

BOOK REVIEWS

Guide to Human Rights Research

(by Jack Tobin and Jennifer Green, Harvard Law School

Human Rights Program, Cambridge, Mass., 1994. ISBN 1-879875-02-0)

There can be no doubt that human rights has come of age as a subject for practising and academic lawyers. As the New Zealand Law Commission noted in its recent report (Report 34: *A New Zealand Guide to International Law and its Sources*), "About a quarter of New Zealand public Acts appear to raise issues connected with international law... Even where there is no direct obligation, there may well be an international standard - especially in the human rights area..."

Human rights literature has been growing at a rapid rate throughout the last decade or so but there have been few bibliographic guides to provide the signposts needed by researchers. The subject is too large for general guides. For example, Elizabeth Beyerly's magisterial *Public International Law: A Guide to Information Sources*, published in 1991, could spare but three pages for the topic. The 1987 work by J A Andrews and W D Hines, *Keyguide to Information Sources on the International Protection of Human Rights* does rather better, with nearly 90 pages of references and brief critical annotations. (The first part of the work provides the general reader with introductions to human rights concepts and institutions.)

Jack Tobin, assisted by Jennifer Green, provides a pragmatically-designed tool for anyone requiring a detailed guide to the literature. Designed as an annotated bibliography, the book devotes just over 200 pages to mapping out the more readily available sources, with the emphasis on material published in English and likely to be available in the wealthier Western nations. The authors assume that the reader is familiar with human rights concepts, terminology and institutions. They do not duplicate existing general guides to legal research in the various jurisdictions.

Chapter one provides an introduction and overview. The authors itemise the indexes and catalogues which may need to be used in searching for articles, monographs and 'official' publications and follow this with listings of current awareness publications, principal scholarly journals and books. The chapter concludes with 10 pages on computer databases and the Internet. Some idea of the complexity of this subtopic is provided by one directory of databases, which 'serves as a guide to 872 computerized databases ... operated by or in association with U.N. organisations and agencies'. It is unfortunate that the Guide was published just before large quantities of United Nations and other institutional resources became available on the Internet. And it was evidently written just before the advent of powerful search engines such as AltaVista and Lycos, since these research tools are not mentioned. This section will no doubt be expanded considerably in content and sophistication in the next edition. In the meantime, researchers can be directed to rapidly maturing Internet sites devoted to

international human rights such as Human Rights Internet at URL <<http://www.hri.ca/>>, the DIANA sites at Yale University at URL<<http://elsinore.cis.yale.edu/dianaweb/diana.htm>> and at the University of Minnesota at <<http://www.umn.edu/humanrts/links/links.htm>>, and to specific tools such as *Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary-General : Status*, located within the United Nations Treaty Database site at <<http://www.un.org/Depts/Treaty/>>.

Although the Guide emphasises printed material, the annotations alert the reader to online resources, where, for example, part of a journal may be available on WESTLAW or LEXIS.

Chapter two focuses on general human rights research tools and sources: guides; bibliographies; books; journals and newsletters; nongovernmental organization publications; practice manuals; compilations of human rights instruments and so on. All items are succinctly and helpfully described in the annotations, which vary in length from a sentence to a paragraph.

Chapter three devotes some 40 pages to material on and from Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs), including the UN and related bodies such as the ILO, and the various American, European and African human rights institutions. The reader is provided with considerable assistance in coming to grips with the complexities of the documentation of the many institutions and judicial bodies.

Chapter four, the largest, lists notable books, articles, bibliographies and guides on a wide range of human rights topics, including specific rights, human rights and the environment, and the rights of particular groups. Again, a new edition will no doubt need to add many significant Internet resources, such as the Fourth World Documentation Project at <<http://www.halcyon.com/FWDP/fwdp.html>>.

There is a final short chapter on sources for United States foreign policy on human rights.

No library which claims to support research into human rights can afford to be without this book. Its accumulation of knowledge about resources make it an essential selection tool for the acquisitions librarian and an invaluable 'bible' for researchers of all levels of experience.

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