

ARCHIVES AND HUMAN RIGHTS
News from the Section on Archives and Human Rights
Issue no. 126, May 2020
Written and compiled by Trudy Huskamp Peterson
Commentary.

It was hard to decide how to treat the massive coverage of the coronavirus and the protests, from Hong Kong to New York and beyond, in this issue of *SAHR News*. You will find some items on both topics below, but they cannot and do not represent anything like complete coverage of the linkage between human rights and the convulsions of medical and social and economic upheaval. To keep track of the many statements made by “56 United Nations special procedures, 10 UN human rights treaty bodies, 3 principal regional human rights systems (each with various components), and their respective ‘parent’ intergovernmental organizations” on issues of human rights in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Justice Resource Center created a webpage that very helpfully provides links to them all. <https://www.justsecurity.org/70170/mapping-the-proliferation-of-human-rights-bodies-guidance-on-covid-19-mitigation/>

Many archives and historical organizations are documenting the worldwide social impact of the coronavirus pandemic, from Singapore to Sao Paulo, from memoirs to street signs, and historians are urging on these plans (see, for example, the presentation by Georgetown University history professor Ananya Chakravarti). And just as this effort was well underway came the immense movement spurred by the killings of innocent black men in the United States and the insistence that Black Lives Matter and the desperate need to document this, too. As the Society of American Archivists said, “Archives workers should follow current guidance on ethical recordkeeping and archiving of social movements during this time of crisis, with special care taken toward the protection and safety of Black Lives amidst anti-Black violence perpetrated by the police.” These dual extraordinary efforts, now stretching over weeks and months, both stress and energize the collecting institutions, especially when many staff members of these organizations have been self-isolating during the pandemic and now find themselves in huge crowds of demonstrators exercising, as Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, their “right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.” <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/GetInvolved/Contribute/Create/DocumentingCOVID-19.aspx>; <https://duetocovid19.com/>; <https://speakerdeck.com/ananyachak/archiving-covid-19-a-guide>; <https://offtherecord.archivists.org/2020/06/02/saa-council-statement-on-black-lives-and-archives/>

As these robust collecting efforts go forward, the records created by existing institutions continue to come to archives. Some of these transfers will simply continue regular practices, but archives will see changes, too. Take, for example, the records of bankruptcies. Bankruptcy is on the rise. Latam, the largest airline in Latin America, filed for bankruptcy in May, as did Colombia’s Avianca, one of the world’s oldest carriers. Fashion retailers, like Canada’s ALDO and the U.S.’s venerable J.C. Penney, filed for bankruptcy. So did the rental car company Hertz and the importer Pier 1 Imports. Travel and tourism, oil and gas sectors all face mounting debts. Add to this the local barber shops and bodegas, pizza places and individuals that face bankruptcy and the stream of bankruptcies we now see may become a flood. Writing in *The Conversation* a group of professors warned, “Without more aid to individuals soon, U.S. bankruptcy courts will likely face a tsunami of filings, not only from average Americans but companies as well. This will clog up the system.” Other countries may face this also. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-28/big-bankruptcies-sweep-the-u-s-in-fastest-pace-since-may-2009>; <https://www.reuters.com/finance/deals/bankruptcy>; European bankruptcy registers track the spread of filings in the European Union: https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_insolvency_registers-110-en.do; https://theconversation.com/bankruptcy-courts-ill-prepared-for-tsunami-of-people-going-broke-from-coronavirus-shutdown-137571?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20May%2013%202020%20-%201620515551&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20May%2013%202020%20-%201620515551+Version+A+CID_c118a7ec5cf4a27ea808a9c4984dba74&utm_source=campaign_monitor_us&utm_term=Bankruptcy%20courts%20ill-prepared%20for%20tsunami%20of%20people%20going%20broke%20from%20coronavirus%20shutdown

Because bankruptcy in most countries involves a court or a court-like government institution, a wave of new bankruptcies means government archives will need to manage massive new quantities of bankruptcy records. These records currently may be scheduled for destruction or for partial retention in the national system, but given the important role that bankruptcy will play in understanding the effects

of the pandemic on people and institutions, government archives need to review the decisions they have made on bankruptcy records to see if these disposal instructions will be adequate for documenting this era. Add to the bankruptcy records the massive increases in medical records of COVID-19 cases (from both private and government facilities) and records of scientific research on the coronavirus, and new accessions will push the capacity of archival storage.

Archives have a central role to play at this critical time. Archivists must ensure that the record of individual and institutional responses to both what nature has done to humankind and what humans have done each other are available for research in the long years ahead.

SAHR news. The Working Group on Archives and Human Rights of the Latin American Archives Association (ALA) and SAHR issued a statement supporting the UNESCO Declaration “Turning the threat of #COVID-19 into an opportunity for greater support for documentary heritage.” The statement concludes, “Perhaps at this time, as never before, we recognize the Archive as a public good and as a key element for the fulfilment of the SDG [UN Sustainable Development Goals] 2030 in relation to access to information.” <https://www.alaarchivos.org/ultimas-noticias/el-papel-de-los-archivos-en-la-crisis-del-covid-19-una-perspectiva-desde-la-proteccion-de-los-derechos-humanos/>

International news.

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (MICT). French police arrested Felicien Kabuga, who was charged by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda with seven counts of genocide. Kabuga was part-owner of the infamous Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines which played a central role in promoting the killings of Tutsis and is accused of being the main financier of the groups that committed the genocide. He will be handed over to MICT for prosecution. The archives of the Tribunal, with the massive evidence assembled on the Kabuga case, will be central to the prosecution. <https://www.irmct.org/en>

MICT also announced “the death of Augustin Bizimana, one of the major fugitives alleged to have been a senior leader of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This confirmation is based on the conclusive identification of Bizimana’s remains in a grave site in Pointe Noire, the Republic of the Congo.” Bizimana was charged with 13 counts of genocide and other crimes related to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis. For the identification, MICT “conducted DNA analysis on previously-obtained samples of human remains” and “verified additional evidence concerning the circumstances of Bizimana’s death.” With the arrest of Kabuga and the confirmed death of Bizimana, six persons indicted by the Tribunal are still at large. <https://www.irmct.org/en>

United Nations. Tresor Mputu Kankonde, a Congolese militia leader accused of involvement in the murder of two United Nations staff members and their interpreter in 2017, was arrested, *AP* reported. A video of the murders, taken by someone using a mobile phone, is part of the evidence. For background, see *HRWG News* 2017-03. <https://www.stripes.com/news/africa/congo-militia-leader-arrested-in-2017-murders-of-american-and-swedish-un-workers-1.631867>

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and information issued a report, “Disease pandemics and the freedom of opinion and expression.” He noted that “many Governments are seeking to restrict freedom of expression in the areas of access to information held by public authorities, reporting on public health data, the sharing of information online and offline, and other areas.” He identified “five challenges during pandemics”: access to information held by public authorities, access to the Internet, protection and promotion of independent media, public health disinformation, and public health surveillance. He called for strict limits on the collection of personal data for COVID-19 surveillance and insisted that “rigorous record-keeping should be required so that individuals and oversight bodies can ascertain that surveillance was conducted for legitimate public health purposes.” https://www.ohchr.org/layout/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Issues/Opinion/A_HRC_44_49_AdvanceEditedVersion.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1

World/general news.

Business records. “After more than two decades, the Amazon rainforest’s Ashaninka indigenous community has finally won a lawsuit against the timber companies who illegally deforested the tribe’s land in the 1980s,” *Green Matters* reported. *Mongabay* said that more than the money to be paid to the community and another sum to be paid to the Human Rights Defense Fund, “for the Ashaninka, the high point of the settlements with the logging companies was the official apology, contained in the agreement signed by all parties.” An Ashaninka leader said the community hopes the written apology will “serve as a reference for other companies, because some laws and rights must be regarded and respected.” <https://www.greenmatters.com/p/amazon-ashaninka-tribe-wins-lawsuit> ; <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/04/3-million-and-an-official-apology-brazils-ashaninka-get-unprecedented-compensation-for-deforestation-on-their-land/>

Global Witness, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in the U.K., reported that a “planned rubber plantation on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island is a highly likely front for illegal logging.” In project documents, the Malaysian-owned logging company Maxland (PNG) Limited said the main focus of its project was to “establish a reliable transportation network, alleviate poverty and improve living standard of its local populace.” However, the land in question “was not demarcated, meaning true owners were not identified” and the local Provincial Forest Management Committee had rejected the project (the central government overruled it). As of April 2020, no rubber trees had been planted and satellite imagery and a report to the government’s Forestry Authority said the company had exported hardwood logs from the area worth about \$1.85 million. Global Witness said the government should cancel “permits found to have been issued illegally” and the Forest Authority should create a “publicly accessible electronic system of documents related to the issuance and oversight of logging and clearance permits and operations, including verification of landowner consent and findings from the agency’s checks on operations.” <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/forests/bending-the-truth/>

Johnson & Johnson announced it is ending sales of its talc-based baby powder in the U.S. and Canada, *AP* reported. The company “faces about 19,400 cases alleging its talcum powder caused users to develop ovarian cancer . . . or mesothelioma,” although “the overwhelming majority of medical research on talc indicates that the talc baby powder is safe and doesn’t cause cancer.” For background see *HRWG News* 2018-12. https://apnews.com/84363e7328a4ebd49fb258b09fbc3ce?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morningwire&pnsid=i.kwtvpIWgWNR_ycPtBV325idAWns3bsHr8MImUa

The U.K.-based Andrew Lees Trust investigated allegations that Rio Tinto’s ilmenite mine in Madagascar is creating a serious health risk to local populations. Since 2016 the Trust has “commissioned a number of independent studies by technical experts” and has had “extensive technical dialogue [with] Rio Tinto . . . documented Q&A, emails and face to face meetings.” The Trust “determined that the . . . mine breached its permitted limits, extended operations into a protective buffer zone and encroached onto the bed of the adjacent Lake Besaroy” and “that waters downstream of the mine are contaminated with elevated levels of uranium and lead, directly linked to the mine’s extraction process.” The Trust concluded that the company “must open its doors to external independent measurement and review of the radioactivity issues on an ongoing basis” and make “all relevant and supporting data,” including that of the government, “available for scrutiny.” <http://www.andrewelestrust.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ALT-UK-WATER-BRIEFING-ON-QMM-2020.pdf>

Using freedom of information provisions, *OpenDemocracy* obtained from the European Union’s External Action Service a redacted copy of an internal report on the controversial open-pit gold mine partially constructed by Canada-based Lydian International at Jermuk, Armenia. The planned mine is “backed by resource investment funds, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as the U.K. and U.S. governments,” and the report says, “Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has been under pressure from the different stakeholders, including U.S. and U.K. governments” to let the mine proceed. *OpenDemocracy* also obtained internal correspondence from the British Embassy in Yerevan, Armenia. Civil society organizations in Armenia called the environmental and social impact assessment that was done for the mine “incomplete, inaccurate and fraudulent.” For background, see *HRWG News* 2018-07. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/armenia-under-pressure-from-uk-and-us-over-mining-dispute-says-eu-report/>

Facebook has agreed to pay \$52 million to current and former moderators to compensate them for mental health issues developed on the job, *The Verge* reported. Moderators view images posted to the

platform to determine whether they violate the content policy of Facebook, subjecting them to a daily encounter with images of rape, murder and suicide. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/12/21255870/facebook-content-moderator-settlement-scola-ptsd-mental-health>

Facebook named members of an independent board that will “have ultimate say over what controversial content should be taken down,” *BBC* reported. It will begin hearing cases later this year. “At first this will just be deliberating on content that individuals feel has been wrongfully removed but, in following months, it will also look at appeals from users who want Facebook to remove content. Panelists will also review content referred to it directly by Facebook.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52558559>

Facebook released “the findings of three independent human rights impact assessments” it commissioned in 2018 to evaluate its role in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Cambodia. Each assessment was carried out by an outside contractor, using the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as a touchstone. <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/05/human-rights-work-in-asia/>

The New Humanitarian investigated claims by residents in Ethiopia’s Oromia state that “contamination from a gold mine owned by an Ethiopia-born Saudi tycoon has led to health problems.” It reported that “unreleased studies commissioned by the government and the mining company reveal, among other things, that the area around the mine has the highest number of birth defects recorded in Ethiopia.” Furthermore, “water that has long been used by locals contains high levels of mercury and cyanide” which are a “serious risk to people.” The mine closed in 2018 “but may be set to re-open” although “serious environmental concerns about the operations were raised back in 2018.” https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/investigation/2020/05/27/Ethiopia-Oromia-Shakiso-gold-mine-health-problems?utm_source=The+New+Humanitarian&utm_campaign=f4225a25c6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_29_Weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-f4225a25c6-75545741

Two counties in the U.S. State of Ohio are suing big pharmacy chains (including CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens, Giant Eagle, and Walmart) as “complicit in perpetuating the crisis” of the opioid epidemic, the *New York Times* reported. “According to federal data presented in the complaint, from 2006 through 2014, the retail pharmacy chains ran 31 pharmacies in Lake County, which has a population of 22,000, and sold nearly 64 million doses of oxycodone and hydrocodone—or 290 pills for every man, woman and child.” In Trumbull County 28 pharmacies “sold nearly 68 million doses to a population of 209,837, or more than 322 pills for every man, woman and child.” The counties argue that “the chains dragged their feet in setting up monitoring protocols at regional distribution centers, enforced those programs anemically at best” and found ways to avoid the law requiring them to report “suspiciously high orders” to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration. www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/health/opioids-pharmacy-cvs-litigation.html

Child abuse. “Police forces across the world are warning that criminals and pedophiles are using the coronavirus lockdown to target children,” *BBC News* reported. “Reports of obscene online material more than doubled globally to more than four million between March and April.” The U.S.-based Center for Missing and Exploited Children said that “since the lockdown began there has been an 89% drop in site deletions by the tech companies.” Australian police reported that downloading of “abuse imagery” increased by 86% in the three weeks after the country’s 21 March lockdown. “Many child abuse videos commissioned to order by pedophiles are made in the Philippines,” where officials said reports of online abusive material went from approximately 59,000 in February to more than 101,000 in March. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52773344?utm_campaign=US-digest-20200529&utm_medium=newsletter-digest&utm_source=blendle-editorial

Environment. “Researchers are using new sources of historical data to better understand long-term environmental changes,” *Undark* reported. These include “fossils, pollen, cave paintings, bone fragments, place names, records from industry and government, old letters and journals, indigenous knowledge, and genetic information.” Scientists from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature are focusing on “recovery” of species from near extinction to the stage of healthy population they term the “Green Status.” “In order to define recovery in terms of the historical abundance and distribution of species, the Green Status will require historical baselines—and long-term data.” As one biologist said, “You cannot present re-establishment without proper baselines.” <https://undark.org/2020/05/18/conservation-science-historical-data/>

Follow the Money, a Netherlands NGO, researched the 15.9 meters of personal archives of “prominent Dutch climate denier Frits Bottcher” that are held by the North Holland Archives. They “reveal that he received over a million guilders—close to half a million in euros—from Shell and other Dutch multinationals during the 1990s. The explicit objective: to question human responsibility for global warming.” Research in “parliamentary archives show that especially the VVD [a ‘conservative-liberal’ political party] welcomed” his work. <https://www.ftm.nl/dutch-multinationals-funded-climate-sceptic>

Medical records. A research group reporting in *BMJ Global Health* searched YouTube on 21 March using keywords “coronavirus” and “CoVID-19” and analyzed the top 75 most viewed videos from each search, coding them by “source, content and characteristics.” They found “over one-quarter of the most viewed YouTube videos on COVID-19 contained misleading information, reaching millions of viewers worldwide.” “Government and professional videos contained only factual information” and had higher reliability scores than the “consumer videos,” but they “only accounted for 11% of the videos and 10% of the views.” <https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/5/e002604.full>

A research team reported in *The Lancet* on its study of babies born between 1 March 2013 and 28 February 2015 in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo. Because of the “widespread environmental contamination caused by mining of copper and cobalt” in the area, they tested a “possible association between birth defects and exposure to several toxic metals” of both parents by interviewing the mothers of 138 newborns about “potentially relevant exposures, including their partners’ jobs.” They found “paternal occupational mining exposure was the factor most strongly associated with birth defects.” As a test to see how representative the sample was, they read the birth registries of 63 of the city’s 109 maternity wards; these listed 282 neonates with birth defects and revealed “that the incidence of congenital malformations was high in wards situated in health districts containing a mine or a smelter, when compared with health districts without mining.” <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2542-5196%2820%2930059-0>

Technology. *The Economist* reported that a new study of COVID-19 used the “medical records of some 17m people on the books” of general practitioners in England including the 5,683 “covid-attributable” deaths they have recorded. “Instead of extracting sensitive patient records from the databases of the company which manages them on behalf of general practitioners” the research team “developed a suite of software that lets them run their massive analysis on the data *in situ*.” The team has made its open-source software available from GitHub. <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2020/05/14/the-pandemic-has-spawned-a-new-way-to-study-medical-records>

Academics from the University of Surrey (U.K.) investigated the impact of a new video tool used in “first appearance remand hearings” in court, *Eurasia Review* reported. (Remand hearings are to determine whether the person in custody will go to prison until the trial begins.) The researchers reviewed “over 600 video-enabled and traditional in-person hearings in magistrates’ courts” and held “semi-structured telephone interviews with court users and stakeholders.” They concluded that the introduction of video hearings made a “benign but relatively modest” impact on court processes, but “optimal functionality is only achieved with high quality courtroom AV and suitably trained court staff” as well as those in “remand centres and police custody suites.” https://www.eurasiareview.com/05052020-research-examines-impact-of-new-technology-used-in-video-court-hearings/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29

Global Witness analyzed a COVID-9 “emergency alert” app called Alerta Guate, which was developed by the U.S. company In-telligent LLC and funded by the Tenlot Group “the multinational company which operates the Guatemalan lottery.” The app does provide emergency alerts, but it “also sends the user’s exact location back to . . . In-telligent LLC at regular intervals, even when it’s closed.” Launched in Guatemala on 24 March, “in less than a week after its launch . . . Alerta Guate had been downloaded more than 100,000 times.” Critics believe there is a “real risk that personal data such as location may be shared with the government.” Guatemala’s human rights ombudsman urged the government to restrict the app’s use to the current crisis period, describing it as “extremely risky for the health of democracy and civil liberties.” <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/covid-19-tracing-apps-must-not-interfere-human-rights/>

The American Civil Liberties Union announced it is suing Clearview AI, which has a search engine that combs the internet (including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Venmo) and pulls photos into a massive database that is believed to contain more than three billion images. “Unbeknownst to the public, this company has offered up this massive faceprint database to private companies, police, federal agencies, and wealthy individuals, allowing them to secretly track and target whomever they wished using face recognition technology.” The ACLU is suing in the U.S. State of Illinois where, it said, “Clearview’s face surveillance activities violate the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act . . . and represent an unprecedented threat to our security and safety.” <https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/were-taking-clearview-ai-to-court-to-end-its-privacy-destroying-face-surveillance-activities/>

World War II. TASS reported that “German embassy officials in Moscow have handed over to Russia the first batch of digitized archives containing information about Soviet prisoners of war who had been kept at Nazi concentration camps during World War II.” The material is from “the former archive department of the Wehrmacht and the German office for the affairs of Soviet prisoners of war who died in German captivity. Among them are x-rays, body temperature charts, personal documents, and military IDs.” This is the first delivery of copies of records identified by a joint German-Russian commission on Soviet prisoners of war and forced laborers. <https://tass.com/society/1153529>

The Times of Israel reported that newly opened records in the Vatican archives both show “more evidence that Pius [XII] was very aware of the genocide of Jews and took little to no action against it” and also contain a wartime letter from Andrey Sheptytsky, the leader of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, to the Pope saying “2000,000 Jews massacred in Ukraine under the ‘outright diabolical’ German occupation.” <https://www.timesofisrael.com/vatican-archive-letter-shows-ukrainian-priest-tried-to-save-jews-in-holocaust/>

Bilateral and multilateral news.

Australia/United Kingdom. Australia’s High Court ruled that 211 letters from Queen Elizabeth II to Australia’s Governor-General Sir John Kerr in 1975 can be released by the National Archives, *AP* reported. The letters are from the period when Kerr “dismissed Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s government,” which is the “only dismissal of an elected Australian government on the authority of a British monarch.” Article 21 (3) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* reads, “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.” https://apnews.com/8ddcfcd6dd7160187d77a6c556f35118?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morningwire&pnewsid=hv18pPdeXAGNT16SxZdaEXYK1a8aESrhK3DLtO28 Queen’s

Australia/United States. Australian police arrested and charged a man with the killing of U.S. citizen Steve Johnson in 1988, part of a series of anti-gay crimes committed in the 1980s and 1990s that the New South Wales police reinvestigated in 2017, *TIME* reported. For background, see *HRWG News* 2017-01. <https://time.com/5835534/australia-anti-gay-hate-crime-murder/>

Balkan wars. The fate of 1,641 people officially considered missing in Kosovo from the war continues to be investigated by the European Union Rule of Law Mission, which has “conducted 651 operations over about a decade, resulting in the identification of the remains of 311 individuals previously listed as missing.” *AP* reported that the work “is hampered by the lack of credible information on the location of the graves, the deaths of witnesses as time goes on and the fear of people with information to share from the traumatic past.” An expert at the Kosovo Institute of Forensic Medicine, noting that 7 of the 10 remains identified last year were Serbs, said, “The international community should exert more pressure on the Serbian government to tell us where the graves are.” <https://apnews.com/d86d5397215c81f2f695f46d2c905977>

Croatia/Hungary. Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orban, posted a Facebook message “with a globe showing the borders of Greater Hungary,” which before World War I included much of Croatia and parts of Serbia, Romania and Slovakia. Croatia’s president, Zoran Milanovic, responded on Facebook, telling Croatian school graduates, “In our closets and archives there are numerous historical maps and maps that show our homeland much bigger than it is today . . . Don’t share them and put them on your profiles. They are not contemporary or achievable today, and, more importantly, [they] endlessly irritate our neighbors.” <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/07/orbans-greater-hungary-map-creates-waves-in->

Estonia/Russia. The National Archives of Estonia received the donation of “6,000 original camera negatives” made by the KGB in Estonia between 1987 and 1991, the period of civil unrest leading to Estonia’s independence. The man who took the photos was an Estonian who joined the KGB in 1976; instead of giving the film reels to the KGB he stored them at an Estonian security company, *ERR* reported. “The pictures show unconstrained rallies, pickets, demonstrations, commemorative events, speech and wake-up meetings, even funerals, as well as the expulsions of dissidents.” <https://news.err.ee/1092534/gallery-thousands-of-kgb-snapped-singing-revolution-photos-enter-archives>

Gambia/Switzerland. Former Gambian Interior Minister Ousman Sonko is in “pre-trial detention” in Switzerland, *justiceinfo.net* reported. “A Swiss NGO, TRIAL International, had filed a complaint against him for human rights violations,” providing “documents, including testimony before the TRRC [Gambia’s truth commission] to the Swiss prosecutor.” The TRRC has collected 462 statements from victims and witnesses of human rights violations, and Gambia’s attorney general said the government “is fully cooperating with the Swiss authorities in the Sonko case.” This is an interesting instance of material from an on-going truth commission being used in a criminal case in another country. Simultaneous truth commission and criminal investigations have been the subject of much debate and disagreement among transitional justice experts. <https://www.justiceinfo.net/fr/commissions-verite/44217-sonko-dessous-dossier-suisse-vu-de-la-commission-verite-de-gambie.html>

Germany/Syria. Germany is trying Syrian nationals Anwar Raslan and Eyad Al-Gharib; the charges include torturing 4,000 persons. Raslan is a former head of investigations at the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate's Al-Khatib Branch in Damascus, also known as Branch 251. Evidence includes the Caesar photographs (smuggled out of a Syrian prison in 2014), 3 documents signed by Anwar Raslan as head of Branch 251, media files, texts and a diary from Raslan, and documents relating to residence in Germany. The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre is monitoring the trial and filing reports. <https://syriaaccountability.org/wp-content/uploads/Trial-Report-1.pdf>

India/Nepal. *Crisis Watch* reported that Nepal’s cabinet on 18 May endorsed a new political map that includes 335 sq. km. of territories disputed with India and on 22 May proposed a constitutional amendment to “update” the national emblem “to reflect [the] new map.” India had previously issued its own map including another disputed area. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch>

Israel/Palestine/United States. *AP* reported that Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said “the Palestinian Authority will no longer be committed to any signed agreements with Israel or the United States, following Israel’s pledge to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.” Such agreements between Palestine and Israel “govern nearly all its basic functions, including the issuance of passports and other official documents.” <https://apnews.com/0796199caacc58b3c61224c21218db6c>

Latvia/Russia. Latvian Television produced a documentary on KGB records. When the KGB left Latvia in 1991 “extensive though by no means complete archives from the KGB’s reign of terror and intimidation were preserved, yet it was to take decades for much of the material they contained to surface into the public domain, and even then it was the subject of hot debate, as the film outlines in its history of the so-called ‘Cheka bags’.” The program has English-language subtitles. <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/features/video/documentary-looks-at-the-controversy-surrounding-the-kgb-archive-in-latvia.a359723/>

Middle East war. A report from the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) described the destruction of Ma’aret al Numan city, Saraqeb and their environs, and the northwestern suburbs of Aleppo. It “documents at least 882 attacks by Russian-Syrian alliance forces in and around Idlib since April 26, 2019, up until May 29, 2020, including attacks on 220 places of worship, 218 educational facilities, 93 medical facilities, 86 Civil Defense centers, and 52 markets,” and 30 cluster munitions attacks in and around Idlib during the same period. Using Ma’aret as a case study, SNHR concluded that at least 2% of the city area is completely destroyed and 40% partially destroyed. Rebuilding will be particularly difficult because of the “laws giving the Syrian regime and its allies total possession of and power over the property of the displaced people,” which SNHR estimated as 6.5 million internally

displaced within the country and another 7 million outside. Among the recommendations, SNHR asks the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to “assist in the building of a central housing and real estate database in Syria, with the aim of achieving reparations, implementing voluntary repatriation programs, and ensuring restitution of housing, land and real estate.” http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/The_destruction_of_the_cities_of_Maarat_al_Numan_and_the_observation_and_displacement_of_residents_is_a_clear_example_of_the_Syrian_regimes_en.pdf

To show Islamic State crimes against Yazidi women and girls, *AP* “put together findings from IS’s own literature, along with interviews with IS members, former slaves and rescuers, to establish how slavery was strictly mapped out from the earliest days.” The nongovernmental Commission for International Justice and Accountability told *AP* that “through IS documents and interviews with survivors and insiders [it] identified 49 prominent IS figures who built and managed the slave trade, as well as nearly 170 slave owners.” And a UN investigative team “said it has collected evidence from Iraq, including 2 million call records, that can strengthen a case of prosecution for crimes against the Yazidis.” https://apnews.com/accbeae67803195628f32d1b5e2ece40?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morningwire&pnespid=ke42o_pcXleNWR.yhdg8mGz1ewvetKmP9vOAA_6n

As required by law, the U.S. Defense Department issued a report to Congress on the number of civilians killed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia during ground and air operations in 2019. The U.S. said there were 132 civilian casualties, up from 120 in 2018. Amnesty International USA commented, “The Defense Department appears to have dismissed out of hand many of the civilian deaths and injuries we have documented in the past two years in Somalia, simply assessing them as ‘not credible’ despite our extensive testimonial evidence and expert analysis of images and video from strike sites, satellite imagery, and weapons identification. . . . If the U.S. is going to engage in lethal operations abroad, then it must develop a reliable means for investigating and reporting on who it has killed and injured in the process.” <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/06/2002295555/-1/-1/SEC-1057-CIVILIAN-CASUALTIES-MAY-1-2020.PDF?source=GovDelivery>; <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/defense-department-undercounts-civilian-casualties-in-new-reporting/>

Saudi Arabia/United States. “The FBI inadvertently revealed one of the U.S. government’s most sensitive secrets about the Sept. 11 terror attacks: the identity of a mysterious Saudi Embassy official in Washington who agents suspected had directed crucial support to two of the al-Qaida hijackers,” *Yahoo News* reported. “The disclosure came in a new declaration filed in federal court by a senior FBI official in response to a lawsuit brought by families of 9/11 victims that accuses the Saudi government of complicity in the terrorist attacks. . . . According to a spokesman for the 9/11 victims’ families, it represents a major breakthrough in the long-running case, providing for the first time an apparent confirmation that FBI agents investigating the attacks believed they had uncovered a link between the hijackers and the Saudi Embassy in Washington.” <https://www.aol.com/article/news/2020/05/12/fbi-inadvertently-reveals-secret-in-911-attacks/24285901/>

United States/Venezuela. A former U.S. military man made an “ill-fated military incursion into Venezuela” and was captured along with a written agreement between his company and the Venezuelan opposition to kidnap and “extract” president Nicolas Maduro and install opposition leader Juan Guaido, reported *AP* and other media. <https://apnews.com/038e966350a9d7e8ec7a38341f0efec>

United States/Yemen. The *New York Times* reported on U.S. manufacturers’ arms sales to Yemen. After “a review of thousands of pages of records and interviews with more than 50 people with knowledge,” it concluded that the Trump Administration’s “embrace of arms sales has helped prolong a conflict that has killed more than 100,000 people in the Arab World’s poorest nation, further destabilizing an already volatile region.” In particular, Raytheon Company “booked more than \$3 billion in new bomb sales, according to an analysis of available U.S. government records,” and “went to great lengths to influence American officials” to allow arms sales. www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/us/arms-deals-raytheon-yemen.html

National news.

Argentina. Femicides in Argentina “reached a 10-year high under coronavirus lockdown,” according to data compiled from local media reports by La Casa del Encuentro’s Femicide Observatory watchdog project, reported *Thomson Reuters Foundation*. <https://news.trust.org/item/20200518223848-b8id6/>

Australia. In a tragic blow to world heritage, “caves used as Aboriginal shelters in Western Australia’s Pilbara region were legally demolished by Rio Tinto” mining company, *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. “The Junkan Gorge caves were the only inland place in Australia to show signs of continual human occupation through the last Ice Age. Among the artefacts discovered was a belt made from human hair that provided a 4,000-year-old genetic link to the current traditional owners of the site, the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura . . . people.” Rio Tinto had “obtained permission to expand an existing iron ore mine in 2013—before the significance of the caves was known and the artifacts were discovered.” The federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs said the blast appeared to be a “genuine mistake.” New facts did not catch up with old permit records. <https://news.trust.org/item/20200529115505-zwur4/>

The portion relating to Cardinal George Pell in the 2017 report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was released. The Commission found the Cardinal “conscious of child sexual abuse by clergy” but failed to act on it. Pell was convicted of sexual abuse charges in a civil court; however, Australia’s High Court overturned the conviction in April, leading to the release of the redacted portion of the report. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-abuse-pell-idUSKBN221J9Z>

Brazil. The government introduced “major modifications to the country’s indigenous land policy,” *Mongabay* reported. Previously a “declaration” of land ownership boundaries would not be issued if “the land claimed included indigenous territory—no matter whether or not the long bureaucratic process of officially recognizing an ancestral indigenous claim had been completed.” Now, however, the declaration will be issued “for land claimed, even if the area is in the process of being recognized as indigenous.” According to the figures of FUNAI, the agency for the Indigenous, “there are 237 indigenous areas, covering 9.8 million hectares (37,830 square miles), where the onerous registration and demarcation procedures have yet to be finished” meaning that not only will the landowners themselves “determine the boundaries of their land” but will, critics say, lead to “massive land fraud on indigenous lands.” https://www.eurasiareview.com/10052020-brazil-opens-38000-square-miles-of-indigenous-lands-to-outsiders-analysis/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29

A study by MapBiomas, “a coalition of NGOs, universities and technology companies,” used high resolution images from Brazil’s Space Research Institute to confirm 7,700 km of deforestation in the Amazon, the *Guardian* reported. “More than three-quarters happened on land registered via a self-registration system Brazilian farmers use to claim ownership—and 99% of deforestation was illegal.” SOS Atlantic Forest, an NGO, released figures showing a 27% increase in the destruction of tropical forests in 17 states in eastern Brazil from October 2018 to October 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/28/studies-add-to-alarm-over-deforestation-in-brazil-under-bolsonaro-covid-19>

Researchers at the University of East Anglia (U.K.) “used census data of indigenous and non-indigenous populations and land use maps to depict the geographic context and the conservation performance of all 587 Brazil’s indigenous territories and their surroundings,” *Science Daily* reported. They found that the “relatively low population densities typical of traditional hunter-gatherers and semi-nomadic and horticulturalist societies were found in only 208 Brazilian Indigenous Lands.” Further, “Indigenous population density is 50 times higher where vegetation cover is reduced to 30% of any given territory,” i.e., deforestation. Not only is deforestation changing traditional life patterns, but increasing density also increases the danger of the spread of diseases such as COVID-19 to Indigenous persons. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/05/200513121649.htm>

Brazil’s attorney general’s office issued a report “analyzing violence against Indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilian rural communities, and other at-risk rural communities by people engaged in illegal logging, mining, and land grabbing, mostly in the Amazon,” Human Rights Watch said. It reviewed 390 cases of threats and acts of violence “committed during the past decade that have been prosecuted or investigated by federal officials,” clearly by using government records. “While violence related to natural resources in Brazil has been chronic for decades, a lack of data had hindered government agencies’ capacity to

understand the scope and nature of the problem—and to create viable policies to address it.” Now they have it. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/brazil-analyzing-violence-against-amazons-residents>

In 2019 police in Rio de Janeiro killed 1,814 people, a record. The *New York Times* used autopsy reports to analyze 48 of the police killings, finding that in “at least half” the person was “shot in the back at least once” and in 20 of the cases the person “was shot by the police at least three times.” Significantly, “one quarter of the police killings examined by the *Times* involved an officer who had previously been charged with murder” and “half of the killings were carried out by officers who had been charged with at least one crime.” www.nytimes.com/.../brazil-rio-police-violence.html

Canada. In yet another litigation stemming from the truth commission process on residential schools and their treatment of indigenous children, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation is appealing a January ruling by the Ontario Superior Court that (a) blocked the creation of detailed statistical reports from the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) that handled more than 38,000 claims from former students for abuse suffered at the schools and (b) said that “all minutes of in camera meetings with the oversight committee, along with records from complaints over the IAP process, the personnel records of IAP adjudicators, and anything covered by solicitor-client or litigation privilege” should be transferred to Library and Archives Canada not to the Centre, reported *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/court-decision-statistical-reports-residential-school-abuse-1.5579455>

China. Three activists who “contributed to an online project to preserve articles about COVID-19 censored by the authorities have been arrested,” *Inkstone* reported. The families of two of the individuals “received official notices” from the police that the activists were being held for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” https://www.inkstonenews.com/politics/chinese-activists-detained-after-posting-censored-covid-19-news-github/article/3081668?utm_medium=email&utm_source=mailchimp&utm_campaign=enlz-inkstone&utm_content=20200427&MCUID=d66d7f7db7&MCCampaignID=60ff5c7ef5&MCAccountID=3775521f5f542047246d9c827&tc=11

China/Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s Independent Police Complaints Council issued a report that “found no serious wrongdoing in the force’s response to last year’s mass protests, despite significant evidence to the contrary,” the *Washington Post* reported. A panel of international experts invited to work on the report all “quit in December over disagreements about its scope.” <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2020/05/15/hong-kong-watchdog-absolves-police-over-protest-crackdown-dimming-prospects-accountability/TI2HICkVHxiVqWcDjVmUfI/story.html>

Colombia. *Semana* published an article saying Army intelligence units developed “detailed dossiers on the personal lives of at least 130 reporters, human rights defenders, politicians, judges, and possible military whistleblowers,” the Washington Office on Latin America (NGO) summarized. A similar wiretapping scandal in 2009 led to the abolition of the Administrative Security Department (DAS) that did the tapping; the records of DAS are in storage in a national archives facility but not accessible for preservation work by archivists. Thanks to Luisa Franco for the *Semana* link. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/scandal-colombia-military-intelligence-spying/>; <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/espionaje-del-ejercito-nacional-las-carpetas-secretas-investigacion-semana/667616>.

The Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz) said more than 710 social leaders have been killed in Colombia since the signing of the peace accords in November 2016 and, *teleSUR* reported, during the first four months of 2020 “one social leader in Colombia is killed every other day”—84 by May 1. The political party that is the successor to the FARC guerilla group asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to issue a “precautionary measure” for its members, saying that 197 people who signed the peace agreement with the government in 2016 have now been killed. Indepaz said 20 former combatants have been killed so far this year. <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Social-Leader-Killed-in-Colombia-84-so-Far-in-2020-20200502-0006.html?emci=4dbf0a48-a48f-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&emdi=ce7b52b3-a48f-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4606001>; <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Precautionary-Measures-Needed-In-Colombia-FARC-20200526-0011.html?emci=7e8d6a9d-eea0-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&emdi=3511bf17-efa0-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4606001>

AFP and *Noticiascaracol.com* published an interview with retired military officer Gustavo Soto Bracamonte, who says he participated in the practice of “false positives” (the killing of civilians who were then claimed as guerrillas). One of the techniques used was to “lose” the identity documents of the victims, he said. “The Prosecutor’s Office has documented 2,248 ‘false positives’ between 1988 and

2014 in various parts of the country” and “investigations have been opened against 29 generals.” <https://noticias.caracol.com/colombia/explosivas-revelaciones-de-protagonistas-de-falsos-positivos-habia-que-dar-resultados-como-fuera-nid228602> ; <https://news.yahoo.com/confessions-colombian-extrajudicial-killer-commander-030545085.html?emci=09b028de-5496-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&emdi=89874c89-9a96-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4606001>

Ecuador. In Guayaquil “Bodies Are Getting Lost” during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Buzzfeed* headlined. Overwhelmed, the state failed to register deaths. The article tells the story of a woman who took her mother to the hospital where the mother died and the hospital staff took “her body without bothering to register her.” The daughter got a death certificate; the hospital said the corpse had been taken to a nearby cemetery. At the cemetery the man in charge said her mother’s name was not on its list of bodies, and her government ID number is not listed “on a government website that purports to list the locations of the recently deceased.” <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/karlazabludovsky/coronavirus-ecuador-guayaquil?emci=4dbf0a48-a48f-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&emdi=ce7b52b3-a48f-ea11-86e9-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4606001>

El Salvador. *El Faro* published an investigative report on El Salvador as “a haven for child rapists.” It reported these disturbing facts: between 2013 and 2016 the Attorney General’s Office received 8,464 rape complaints; 60% of these involved children under 15; 80% of those under the age of 15 were girls; only 27% of those cases went to trial. After reviewing statistical data provided by the AG’s Office and “284 public versions of the final sentences in cases of violation of a child or incapacitated person,” *El Faro* found 42% were acquitted. Altogether, the data shows 90% of the accused were not held accountable.

https://elfaro.net/en/202005/el_salvador/24440/A-Haven-For-Child-Rapists.htm?utm_source=DB+El+Faro+English&utm_campaign=4183f3f618-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_22_01_08_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3ec9190c89-4183f3f618-363082696

France/French Polynesia. France sold a building in Papeete, Tahiti, to French Polynesia to “install a future archive, information and documentation center for nuclear tests,” *Ouest-France* with *AFP* reported. The building is “to store and transmit ‘the memory of events which took place during the nuclear test period, in a peaceful approach to the search for historical fact’,” said the statement from the French High Commissioner and the government of Polynesia. <https://www.ouest-france.fr/polynesie/polynesie-1-etat-cede-un-batiment-pour-le-futur-centre-de-memoire-des-essais-nucleaires-6829940>

Germany. “The German government must come up with a new law regulating its secret services,” the Constitutional Court ruled, saying “the current practice of monitoring telecommunications of foreign citizens at will violates constitutionally-enshrined press freedoms and the privacy of communications,” *DW* reported. “The ruling said that non-Germans were also protected by Germany’s constitutional rights, and that the current law lacked special protection for the work of lawyers and journalists. This applied both to the collection and processing of data as well as passing on that data to other intelligence agencies.” A confidential document of the BND [national intelligence agency] on “Signals Intelligence” leaked to *Der Spiegel* and Bavarian public broadcaster *BR* showed “the BND has been trying to self-regulate what kind of communications among German citizens it may eavesdrop on.”

<https://www.dw.com/en/german-intelligence-cant-spy-on-foreigners-outside-germany/a-53492342>

The Berlin-based Society for Civil Rights (GFF) filed suits against Germany’s ministry for migration and refugees (BAMF) on behalf of three refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Cameroon “for accessing personal data on their mobile phones arguing it was an unnecessary invasion of privacy,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. BAMF’s spokesman said, “A mobile phone is often the only, or a very important, source to establish the identity and nationality of people entering Germany without a passport or identification documents.” <https://news.trust.org/item/20200505161630-vhiiz/>

Hungary. Parliament voted “to ban transgender people from changing their gender on identity documents,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. Birth, marriage and death certificates will now list “sex at birth.” <https://news.trust.org/item/20200519161819-g4rcv/>

Iran. *AP* interviewed more than 30 medical professionals and reviewed “communications by doctors on messaging apps and other documents” to determine the extent of coronavirus in Iran. As in most countries, the flood of cases put extreme pressure on recordkeeping systems, but in Iran other factors seem to have been at work. According to the story, “The feared paramilitary Revolutionary Guard kept health facilities under tight control and medical statistics were treated as top secret, the medical staffers

said. Death certificates were not recording the coronavirus as the cause of deaths--either because not all severe cases were tested or just for the sake of keeping the numbers down.” https://apnews.com/6c7715f300797502329f6117e1141503?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morningwire&pnespid=jNkrfZXBCNPYm.KfBTF_K.eDc6t8oFHhEF32xo

Iraq. The UN Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) said that “since the protests erupted at the start of October, the UN has verified 490 deaths of activists and 7,783 injured.” These figures do not include “injuries caused by inhalation of tear gas” or “those demonstrators and activists assassinated by unidentified armed actors away from demonstration sites, those who remain missing, or those “harmed during abduction or detention.” UNAMI also documented cases involving 123 people who disappeared during demonstrations between 1 October 2019 and 21 March 2020. “Of these, 98 people were located, but 25 remain missing or are in an unknown status.” UNAMI interviewed 25 individuals who had been abducted, several of whom said they were “forced to sign a document of unknown content before they were released,” “requested to identify other protestors from names or photographs” and give the abductors access to their cellphones. http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=12359:iraq-un-details-ordeal-of-abducted-protesters.-welcomes-government%E2%80%99s-promise-to-investigate-and-compensate&Itemid=605&lang=en

The Norwegian Refugee Council conducted a survey of 1,002 displaced people, held 64 focus group discussions and conducted 59 interviews across Dohuk, Neneva, Kirkuk and Anbar governorates. The research revealed that “displaced women are much worse off than men: they are 11% more likely to face barriers impeding them from going back home” including “inability to regain access to their property, re-establish ownership and seek compensation for damaged property.” Among the key recommendations to the government are to “include women’s access to housing, land and property as a priority in the procedures for document recovery and reconstruction of the land registration infrastructure,” “take steps to end harassment and exploitation of women at government institutions that distribute civil documentation, and housing, land and property documents,” and “delink ‘security clearance’ processes from the procedures to obtain civil documentation.” <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/broken-homes---iraq-report-may-2020/hlp-report-1.8.pdf>

Israel. The Ombudsman’s Office ruled that Israelis are allowed to copy—manually--documents from the Israeli Defense Forces and Defense Establishment Archive. “Until the decision,” the *Jerusalem Post* noted, “one was only allowed to read documents on the computers in the archive’s reading room while the archive did offer copies of the documents for a significant fee.” <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/idf-archive-allows-israelis-to-copy-declassified-documents-628079>

Mexico. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights signed an agreement with Mexico and representatives of the families of the 43 Ayotzinapa students who disappeared in 2014 “to reinstate the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) to provide international technical assistance in connection with the Ayotzinapa case.” The assistance will include involvement in designing investigation plans, “technical analysis and assistance with investigations, monitoring the implementation of the Agreement . . . identifying patterns of torture, and analyzing guarantees of independence of the investigation.” For background, see *HRWG News* 2019-03 and 09. http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2020/104.asp

To identify “which and how many criminal groups are operating in Mexico” the International Crisis Group (an NGO) “began by ‘scraping’ major websites, that is, automatically downloading the text of posts in a way that can be processed into data” from “narcoblogs,” the “anonymously run websites that aggregate news of cartel activities from both mainstream media outlets and ordinary citizens.” ICG researchers identified 463 criminal groups operating in Mexico between mid-2009 and 2019, which they believe is an undercount. They think the data “can help explain the dynamics of criminal violence and group formation in Mexico, and the challenges facing conflict resolution strategies at the regional and national levels” as well as be used “to understand how economic variables, such as shifts in commodity prices or the emergence of new trafficking routes, may affect the entry or exit of groups.” https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/more-cartels-counting-mexicos-crime-rings?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=056fe6bb14-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-056fe6bb14-359425329

Montenegro. Parliament established a Documentation Centre to be located in the parliament building which “will hold statements, indictments, judgments and other source material related to the 1990s wars,” *BIRN* reported. “It is being set up as a partnership between parliament and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights NGO, which has already been collecting material for the Documentation Centre.” The decree establishing the Centre says the “Montenegrin parliament commits to looking after the material and making it permanently accessible to all interested parties.” https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/15/montenegrin-parliament-to-collect-war-crime-documents/?utm_source=Balkan+Insight+Newsletters&utm_campaign=1324947ecb-BI_DAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4027db42dc-1324947ecb-319725265

Myanmar. Human Rights Watch reported that “satellite imagery recorded on May 23, 2020, shows approximately 70% of Let Kar village destroyed by fire,” with at least 200 buildings burned. HRW said the “burning of Let Kar village has all the hallmarks of Myanmar military arson on Rohingya villages in recent years,” and urged a “credible and impartial investigation.” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/myanmar-imagery-shows-200-buildings-burned>

Netherlands. A District Court judge said a grandmother violated the General Data Protection Regulation by posting photos of her three grandchildren on Facebook and Pinterest without the permission of her daughter, the children’s mother, the *New York Times* reported. A lawyer specializing in internet law said, “This is to my knowledge the first case ever in which the G.D.P.R. is used to adjudicate a family dispute.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/22/business/facebook-privacy-law-grandmother.html>

Pakistan. *Eurasia Review* published an analysis of the “abysmal human rights situation in Balochistan.” In March 2019 Pakistan’s government told Amnesty International that there were 2178 unresolved cases of disappearances in Balochistan, but the figures “are not reliable.” The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan “reported about 47,000 Baloch have gone missing or disappeared,” while Hakkpaan, a Baloch NGO, said “568 persons disappeared and 241 were killed by the Pakistan security forces in 2019 alone” and “students remained the main target.” On 10 May Hakkpaan was told by Pakistani authorities that its “website has been banned in Pakistan.” The *Balochistan Post* network is also banned. https://www.eurasiareview.com/01062020-abysmal-human-rights-situation-in-balochistan-analysis/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29; <http://hakkpaan.org/hrcbs-website-banned-in-pakistan/>

Russia. The Supreme Court of the region of Karelia extended the detention of Yuri Dmitriyev, a Russian historian and prominent researcher of the Stalin-era gulag, *RFE/RL* reported. For background, see *SAHR News* 2020-04. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-court-upholds-decision-to-extend-detention-of-prominent-gulag-historian/30599607.html>

Human Rights Watch warned that a “new law creating a ‘uniform federal database’ . . . infringes on the right to privacy and weakens protection of personal data.” The database is to be “fully functional” by 2025, run by the Federal Tax Service with other agencies contributing to it. The database will contain “birth certificates, passport details, marital status, any change of gender, education, residence permits abroad, employment, taxpayers’ information, and “references to parents’ and children’s profiles.” It would be available to “election commissions, courts, prosecutors, and other law enforcement.” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/new-database-threatens-right-privacy-russia>

Russia/Chechnya. Amnesty International sent out an “urgent action” alert on the case of Russian journalist Elena Milashina. In February Milashina and her lawyer were “attacked and beaten up by a mob in a hotel in Grozny,” Chechnya’s capital, but “CCTV recordings from the crime scene have reportedly been ‘lost’ and no perpetrators have been brought to justice.” On 12 April she published an article in *Novaya Gazeta* on the COVID-19 situation in Chechnya and the authorities’ response to it. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen head of state, responded to the article on his Telegram account and issued a video on Instagram in which he called the newspaper and its journalists “puppets of the West” and said that if the Russian government and its Federal Security Service did not stop the publication of such stories and “If you want us to commit a crime and become criminals, then tell us so! One of us will take the burden of this responsibility on himself”—a barely-veiled death threat. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/2172/2020/en/>

South Korea. In May the parliament “relaunched” the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose work had been halted in 2010 by the then-government. “The nine-member commission will get four years to handle cases that occurred between the country’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule at the end of World War II and its brutal military dictatorships from the 1960s to 1980s,” AP reported. Among other human rights cases, the commission is expected to investigate the Brothers Home, “a state-funded vagrants’ facility where thousands were enslaved and abused in the 1970s and 1980s” and even “shipped children overseas for adoption as part of a massive profit-seeking enterprise.” <https://apnews.com/6c28ae2dc735c3c818eb77b2e8c29f70>; www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/world/asia/south-korea-prisoner-of-war.html

Syria. The Day After (TDA), an NGO “supporting democratic transition in Syria,” issued a report of its survey of 2,131 Syrians inside and outside the country to identify “types of attacks and the parties responsible . . . the social groups most vulnerable to these types of aggression, and . . . the physical and psychological effects of the attacks and the attitudes of victims towards future justice.” TDA found that it “does not appear that uncovering the truth and providing apologies and amnesty will play a significant role in the future. The victims visualize it differently: accountability first and foremost.” Individuals who were “directly subjected to violations or those who lost a family member to violations . . . are more insistent on revealing the truth than others and want to punish the perpetrators with more severe penalties.” A related survey of over 2,000 Syrians living in Turkey found that over 70% want to return only to their original areas of residence. TDA pointed out that to achieve that, “law and decrees that violate property rights that were issued by the Assad regime . . . must be addressed to prevent the regime from changing the demographic make up of several regions in the country through its tampering with the civil registry documents of refugees.” These survey data need careful preservation for use in developing effective plans for post-conflict assistance and future justice projects.

<https://tda-sy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Conditions-of-Victims-and-their-Attitudes-Towards-Accountability-and-Reparations-English.pdf>; <https://tda-sy.org/2020/05/18/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-outline-conditions-for-safe-and-voluntary-return-to-syria/>

TDA also issued a statement opposing Decree No. 5 issued in January that said “property and vehicle sales will not be officially documented by authorities unless the buyer deposits the full or partial sale amount into the seller’s bank account.” <https://tda-sy.org/2020/05/08/opinion-decree-no-5-infringes-on-syrians-property-ownership-rights/>

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) wrote that “two months since issuing [an] amnesty decree, the Syrian regime released only 96 of nearly 130,000 detainees and arrested 113 more,” based on information in its 9-year-old “extensive database of detainees, disappeared persons, and individuals who have been released” and information obtained from detainees, their lawyers and families. http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/The_Syrian_regime_only_releases_96_cases_out_of_approximately_130000_two_months_after_the_amnesty_decree_was_issued_en.pdf

On 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, SNHR released a report on the most notable violations of the rights of citizen journalists, based on documentation in SNHR’s database. Since March 2011, 707 citizen journalists were killed and at least 422 are still detained or forcibly disappeared; SNHR demanded their release. “The Syrian regime is by far the largest perpetrator of violations,” SNHR wrote, but noted that it “experienced long periods of hardly receiving any news or information from areas that were under the control of ISIS” which “copied the Syrian regime’s practices in many types of violations, such as filming and publishing various videos showing clearly coerced ‘confessions’ by citizen journalists . . . before being executed.” http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/On_World_Press_Freedom_Day_We_demand_the_Release_of_422_Citizen_Journalists_in_Syria_en.pdf

Four Syrian NGOs sent an open letter to the Government’s Committee on Detainees and Kidnapped Persons in Syria (formed in April 2020). They urged the Committee to cooperate and coordinate with civil society organizations “especially those that are capable of helping the committee to have access to lists of detainees, missing persons, and the forcibly disappeared” while guaranteeing the “confidentiality of the shared information and save and archive it in a safe place and encrypt it to protect it from hacking.” They recommended that the committee talk with ISIS detainees to obtain what information they have about “the fate of the thousands who went missing when ISIS controlled large areas of Syria.”

https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2020/05/20/letter-to-the-committee-on-detainees-and-kidnapped-persons-in-syria/?utm_source=SJAC+Weekly+Update&utm_campaign=2a72e429dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_10_02_56_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0a7405c641-2a72e429dc-90540617

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), an NGO, issued a useful report, “Gone without a trace: Syria’s detained, abducted, and forcibly disappeared.” It includes tables of the responsibilities of the government security agencies and brief descriptions of the major non-state armed groups and the various civil, military and “exceptional” courts. Focusing primarily on those disappeared by the government, it says that “although it is believed that the Syrian government keeps a detailed bureaucratic record of where it keeps its detainees and on what basis, the detained, their families, and human rights organizations have no access to these records.” In addition to recommendations on access to information about deceased persons, ICTJ called for all prisoners detained for nonviolent offences to be released and provided with “any official documentation and identification required to travel, gain employment, and re-establish family contacts.” https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ_PolicyPaper_Syria_Gone_Without_a_Trace_web.pdf

Taiwan. The Transitional Justice Commission, investigating the period from 1947 through the martial law era ending in 1987, has been extended for another year, *Al Jazeera* reported. “So far, about 6,000 victims have been exonerated—but in name only. Their criminal records remain because the passage of time has made retrials impracticable. All told, between 3,000 and 4,000 people were executed and 140,000 imprisoned during martial law.” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/taiwan-targets-truth-justice-investigates-darker-times-200513064124539.html>

United States. A professor of sociology and criminology writing in *The Conversation* reviewed the relationship between police officers accused of brutal violence and the complaints against them by citizens. The Minneapolis, Minnesota, now-ex-police-officer charged with second degree manslaughter for killing George Floyd had been involved in at least 18 separate misconduct complaints and three additional shooting incidents. In Louisville, Kentucky, “at least three of the officers involved in the shooting death of Breonna Taylor . . . had previously been sanctioned for violating department policies.” The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports from across the nation show that “fewer than one in twelve complaints of police misconduct result in any kind of disciplinary action.” https://theconversation.com/police-officers-accused-of-brutal-violence-often-have-a-history-of-complaints-by-citizens-139709?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20June%201%202020%20-%201637815739&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20June%201%202020%20-%201637815739+Version+A+CID_f67533495bc59672a8ee2443e2839898&utm_source=campaign_monitor_us&utm_term=Police%20officers%20accused%20of%20brutal%20violence%20often%20have%20a%20history%20of%20complaints%20by%20citizens

A journalism professor also writing in *The Conversation* urged “American to stop viewing footage of black people dying so casually. Instead, cellphone videos of vigilante violence and fatal police encounter should be viewed like lynching photographs—with solemn reserve and careful circulation.” https://theconversation.com/why-cellphone-videos-of-black-peoples-deaths-should-be-considered-sacred-like-lynching-photographs-139252?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20May%2029%202020%20-%201636015722&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20May%2029%202020%20-%201636015722+Version+A+CID_d1bce6e46ba051e3fb00ecccfa42bc6a&utm_source=campaign_monitor_us&utm_term=Why%20cellphone%20videos%20of%20black%20peoples%20deaths%20should%20be%20considered%20sacred%20like%20lynching%20photographs

According to statistics gathered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, “officials at the southern border have removed more than 20,000 migrants without proper documents to Mexico or directly to their home countries since March 20,” *CBS News* reported on 13 May. Only two people “have been allowed to pursue requests for humanitarian protection” during that time, and during April only 58 of the 766 unaccompanied migrant children at the border “were transferred to the U.S. refugees agency, which Congress tasked with caring for these minors, according to government data.” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/only-2-migrants-allowed-to-seek-humanitarian-protection-under-trumps-coronavirus-border-order/>

The Urban League (NGO) blogged that U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data on nationwide job losses through April show that the Hispanic unemployment rate is the highest of all racial and ethnic groups, standing at 18.9% in April. The BLS began tracking unemployment by ethnicity in 1973; this is the first time the Hispanic population has led that sorry list. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/latinx-unemployment-highest-all-racial-and-ethnic-groups-first-time-record?fbclid=IwAR0wrF06j3rPph76dWrV9pUKpTJPcVDieLxFeGYU7A69CXZvhpD04v4Z-wk>

And another sad finding: in 1979 the Anti-Defamation League (NGO) began to “audit” anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. In 2019 it recorded 2,107 anti-Semitic incidents, the highest number in all the years

it has audited. The majority were incidents of harassment (1,127), plus 919 incidents of vandalism and 61 assaults. <https://www.adl.org/2019-audit-h>

In what can only be characterized as a jaw-dropping report, San Francisco State University announced that “anthropology professor Doug Bailey destroyed more than 1,200 transparencies from SF State archives, and he is proud of it. He culled 35-millimeter images from decades-old research projects that are now considered unethical—studies of ethnicity, sexuality, animal dissection and human reproduction—and soaked them in diluted sodium oxychloride.” The images were from the university’s “now-defunct” anthropology museum; he called it “Releasing the Archive” as an art/archaeology discipline. No report of the view of the university archives. <https://lca.sfsu.edu/lcanews/2020/05/11/819951-professor-bailey-destroys-archival-research-images-name-art-ethics>

United States/Georgia. Two months after Ahmaud Arbery was “shot to death while jogging on a Sunday afternoon,” a video of the shooting was posted to social media, causing outrage and leading to the arrest of the two men directly involved and the man who shot the video. A Brunswick County attorney said he was the person who shared the video with the media but did not say how he obtained it. <https://apnews.com/b1abc55058e7e6aa8cf8f8084681097e>

“One of the men facing murder charges in the death of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery is a retired chief investigator for the Brunswick District Attorney’s Office. Personnel records obtained by the *News4Jax I-TEAM* show [that] for eight of the years Gregory Michael was employed as a chief investigator . . . he had no arrest powers” because he did not complete “state-mandated training for community-oriented policing, de-escalation, and use-of-force.” <https://www.news4jax.com/news/local/2020/05/14/retired-da-investigator-accused-in-arberys-death-missed-critically-important-training/>

Good reads. Swisspeace published *Guiding Principles for Safe Havens for Archives at Risk: A Commentary*: <https://www.swisspeace.ch/publications/essentials/guiding-principles-for-safe-havens-for-archives-at-risk-a-commentary>

Open Global Rights, “Systemic bias in data models is a human rights issue”: https://www.openglobalrights.org/systemic-bias-in-data-models-is-a-human-rights-issue/?mc_cid=c737a16c81&mc_eid=f1f6556540

Wired, “How well can algorithms recognize your masked face?”: https://www.wired.com/story/algorithms-recognize-masked-face/?bxiid=5c48efcf2ddf9c4807adf975&cndid=53684912&esrc=sign-up-page&source=EDT_WIR_NEWSLETTER_0_DAILY_ZZ&utm_brand=wired&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_mailing=WIR_Daily_050220&utm_medium=email&utm_source=nl&utm_term=list1_p4

Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes has online "Prevention Talks," conversations on atrocity prevention hosted by Mò Bleeker with experts from around the world: https://gaamac.org/prevention-talks?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=atrocipy_prevention_and_transitional_justice_in_times_of_covid_19&utm_term=2020-05-16

Eight researchers from Europe and Iraq published “Heritage and cultural healing: Iraq in a post-Daesh era” in *International Journal of Heritage Studies*: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2019.1608585https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2019.1608585>

Please share news with us! trudy@trudypeterson.com

The Section on Archives and Human Rights is grateful to the online Italian archival magazine *Il Mondo degli Archivi* for handling the distribution of *HRWG News*. To subscribe to the *News*, enter the required information on the form that you will find here: <https://anai.us13.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=5942a8a83f3023c6a5a63139e&id=324882c3f7>

This Newsletter is published under a Creative Commons license. Feel free to further circulate it and reuse it for non-commercial purposes.