

Written and compiled by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Chair, HRWG

**Commentary.**

2015 was a year of horrific videos: Islamic State videos of beheadings; police camera videos of violence on the streets of the United States; media images of refugees coming ashore in Greece. It was a year in which truth commission reports were issued (Canada, U.S. State of Maine), new truth commissions were promised (Sri Lanka, Colombia, Panama), and archives began to accept the records of completed truth commissions (Brazil, Canada). Old archives were used to reopen old cases (Chile, Peru). Satellite imagery continued to be an important tool for human rights investigations: crowd sourcing using satellite imagery to map child trafficking in Lake Volta region of Ghana, haunting images of destruction of cultural heritage sites in Iraq and Syria and of Nigerian towns set fire by the Boko Haram rebel group. Medical records were used in Guinea to determine the numbers of wounded during post-election violence; an increasing number of businesses found themselves confronted with documentation on their practices that had a negative impact on human rights. Quite a year.

Looking over the 2015 issues of *HRWG News*, here are a variety of other stories:

January: A court in Guatemala convicted Pedro Garcia Arredondo, former head of a special investigations unit of the police, of homicide and crimes against humanity for his leadership of the 1980 siege of the Spanish Embassy during which 37 protesters and hostages died. Video footage proved Arredondo was present at the Embassy during the siege and historical archives of the National Police identified those responsible for the operation as Arredondo and two others.

February: The first child in Bosnia was registered with the nationality “Bosnian.” When the parents went to register the birth with the municipality, they were told “Bosnian” was not acceptable and he must be “Bosniak, Croat, Serb or Other,” but at the end of January the municipality “decided there were no legal restrictions preventing anyone from being registered as a Bosnian.” The parents and the other children planned to reregister as Bosnians also “to fight a system that is based on ethnic divisions,” the father said.

March: Iceland is well known for its nationwide program to obtain DNA information on its population. Geneticists are pairing the DNA results with national genealogy databases to look for diseases that are unusually common in relatives—a sign that they share a genetic mutation.

April: Pope Francis ordered the Vatican to open its files on Argentina’s military dictatorship (1976-1983) during which an estimated 20,000 people were made to “disappear” by the regime.

May: Researchers studied death registries in southern European countries to establish how many migrants have been recorded as dying in transit. They discovered that only 40% of the bodies of migrants found since 1990 have been identified.

June: The International Committee of the Red Cross opened its archives for the period 1966-1975, covering the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970), the Vietnam War (1964-1975), the military junta in Greece (1967-1974), the coup against President Salvador Allende in Chile (1973), the ICRC’s work in South Africa during Nelson Mandela’s detention, the Cyprus conflict, and the wars of independence in Mozambique and Angola. An estimated 97% of all files are open.

July: The United Nations' Independent Panel of Experts issued its report on the 1961 plane crash that killed UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and 15 other passengers. The panel said it found "significant new information" that the plane was brought down by "aerial attack or other interference." Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom provided access to all the archives that the panel requested, and the panel urged further disclosures of information by UN member states.

August: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported that for the first time in five decades, mortality rates increased among Palestine refugee newborns in Gaza. To get the data, UNRWA asked all mothers who had more than one child and who came to one of the 22 UNRWA health centers to register their last-born child for immunization, to tell them whether their preceding child was alive or dead. The information from interviews with 3128 mothers was documented on data collection sheets and used with "child health records and antenatal records" to determine mortality rates. The researchers concluded that "inadequate neonatal care" is contributing to the sad trend.

September: Taiwan issued new court regulations to ensure that video footage, audio recordings and written court transcripts of cases where prosecutors are seeking the death penalty or life imprisonment are stored permanently in the central archives and is made available to defendants on request.

October: Tanzania launched a nationwide drive to help parents register their children's births by mobile phone. A health worker will send the baby's name, sex, date of birth and family details by phone to a central data base and a birth certificate is issued free of charge within days.

November: Algeria's former counter-terrorism chief, who was responsible for leading a war against various groups that lasted over 20 years, was sentenced to five years in prison for breaching orders and destroying documents.

December: Since March, when Syrian opposition activists posted online thousands of post-mortem photographs smuggled out of the country by a police photographer who defected in 2013, families of the missing have been looking for the fates of their loved ones by sifting through the grim photographs.

## **International news.**

European Court of Justice. The Historical Archives of the European Union opened the historical records of the European Court of Justice for research. <http://www.eui.eu/Research/HistoricalArchivesOfEU/News/2015/12-17-Official-opening-of-the-European-Court-of-Justices-papers.aspx>

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). At the official ceremony closing the ICTR, Rwanda's minister of justice said, reported *JusticeInfo.Net*, "We will never stop demanding" custody of the archives of the Tribunal. <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/leading-rwandan-genocide/2336244.html>; <http://allafrica.com/stories/201512020938.html>

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. An historian serving as an expert witness for the defense in the trial of Ratko Mladic challenged the use of documentary evidence by the experts for the prosecution. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/mladic-witness-focus-bosnian-serb-crimes>

United Nations. An independent panel appointed by the UN Secretary General issued what the *New York Times* termed "a scathing report" on the UN's mishandling of reports of child sexual abuse by UN peacekeeping troops in the Central African Republic. The panel also exonerated the officer of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who gave a document to the French government on the abuse allegations against French troops. For background, see *HRWG News* 2015-04 and 2015-05. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/world/africa/report-criticizes-uns-handling-of-child-sex-abuse-allegations.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/world/africa/report-criticizes-uns-handling-of-child-sex-abuse-allegations.html?_r=0)

The United Nations Committee on Torture issued a report saying that in China torture "is still deeply entrenched in the criminal justice system" and pointing out that China "failed to produce information" the

panel requested. It did, however, commend China's change to its criminal procedure law to require "audio or video recordings of interrogations in major cases," particularly since the justice system "overly relies on confessions as the basis for convictions," reported the *New York Times*.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/world/asia/chinese-justice-system-relies-on-torture-un-panel-says.html?smtyp=cur&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/world/asia/chinese-justice-system-relies-on-torture-un-panel-says.html?smtyp=cur&_r=0)

United Nations and World Bank. Two senior officials of the World Bank published an essay arguing that for the United Nations to evaluate how countries are progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, countries need to have much better data: "One of the most pressing challenges facing many developing countries is simply a lack of data, even in priority areas. The problem is acute. Recent studies show that 29 of the world's poorest countries have no data at all to measure trends in poverty between 2002 and 2011." They noted that a "fundamental method of collecting data is through household surveys," and "another important data source is in administrative records." [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mahmoud-mohieldin/data--the-first-hurdle-t\\_b\\_8845924.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=world&ir=WorldPost](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mahmoud-mohieldin/data--the-first-hurdle-t_b_8845924.html?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=WorldPost)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The records of the two UN organizations indicate that "an unprecedented one million people" fled to Europe in 2015. The UNHCR records show that 972,500 people crossed the Mediterranean Sea, and one in every two of those was a Syrian escaping the war in Syria. IOM estimated that more than 34,000 people crossed from Turkey into Bulgaria and Greece by land. <http://www.unhcr.org/567918556.html>

United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in Congo. The Office issued a report that "documented 143 human rights violations and at least 649 people arbitrarily detained in connection with the electoral process during the first nine months of 2015," *Reuters* reported. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-congodemocratic-rights-idUSKBN0TR0U020151208>; for the report see <http://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/report-united-nations-joint-human-rights-office-human-rights-and-0>

United Nations Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT). On December 3 MICT launched a new online research tool, the Judicial Records and Archives Database (JRAD), "which is aimed at enhancing access to the public judicial records of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the Mechanism." The judicial records of the Yugoslav Tribunal "remain accessible via the public interface of the ICTY's judicial records database." [Judicial Records Research Tool \(JRAD\)](#)

## World/general news.

Business records. Margaret Jungk, the chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, published an essay on the *Huffington Post* blog titled, "Why do we know so little about corporate human rights abuses?" The first of three reasons she cited was the lack of records: "We lack systematic, up-to-date information on which countries have the highest rates of child labour, which companies are buying up the biggest pieces of farmland, which government agencies are most likely to ask for bribes. Not only that, but we lack even basic data on where the greatest risks of these violations are."

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/margaret-jungk/why-do-we-know-so-little-\\_b\\_8687196.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/margaret-jungk/why-do-we-know-so-little-_b_8687196.html)

A Dutch appeals court ruled that Royal Dutch Shell can be held liable for oil spills at its subsidiary in Nigeria and ordered Shell to make available to the court "documents that might shed light on the cause of the oil spills and whether leading managers were aware of them," reported *Reuters*. The suit was brought by farmers whose land was damaged by the spills and their income lost. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-shell-nigeria-pollution-idUSKBN0U11C520151218>

Colonial borders. In a fascinating article, two economists compared a map created in 1959 showing "ethnolinguistic" boundaries in Africa at the time of colonization with four current datasets to look at the impact of colonial borders that split ethnicities on today's civil conflicts, discrimination by the national government, instability and poverty. "Our work," they wrote, "shows that, by splitting ethnicities across countries, the colonial border design has spurred political violence." They believe that "in the majority of cases, Europeans did not consider ethnic features and local geography in the design of colonial borders" and quote historian A. I. Asiwaju's finding that the "study of European archives supports the accidental rather than a conspiratorial theory of the marking of African boundaries." Nonetheless, the boundary

markings have had long-term, disastrous consequences. [http://www.eurasiareview.com/26122015-the-long-run-effects-of-scramble-for-africa-analysis/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29](http://www.eurasiareview.com/26122015-the-long-run-effects-of-scramble-for-africa-analysis/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29)

**Medical records.** The Institute of Medicine of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine published a report of its workshop on the impact of applications of digital health records (DHR) on Alzheimer's disease (AD) research. The summary said, "Given the few therapies currently available to treat the symptoms of AD, compared to other central nervous system disorders, this session explored how DHRs may be used to help improve clinical trial design and methodology for AD research." The Institute estimated that 46.8 million people worldwide "are currently living with dementia, and the prevalence is expected to double every year for the next 20 years." [http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/Assessing-the-Impact-of-Applications-of-Digital-Health-Records-Alzheimers-Disease-Research.aspx?utm\\_source=IOM+Email+List&utm\\_campaign=ec6855ff14-12\\_1\\_Health\\_Lens\\_WS11\\_30\\_2015&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_211686812e-ec6855ff14-180156329](http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/Assessing-the-Impact-of-Applications-of-Digital-Health-Records-Alzheimers-Disease-Research.aspx?utm_source=IOM+Email+List&utm_campaign=ec6855ff14-12_1_Health_Lens_WS11_30_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_211686812e-ec6855ff14-180156329)

"A study published . . . in *The Lancet*, following one million middle-aged women in Britain for 10 years, finds that the widely held view that happiness enhances health and longevity is unfounded," reported the *New York Times*. The study is based on "the so-called Million Women study, which recruited women aged 50 to 69 from 1996 to 2001, and tracked them with questionnaires and official records of deaths and hospital admissions." [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/health/happiness-health-study.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/health/happiness-health-study.html?_r=0)

Using "incidence and mortality data for 2003 through 2007 from the International Agency for Research on Cancer databases and mortality data from the World Health Organization through 2012," researchers showed that there is a "growing inequality between high-income and lower-income countries—with cancer rates declining in high-income areas and rising in poorer places," reported the *Washington Post*. The researchers found that the difference "is especially striking in lung, colorectal and breast cancer" and developing countries "bear a disproportionate burden of infection-related cancers." <http://triblive.com/aande/moreaande/9630782-74/cancer-countries-income#axzz3waYuXAPa>

**Military records.** In response to a Freedom of Information request filed in 2006, the U.S. Air Force released, through the National Archives, the "Atomic Weapons Requirements Study for 1959." The National Security Archive, the nongovernmental organization that made the request, described the study as "essentially a huge spreadsheet, produced by the Strategic Air Command in 1956 and projecting the number and variety of targets in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China to be hit in a future war." <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb538-Cold-War-Nuclear-Target-List-Declassified-First-Ever/>

## **Bilateral and multilateral news.**

**Europe.** "The final draft of the General Data Protection Regulation, agreed upon by a negotiating session between the European Commission and European Parliament, will include a provision explicitly stating that Holocaust related archives will be exempt from restrictions," reported the *Jerusalem Post*. However, for other records the regulation "does not stipulate how long after a person's death his or her private information can be revealed." The *New York Times*, reporting on the new rules, also noted that companies must inform national regulators within three days of any reported data breach and can issue fines to companies that misuse people's online data. <http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Holocaust-reference-to-be-included-in-data-protection-act-437522>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/technology/eu-data-privacy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/technology/eu-data-privacy.html?_r=0)

**Finland/Iraq/Sweden.** Two brothers from Iraq were arrested in Finland and charged with being involved in a massacre near Tikrit, Iraq, in June 2014. The main evidence, said a Finnish official, is "a video showing at least part of the massacre at Camp Speicher." In Sweden a court "handed life sentences to two Swedish nationals found guilty of assisting in the beheading of two civilians in Syria in the summer of 2013," an act that was caught on video that was found "on a USB stick in the home of one of the defendants." The *New York Times* commented, "Authorities are aided by the penchant of Islamic State fighters to document their acts on camera." [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/25/world/europe/finland-iraq-refugees-isis.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/25/world/europe/finland-iraq-refugees-isis.html?_r=0)

**France/Germany.** France announced the opening of the archives of the Vichy government, 1940-1944, "subject to the declassification of document covered by national defence secrecy rules," reported *FRANCE*

24 with AFP. The *Jerusalem Post* quoted the Simon Wiesenthal Center's coordinator of war crimes research as saying, "We welcome the opening of the archives that will shed additional light on the sad chapter of French collaboration with the Nazis." <http://www.france24.com/en/20151228-france-opens-nazi-collaboration-era-files-germany-vichy-world-war-two> and <http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Opening-of-Holocaust-era-archives-may-shed-light-on-French-collaboration-with-Nazis-438759>

Islamic State. *Reuters* obtained copies of a "fraction" of the documents seized by U.S. Special Operations Forces during a raid in Syria last May that killed IS financial official Abu Sayyaf. "Many of the seized documents are fatwas, or religious rulings, covering issues from rape of female prisoners and the treatment of slaves with minor children to when it is permissible for a son to steal from his father to fund travel to fight jihad, or holy war." One ruling sets out the "proper procedure for filling out the personal details of prospective fighters: name, gender, and communications methods—telephone, telegram, Skype or the mobile messaging service WhatsApp." [https://news.vice.com/article/stolen-antiquities-department-and-slave-ministry-government-islamic-state-style?utm\\_source=vicenewsemail](https://news.vice.com/article/stolen-antiquities-department-and-slave-ministry-government-islamic-state-style?utm_source=vicenewsemail)

Islamic State/Israel/ Russia/United States. In an audio recording at the end of the month, reported *Al Bawaba News*, the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi threatened to attack Israel and said that nations fighting against the Islamic State, including Russia and the U.S., will pay a "dear price." [http://www.eurasiareview.com/27122015-islamic-states-baghdadi-threatens-israel-in-new-audio-message/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29](http://www.eurasiareview.com/27122015-islamic-states-baghdadi-threatens-israel-in-new-audio-message/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29)

Israel/Palestine. Israel's Channel 10 broadcast a 25-second video, filmed at a wedding, "that appeared to show young Jewish extremists celebrating the death of a Palestinian toddler in an arson attack last summer." The public reacted with "shock and outrage," the *New York Times* said. Israeli's Defense Minister obtained a copy of the video and showed it to a group of advocates for Jewish settlements in the West Bank "apparently to impress upon them the seriousness of the extremists who have emerged at the movement's fringes." [https://news.vice.com/article/wedding-video-shows-jewish-extremists-celebrating-the-death-of-palestinian-baby?utm\\_source=vicenewsemail](https://news.vice.com/article/wedding-video-shows-jewish-extremists-celebrating-the-death-of-palestinian-baby?utm_source=vicenewsemail)

Japan/South Korea. Japan and South Korea reached an agreement to provide compensation to the Korean women who were forced to work as sex slaves ("comfort women") for Japan's Imperial Army during World War II, reported *Reuters* and many sources. "The women began to come forward in the 1990s to demand compensation and an apology," and apparently at the time the South Korean government "registered" 238 former comfort women, of whom only 46 are still alive. It is not clear how the South Korean government will determine how many other women who did not register are still alive (or how they will be registered, if that is the procedure) and how the \$8.3 million from the Japanese government will be distributed. [https://news.vice.com/article/japan-and-south-korea-have-reached-a-historic-deal-on-comfort-women?utm\\_source=vicenewsemail](https://news.vice.com/article/japan-and-south-korea-have-reached-a-historic-deal-on-comfort-women?utm_source=vicenewsemail)

Lebanon/Libya. In 1978 Moussa al-Sadr, an important Lebanese Shiite cleric, and two companions disappeared while on a visit to Libya, then ruled by Libyan dictator Moammar Qaddafi. Now Lebanon has arrested Qaddafi's son, who was first kidnapped by "Lebanese militants who are followers of the missing cleric" and subsequently turned over to Lebanese authorities, reported the *New York Times*. Although the son was a small child when the three men disappeared and it is not clear what he might know about the disappearances, the son of one of the other men who disappeared said Lebanon's missing persons file on the case "has been reactivated." <https://platosguns.com/2015/12/15/qaddafi-son-arrested-by-lebanon-in-new-twist-on-missing-imam-mystery-hwaida-saad-rick-gladstonenew-york-times/>

## **National news.**

Australia. The Public Record Office Victoria opened 75- year-old criminal records and asylum ward logs. They had been closed under the Public Records Act which requires "personal or private" records to be withheld until it can be assumed that the persons named in the records are dead. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-01/victorian-section-9-archives-opened-for-2016/7031026>

Canada. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its final report. <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/12/15/truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-report-details-deaths-of-3201-children-in-residential-schools.html>; for the report see <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

“*Global News* has learned a military captain ordered the destruction of a document in a soldier’s personnel file on the day she died of a drug overdose.” A Military Board of Inquiry was conducted after the death, but now the Alberta government is planning to hold a Public Fatality Inquiry and a copy of the destroyed document has been located and provided to the Alberta government. The soldier’s father said, “Was it important? It was important enough for them to destroy. And what bothers me is if they are willing to destroy that, what else are they willing to destroy.” The family says the soldier hurt her back in a “training incident” after which she became addicted to painkillers given her by military doctors, leading to her death from a drug overdose. <http://globalnews.ca/news/2381477/military-captain-ordered-destruction-of-document-from-lt-shawna-rogers-file/>

China. China adopted a counter-terrorism law which created a “national intelligence center dedicated to counter-terrorism,” reported *CNN*, and which requires “telecommunications companies and Internet service providers to provide technical support and assistance ‘including decryption’ to authorities.” The new center’s important archives will need strong, steady management. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/27/asia/china-terror-law-approved/index.html>

Colombia. The government, the FARC rebels and groups representing victims adopted an agreement to create four new bodies to address the consequences of the conflict that began in 1964: a tribunal to consider amnesty petitions, a tribunal with authority to punish war criminals, a truth commission, and a special unit “that will focus on clarifying the disappearance of tens of thousands of Colombians,” reported *Colombia Reports*. Each of these new bodies will have serious archival needs and will create historically significant bodies of records. <http://colombiareports.com/farc-government-and-victims-announce-deal/>

Ecuador. Ecuador passed an “identity law” that will allow citizens to change their names once in a lifetime. Once the new name is registered with the state, it will be “certified by a new identity card to be issued within two years.” <http://www.eurasiareview.com/15122015-ecuador-passes-identity-law/>

India. The Prime Minister’s office announced that the first batch of files (33 files) relating to the controversial World War II figure Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose have been declassified and “handed over to National Archives of India for further processing, preservation and digitization,” reported *dnaindia*. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-first-set-of-33-netaji-files-handed-over-to-national-archives-of-india-2152026>; for background on the files, see <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/explained-the-netaji-files/http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/explained-the-netaji-files/v>

“Crucial documents, including investigation files of sensitive cases and service register of police personnel, were reportedly damaged or washed away after an overflowing Adyar river gushed” into a government office building in Chennai, *The Hindu* reported. A senior police officer said, “Unfortunately there is no back up to these documents,” but the Director General of Police said, “We will be able to reconstruct the whole thing in due course of time.” <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/floods-ruin-crucial-documents-in-eow-headquarters/article7968067.ece>

According to annual police data, in Chandigarh crime against women is rising, with six women raped, ten women molested, and “10 women are facing harassment on the pretext of dowry every month,” reported *The Times of India*. During 2015 “five cases of death due to dowry harassment were registered.” <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Chandigarh-sees-rise-in-crime-against-women/articleshow/50424710.cms>

Japan. “There are still many families looking for information about how their fathers or brothers died” during World War II, reported *The Japan News*. These relatives seek official government records on the death, but also use the holdings at the Yasukuni Shrine, which holds approximately 130,000 documents received “from the Kaiko-sho social group of former army officers” that include “army unit records, newsletters from veterans’ associations and soldiers diaries.” <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0002645330>

Mexico. The expert panel from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights gave Mexico’s Attorney General “new satellite evidence” that “contradicts” the official version of how 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teacher training school disappeared in 2014, reported *BBC News*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35035771>

Myanmar. Myanmar's maternal mortality rate is 200 per 100,000 live births, compared to the Southeast Asia average of 140 (4 in countries such as Finland and Sweden), the United Nations Population Fund said in a statement. Ethnic Rohingya Muslim women in Rakhine province are especially vulnerable. A Fund official said, "Imagine women there who want to deliver a baby, and they don't have means of transport, or they do not have proper documents to move within their areas: These are factors that contribute to maternal death." [http://www.trust.org/item/20151222164019-t149n/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Weekly%20Digest%20301215&utm\\_content=Weekly%20Digest%20301215+CID\\_2d3dca7a0387ddf8b5a9c42103ad5932&utm\\_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm\\_term=Women%20in%20Myanmar%20conflict%20zones%20face%20rape%20lack%20healthcare%20-%20UN](http://www.trust.org/item/20151222164019-t149n/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Weekly%20Digest%20301215&utm_content=Weekly%20Digest%20301215+CID_2d3dca7a0387ddf8b5a9c42103ad5932&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=Women%20in%20Myanmar%20conflict%20zones%20face%20rape%20lack%20healthcare%20-%20UN)

North Korea. Two German researchers analyzed North Korea's internal computer operating system, "which first surfaced online about a year ago." They told *BBC News* that "any files uploaded to the system via a USB stick or other storage device can be watermarked, allowing the state to trace the journey of that file from machine to machine." The system was "designed in response to the proliferation of foreign films and music being shared" and is capable of identifying "undesirable files" and will "delete them without permission." <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35188570>

Pakistan. *The Express Tribune* reported that former president Asif Ali Zardari was acquitted in two corruption cases "because the original records of the cases went missing." His aren't the only missing files: "a district judge of Islamabad registered a criminal case against three of his own staffers, after it emerged that the original records of a case was stolen from the courtroom" and some files disappear when staff members "leave the documents at photocopy shops, at the behest of litigants." *The Express* concluded, "Missing court records will keep resulting in adverse decisions. Besides, what better help can suspects receive than knowing that their track records no longer exist?" <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1009521/the-curious-case-of-missing-court-files/>

Philippines. "Responding to a complaint filed by typhoon victims," the Philippines Human Rights Commission decided to investigate "whether large international fossil fuel companies are violating the human rights of its citizens by driving climate change," reported *Thomson Reuters Foundation*. Among the 50 companies named are Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP, Royal Dutch Shell and ConocoPhillips, all of which must have large corporate archives that will be relevant to the investigation. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-climatechange-summit-legal-idUSKBN0TN1ZZ20151204#5cUEiVVd7m6HuyQp.97>

Serbia. Eleven men are on trial for the war crime of killing 41 Croatian civilians in Lovas, Croatia, in 1991. The Humanitarian Law Center, which monitors the trial, reported: "During the trial session held on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Court played a VHS footage made on March 1990 in Lovas at the HDZ [Croatian Democratic Union political party] Founding Assembly, inspected the documents obtained from the VBA [Serbian Military Security Agency] relating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Motorized Brigade, and the Registry of Croatian Defenders for persons from Lovas. The Court also inspected the defence cases of the now deceased co-defendants, witness statements, the finding and opinion of a medical expert witness, and other documents in the case file." [towardsJUSTICE@hlc-rdc.org](mailto:towardsJUSTICE@hlc-rdc.org)

Syria. *Al-Monitor* published an article titled "What it takes to smuggle information out of IS strongholds in Styria." The reporter asked the leader of Deir ez-Zor Is Being Slaughtered Silently (DBSS), a group that works to get information out of Syria, what was "the most important information that the group has managed to gather." He said it was, among others, "papers on hundreds of Shaitat tribe members killed by IS." DBSS and another Syrian media group told *Al-Monitor* that "the most important thing is to provide verified information," and the DBSS leader added, "And to have an archive for the future." [http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/syria-journalists-media-activists-killed-isis-der-ez-zor.html?utm\\_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm\\_campaign=b436e67e9c-December\\_08\\_2015&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_28264b27a0-b436e67e9c-93088897](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/syria-journalists-media-activists-killed-isis-der-ez-zor.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm_campaign=b436e67e9c-December_08_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264b27a0-b436e67e9c-93088897)

Less than two weeks after *Al-Monitor* published the article, Naji Jerf, a Syrian journalist and documentary film maker, was assassinated in Gaziantep, Turkey. He had just published a documentary (almost surely using smuggled images) "in which he documented the killing of Syrian activists at the hands of Islamic state during the militant group's occupation of the city of Aleppo in 2013 and 2014," reported the Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2015/12/syrian-journalist-naji-jerf-shot-dead-in-gaziantep.php>

“Since March, when Syrian opposition activists posted a trove of images online, families of the missing have been looking for traces of their loved ones by sifting through thousands of post-mortem photographs smuggled out of the country by a police photographer who defected in 2013,” wrote the *New York Times*. Eight families whose relatives are among those photographed agreed to let Human Rights Watch share their stories. A military defector who served at the Harasta Military Hospital in Damascus and witnessed bodies being registered told HRW: “When the corpses arrive, [the forensic doctor, who is also an army officer] asks how many corpses there are, and then she asks [conscripts] to wrap them up. She gives each body a third number on a bandage. She writes on the register: the number of detainee, the branch number, and the hospital number [examination number]. Then they are put in the [morgue] refrigerator.”

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/world/middleeast/syrian-families-look-through-photos-of-the-dead-for-relatives-lost-in-government-custody.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/world/middleeast/syrian-families-look-through-photos-of-the-dead-for-relatives-lost-in-government-custody.html?_r=0); for the HRW report see <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/16/syria-stories-behind-photos-killed-detainees>

The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, a nongovernmental organization that “aims to ensure that human rights violations during the conflict are comprehensively documented in order to advance transitional justice and peacebuilding in Syria,” commissioned a research firm to “assess Syrians’ attitudes toward survivors and perpetrators” of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The firm interviewed 60 Syrian refugees (30 men and 30 women) in southern Turkey; each interview was transcribed and coded for analysis. The survey found that “nearly all respondents expressed genuine sympathy and a willingness to help survivors of SGBV, but respondents just as commonly expressed that the community would ostracize SGBV survivors.” It also found that a “large majority of respondents” believed that “justice for perpetrators should be dispensed in a formal manner through the courts.”

<http://33bjjc3l8q7dpgn6j1rg637f.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/Societal-Attitudes.pdf>

Uganda. The Citizens’ Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda questioned the accuracy of the recently released voters’ register, reported *allAfrica*. Uganda “extracted” the voter data from the National Identification Register, but the both the Identification Register data and the process of extracting information from it to certify voters were flawed, they argue. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201512212853.html>

United Kingdom. The first national building workers’ strike in the U.K. was in 1972. Twenty-four strikers in Shrewsbury were arrested and six sent to prison; a petition in 2013 to clear the names of the men gathered 100,000 signatures. Now a Member of Parliament says he has “compelling new evidence” that the 24 were victims of a “politically orchestrated show-trial” and demands that the government open its records on the case, *BBC News* reported. The government, however, said it will not open the files, both because “the papers sought by campaigners . . . are not relevant to the 24” and because in October Cabinet Minister Oliver Letwin “decided not [to] allow the release of the Shrewsbury 24 papers for reasons of national security.” The Criminal Cases Review Commission is now looking at the case. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-35047872>

The same Oliver Letwin featured in an end of year release of Prime Ministerial records from 1986-1988. The records included a paper written by Letwin and a colleague to then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, arguing against providing “assistance for black unemployed youth following the 1985 inner-city riots with the argument that any help would only end up in the ‘disco and drug trade’,” reported *The Guardian*. After the paper was made public, Letwin apologized “unreservedly.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/dec/30/oliver-letwin-blocked-help-for-black-youth-after-1985-riots>

United Kingdom/Northern Ireland. “Operation Banner” was the name given to the U.K. military operations in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2007. *BBC Spotlight* obtained a copy of a Ministry of Defence order to preserve all Operation Banner records that was issued in July 2014—seven years after the operation closed. “Families pressing for inquests or fresh investigations into Troubles cases have been seeking access to the files,” *BBC News* wrote, wondering what had happened to the records in the intervening years. The Ministry of Defence said “some non-essential Troubles documents have been destroyed but others are already publicly available; closed files are retained ‘because of personal or operational sensitivities’.” <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-35047486>



A member of the Real IRA was killed in Londonderry in February 2010. His family believes the U.K. Security Services “could have played a role in his death,” and an inquest is planned, reported the *Belfast Telegraph*. A representative of the Police Service of Northern Ireland told the coroner that “progress has been made on five of the eight main police folders” relating to the case, but in the other three files “significant issues remain” and he was “not sure how useful the files would be” because “the volume of material blanked out would be ‘quite extensive’.” He also said the redactions were required “to make the disclosure compliant with the U.K.’s obligation to protect life and privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights.” <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/police-files-on-kieran-doherty-murder-to-be-heavily-censored-34276788.html>

United States. The *Washington Post* logged “every on-duty fatal shooting by police” nationwide in 2015. By using public sources, the *Post* “compiled data about each death, including the race of those killed, whether they were armed and descriptions of the events.” As of December 24, there were 965 fatal police shootings; 564 of the people killed were armed with a gun and 281 had “knives, toy weapons or other objects.” The *Post* said it will continue this log in 2016 at [wapo.st/police-shootings](http://wapo.st/police-shootings). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/classic-apps/year-of-reckoning-police-kill-nearly-1000/2015/12/26/e9697506-9cfd-11e5-8728-1af6af208198\\_story.html?wpisrc=nl\\_draw](https://www.washingtonpost.com/classic-apps/year-of-reckoning-police-kill-nearly-1000/2015/12/26/e9697506-9cfd-11e5-8728-1af6af208198_story.html?wpisrc=nl_draw)

In a related story, the *Washington Post* reported that the existence of a video of a police shooting is “no guarantee of conviction in police shooting cases.” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/why-a-dash-cam-video-of-a-police-shooting-might-not-be-a-smoking-gun/2015/12/28/9e0f8cda-ad7e-11e5-9ab0-884d1cc4b33e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/why-a-dash-cam-video-of-a-police-shooting-might-not-be-a-smoking-gun/2015/12/28/9e0f8cda-ad7e-11e5-9ab0-884d1cc4b33e_story.html)

*ProPublica* published a series of articles on privacy of medical information, using data on privacy violations from “three main sources”: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Civil Rights, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the California Department of Public Health. One article focused on the growing trend of “breaches that expose the health details of just a patient or two,” which *ProPublica* believes “often cause the most harm.” Unfortunately, however, regulators “rarely take action on small ones.” A review of Veterans’ Administrations practices found that patient privacy was breached more than 10,000 times between 2011 and 2015. “The breaches range from inadvertent mistakes, such as sending documents or prescriptions to the wrong people, to employees’ intentional snooping and theft of data. Not all concern medical treatment; some involve data on benefits and compensation,” *Pro Publica* wrote. One article in the series helpfully explained the methodology *ProPublica* used to get relevant electronic and paper data and analyze it. [https://www.propublica.org/article/new-jersey-psychology-practice-patients-mental-disorders-lawsuits-debts?utm\\_source=et&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm\\_content=&utm\\_name;](https://www.propublica.org/article/new-jersey-psychology-practice-patients-mental-disorders-lawsuits-debts?utm_source=et&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm_content=&utm_name;) [https://www.propublica.org/article/privacy-violations-rising-at-veterans-medical-facilities?utm\\_source=et&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm\\_content=&utm\\_name;](https://www.propublica.org/article/privacy-violations-rising-at-veterans-medical-facilities?utm_source=et&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm_content=&utm_name;) [https://www.propublica.org/article/small-scale-violations-of-medical-privacy-often-cause-the-most-harm?utm\\_source=et&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm\\_content=&utm\\_name;](https://www.propublica.org/article/small-scale-violations-of-medical-privacy-often-cause-the-most-harm?utm_source=et&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm_content=&utm_name;) and <https://www.propublica.org/article/methodology-how-we-analyzed-privacy-violation-data>

In an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, a registered nurse argued that electronic records are leading to worse hospital care: “Computer documentation in health care is notoriously inefficient and unwieldy, but an even more serious problem is that it has morphed into more than an account of our work; it has replaced the work itself. Our charting, rather than our care, is increasingly what we are evaluated on.” <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/opinion/sunday/when-hospital-paperwork-crowds-out-hospital-care.html>

A database with records of 191 million voters, containing voters’ names, home addresses, voter IDs, phone numbers and date of birth, as well as political affiliations and a detailed voting history since 2000, was posted online, apparently by accident. It has been taken down, reported *The Hill*, but no one has claimed responsibility for the database and the breach. <http://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/264297-report-191m-voter-records-exposed-publicly-online>

## **New listserv and publications.**

Swisspeace launched an Archives and Dealing with the Past listserv “to provide a platform for information exchange and joint learning on issues related to archives and dealing with the past (also referred to as transitional justice), linking persons working on archives, human rights, international humanitarian law,

information technology, etc.” To subscribe, go to [http://archivesdwp.org/mailman/listinfo/adwp-l\\_archivesdwp.org](http://archivesdwp.org/mailman/listinfo/adwp-l_archivesdwp.org)

The Colombia office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published the records of the November conference, “The Role of Archives in the Construction of Peace in Colombia.” The event was organized around four issues: “1) identification of which archives of relevance to the peace process after a conflict of 50 years; 2) protection of archives from destruction and loss; 3) how to ensure adequate access to the archives by transitional justice mechanisms and the society in general; 4) the practical challenges of processing and using massive amounts of archives in a timely and effective manner.” Thanks to Auro Fraser for this information. <http://www.hchr.org.co/migracion/index.php/seminario-archivos-y-paz>

Transparency International (TI) published its African edition of the *Global Corruption Barometer*. TI partnered with the Afrobarometer, which spoke to 43,143 respondents across 28 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa between March 2014 and September 2015 to ask them about their experiences and perceptions of corruption in their country. The report says bribery affects more than one-in-five Africans: “Shockingly, we estimate that nearly 75 million people have paid a bribe in the past year – some of these to escape punishment by the police or courts, but many also forced to pay to get access to the basic services that they desperately need.” [http://www.eurasiareview.com/03122015-bribing-ones-way-to-basic-necessities-of-life-in-africa-analysis/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVs+nE+%28Eurasia+Review%29](http://www.eurasiareview.com/03122015-bribing-ones-way-to-basic-necessities-of-life-in-africa-analysis/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVs+nE+%28Eurasia+Review%29)

The American Philosophical Society officially published "Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials" which were developed over a 3-year period under the direction of the Society's Native American Advisory Board. The Society says, “These protocols were developed to provide the APS with its own guidelines for how to identify and appropriately protect culturally sensitive materials in its extensive archival collections of materials relating to indigenous peoples of the Americas,” but they may be useful to other repositories holding similar materials. Thanks to Brian Carpenter for this information. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/proceedings/Protocol.pdf>

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