

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF LiU
Conference Title:	Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law: Investigation and Prevention of Torture and Death in Custody
Dates:	2-7 May 2010
Chair:	Prof. Bernice Elger
Rapporteur:	Prof. Andrew Coyle

General Comments

The preparation for the conference was very thorough. A great deal of thought had gone into both the programme and the spread of contributors. In the spirit of ESF events, the conference brought together experts from a spectrum of academic disciplines who might not mix with each other in the normal course of events. The atmosphere was very collaborative and friendly.

The working language of the conference was English, which limited the active contribution of some people who might have had worthwhile comment to make had there been interpretation. In addition, the standard of English of some of the younger contributors meant that they were quite difficult to follow, even for native English speakers.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

In general the quality of the presentations was very high, with a good mixture of experts speakers who were at the cutting edge of their discipline and younger researchers who welcomed the opportunity to speak publicly about their work. All were given an attentive hearing.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

The atmosphere was very positive. Professor Elger set everyone at ease. The number of participants was slightly reduced because of problems with air travel. However, that led to a more intimate atmosphere in which everyone had the opportunity to speak to everyone else. There was a clear sense of positive networking, with participants making useful professional contacts which they were likely to pursue after the conference.

Balance of Participants

The mix of senior academics and junior researchers was very good, with great respect on both sides. There was also a good geographical mix from the greater European region. This provided an opportunity to observe different style of academic approach. There was a sense that some academics who may work in a rather isolated environment especially benefitted from the opportunity to mix more widely than usual. Perhaps inevitably there was a preponderance of forensic pathologists and fewer people from other disciplines but this did not restrict the debate.

Outlook and Future Developments

There will undoubtedly be informal follow up and collaboration. Participants are now more aware of what is going on in fields which are parallel to their own. There is likely to be attendance at further conferences and professional gatherings.

Follow-up

The project on Deaths in Custody being led by Professor Elger, involving the Universities of Geneva, Lausanne and London, as well as the ICRC has been significantly advanced since most of the key contributors were present at the conference.

At the conclusion of the conference there was an agreement to form working groups to discuss future collaboration. The names of the co-ordinators will be placed on the follow-up ESF website with the intention of encouraging others to join. There are also proposals to involve other bodies, such as the International Academy of Legal Medicine, in gathering statistics on deaths in custody.

Consideration will be given to a further conference on the same theme in two years time.

Organisation and Infrastructure

The ESF Conference Organiser Alessandra Piccolotto was extremely competent and was very attentive to everyone's needs. The hotel provided all the support that was required; the accommodation was first class and the catering was excellent.

Linköping is not easily accessible from most of Europe and travel arrangements were complicated by difficulty with air travel. One understands that the conference was held in this location because of the link between the University of Linköping and the ESF. That made it particularly surprising that no one from the university came to the conference, even merely to welcome participants. It would be much appreciated if this could be remedied for any future conference arranged in Linköping.

Professor Andrew Coyle PhD

11 May 2010