

Main Conclusions of Videoconference Meeting of Steering Committee for the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum held February 13, 2006

The following persons participated in a videoconference meeting of the Steering Committee for the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum on February 13, 2006:

Steering Committee

Richard Breitman
Tuvia Friling
Radu Ioanid
Yaacov Lozowick
[Absent: Jacques Fredj]

Cataloging Working Group

Esther Aran
Henry Mayer

Claims Conference

Wesley Fisher
Zvi Inbar
Miriam Weiner (via telephone)

1. Cataloging, Descriptions of Collections

The Cataloging Working Group reached agreement on the standards to be used to describe Holocaust-related archival collections and sent out instructions to the members of the Forum. However, receipt to date of sample descriptions has been very slow, impeding the construction of a trial common database, nor for the most part have institutions that have developed thesauri or relevant lists or software made them available on the Forum web site or otherwise so that the other archives can suggest additions and corrections. The Steering Committee discussed ways to invigorate these processes so that researchers may have a sense of what records are available and where they are located.

Conclusions:

- a) A letter should be sent to all institutions reminding them to submit descriptions of collections.
- b) It should not be a requirement that descriptions of collections be in English. If institutions submit descriptions in languages other than English, translation should be done centrally (by the Claims Conference or with Claims Conference support).
- c) The website of the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum should be opened to the public [but see discussion below on acquisitions] and a link made to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The Claims Conference will check with the individual institutions whether the survey answers that were compiled for the March 2004 meeting may be made public and/or updated. Links will appear to the descriptions/catalogs existing on many institutions' websites.

- d) Institutions that already have descriptions or catalogs do not need to alter these to conform to the recommended standards for descriptions, and links to their websites are sufficient. At a later time it may be desirable to discuss a database format in regard to descriptions of collections worldwide, as well as new technologies of creating automatic linkages between deferent synonyms, chains of keywords, etc.
- e) Consideration should be given by the Claims Conference to adding the making of basic descriptions of collections to the conditions of grants to archival institutions.

2. Acquisitions

One of the conclusions of the March 2004 meeting was that information needs to be exchanged concerning plans for acquisitions, in particular concerning collections in danger or that should be duplicated and specific documents of particularly great historical significance that are in need of conservation. The concern, particularly among the largest institutions, was noted that future plans for acquisitions not be made so generally known as to complicate their implementation or to impede serendipity in taking advantage of opportunities as they appear. For grants approved in July 2004 and later, the Claims Conference now includes specific conditions in its allocation letters to archives concerning information on acquisitions and sharing of materials. The Steering Committee discussed ways to handle the various concerns.

Conclusions

- a) Descriptions of collections and cataloging will help greatly in making known what acquisition projects have already been done and what is available, and these should be made public through the website as discussed above.
- b) In addition to descriptions of collections, it is fine to make public current projects on which formal agreement has been reached (but not projects currently under negotiation). Thus reports to the Claims Conference on recently completed or ongoing agreed-upon projects should be made public over the website. If these reports are in languages other than English, translations should be done centrally (by the Claims Conference or with Claims Conference support).
- c) In regard to proposed *future* acquisitions projects, a mechanism should be created whereby the Claims Conference consults with a committee or subcommittee of the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum so as to permit greater coordination of projects, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure the rational use of available funding.
- d) Coordination with other major funding sources for Holocaust-related archives such as the French, German, and Austrian foundations is desirable.
- e) In regard to the sharing of materials, where the archive of origin prefers to share by uploading requested materials onto the Internet but such uploading will take place only in future, the “timely manner” called for in the conditions in Claims Conference grants should mean that the archive of origin should provide the materials on a diskette (or otherwise) with conditions of use placed on the

materials, including restriction against the receiving institution uploading the materials onto the Internet, if desired.

3. Membership in the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum

A listing of 681 archives around the world that have significant Holocaust-related holdings has been made available on the web site of the Forum. The listing includes administrative archives as well as archives specializing in the Holocaust as such. The Steering Committee discussed which of these archives should be invited to participate in the activities of the Forum.

Conclusions

- a) The list of 681 archives may not be complete. Yad Vashem will send its list of its source archives, which is greater in number, for comparison. [Subsequent to the meeting, Esther Aran forwarded the Yad Vashem list of 707 archives. The two lists will be compared and additions made as appropriate.]
- b) Archives that should be invited to participate in the Forum are of two types: those whose primary concern is the Holocaust and those for which it is not the primary concern but which have substantial holdings on the Holocaust.
- c) A request should be sent to all the institutions that participated in the March 2004 meeting to recommend 5 additional institutions for membership.
- d) Making the website public with a link to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research should attract the participation of additional institutions, including that of state archives.

4. Continuing Discussion Regarding Scanning of Archives and Internet Posting

Despite various reservations and hesitations, archives are beginning to contemplate scanning their holdings and/or are acquiring digital material. The Steering Committee discussed the current experience of Israeli archives and what may or should lie ahead for archives in Israel and outside of it in this respect. It was reported that many Israeli archives are continuing to move towards scanning their holdings and uploading unclassified material onto the Internet. A central database through the Israeli Government will not be possible, and there is a search for another institutional base to ensure leadership and policy. Most of the Holocaust-related archives in Israel are opting to use the Sapir Enterprise software created by the IDEA Information Systems company (www.idea-is.com), and it is possible that IDEA Information Systems may create the needed standards.

Conclusions

- a) Demonstrations of Yad Vashem's reinvention of what archives do with technology should be done through a combination of the following proposed meetings:

April, 2006: Ilan Bzalel (possibly accompanied by others from Yad Vashem) makes presentation of Sapir Enterprise at the USHMM in Washington, DC [this presentation is also important to the Victim List Project of the Swiss Banks Settlement and can be funded by it].

May, 2006: Steering Committee of the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum meets in Jerusalem for presentation by Yad Vashem.

February, 2007: Meeting of representatives of the member institutions of the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum at which Yad Vashem makes presentation.

- b) The Claims Conference should consider the possibility of holding group negotiations on behalf of Holocaust-related archives in Israel with IDEA Information Systems so as to reduce costs. One of the smaller archives in Israel to be selected by the Steering Committee should be used as a model for a pilot of a full and state-of-the-art computerization project.

5. Notification to the Scholarly Community

The Steering Committee discussed the desirability of informing the academic research community of the developments in archival cooperation under the International Shoah Archivists Working Group.

Conclusions

- a) Once the website is made public, informational notices should be placed in *Yad Vashem Studies*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, and other appropriate venues to notify the scholarly community of these developments.