AAA Committee for Human Rights
Annual Report 2009

Compiled by Peter Redfield, CfHR Member

CfHR Members 2009
Victoria Sanford (2008-2010) (chair through 2009)
Deborah Poole (2009-2011) (co-chair from 2010)
Robin Root (2009-2011) (co-chair from 2010)
Peter Redfield (2008-2010)
Victoria Sanford (2008-2010)
Gretchen Schafft (2009-2011)
Shanon Speed (2008-2010)
Kimberly Theidon (2008-2009) (replacing Ellen Lutz)
Peter Van Arsdale (2007-2009)

Incoming CfHR Members
Ilana Feldman (2010-2012)
Stephen Loring (2010-2012)

CfHR ex-officio members
Setha Low, AAA President
Virginia Dominguez, AAA President-elect

AAA Staff Liaisons
Damon Dozier (general)
Brian Estes (web, electronic)

Introduction: Committee Background, Mission and Objectives

The AAA’s permanent Committee for Human Rights (CfHR), established in 1995, is composed of 10 members, 8 of whom are elected by the AAA membership and serve three-year terms, with 2 ex-officio members (AAA President and President-elect). The Committee’s internal mission is to stimulate informed involvement in human rights among professional anthropologists through publications, panels, and other outreach. The Committee’s external mission is to gather information on selected, anthropologically relevant cases of human rights abuse and to propose appropriate related action. CfHR efforts occur at the annual meetings and throughout the year through Committee Task Groups and case-specific actions. This report briefly describes actions and activities taken by the CfHR between November 2008 and January 2010.
Part I: Internal Structure, Activities and Initiatives

During 2009 Victoria Sanford continued to chair the committee. Having undergone extensive restructuring the previous cycle (see the five year report covering 2003-2008), the committee experienced little formal realignment in this one. However, with the departure of Ellen Lutz due to health concerns, former member Kimberly Theidon stepped in to fill the remainder of her term. At the 2009 annual meeting Deborah Poole and Robin Root took over as co-chairs for 2010.

The institutional and topical task groups established at the 2008 meeting included the following members:

2009 AAA CfHR Standing Institutional Task Groups

*CfHR Capacity Building and Materials Development*
Shannon Speed
Victoria Sanford
Richard Wilson

*Education/Outreach*
Peter Van Arsdale
Richard Wilson

*Human Rights Curricula*
Gretchen Schafft
Peter Van Arsdale

*Anthropology News CfHR Forum*
Shannon Speed
Victoria Sanford

*AAA Meeting*
Victoria Sanford
Deborah Poole
Robin Root

2009 AAA CfHR Topical Task Groups

*Indigenous Rights*
Ellen Lutz
Shannon Speed

Reparations
Richard Wilson

Language and Social Justice
Laurie Graham
Ana Celia Zentella
Bonnie Urciuoli
Victoria Sanford

Forensic Anthropology
Victoria Sanford
Heather Walsh-Haney

Iraqi Refugees
Kathy Libal
Scott Harding
Richard Wilson
Daniel Rothenberg

Health and Human Rights
Robin Root
Peter Redfield

Other Topics of Specific Concern and Ongoing Initiatives

Concern over Executive Board Review of Advocacy
A new policy increasing review of all public letters by the AAA Executive Board constituted a primary topic of concern for the CfHR before and during its business meeting. After considerable discussion the committee decided to seek clarification from the incoming president and EB, particularly with regard to cases involving urgent action. Richard Wilson agreed to join the chairs in taking a lead in this matter.

Website and Database of Human Rights Experts
During 2009 CfHR continued to work on its web presence in the new AAA website. Staff member Brian Estes oversaw updates in May of 2009 and continues to work with Richard Wilson and Peter Redfield on ensuring that the forthcoming AAA database initiative includes a searchable means to locate an updated list of human rights experts.
Part II: External Activities

The CfHR maintained public involvement in three areas: 1) sponsoring events at the AAA annual meetings, 2) publishing a regular series of short pieces in *Anthropology News* and 3) responding to calls for action and public advocacy by AAA members and international colleagues. A summary of each is provided below:

CfHR activities at AAA Meetings in Philadelphia

The 2009 annual meeting in Philadelphia, December of the AAA annual meeting took place in Philadelphia between December 2nd and December 6th. In addition to its standing business meeting for the committee, the CfHR sponsored an Advocacy Training Workshop hosted by Richard Wilson and Shannon Speed, an Open Forum chaired by Victoria Sanford and Deborah Poole, and the three invited panel sessions described below. Despite some issues with scheduling, the events all met with considerable success. Details of the invited sessions are as follows:

“CRISIS IN GAZA: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FOR ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS (ALSO SPONSORED BY THE MIDDLE EAST SECTION)”
Invited Session: Fri., 8:00 AM-11:45 AM (organized by Deborah Poole)

Abstract: The Israeli assault on civilian populations in Gaza in January 2009 raises pressing human rights issues. One characteristic of the Gaza case, and Palestinian human rights advocacy in general, has been the difficulty of gaining access to mainstream US media. This highlights the importance of creating new avenues and venues for advocacy by building bridges with activists, strengthening social capital, and promoting existing regional and local human rights movements. To deepen our understanding of the diverse strategies anthropologists deploy to understand, publicize and take action on human rights violations, this panel takes the January 2009 ground and air assault on Gaza and its civilian populations as a site from which to reflect on anthropologists’ roles as human rights advocates and the challenges of engaging human rights effectively in highly polarized military and political contexts. Panel themes include: strategies and experience for engaging mainstream media, the relationship between teaching and human rights advocacy, the importance of alternative, community and web-based media, and the creation of multiple information sources and publics. Panel participants will discuss the relationship between the overt instances of human rights violations that occur in contexts of war and military occupation, and the more diffuse spatiotemporal practices of domination such as borders, roadblocks, pass-laws, naming, and settlements through which civilians in Gaza are denied civil, legal and human rights in the everyday. We hope to provoke broad discussion of
anthropological experiences and strategies for responsible human rights advocacy, and to explore the multiple ways in which mediation shapes human rights advocacy.

“TESTIMONY, TRUTH, POLITICS AND ATROCITY: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF DOCUMENTATION HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN IRAQ”

Invited Session Fri., 10:15 AM-12:00 PM (organized by Daniel Rothenberg)
Panelists: Daniel Rothenberg, Christa Salamandra, Kathryn Libal

Abstract: Despite widespread international coverage of politics in Iraq, there remains an inadequate understanding of the profoundly destructive impact of political violence under the regime of Saddam Hussein and following the US-led invasion. Over the past 6 years, studies show that 100,000 to 800,000 Iraqis have been killed and the United Nations estimates that 1 out of every 6 Iraqis has fled their home because of violence, creating one of the world’s most significant refugee and displacement crises. All of this in a country that suffered devastating losses involving hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions displaced during three decades of authoritarian rule. While the basic data on these issues is available, there are few ways for Americans and others to engage first-hand accounts of what ordinary Iraqis have suffered raising questions as to the possible contributions that anthropology can make towards understanding political violence across cultural divides within a contested political terrain. This panel reviews the complex interface between testimony, politics and atrocity with a focus on different modes of linking fieldwork, broadly defined, and truth-telling. The panel considers the relative value of anthropology, statistical sociology, journalism and activism as regards human rights violations in Iraq by bringing together a diverse collection of interdisciplinary practitioners. Their presentations cover large-scale fieldwork-based documentation and analysis of past and present human rights violations in Iraq; advocacy related to the Central Criminal Court of Iraq; covering Iraq as a journalist; and defining repressive patterns through the statistical analysis of fieldwork data in Iraq and Darfur. Each presentation raises a series of basic methodological questions regarding fieldwork in conflict zones. In addition, it references key issues associated with the truth value and representational power of gathering testimony as a form of fieldwork based research and as an element of the evolving practice of transitional justice. The panel reviews how violence produces, reinforced and defines social reality precisely as it creates harm, discord, chaos and suffering that, at times, exists beyond clear description and almost beyond words, raising complex issues of representation and power. It considers theoretical and practical questions about representation with regards to the power of violence to define limit and force political agendas. The panel reviews the link between social science research, the “right to truth” and the representation of atrocity in distinct academic and non-academic formats and the overall challenge of communicating the social reality of severe political violence.
“HEALTH AND THE PRODUCTIVITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSES”
Invited Session, Sat., 10:15 AM-12:00 PM (organized by Clara Han and Robin Root)
Panelists: Clara Han, Robin Root, Joseph Amon, Lisa Stevenson, Cesar Abadia, Daniela Heil, Erica Dwyer, Didier Fassin, Alejandro Ceron

Abstract: This panel brings together ethnographic and theoretical papers to examine the productivity of human rights discourse in the fields of public health, medicine, and anthropology. In our contemporary world, a discourse of health as a human right has played a central role in configuring humanitarian responses to disasters, economic inequality and poverty, and the differential burden of disease. It has also raised methodological, conceptual, and ethical challenges in the field of medical anthropology. We are interested in bringing together critical ethnographic examinations of the mobilization of human rights discourse in informing claims to health by communities, populations, and the state, as well as reflections on how human rights discourse has informed the knowledge and concepts of health and well-being in anthropology. In keeping with the theme of the AAA meetings, we hope to foster discussion about anthropology’s “ends”: how can anthropological modes of knowing inform and help shape responses to global differentials in well-being, health, and life chances that are lived and experienced locally? What critical reflections from the field of health can be brought to bear on the discourse of cultural relativism in anthropology, and what alternative frameworks might we generate from these reflections? By focusing on the productivity of human rights discourse, this panel is particularly interested in the new directions, methods, and concepts that can inform and challenge discursive understandings of health, knowledge, and values. Such new directions may include exploring the instabilities of a language of rights in advancing claims to health, and how local concepts of health and well-being are conditioned by often invisible institutional failures as well as economic insecurity and emergent value systems. How are humanitarian interventions and large-scale public health initiatives informed by regimes of value? How are discourses of human rights enacted by the local to advance claims to health from the state, and how are subjects constituted through this discourse? In examining such interventions and claims predicated on “health as a human right”, what local and trans-local concepts of the human emerge? Refracting such questions back on our own discipline, this panel explores how the language of rights has informed our field’s knowledge production on health, our ethnographic engagements, and our stakes in normative projects.
Anthropology News Articles

During 2009 the CfHR continued its sponsorship of a regular series of short articles/briefs dealing with human rights issues in *Anthropology News* under the title “Human Rights Forum.” Shannon Speed took over from Ellen Lutz as the designated series editor. Articles published over the past annual cycle included:

“A Modest Map of the Aid World,” by Peter Redfield

“A Call to Promote Indigenous Rights,” by Ellen L Lutz (March 2009).


CfHR Responses to AAA Member Requests and Requests from International Colleagues

In the past year the CfHR and AAA have responded to the calls of colleagues for action on human rights crises. We have initiated statements and letters to national and international leaders, lending our anthropological expertise to critical human rights issues, including both urgent action responses and advisory letters to policy makers. The following is a list of CfHR letters generated in 2009. The letters themselves are available for review via the CfHR webpage: http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/cfhr/index.cfm:

- AAA & WCAA Statement Regarding Indigenous Human and Political Rights in Peru (06/22/09)
- CfHR letter concerning the impact of global warming (5/04/09)
- CfHR Statement Regarding Israeli Attack and International Siege on the Gaza Strip (2/5/09)
- CfHR letter to President Obama requesting US endorsement of the UN
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2/2/09)
• CfHR letters (Spanish) requesting investigation of the 2007 assassination of Pepe Mendez (1/27/09)
• AAA letter (Spanish) concerning a new set of death threats against FAFG members in Guatemala (1/21/09)
• Response (Spanish) from Guatemalan vice-president Espada regarding threats against FAFG (01/19/09)
• CfHR letter (Spanish) requesting additional protection for FAFG family members (01/16/09)
• CfHR letter of support to FUNAI, Brazil (1/05/09)