SHINING A LIGHT ON SITES OF ATROCITY:

Digital Mapping and Documentation in the Middle East and North Africa

International Coalition of
SITES *of* CONSCIENCE

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF SITES OF CONSCIENCE

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a global network of museums, historic sites and grassroots initiatives dedicated to building a more just and peaceful future through engaging communities in remembering struggles for human rights and addressing their contemporary legacies. Founded in 1999, the Coalition now includes more than 230 Sites of Conscience members in 55 countries. The Coalition supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Learn more at www.sitesofconscience.org.

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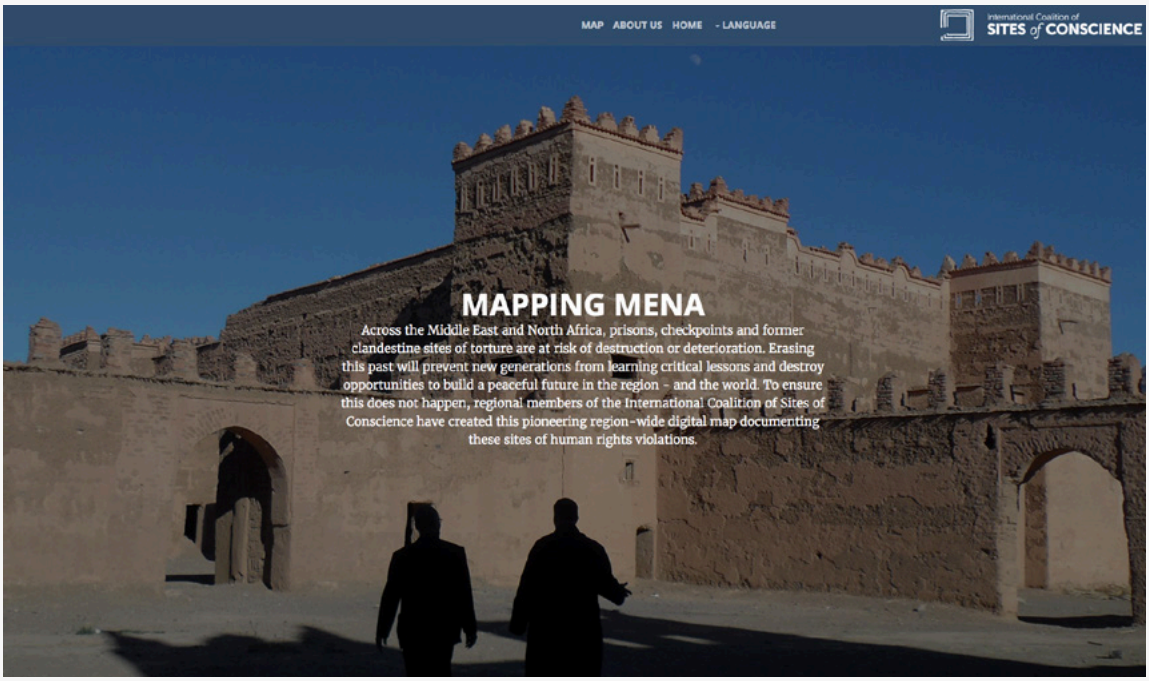
Robert Bosch Stiftung

MENA DIGITAL MAPPING TOOLKIT

Across the Middle East and North Africa, prisons, checkpoints and former clandestine sites of torture are at risk of destruction or deterioration. With the goal of preserving historical testament to past atrocities as well as contemporary evidence of ongoing human rights violations, members of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (the Coalition) in the region developed a mechanism to provide regional and global access to documentation of these sites.

The Digital Mapping and Documentation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) project brings together Sites of Conscience from seven countries to create a pioneering digital map identifying sites of human rights violations in the region. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is training the project partners to use this accessible technology to 1) compile data on critical sites; 2) pinpoint their geographic location; and 3) easily store, update and control access to this information. Representatives from the Latin America and Caribbean Sites of Conscience Network, who have worked on similar maps in their region, are serving as mentors for the project, offering their expertise and first-hand experience.

Following training meetings, field missions and the collating of collected information, a pilot map was completed in August 2017, and made available on the Coalition's website. Plans are underway for the next project phase, in which the Coalition and its MENA partners will add new sites to the map, incorporate oral testimonies, and develop the usability of the map content for the pursuit of transparency and accountability. This toolkit is designed to detail the map-building process to allow for pan-regional replication of the model for Coalition members and partners worldwide.



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INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL MAPPING: DEFINITIONS, USES AND EXAMPLES

In its most basic form, a map is an agreed-upon representation of selected content, ranging from a geographic area to a specific group of sites. Technology, however, has vastly expanded the range of the roles maps can play. They are no longer restricted to flat illustrations of countries or landscapes, but through the use of digital technology can employ a number of interactive features that enhance and deepen the user's understanding and level of engagement. Through the digital mapping process, maps can serve a spectrum of roles that include:

- DATABASE OF HISTORIC SITES
- PLATFORM FOR COMMUNICATING INFORMATION
- VIRTUAL MUSEUM
- ADVOCACY TOOL

Selected examples of interactive digital maps built to document historical struggles or periods of violence that reflect the advances MENA partners plan to incorporate include:

http://espaciosdememoria.pe

http://www.mapamemoriagranada.es

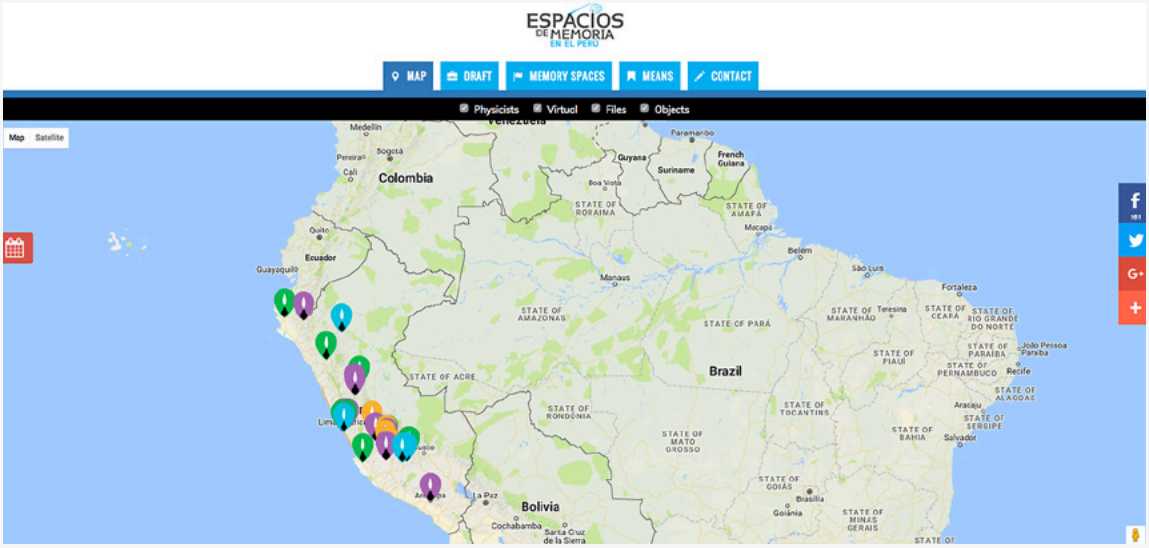
http://www.memorialmuseums.org

http://memoriahistorica.org.es/mapa-de-la-verguenza

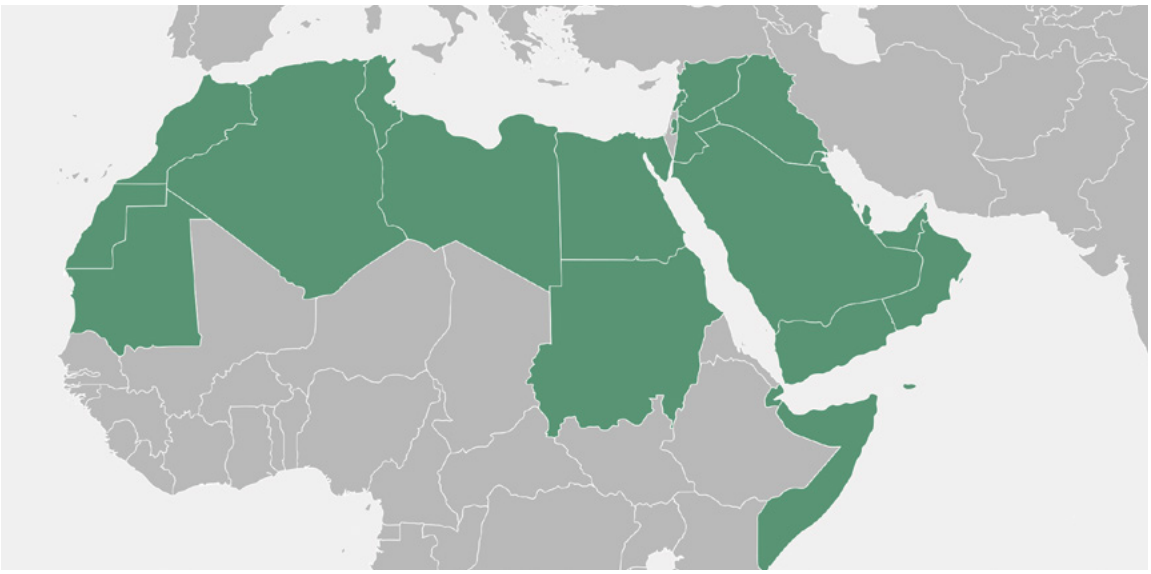
http://mapeo.memorialparalaconcordia.org

http://gulag.cz/en

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_history_of_american_slavery/2015/06/animated_interactive_of_the_history_of_the_atlantic_slave_trade.html



MAPPING IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



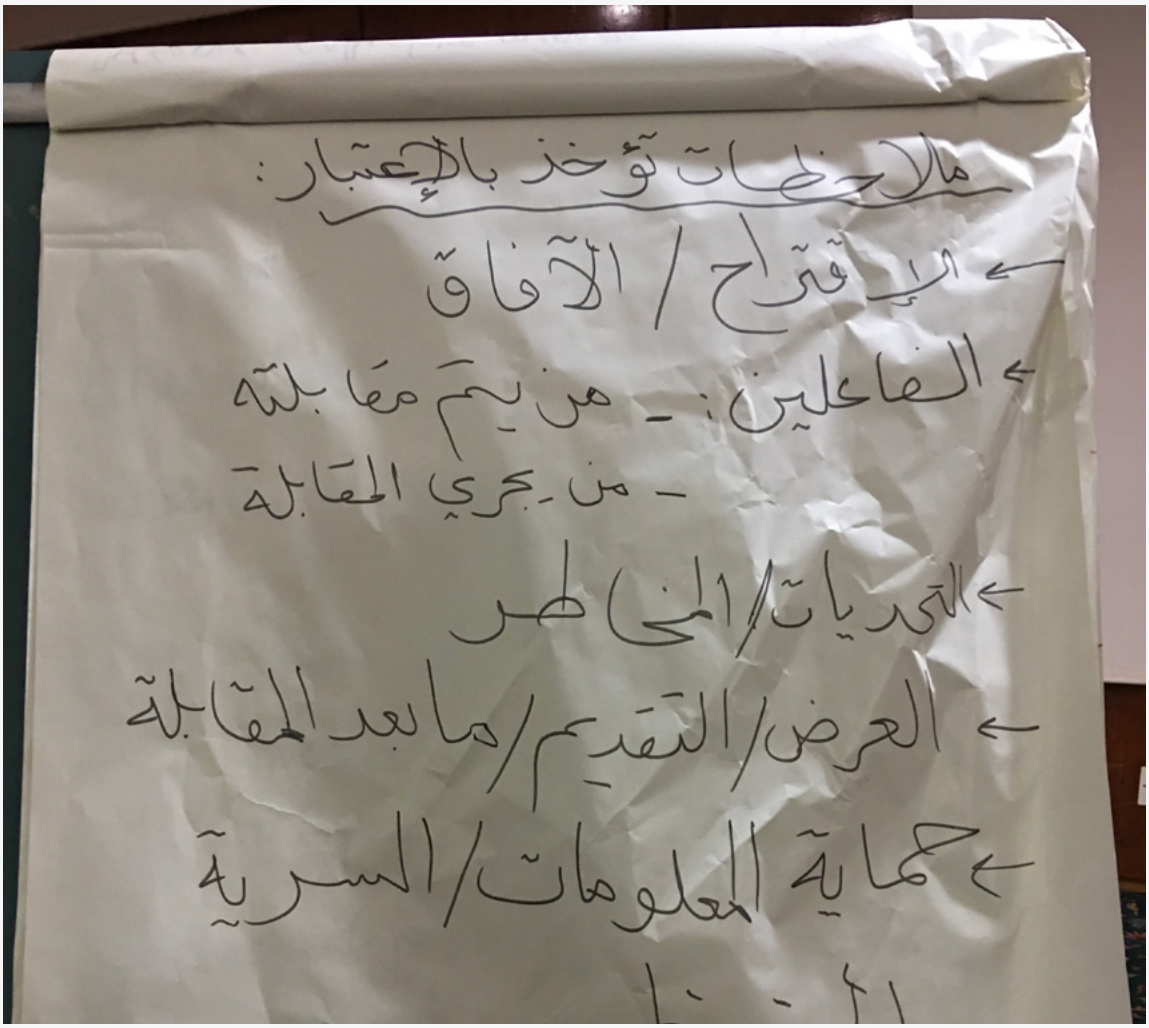
Six years after the Arab Revolutions of 2011, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) continues to be a crucible of political transition. While several countries in the region have made notable progress toward stability, open society and democratic participation, others are struggling with violent conflict and repressive, dictatorial governments that support revisionist and exclusive national narratives. With a long history of little or no civic participation across the region, it is particularly important in this transitional stage to promote cultures of civic engagement and encourage dialogue on historical truths that include multiple voices. Memory initiatives are often one of the only ways to publicly address issues of human rights abuse, mass atrocity or repression while minimizing the risk of concern within governments.

One form these memory initiatives may take is documenting sites where human rights violations have occurred. In MENA, however, sites of human rights abuses, including former sites of detention or torture and checkpoints are at great risk of destruction or deterioration. The concern for the possible disappearance of sites that stand as testimony to past violence and human rights struggles gave rise to the genesis of the plan to create a digital map marking and commemorating these sites. The ensuing mapping project was designed to build the capacity of academics, historians and human

rights activists in the region to carry out this pioneering work, and to introduce a mechanism for collaborative work among participating organizations.

The Coalition facilitates seven regional networks designed to help members coordinate and elevate their individual efforts to remember common histories and address their legacies today. They also offer the opportunity for cross-regional exchange and collaboration, providing members with the unique experience of sharing methodologies and best practices across regions. For this project, the MENA network took inspiration from other member sites and networks – particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean – who have found digital, interactive maps to be useful tools in both documentation and in sharing information gained. As a regional project, it helps both map creators and users to understand commonalities and differences among countries, as well as to examine trends over time. The ability to understand the issues in a cross-regional, multinational manner necessarily generates cross-regional, multinational solutions.

A digital map, through its accessibility and transparency, can prevent whitewashing and/or destruction of records of human rights violations; serve as a tool for advocacy and accountability; and constitute a visual force supporting narrative truths. Digital maps allow us to create a visual depiction of almost any kind of information. Additional information can be added continually, deepening the topics addressed exponentially.



MAPPING MECHANICS: HOW TO CREATE A DIGITAL MAP

I. DETERMINE MAP CHARACTERISTICS

MENA project participants surveyed and assessed a range of existing maps as the first step in their training. This provided the basis for determining which elements would serve the goal for which their map was designed. MENA participants compiled the following initial list of attributes deemed essential:

- The map should be interactive
- The map should be accessible
- The map should contain audiovisual content
- The map must have a mechanism for sharing data
- The content should include sites of atrocity
- Pictures and videos must be incorporated
- Data should be comprehensive and detailed

II. DEFINE INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED

To begin collection of information, it may be useful to ask the following questions:

1. What are we going to map?
2. In what geographical area we will map?
3. What is the historical period that the map will document?
4. What events occurred at the site?
5. Who were the victims?

Experienced map developers suggest beginning the map process with a limited number of data categories.

For the pilot MENA project, project partners collected the following:

- Exact coordinates
- The date the site was used and dates of the site's creation and closing. Many of the sites in this region functioned as castles before becoming prisons, and some of the sites still function as check-points and sites of detention and torture.

الاحتياجات
التوثيق
أخلاقية التوثيق
حماية الضحايا أثناء التوثيق
الحقيقة في التوثيق
أدلة تدريبية
جميع معلومات
دراسة وتشاركية مع الأخريين
إظهار الحماية للأحياء
الثقافة
الاجتماعي

- A 200-word description of the site
- Photographs of the site, at the highest resolution possible and from different angles
- The source of the information

In the future, the partners hope to add:

- Additional photographs
- Oral histories and testimonies in video, audio or text form
- Images of objects and archival materials from the site
- Any other relevant information that can be collected and shared

III. GEO-MAPPING LOCATIONS

Before sites can be pinpointed on a map, their coordinates in terms of latitude and longitude must be established.

Latitude

Lines of latitude measure north-south position between the poles. The equator is defined as 0 degrees, the North Pole is 90 degrees north, and the South Pole is 90 degrees south. Lines of latitude are all parallel to each other, thus they are often referred to as parallels.

One degree of latitude is 60 nautical miles, 69 statute miles or 111 km.

One minute of latitude is 1 nautical mile, 1.15 statute miles, or 1.85 km.

Latitude

Longitude

Lines of longitude, or meridians, run between the North and South Poles. They measure east-west position. The prime meridian is assigned the value of 0 degrees, and runs through Greenwich, England. Meridians to the west of the prime meridian are measured in degrees west and likewise those to the east of the prime meridian are measured by their number of degrees east.*

Longitude

*https://www.maptools.com/tutorials/lat_lon/definitions

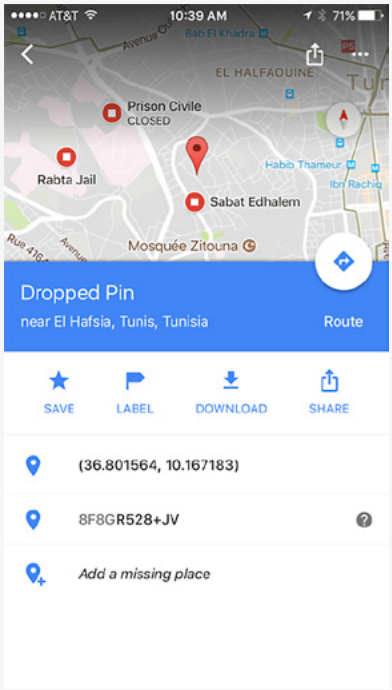
You can locate coordinates using the following tools:

Google Maps

Google Maps offers a simple method of finding coordinates on your computer. Follow these instructions:

1. Open Google Maps. It may be easier to see a specific place by using the satellite view. If using Google Maps in Lite Mode, you'll see a lightning bolt at the bottom and will not be able to access the coordinates of a place. Right-click the place or area on the map.
2. Select "what's here?"
3. At the bottom, the coordinates will be displayed.
4. If using a smartphone, press the location to drop a pin and scroll up to see the coordinates.

To the right, the coordinates are in parentheses, with latitude first.



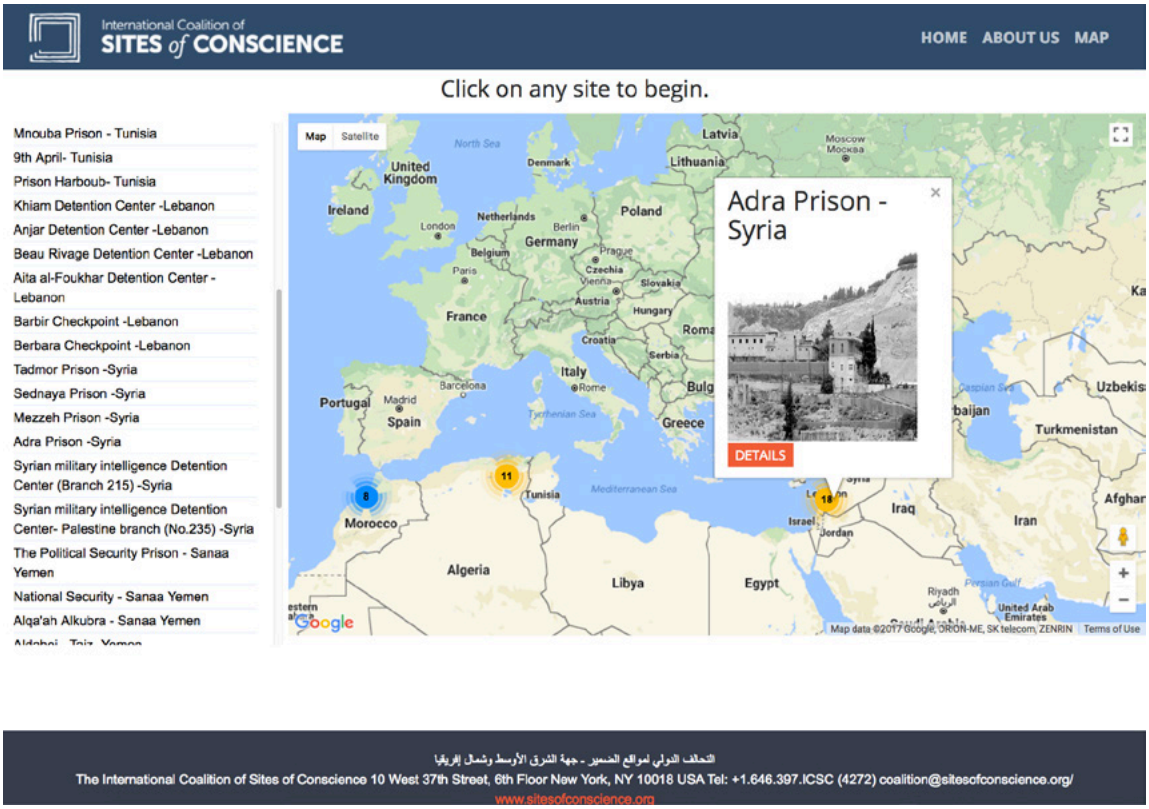
Note: To determine coordinates while in the field, follow these instructions:

1. Tap on "current location" or drop a pin to a location of your choosing by tapping.
2. Tap on the arrow within the blue circle.
3. Tap on "share location," choose email.
4. Email it to yourself. On the email, there should be a link and a vcard. Both of these include coordinate information.

WhatsApp

It is also possible to map coordinates in the field using WhatsApp. Below are directions for iPhones; directions for other phones can be found on the internet.

1. Launch WhatsApp on your iPhone.
2. Select and tap on a contact/group with whom you want to share the location.
3. Tap on an up arrow on the left side of text box. A menu will swipe up with four options: (1) Take Photo or Video, (2) Photo/Video Library, (3) Share Location and (4) Share Contact.
4. Tap on Share Location option. A map will appear on your iPhone screen with many options of surrounding locations.
5. Tap on the option that provides the closest location to yours. Your contact will receive a map with an address of that location. Note that if only "Send Your Location" is selected, which is right below the map, your contacts will not receive the written address.



IV. TIPS FOR FORMATTING COORDINATES

Here are some tips for formatting your coordinates so they are compatible with Google Maps:

- Use the degree symbol instead of "d."
- Use periods as decimals, not commas. Incorrect: 41,40338, 2,17403.
  Correct: 41.40338, 2.17403.
- List your latitude coordinates before longitude coordinates. Coordinates are always in alphabetical order so that latitude is first.
- Check that the first number in your latitude coordinate is between -90 and 90.
- Check that the first number in your longitude coordinate is between -180 and 180.

V. STORING YOUR INFORMATION

Keeping track of data collected is vital. For the MENA project, a simple Excel spreadsheet was used with the following columns. Participating members in each country completed these spreadsheets for eventual upload into the digital map.

Name of Country:
Name of Data Collector:

Name of Site	Coordinate X (Latitude)	Coordinate Y (Longitude)	Date of Activity of the Site	Date of Site Creation and Date of Site Closing	200 Word Description of the Site	Can the Information Be Shared Publicly?	Photos of Site to Be Added in a Word File	Source of Information/ Source
1.								
2.								
3.								

VI. BUILDING THE WEBSITE

Building the website is outside of the scope of this toolkit, but Google Maps can be easily embedded into a variety of accessible website formats including Wordpress, Squarespace and others. Key factors in deciding what to use are ease of use and ability to update and expand.

CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER

Language

MENA members and Coalition staff worked in three languages (English, French and Arabic) and produced the map in two, Arabic and English. This meant, in effect, having a shadow version of the website in the second language. This was important in order to make the map as useful as possible, but it presented editing, web design and user experience challenges.

Key question: What language(s) will make the site most accessible to your potential audience?

Security and Safety

Each member was responsible for certifying that the material collected could be shared publicly. Moving forward MENA project participants will develop a more formalized process as the volume of material grows. Mapping data was stored on the Coalition's server before its final use on the map.

Personal safety was also a concern in the physical documentation of the sites. Some photos were taken surreptitiously, and in other cases, it was not possible to document the sites and so existing photographs were used. Each participant's choice was always respected.

Key questions: How do we ensure the security of data/information? How do we ensure the security of participants?

Choice of Sites

Participating members had autonomy in choosing sites for the pilot map. When there was more than one member in a country, they consulted together on what sites to choose. Factors that were considered were availability of documentation, including photographs and testimonies, and the site's importance and relevance. Next stage plans include developing written criteria and having all submissions reviewed by a steering committee.

Key questions: What sites are critical to include in order to present a complete picture? What kinds of information are available for the site? Is the site at risk of destruction? Will sites such as crossroads or checkpoints be represented? Should there be written criteria for inclusion? Who will make that decision in a joint project?

Research

The mapping of a site of atrocity is just one element in a documentation process, but it can serve as a tool for accountability given its evidentiary value. Research may include work with historic maps, with oral or written testimonies, and in governmental or personal archives.

Key questions: Is the research source reliable? Can it be corroborated through other evidence? How can this material be best understood online? Who will vet the research and how?

CONCLUSION

This toolkit transforms the simple tools of digital technology into powerful tools for advocacy and human rights. In the MENA region, this project built organizational and network capacity, while drawing attention to sites of atrocity in the region as a way of preserving historical and present-day documentation and memories of human rights abuses. By virtue of an accessible online presence, digital projects like these can ensure that past events are not forgotten, and remain accessible to victims, activists, researchers, students, journalists and governments.

Sites of Conscience around the world are already using digital maps to document the past and advocate for justice and human rights. In Europe, Gulag.cz has produced the virtual museum of the Gulag, mapping sites throughout the former Soviet Union. Perm-36 in Russia continues its documentation work towards the creation of online resources, including maps. In Latin America, Memorial para la Concordia maps sites of memory in Guatemala, including memorials, museums, and sites of detention and torture while Memoria Abierta's innovative, detailed maps have been used not only by survivors, but in judicial proceedings. Each mapping project builds upon the ones that have gone before. New technologies such as 3D imaging and virtual reality open up additional possibilities as powerful ways to convey the truth of human rights abuses. As newly-opened or discovered archives are digitized and testimonies are collected, each online map becomes a more powerful testament, giving truth visible and tangible form.

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