing and making accessible archives and records of past human rights violations in countries that have experienced gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law.
- To raise awareness on the importance of archives and data collections of human rights violations within a broader understanding of Dealing with the Past initiatives.

Swiss expertise

Due to its previous experience in this field and thanks to its expertise in both dealing with the past and archives, Switzerland has been approached by several governments and organizations with requests regarding support in safeguarding archives and records

on human rights violations. This led to the creation of the joint project between the FDFA, the SFA and swisspeace, combining the best competences of each partner in one project.

What we do

Upon request, the project "Archives and Dealing with the Past", undertakes an assessment to identify specific needs with local actors and then supports them in designing and implementing tailor made responses. For this purpose, the project relies upon a broad network of experts in archival issues, data collection, management, and analysis.

With the participation of the most pertinent experts for each local need, the project will also offer training, analysis and counseling. We are currently supporting such processes through projects in the Great Lakes, Former Yugoslavia and in Guatemala. The project also supports local actors to find some funding for these purposes.

Who we are

The project "Archives and Dealing with the Past" started in June 2011 as a joint venture between the Political Affairs Division IV, Human Security, of the Swiss "FDFA", the "SFA" and "swisspeace".

The Political Affairs Division IV, Human Security: Peace, Human Rights, Humanitarian Policy, Migration, of the FDFA, is responsible for implementing measures to promote peace and strengthen human rights in the world. The concept of human security focuses on the safety of individual human beings and protecting people against political violence, war and acts of arbitrary violence. It is based on the recognition that peace policy, human rights policy and humanitarian policy are closely interlinked. It has developed sound competences in the field of Dealing With the Past.

The Swiss Federal Archives (SFA) are the Confederation's service and competence centre for lasting information management. They appraise, secure, describe and provide access to archive-worthy records of the Swiss Confederation. In the last years the SFA and the Federal Archive has sent archival experts to Albania, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Russia and Lithuania. The SFA hold security copies of the Archives of the National Police of Guatemala.

swisspeace, the Swiss Peace Foundation is a practice-oriented peace research institute. We analyze the causes of violent conflicts and develop strategies for their peaceful transformation. One of swisspeace's programs is dedicated to Dealing with the Past.

Highlights

- Since 2006 the FDFA has co-authored several Resolutions in the Human Rights Council on the right to truth. In 2011 together with Argentina and Morocco, Switzerland successfully presented a resolution for the nomination of a special rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non recurrence.
- The SFA stores security copies of the Guatemalan Police Archives.
- The FDFA and SFA have provided technical support to three documentation centers collecting records on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the Balkans and organized workshops on these issues in Colombia and Burundi.
- The project partners co-organized a Workshop on the ICTY Legacy and the Establishment of Information Centers in the Former Yugoslavia in Zagreb, June 2011.

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