

LIVING ARCHIVES

**An Introductory Toolkit for Civil Society Organizations
in the Creation of Human Rights Oral Archives and
Organizing Their Documentation**



GIJTR

Global Initiative for Justice
Truth & Reconciliation

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF SITES OF CONSCIENCE

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition) 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 modern repercussions. Founded in 1999, the Coalition now includes more than 300 Sites of Conscience members in 65 countries. The Coalition supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices. The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation is a flagship program of the Coalition.



International Coalition of
SITES of CONSCIENCE

Learn more at www.sitesofconscience.org.

Cover photo: Wayúu women from the Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu (Strength of Wayúu Women) collect community testimonies in the Guajira region in Northern Colombia. Photo: Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This document was developed as an instrument to support civil society organizations (CSOs) in Colombia in the development of oral archives and in the organization of their archival collections. It draws from the experience of GIJTR partners ICSC and PILPG, and ICSC members Memoria Abierta (Argentina), Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi (Chile) and Centro de Memoria Monseñor Juan Gerardi (Guatemala), combined with lessons learned in supporting Colombian CSOs in preparing documentation for the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad) Truth Commission.

This practical guide highlights basic principles in developing oral archives based on interviews, and in organizing human rights documentation archives. Section 1 focuses on the development of oral archives, and Section 2 offers basic advice on the first steps to help CSOs organize their archives.

The GIJTR published these guidelines in the hope that this experience may become inspiring for CSOs beginning to document human rights abuse across the globe.

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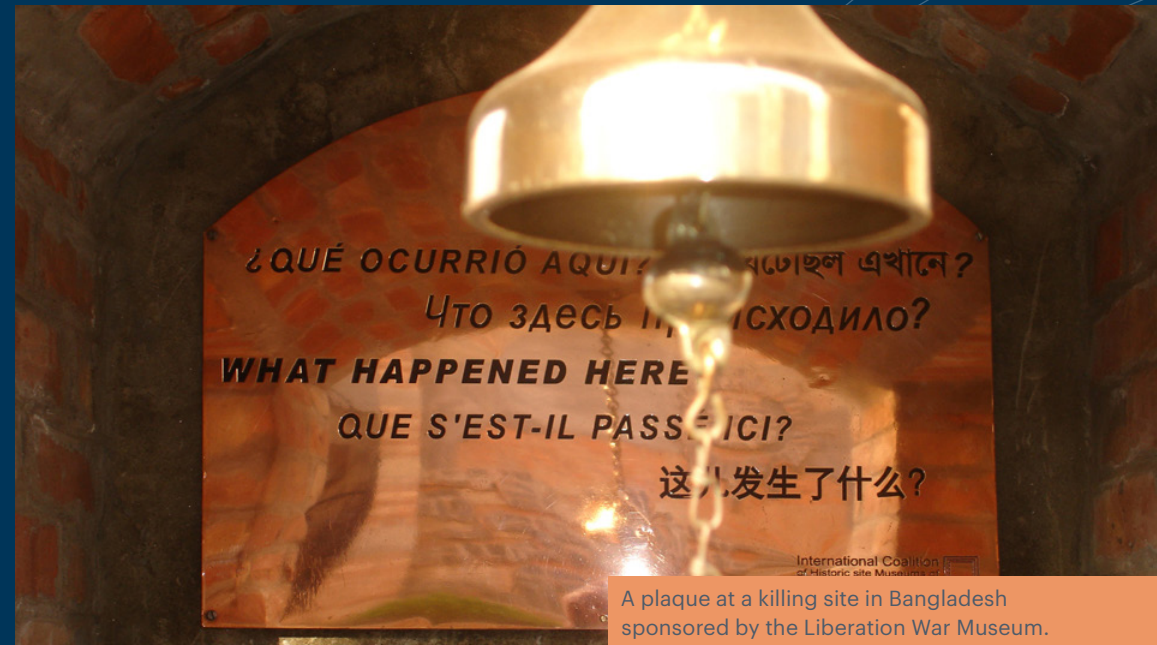
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ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION (GIJTR)

Around the world, there are increasing calls for justice, truth and reconciliation in countries where legacies of gross human rights violations cast a shadow on transitions from repressive regimes to participatory and democratic forms of governance.

To meet this need, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) in August 2014. GIJTR seeks to address new challenges in countries in conflict or transition that are struggling with legacies of or ongoing gross human rights abuses. The Coalition leads the GIJTR, which includes eight other organizational partners: American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), United States; Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), Indonesia;



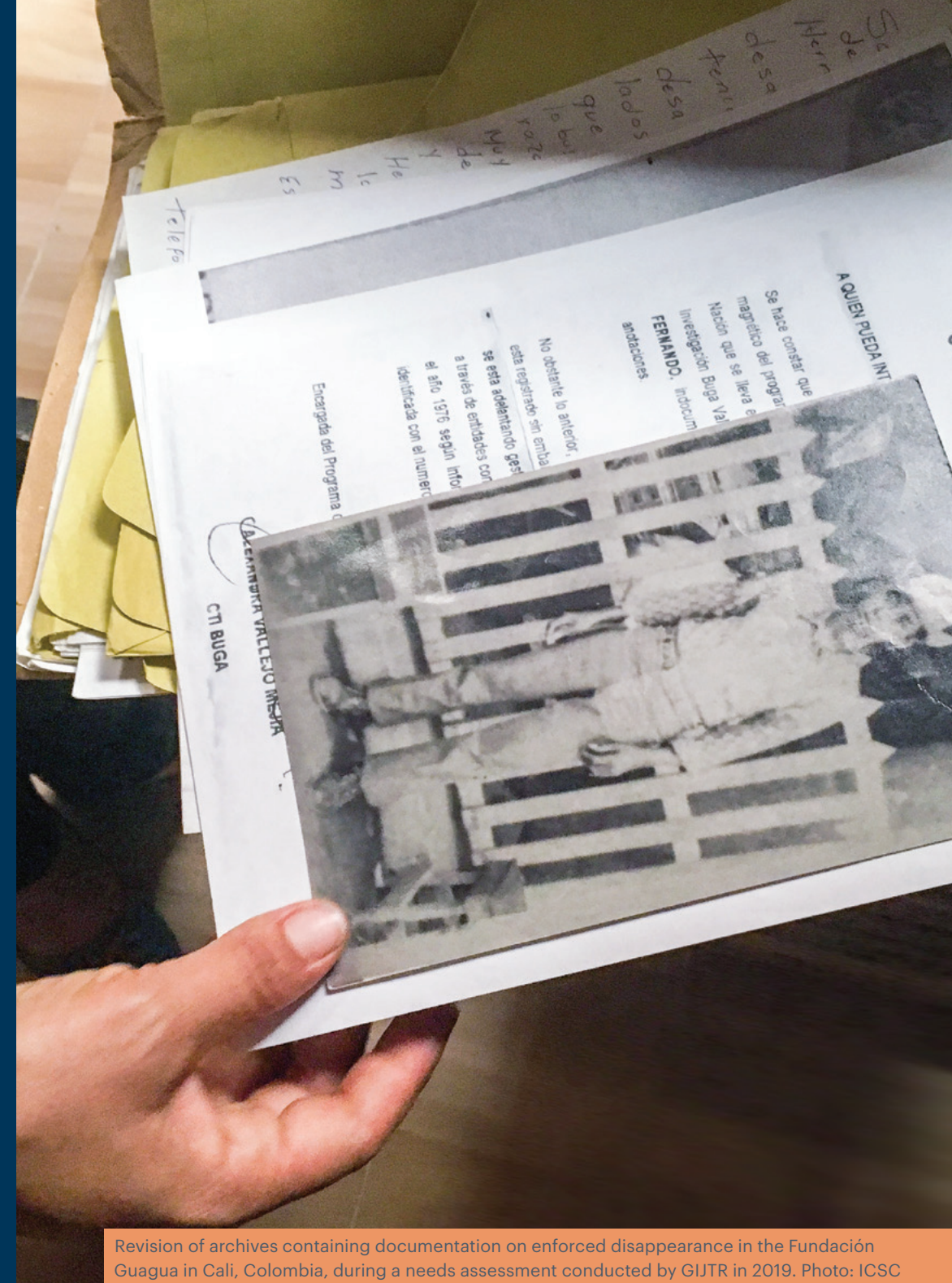
Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV), South Africa; Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), Cambodia; Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), United States; Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG), Guatemala; Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), Serbia; and Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), United States. In addition to leveraging the expertise of GIJTR members, the Coalition taps into the knowledge and longstanding community connections of its 300-plus members in 65 countries to strengthen and broaden the GIJTR's work.

GIJTR partners, along with members of the Coalition, develop and implement a range of rapid-response and high-impact program activities, using both restorative and retributive approaches to justice and accountability for gross

human rights violations. The expertise of the organizations under the GIJTR includes:

- Truth telling, reconciliation, memorialization and other forms of historical memory;
- Documenting human rights abuses for transitional justice purposes;
- Forensic analysis and other efforts related to missing and disappeared persons;
- Victims' advocacy such as improving access to justice, psychosocial support and trauma mitigation activities;
- Providing technical assistance to and building the capacity of civil society activists and organizations to promote and engage in transitional justice processes;
- Reparative justice initiatives; and
- Ensuring gender justice in all these processes.

To date, the GIJTR has led civil society actors in multiple countries in the development and implementation of documentation and truth-telling projects; undertaken assessments of the memorialization, documentation and psychosocial support capacities of local organizations; and provided survivors in Asia, Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region with training, support and opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of community-driven transitional justice approaches. Given the diversity of experience and skills among GIJTR partners and among Coalition network members, the program offers post-conflict countries and countries emerging from repressive regimes a unique opportunity to address transitional justice needs in a timely manner, while promoting local participation and building the capacity of community partners.



Revision of archives containing documentation on enforced disappearance in the Fundación Guagua in Cali, Colombia, during a needs assessment conducted by GIJTR in 2019. Photo: ICSC

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the framework of the Support for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation project in Colombia, the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR), led by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), has developed various programs to strengthen the human rights archives of civil society organizations (CSOs). These programs focus on supporting the truth-seeking processes of Colombian transitional justice mechanisms, while also assisting strategies for the long-term sustainability of these archives, such as contribution to the peace-building process.

At the start of 2019, the ICSC, with the support of Memoria Abierta, one of its Latin American members, a needs' assessment process of civil society archives was carried out across various regions of Colombia. The purpose of this assessment was to support Colombia's Truth Commission by identifying civil society archives in order to contribute to its investigations.

The findings of this needs' assessment allowed the development of programs aimed at strengthening the archives of civil society organizations with technical support from local specialists and across Latin America. Thus, the development of these programs helped identify challenges and the needs for technical guidance shared by several of the participating organizations.

The main challenges included technical aspects in the organization, development and structuring of documentation to facilitate its use in clarifying the truth, memorialization and human rights' advocacy. Experience gathered by the ICSC also helped establish that these challenges and needs for technical guidance often coincide with the needs identified in other regions of the world, where the GIJTR conducts similar programs.

This document is an introductory toolkit developed by the ICSC to help guide CSOs seeking to organize archival documentation processes. It is not a comprehensive manual covering all the technical, conceptual and regulatory aspects required for creating and managing archives. Its main purpose is to offer a series of "first steps", useful advice, good practices and recommendations that allow CSOs to prepare an action plan to initiate or develop human rights archives.

This toolkit is divided into two sections; the first looking at the particularities of oral archives and the second on the techniques used for organizing archives in a more general sense.

The first section, *Introduction to the creation of oral human rights archives based on testimonies*, is a guide for the production, compilation and custody of archival documentation compiled in testimonies from victims and witnesses of human rights violations. This toolkit is based on a variety of sources:

- The methodological experiences shared during a training workshop held in October 2020 with 24 organizations in Colombia led by specialists from Memoria Abierta (Argentina), the Monseñor Juan Gerardi Memory Center of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala and the Parque por la Paz (Park for Peace) Villa Grimaldi in Chile.
- The manuals produced by the three facilitating organizations of the workshop, which are referenced throughout this text.
- Reflections that emerged in dialogue with the 24 organizations during the workshop.
- Methodological experiences collected by the Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG) and other GIJTR partner organizations.

- Complementary materials gathered by the ICSC work team to respond to concerns raised by organizations during the workshop.

The second section, *Introduction to the organization and preservation of human rights archives*, is an introductory toolkit to the organization, classification and cataloging of archives for organizations. This material was prepared based on various successful experiences following a program developed in 2020 by the ICSC, with the support of Memoria Abierta and local specialists in Colombia. In this initiative, seven civil society organizations were supported in the preparation of archival documentation packages for the transfer of information to investigation teams of the Colombian Truth Commission.



Testimonial collection by the Association of Community Councils of Lower Atrato (ASCOBA) in the Pacific region in Colombia. Photo: ASCOBA

SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE CREATION OF ORAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES BASED ON TESTIMONIES

1.1 What are Oral Human Rights Archives?

Oral archives refer to the gathering of testimonies expressed through spoken language, by certain people (individuals or groups), and recorded using various means (audio-visual, audio or written). Within organizations focused on truth-seeking in areas of human rights, oral archives tend to play a leading role compared to other types of archives. These often contain first-hand information from people who lived through or are related to crucial events that need to be reconstructed in order to achieve the recovery of the truth. In addition to the verbal content of these testimonies, oral archives may also be rich in non-verbal information, such as image or audio data regarding the context to which the participant belongs (their home, the region they inhabit, etc.); gestural and perceptual information of the interviewee; emotional and expressive data that add meaning to a testimony; and, in general, any data on the identity, customs and reality of interviewees that are of invaluable historical value.

An oral archive's potential use will largely be determined by how information is gathered, classified and accessed.

An archive aimed at providing information for litigation will give priority to cases and evidentiary elements, in addition to taking care of the chain of custody, trying to establish facts, places, dates, participants, patterns of criminality,

etc. while an oral archive created for memory purposes will be more focused on gathering the emotional context of victims: their biographical data, relationships with the community and perspective within the historical context of the events.

In many other cases, especially when the facts of violence are recent or when an armed conflict is still on-going, CSOs often want to document human rights violations with more than one purpose in mind.



Interview in the oral history and memory program in the community of San Basilio de Palenque in the Caribbean region of Colombia. Photo: Kucha Suto

1.2 Documentation Uses for Oral Archives

The construction of human rights archives enables the collection of valuable documentation resulting from clarification, truth recovery, and peace-building processes in societies affected by armed conflicts or following the end of a repressive period.

CSOs related to the defense and protection of human rights give various uses to oral archives. These types of use can be classified into three broad categories: *truth-seeking*, *memorialization* (either as the returning of testimonies to participants or for use by society), and *advocacy*. According to their mission, some CSOs focus their archive management on only one of these uses, while others give their archives mixed uses, including two or even all three of the above categories.

1.2.1 USE OF TESTIMONIES FOR TRUTH-SEEKING PROCESSES

Various CSOs carry out archival documentation processes with a view to clarifying the truth long before even official processes of peace or transitional justice dialogues begin. In fact, a large part of the work conducted by official institutions in charge of these transitional processes rests on the legacy built by CSOs over decades.

Archival documentation for the clarification of the truth seeks to reconstruct events that represent crimes against human rights. That is, it seeks to determine who were responsible (material and intellectual authors) for the acts committed, the circumstances in which they were committed, the victims affected, and the possible causes of these events.

Archival documentation for truth-seeking can serve several purposes:

- Offer archival documentary material to victims of human rights abuse that serve as a basis for them to claim their right to truth, justice and reparation, indicating the responsibility of certain actors, individuals, groups or institutions in the execution of these crimes against human rights.
- Publish reports or articles in which part of the truth contained in the archives is disclosed to raise awareness within society regarding the circumstances, specific events and those responsible (material and intellectual authors) for crimes that violate human rights.
- By providing archival documentation to accountability institutions created for the purpose of clarifying the truth, whether this be judicial (courts, the International Criminal Court, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, etc.) or extrajudicial (truth commissions, commissions of inquiry, investigative mechanisms of the United Nations Human Rights Council, such as the IIMM for Myanmar or the IIMM for Syria, etc.) bodies, as long as these institutions approve their admissibility.
- With the formation of non-official (symbolic) transitional justice processes such as citizen truth commissions made up of networks of various CSOs. Here, it is worth highlighting the experience of the CSO Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres (Pacific Route of Women), which developed the Women's Truth Commission in Colombia, or the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) project, which produced the Guatemala Never Again Report.



Testimonial collection by the Association of Community Councils of Lower Atrato (ASCOBA) in the Pacific region in Colombia. Photo: ASCOBA

- By accompanying victims in judicial processes.
- Providing contextual reports for judicial processes.
- In general, through the availability of archives for consultation (at different levels of access) in truth-seeking processes.

1.2.2 RETURNING TESTIMONIES FOR MEMORY EXERCISES IN COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO PRODUCED ORAL ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

This return process consists of delivering copies of the testimonies to those who provided their testimony, in order to contribute to personal and community processes of healing, dignity, recognition, reconstruction of the social fabric and reconciliation. However, this step must take into consideration possible risks to the personal safety of interviewees in possession of such material. The final decision on how to approach this may either already be foreseen within the archival documents called “informed consents”, or it may be part of a final agreement between the organizations and the interviewees. However, in any case, a risk assessment is required with measures taken to mitigate such threats.

In the case of group testimonies, organizations that produce these archives can carry out various activities as part of a return mechanism. For example, public awareness activities, collective reflection sessions, or the production of truth narrative initiatives, in which general aspects of the files are shared with the community in a participatory way. Furthermore, these files can serve as a basis for the construction of memory sites that allow the consolidation of permanent mechanisms of symbolic reparation for victims and in the reconstruction of the social fabric, while being preserved as a legacy for new generations.

Decisions regarding this return processes in memory archives must follow consensus between the organizations responsible for the creation of the archives and the communities that offered their testimonies.

1.2.3 MEMORY BUILDING INITIATIVES BY CIVIL SOCIETY

Testimonies that are part of an oral human rights archive can serve as a basis for the creation of memory initiatives to help people deal with a traumatic past through initiatives led by educational institutions, artists, human rights groups, victims’ groups, journalists, academic researchers, and the general public. This memorialization serves various purposes, such as symbolic reparation, dignifying the victims and strengthening a culture of peace for non-repetition. In addition, the creation of community memory archives (in museums or houses of memory in affected territories) can serve to promote processes of reconstruction of the social fabric, and as a legacy for new generations.

However, when using testimonies in memorial initiatives, precautions must be taken so that this does not threaten the safety of the interviewees. This generally requires guaranteeing the anonymity of testimonies whenever this is required, which must be clearly defined in the conditions of use of the archives.



Community gathering to discuss the documentation program in the Colombian Pacific region, in the village of Tanguí. Photo: Community Council of Tanguí

The uses of oral archives for the reconstruction of memory are especially aimed at raising the awareness of citizens, public opinion and the general population of events classified as systematic violations of human rights in the history of a society. The social aims of memory initiatives may include:

- Avoid any repetition of violent events at all costs, through awareness processes and by building society's empathy with victims.
- Celebrate and commemorate the life stories of victims and survivors recognized by their own communities and society in general.
- Promote healing processes, through the understanding of the truth, to help re-establish the social fabric and strengthen community ties.
- Contribute to symbolic reparations and the recognition of victims.
- Establish intergenerational communication channels (allowing contact with the daily experience of young generations) so that this recovered truth is discovered by those who did not experience the events and thus enable the establishment of a culture of peace.
- Recognize the value and importance of the past and its connection to the present.

1.2.4 USE OF TESTIMONIES FOR ADVOCACY PURPOSES

In agreement with CSOs contributing documents to an archive, it is possible to create reports that analyze various issues (academic, political, civil society) summarizing systematic cases of human rights violations against specific populations, groups, and social or political movements. These reports, released at public events with the participation of international oversight bodies, can have a strong impact on decisions and actions of political actors and state institutions.

Likewise, the analysis of archival documentation of systematic cases may be the subject of journalistic investigations that, in agreement with the contributing CSOs, can create a climate of public opinion fostering policy changes in public entities regarding the protection of victims, the transformation of contexts of violence, the political control of state officials or the prosecution of the perpetrators.

The uses of oral archives for advocacy can be particularly aimed at *exerting political pressure and influence* on decisions and actions taken by state institutions, national and international organizations, international justice systems and public opinion in general. Its purpose is to promote changes in various systemic dynamics of violence against human rights. Some of the social purposes of the use of testimonies for advocacy may include the following:

- Encourage changes that help eliminate systematic violence against certain populations or territories.
- Promote changes that make it possible to eliminate the root causes that generate impunity through the establishment of responsibilities, both for individual actors and for state agencies and institutions.
- In the same sense, to exert pressure so that clarification and prosecution processes are opened, while at the same time political control processes are initiated against state officials who have promoted impunity, whether by action or omission.
- Promote changes that help eliminate forms of mass communication that stigmatizes to the eyes of the public certain populations and social or political movements that have been, or are in danger of being, victims of human rights violations.

1.2.5 CAUTIONS WITH MIXED USES OF ORAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES

Given the fundamental role that many CSOs play in defending human rights in territories where serious human rights violations persist, the use of testimonies can present challenges.

On the one hand, for example, a testimony can often become part of a judicial process and therefore must be kept completely confidential during the investigation stage. In these cases, its simultaneous uses, whether for academic or memorialization purposes, may invalidate the testimony.

On the other hand, certain archival documents created for *memorialization* purposes and, especially with the aim of advocacy, could be invalidated for use in the *clarification* of judicial processes. This is because, in the first two cases, the contents are usually a mixture of interpretations of the events, which can

be seen by lawyers, prosecutors or judges as having a bias towards one of the parties, hindering its capacity for clarifying an event. It is possible, for example, for perpetrators' lawyers to take advantage of the content of the claims of victims' groups, collectives and social and political movements, to request that certain testimonies be invalidated as evidence, arguing that this content is biased, or simply emphasizes a version of the events.

In other cases, when an interviewee has offered their version on more than one occasion, there may be some inconsistencies between the two testimonies, especially if a long time has elapsed between relating each version. Although this does not represent a great inconvenience in memorialization processes, this can invalidate the entire testimony in a judicial process.

1.3 Taking of Testimonies

The taking of testimonies is the most important process in the formation of oral archives for memorialization and truth-seeking. This is especially true in cases in which CSOs are planning the creation of an oral archive from scratch, since it is what allows them to build a basic collection upon which all other stages can be carried out. The most important questions that CSOs should consider before starting a process of taking testimonies are the following: Why do they feel the need to gather testimonies from people in a certain community or group, or from collectives? How is the taking of testimonies related to the organization's mission, its aims and values? What kind of truth, content, knowledge, realities and stories do you hope to obtain from the gathered testimonies? What future uses could the testimonies have? What type of truth, content, knowledge, realities and stories do they hope to obtain from the gathered testimonies? What future use could these testimonies provide?

These questions don't just shape the future archive's identity and meaning in accordance with the expectations and objectives of each organization, but also greatly facilitate the subsequent stages of organization and cataloging.

1.3.1 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE TAKING OF ORAL TESTIMONIES

Before establishing an initial contact with possible interviewees, it is necessary to consider certain standard ethical principles that allow us to establish bonds of confidentiality, trust, respect and ethical commitment with people who are part of this process, which should always take precedence over the interest of gathering or disclosing information. These principles must be taken into account by the entire team before, during and after the interview.

DO NO HARM

The most important principle in carrying out archival documentation processes on human rights is to ensure that participants are not harmed during the gathering and use of information by exposing them to unnecessary risks, re-victimizing them, or increasing, in some way, their vulnerability.

CONFIDENTIALITY

From the very start, the OSC must commit to preserving personal data and, in certain cases, the identities of those people providing testimonies. In order to do this, processes include several strategies such as procedures during "informed consents" or establishing "anonymization" processes, which will be discussed later.

PROVIDE CLEAR AND CONCISE INFORMATION

From the first contact, it is recommended to provide interviewees with clear information. This includes a presentation of the



Testimonial collection by the Association of Community Councils of Lower Atrato (ASCOBA) in the Pacific region in Colombia. Photo: ASCOBA

objectives the organization wishes to achieve within the documentation process, as well as the subsequent uses of the resulting archival documents.

When conducting the interview, the interviewer must make sure that the interviewee is aware of the importance of their story and any future uses that this will involve. These agreements must be recorded on an informed consent form (see below), which must be explained to the interviewee from the beginning and completed also at the end of the interview.

Furthermore, it is important to be able to manage a participant's expectations, since in many cases people expect immediate results or to see a concrete effect after the interview. Interviewers should insist on the CSO's actual scope and a realistic view of possible expected consequences of the work being accomplished.

PROVIDE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

This principle must apply across the board to all the members involved in the process, both for interviewees and team members, in the understanding that the topics addressed may contain sensitive and painful elements. This support depends on the CSO's scope and budget. If possible, professional and specialized psychological assistance should ideally be provided in all necessary cases. Otherwise, it is recommended that team members themselves obtain a good level of training and thus take on that responsibility. It is essential to respect people's time, while allowing space for silences and any interruptions they may feel necessary. Interviewees should not be made to narrate painful events or certain details that they do not wish to dwell upon.

COMPLIANCE WITH AGREEMENTS AND COMMITMENTS

Since making the first contact, the CSO undertakes to comply with all the agreements reached during the process, such as continuing to accompany participants, maintain contact and keep them informed of the entire process. It should be clarified that these agreements do not have a defined structure; instead they depend on each organization's context, objectives and budget.

Memoria Abierta's Recommendations

The interviewer's commitment with the interviewee must be placed above the objective of obtaining and disseminating information. Instead of focusing solely on what information is obtained, it is also important to consider how this information is collected and what is subsequently done with it.

Likewise, it is essential not to manipulate, distort or obstruct the testimony, but to guarantee that interviewees are free to express their points of view, perspectives and dilemmas. Not all questions are pertinent. It is necessary to prevent a survivor's testimony leading to a situation of re-victimization. The interviewee must understand the meaning behind giving testimony and its subsequent possible uses or circuits of dissemination. Both sides sign a consent form and it is important that the scope of this is made clear. Finally, a testimony must always accompany and never interfere with the task of the justice system.

1.3.2 PREPARATION FOR THE TAKING OF TESTIMONIES

According to the number of people that will be interviewed, there are two main types of interview: individual and group. The first corresponds to the classic model with a single participant in a private session. Most existing oral archival production techniques and strategies correspond to this model.

However, due to the complexity and flexibility of the contexts in which memory and human rights archives arise, it is important not to limit interviews exclusively to this format. Many valuable records within these archives are testimonies taken from oral experiences with groups. These experiences include interview sessions that feature open questions to community members.

Most of the advice in this section is for the taking of individual interviews and are based on the methodologies developed by Memoria Abierta, the Parque por la Paz (Park for Peace) Villa Grimaldi and the Memory Center Monseñor Juan

Gerardi. However, in each stage of the process, indications are also made for group interviews. Each team, in accordance with their knowledge of their socio-cultural context, their resources and capacities, can design individual, group or mixed testimonial strategies.

1.3.2.1 Criteria for Selecting People or Groups to Interview

The selection of people or groups to be interviewed must be in accordance with the purposes and aligned to the oral archive's objective. Therefore, it is recommended that the entire team agree on this process. In this sense, the selection criteria may change over time, according to the objectives that the organization wishes to pursue at any particular stage.

It is important to add that, in complex contexts where armed conflicts are still active, as is the case in Colombia, the taking of testimonies may face serious challenges, such as access to territory or risks posed to the personal security for both the interviewer and interviewee upon entering the territory. The following are some general criteria, sensitive to these realities, which can be considered. These criteria are not exclusive and may vary according to the context and needs of each organization.

Memoria Abierta's Recommendation

It is necessary to clearly establish the objectives in the creation of a new oral archive. This helps guide decisions about the array of people to be interviewed, how the testimonies will be taken and what future uses they may have. These objectives can be diverse: to contribute to the work of documenting human rights violations in order to support justice and truth-seeking; to work for preserving memory; or to create spaces for victims to communicate their experiences and thus pass them on to new generations.

Through Links with the CSO

This is the case for victims who have direct contact with the CSO. These may include those participating in the construction of the archive and, in addition, they may invite other people to contribute who have gone through similar situations. Likewise, CSOs can serve as intermediaries in order to establish contacts with leaders, activists or associations trusted by the communities, who can provide security and confidence when taking a testimony.

Through Family Links

This criterion includes members of both the nuclear family (mother, father, siblings, spouse and children) as well as the extended family (grandparents, uncles, cousins, nephews, etc.) of missing persons or victims of violence.

Witnesses

These could include people who may have had first-hand experience of the violent events or associated circumstances. It is possible to have knowledge and gain access to these people through other testimonies (family members, leaders, etc.), or through direct dialogues with communities. Furthermore, the testimonies of those who have knowledge of particular relevance about a certain event may also be of great value, such as members of institutions, employees of a cemetery, etc.

Links Related to Political or Social Activities

These are people belonging to social, ethnic-territorial, religious and student organizations related to the events. Members of political parties and trade union movements can also be included in this criterion.

From an Identifiable Group of Victims

From time-to-time CSOs will access victims and survivors from a pre-existing registry of victims held by state institutions or by circumstantial groups in refugee, displaced or diaspora exile camps. Although the identification of



Recording of an interview for the oral archive of Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi in Chile. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

interviewees may seem relatively simple, in cases where there are no direct personal references, it is advisable to carry out a preliminary process of how to approach the natural leaders of these groups to facilitate the development of bonds of trust and who may be encouraged to actively participate in the archival documentation process. This is particularly applicable in the case of refugee camps or displaced communities.

Witnesses Linked to Groups of Former Perpetrators

In certain transitional contexts, it is possible to identify members of an armed group or some other group responsible for human rights violations who may be interested in contributing to the clarification of events following a demobilization process. The point of view of these perpetrators or people linked to them can be of vital importance for the recovery of the truth. They can help explain the dynamics of armed groups, their modes of action in certain territories, the reasons behind why they committed the crimes, what interests they pursued with their actions and who benefited from their activities.

However, extreme care must be taken in the selection, prior preparation, how to treat interviews and the subsequent evaluation of their relevance. The decision to collect testimonies from armed groups, security forces or perpetrators must be taken collectively, evaluating the possible negative impacts on individual victims, groups or organizations with the other witnesses and victims, in addition to the effect that this could have on the oral archive.

Furthermore, in practical terms, it is not always easy to find perpetrators who are willing to clarify the truth, while it is also possible that their testimonies contain false, inaccurate and incomplete information. In certain transitional justice processes, some perpetrators involved in a demobilization process may take advantage of approaching a community of survivors to obtain judicial or political benefits. Likewise, it may also be the case that some perpetrators intend to use their testimony to launch speeches of justification or to exalt their “heroism”.

To counteract these dangers, it is first important to consider these testimonies within the context of producing archival documents. Thus, they should not be thought of as isolated pieces, but always contrasted with the testimonies of their victims and other participants. Secondly, conducting a preliminary investigation into a potential participant is very important in recognizing the fair value, in terms of clarifying the truth and memory recovery that this may contribute. Finally,

it is important for the interview to maintain focus on future consequences and the victims, thus avoiding any speeches of justification and exaltation made by perpetrators, which may result in a re-victimization of the survivors.

An Open Invite to Members of the Public

In some cases, testimony-taking processes have been carried out through public events. In several of these, the participation of religious leaders or organizations has been fundamental, such as in the examples of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala, in the Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI, 1995-1998); the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (1973-1975), later replaced by the Vicariate of Solidarity (1976-1992); the Inter-Church Commission in Colombia; or the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, a facilitator of peace since 1991.



Recording of an interview for the oral archive of Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi in Chile. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

In such cases, before taking a testimony, a population must be made aware of the importance of providing a testimony through group chats or messages provided by the media promoting the recovery of historical memory. In the experience of REMHI this was done through the *Doña Remhi* y *Don Olvido* radio programs.

Other Types of Links

People or groups other than those described above may vary according to the context and objectives of the oral archive. The team can define new criteria and strategies according to the varying circumstances and history of their organization.

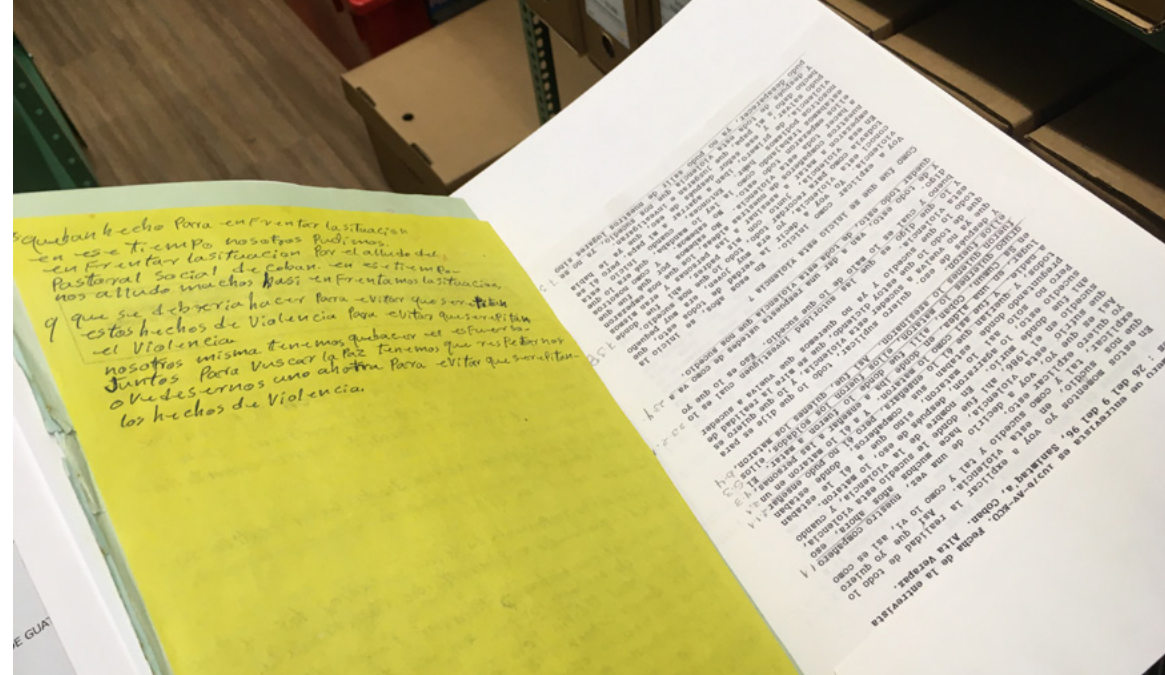
1.3.2.2 Selection and Preparation of Interviewers

It is essential that interviewees feel fully confident with the team designated to take the testimony. The success or failure of the account will depend on this, as well as future collaborations. This is why, depending on the context and the objectives set, it is necessary to define the profile of the interviewers in advance. In some cases, for example, it is advisable to incorporate professionals or experts in qualitative methods (mainly ethnographic) within the team.

Also, in cases where communities speak a different language to that of the interviewers, the support of translators is needed. These professionals must go through training processes in interview techniques and psychosocial support, just like the interviewers.

Local Interviewers:

Many organizations experience difficulties in taking testimonies when access is difficult, either due to geographical factors or to the persistence of an armed conflict. For example, in the Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) in Guatemala, geographic, cultural and linguistic



Transcription of interviews originally conducted in the REMHI collection – Centro de Memoria Monseñor Juan Gerardi, Guatemala. Photo: ODHAG

difficulties were a barrier for interviewers who did not reside in the same place as interviewees. In addition to this, the armed conflict that continued to afflict Guatemala while testimonies were gathered failed to guarantee the safety of the interviewers. Therefore, the organization opted to incorporate interviewers into their team from the same community, whom they called *facilitators of reconciliation*. These *facilitators of reconciliation* not only knew the territory but had also lived similar experiences to those of the interviewees, thus inspiring greater confidence for those telling their stories.

Generational and Gender Diversity

It is recommended that the interviewing team be diverse in terms of age and gender, so that potential interviewees have the option to choose the professional with whom they feel most comfortable. For example, women victims of sexual violence clearly prefer to relate their experience to another woman and not to a man. On the other hand, in cases of events that occurred decades ago, it is recommended to include younger interlocutors so that the interviewees feel motivated to talk to people who, because of their age, did not fully know about their story.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

It is important to encourage interviewers to participate in training processes regarding the historical, socio-political and security context at both national and local levels before they start the process of compiling interviews.

Furthermore, investigators must be trained in psychological strategies for conducting interviews, such as active listening and emotional restraint tools.

However, it is also important to ensure psychosocial support to those who are taking the testimonies, through regular meetings, in order to prevent emotional overload caused by information they have received.

1.3.3 APPROACH STRATEGIES

FIRST CONTACT

Before the interview, it is very important to arrange a prior meeting with the interviewees (whether individual or group). In this meeting, the organization must be introduced to participants with thorough information about the archive, the project's objectives and the scope and uses of the testimonies provided by individuals or groups.

It is recommended to keep the meeting brief, in order to ensure that the information provided is clear, concise and reliable about the process, testimony taking, management, custody and access to the testimony. However, it is still necessary to allow enough time for individuals or groups to express all concerns that may arise.

Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi's Recommendation

The first meeting is a mechanism to generate trust, both in the institution and in the people who will later carry out interviews. Regarding the institution, it is necessary to clarify the handling of the testimonies (conservation, dissemination, access and public information campaign), as well as the means of financing. It is important that potential interviewees are made aware of the sources of the funding that supports the development of the archives, especially when it involves state funds.

Regarding the members of the team, it is necessary to ensure enough time and willingness to answer all possible questions about the biography and trajectory of the cameraperson, the interviewer and any other person who may be present during the interviews.

On some occasions, the potential interviewee will tend to relate all their experiences in this meeting, within the framework of an extensive conversation. This is a positive sign in terms of building trust, but it can be problematic if later, in the official recording of the testimony, the interviewee omits information because they think this information has already been transmitted. To avoid this happening, during this first meeting it is necessary to assure the interviewee that all information they provide will be considered relevant, while reminding them that they will again be asked about these same events during an official recording due to the importance of the archive.

In selecting a location for this meeting, various options may be considered: the interviewee's home, the organization's facilities, the headquarters of the group of interest or whichever place the interviewee considers the safest and most comfortable. However, due to factors such as time, distance, or other types of contingencies (for example, the current Covid-19 health crisis), first contact may be established by telephone, email or other virtual platforms (Zoom, Google Meet, WhatsApp). However, other independent messaging platforms (free and open source), or phone calls that have security and privacy systems periodically

reviewed by peers from the scientific and technological community, such as Signal, are preferred for confidentiality purposes.

If contacting ethnic organizations is contemplated, prior consultation will be required with leaders of these collectivities, who have the power to approve any outside participation or activity. However, it should also be borne in mind that, in places where conflicts include various political, ethnic, or tribal groups, belonging to any of them could result in stigmatization. In such cases, contact with leaders of intergroup organizations can be especially helpful. These organizations provide support to populations due to the wide-ranging consequences suffered because they support populations who are all affected in some way by the conflict. Examples of such organizations are the Women Block of South Sudan and the South Sudan Women Coalition.

In some cases, a brief document specifying the objectives and activities that are to be carried out may be required, as well as a list of the group or groups who are expected to be involved in the work.

INVITATION TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE ARCHIVE

This recommendation is primarily aimed at organizations that already have an archive, regardless of whether it is not fully organized. The invitation can be presented verbally or with supporting material (so that people can review it later). In the event that the archive has a website or uses social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), it is important to invite people to visit these pages. Visiting the archive is a fundamental step, firstly because it serves to generate confidence regarding the orientation and possible future uses of the testimony and, secondly, to highlight to readers the value of their testimonies as part of a human rights archive, according to the organization's mission.

Once the first meeting has been completed and an eventual visit to the archive made, a follow-up meeting is not necessarily immediate. On the contrary, it is often the case that the person or group contributing with their testimony needs time to reflect on the information provided by the CSO, as well as on the events or information they wish to include during their participation.



Transcriptions and supporting documents bonded with an acid-free laces and preserved in acid-free boxes in the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi, Guatemala. Photo: ODHAG

1.3.4 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

In addition to general investigations that organizations may have conducted to find out about the communities they plan to work with, and the purposes of the interviews to be carried out, it is also important to carry out specific focused investigations prior to the interview. In these, it will be necessary to inquire about the identity, life history, role and work within the community of the person to be interviewed. For example, if the interviewee is or was part of a trade union movement, it is essential to previously know about the history and role of the union that they are a member of; what have been the main effects suffered by the community in terms of human rights; what have been the roles, tasks and legacy of the interviewee within the movement; and more information about the participant's life context (place of origin, family environment, victimization processes, etc.). It is important to have specific information at hand regarding places, dates, institutions, people or situations that will help in the preparation of the questionnaires and contribute to the fluidity of dialogue with the participant during the interview.

Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi's Recommendation

Within this preliminary research process, it is important to take into account so-called “social frames of memory” (aspects of the social context relative to the moment in which the interview is carried out). Although the archive establishes its objectives and methodologies before recording the testimonies (defining the question guidelines), it is possible that, during the interviews, certain social, political, judicial or cultural events may affect the interviewee emotionally. Some examples of such situations are judicial verdicts, the proximity of emblematic dates, the publication of accounts of repressors, etc. These actions may affect both the spirit of the witnesses, and the direction of the conversation that develops. Therefore, it is important to consider the possible impact of these situations when planning the interview date. A flexible interview pattern, organized around themes and moments, is recommended.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

For the REMHI project, it was very important to conduct contextualization processes of the narrated events, based on case studies, monographs and other academic and journalistic material. This allowed a greater understanding of individual cases, but also enabled the possibility of complementing analytic work developed during the creation of the archive (for example, strengthening reports provided to the truth commission).

This contextualization work can be very useful in the stages of organizing the archive, in which the archival documents must be grouped by series. For more information on document grouping and classification processes, see section 2 of this toolkit, *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.

1.3.5 PREPARATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Interview questionnaires are designed based upon information gathered in the first contact and during the investigation. These questionnaires are, in effect, roadmaps designed in accordance with the organization's expectations regarding the specific taking of the testimony. However, just like in a day-to-day conversation, it is very likely that, in the course of the interventions, the testimony will take different paths than those foreseen. In addition, when an interviewee recounts a memory, it is often the case that a whole series of derived memories are spontaneously activated in their mind. A high degree of flexibility with these “twists” in the interview is therefore recommended. In these, very valuable information may arise that was not envisioned in the initial purposes of taking the testimony. This new information can even generate new questions that modify the initial questionnaire plan.

In general terms, it is always advisable to prepare short, open questions in an understandable language. Where possible, questions that promote an affirmation or denial should be avoided. Here are some interview types that are typical of human rights oral archives:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The main characteristic of this type of interview is that while maintaining a basic structure (objectives and topics to be addressed) they should also remain flexible and allow reorienting the meeting to issues not previously considered by the interviewer and that may be relevant to the collected story.



Interview recorded on video by the Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, Chile. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

IN-DEPTH BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEWS

These types of conversations give priority to free narration and feature few interventions by the interviewers. To give centrality to the narration, the interviewee is encouraged to narrate relevant events of their life through questions such as: What was the experience you went through like? What were you doing at the time? What kinds of decisions and learnings came out of that experience?

TRUTH-CLARIFICATION INTERVIEWS

The objective of these types of interviews is a faithful reconstruction of the events involved in a human rights violation, in order to determine those

responsible (material and intellectual authors), the individual and collective victims, as well as the systemic causes that produced them.

Therefore, this type of questions is less open than in the previous cases, although open enough to avoid conditioning the answer. It is about determining, as accurately as possible, the facts and their circumstances. Typically, these questions seek to establish *who did what, to whom, when, where, for what reason and what actions were carried out afterwards*.



Shelves containing CDs with digitized recordings of interviews originally collected on cassette tapes at the Centro de Memoria Monseñor Juan Gerardi. Photo: ODHAG

In many cases, however, the same testimony can serve several purposes (memory, advocacy or clarification).

Testimonies resulting from this type of interview can serve as future material to accompany legal cases in court, or as an archival documentary basis in transitional justice processes (either judicial such as special courts or non-judicial such as truth commissions). In these cases, it is necessary to preserve as strictly as possible the chain of custody of the information records (a document that registers who has held the information, from what moment and until when, and to whom it was delivered) from the moment the testimony is produced until the moment it is delivered to an instance of justice.

There are relevant experiences of these types of interviews, such as those that were generated for the Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI), in Guatemala; the interviews of the Women's Truth Commission (an unofficial commission, formed prior to peace talks in Colombia) of the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres – Pacific Route of Women CSO; or the interviews for the Red Nacional de Bancos de Datos de Derechos Humanos y Violencia Política – National Databanks Network on Human Rights and Political Violence of the Center for Popular Research and Education (CINEP), also in Colombia.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

These interviews are aimed at collectivities, community groups, movements, organizations and groups of witnesses or communities who experienced the events. Participants are asked about events experienced as individuals who are part of the same community. Their stories may be interconnected and refer to similar experiences (although not necessarily). For the construction of oral memory and clarification archives, the practice of group interviews can be very valuable for some of the following reasons:

- There are testimonies that have collective subjects as their protagonists. For example, in several cases of forced displacement, it has been the communities under the protection of their leaders that have planned the safe escape of the population, protection in shelters, the assignation of temporary jobs, and return strategies. Some communities have called these narratives “exoduses”, a figure that always refers to group stories.

- Through collective organizational strategies that hold legal or symbolic recognition, several communities have been declared “subjects of collective reparation” or “communities of peace”. These strategies allow them to jointly confront the dynamics of terror through which armed actors have tried to divide and control populations. The account of these strategies and their achievements represent valuable records for the oral memory of a community.
- These collective interviews can serve as an anonymity strategy during the taking of a testimony. By being “the voice of a community”, without identifying any individual participant, populations can reduce the risks for those who give their testimony to become military targets for armed actors.

1.3.6 PREPARATION OF THE INFORMED CONSENT

This archival document is a legal permit signed by the organization and the interviewee, whether individual or collective, in which the latter manifests their agreement to the subsequent uses that the organization makes of their testimony and other contributed material.

A usual procedure is to perform a double reading and signing of the consent, before and after taking the testimony. This procedure allows the participant, having gone through the experience of the interview, to request changes in the initial document of consent, adding, modifying or removing new clauses or conditions. These must be clear, specific and in accordance with what has been stated by the parties.

Furthermore, after the interview the participant may desist, for certain reasons, from giving testimony to the organization and consequently, not signing the final consent. Therefore, it should always be clear to the organization that the interviewee has every right to withdraw their participation at any time (before, during or after the interview), without this representing any detriment to them.

The consent is signed by both parties: the interviewer and interviewee. The former agrees to reserve and make good use of the information provided by the latter. It is recommended that the archival document does not exceed more than one page in length and that it is expressed in clear language for all signatories.

Informed consent is accompanied by an “Interview cover sheet” and a “Interviewee information sheet”, which is generally kept confidential. In the general interview cover sheet, general information of the interview is recorded: date, place, duration, number of sessions and details of who took the testimony. There is also an indication of the means by which the testimony was recorded and preserved. Each CSO will indicate the type of recording to be carried out (audiovisual, audio, written). These alternatives will be described in more detail later.

The “Interviewee information sheet” is a confidential section where basic interviewee data is registered. In cases where risks to interviewees persist, this personal information section will be kept in a separate place and will include additional security measures. This identification sheet should also specify if the interviewee has provided a testimony in the past. This is essential in order to make comparisons with other testimonies made by the same participant. Future analysis of the testimony may find possible contradictions with versions taken at other times or circumstances, which may invalidate the use of the testimony in formal justice and accountability processes.

The design of the informed consent must clearly indicate the uses and destinations of the material provided by the interviewee, as well as the CSO responsible for its custody. Among possible future uses, it is necessary to mention two of particular importance:

Firstly, CSO human rights archives may play a key role for future truth commissions, in countries where there have been armed conflicts or authoritarian regimes. It is important that participants understand that their testimony may be part of other truth processes in the future, for which it is advisable to expressly provide their consent.

Secondly, the participant must be advised of the possibility that their testimony could be used in future ordinary or transitional justice processes. This also implies that their counterpart, that is, the perpetrator’s defense, may also read the content of these testimonies as part of their case preparation. In these circumstances, the interviewee may decide not to authorize future use of this information. However, they may grant partial authorizations in which such information is kept anonymous. In this last option, it is also necessary to warn the interviewee that, in such a case, the legal usefulness of their testimony may be significantly reduced, serving only as contextual information.

Before signing the informed consent, it is necessary for the interviewee to review every detail, get any doubts or concerns resolved by the interviewer and only then proceed to the signing of the agreement by both of the interested parties.

However, it should be noted that designs and formats are not standard, so it is the duty of organizations to develop their own template according to their objectives, resources (technical and human) and the methodology to be used in taking the testimonies.

In the event that the taking of the testimony is carried out by remote means, such as through videoconferencing, testimony by electronic messaging, etc., informed consent must be given orally, both at the beginning and at the end of the interview.



Documents stored in acid-free boxes in the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi, Guatemala. Photo: ODHAG

INFORMED CONSENT MODEL

INFORMED CONSENT

To be signed or with fingerprint (confidential record)

I (name of interviewee or code No. _____), identified with identity document (*type and document number or code No.* _____), declare that I have met with (*name of interviewer* _____), who has explained the archival documentation project (*name of organization* _____) and the reasons why they have met with me. He/she has explained the potential benefits and risks of participating in an interview for this project. I declare that I understand the implications of the interview process and I have the choice not to participate. I also understand that my participation in an interview does not guarantee any benefit to my family or myself, nor does it guarantee that I will be able to testify in court or sue anyone. I clearly understand that the purpose of my story is to contribute to transitional justice processes, including promoting awareness in the community, memory initiatives, purposes of defending human rights and community reconciliation initiatives, as well as possible investigations, initiatives to clarify the truth and other similar endeavors. I declare that these processes have been explained to me and I understand the ways in which my story may be used. I also understand that the archival documentation project of the organization interviewing me will not use my name or other information that reveals my identification or that of others that I mention in the interview unless I expressly authorize this below.

As described here, I declare that I voluntarily participate in this interview to give my testimony and I give my consent to *(name of organization_____)* to record, safeguard and use my testimony under the following terms:

I agree that my testimony be recorded in a formal manner: *(select)*

☐ Written ☐ Audio ☐ Audiovisual

I agree that my testimony will be used for the following: *(select)*

- ☐ Create products for cultural or educational purposes
- ☐ Be cited in the organization's publications and writings
- ☐ Share information in a database for public use
- ☐ Share information solely in a research database
- ☐ Share information with transitional justice institutions
- ☐ Contribute to efforts to raise awareness in the community
- ☐ Support memory and reconciliation initiatives
- ☐ Support initiatives in the defense of human rights

I agree for my name to be cited:

- ☐ Only in investigations
- ☐ Only in reports for transitional justice institutions
- ☐ In publications
- ☐ In no instances

Name *(or code)* _____

Place and date _____

Signature _____

Name of interviewer: _____

Signature _____

1.3.7 INTERVIEW DESCRIPTION SHEETS

A. INTERVIEW COVER SHEET – NON-CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Code No.	
Name of interviewer	
Organization of the interviewer – if applicable	
Interviewer's gender	
Interview date	dd/mm/yyyy
Location of the interview – only to be used if this information does not put the person being interviewed at risk	
Name of the interpreter or translator – if applicable	
Other people present at the interview – if applicable	
Language of the interview	
Interview duration	
Interview format	Audio (Mp3, wav, etc), Video (Mp4, etc), Written (manuscript notes, digital notes).
Interview summary	
Key words	

B. INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION SHEET: CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Details of the Person Interviewed – SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATELY

Code No	
First name	
Other names	
First surname	
Other surnames	
Gender	

Date of birth	<i>dd/mm/yyyy</i>
Place of birth	<i>Country – State/province</i>
Nationality	
Current address	
Permanent address	
Occupation	
Family information (marital status, children, etc.)	
Preferred method of communication to contact person	
Languages spoken and understood	
Previous interviews	Yes ____ No ____ If answered Yes: Who interviewed you? When? Where? Purpose of the interview?
Relationship with events being narrated	<i>Victim / Witness / Perpetrator / Family member of victim / Other</i>

1.3.8 SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR GROUP INTERVIEWS

Group interviews are conducted by a moderator and can generally be assisted by a person in charge of technical matters. Just like in individual interviews, it is important to carry out a preliminary investigation, especially if the interviewing team does not belong to the community. The moderator must understand the particular context of the interviewees (socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural aspects, the way they have been affected and their demands, claims, etc.).

Likewise, prior meetings with community leaders are necessary, both to agree on the objectives, the meaning and contents of the interview, as well as for all logistical and technical aspects.

Like any other event involving several people, group interviews feature some peculiarities that are not part of individual interviews. Designing the most appropriate strategy will depend on the economic, human and technological resources available to each organization.

Firstly, the location of the interview must be considered and whether it will be conducted at the organization's headquarters, if a location space has to be rented or if the team has to travel to another region (urban or rural). Likewise, it is necessary to consider the duration of the interview (half a day, a day or more), the time it will be held (morning or evening), as well as the technical equipment that will be used (cameras, microphones, recording in a cell-phone, recording information on paper).

If the interview is conducted in a rural area and participants must travel from their places of origin, the organizations must allocate a meal (breakfast, lunch and dinner), or a snack, if a short interview is planned. When the taking of a testimony takes more than a day, the CSO will also have to provide an accommodation strategy, especially if the participants reside in places far from the meeting place. If the meeting is at the CSO premises, a space for coffee or a snack is also recommended. Social interactions around food make it easier to break the ice and strengthen bonds of trust between the interviewer and the interviewees.

If the organization does not have sufficient resources, it may seek financial or material support from local leaders, organizations and NGOs, or within the community.

1.4 Formats of Testimony Recording

The most common types of oral archive records are audiovisual, audio and written (we will discuss each of these in detail below). The decision on which of these modalities to use is directly related to the context of the production of human rights archives in which actions are being carried out by the organization.

The first important decision in this regard relates to the appropriate security conditions for taking the testimony. The audiovisual record, for example, is much more complete in terms of the breadth of information it provides (perceptual, emotional, spatial, contextual, body language), and may require greater logistics and infrastructure, thus more attractive to external observers, which may increase risks for the interviewee. Therefore, participants quite often prefer more discreet and anonymous modalities such as audio and written records.

Although gathering testimonies through video is extensively used by the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Colombia, by Memoria Abierta in Argentina and by Villa Grimaldi in Chile, it is important to clarify that this modality is not necessarily the most recommended as a “technical solution”, since there are cases where this may pose a security risk.

Another decision to be taken is related to certain reactions (conscious or unconscious) of the interviewee while being recorded using certain devices such as video cameras.

In some cases, there is the possibility that by using cameras the spontaneity and depth of the testimonies are inhibited. Some participants may also have a tendency to provide too general or stereotyped testimonies about their victimhood, focused on projecting a positive and “correct” image. This type of testimony is



Testimonial collection by the Association of Community Councils of Lower Atrato (ASCOBA) in the Pacific region in Colombia. Photo: ASCOBA

usually more linked to the evaluative interpretation of the facts than to their detailed description. In other cases, cameras or microphones may feel like an invasive device that intimidates the participant. This can be common in rural and ethnic communities that may feel more comfortable in more “informal” and up-close conversations without the presence of a camera.



Testimonial collection by the Association of Community Councils of Lower Atrato (ASCOBA) in the Pacific region in Colombia. Photo: ASCOBA

On the other hand, it is important to consider the human, economic and technological resources available to the organization. Not all CSOs have funding or audiovisual equipment to take recordings while fulfilling standard technical requirements. However, for each modality there are alternatives that will effectively meet the organization’s objectives in terms of consolidating its collection. For example, it is possible to record audiovisual archives using cell phones, produce sound files using a journalist’s Dictaphone, or even carry out transcriptions on paper (written record).

Finally, in certain contexts, the access conditions to territories inhabited by potential interviewees are a fundamental variable. In some territories, either for geographical reasons or because a conflict is still ongoing where these populations are located, face-to-face access is almost impossible. In these extreme cases, it is possible to think of strategies for taking a testimony “remotely”, for which it is necessary to weigh up which tools and computer applications represent the least risks in terms of security, both for the interviewers and for the interviewee. Below are some techniques for gathering testimonies that range from the most complex to the most straightforward but are equally as effective.

1.4.1 AUDIOVISUAL RECORDING

TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL TEAM

The minimum team size for this type of record is a cameraperson and the interviewer. It is also possible to have an assistant available to review the interview model in order to confirm that no relevant aspect was left out; or to collaborate in technical tasks such as the positioning of microphones or details of the setup in terms of space and lighting.

While the interviewer and the interviewee finalize details prior to the start of the interview, it is recommended that the cameraperson take advantage of this time to setup the equipment that will be used during the recording of the testimony. To this end, several aspects can be reviewed, such as the framing of the camera, the lighting of the place, the sources of electrical energy and the quality of sound, as well as the correct operation of equipment and availability of backup and spare materials that may be needed. At the end of the interview, it is possible to include supporting images such as photographs, archival materials or other relevant elements that could provide context to the story.

CAMERA

The location of the camera is decided at the place of the interview. This depends on the location and lighting. On some occasions, when the interview is recorded at the interviewee's home, the interviewee may want the recording to take place in a meaningful spot. Therefore, technical decisions must be conditioned according to these decisions. As a general rule, for recording testimonies of memory and truth-telling, "austere" styles are preferred (without camera movements, or noticeable alterations in the lighting that, preferably, should be as natural as possible, always favoring clarity and visibility). The camera should be located in front of the interviewee to avoid a side shot of their face, and the interviewer must be positioned in the same axis as the camera.

Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi Recommendation

Although it is recommended to use natural light, if this is not possible, it is preferable that artificial light is kept to a minimum and is not invasive. In the case of illegally detained and / or tortured persons, the presence of a prominent light apparatus may evoke interrogation sessions, in which such equipment was also used.

SOUND

When setting up the microphones, avoid cables appearing in the shot, ensuring they are not visible in the background or displayed on the interviewee's body. Before starting the interview, sound tests are recommended to be carried out to verify that the microphones are working correctly.

For more information on this type of recording, please refer to the methodological guidelines compiled by the organizations Memoria Abierta, from Argentina, and Corporación Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, from Chile (see bibliography).

VIDEO RECORDINGS WITH A CELLPHONE

Not all organizations have a technical and professional team available to record videos, while there may also be difficulties transporting equipment. Therefore, making videos with a cell phone is an economical, discreet and more flexible alternative. It should be kept in mind that the most important idea in taking an oral human rights testimony is the clarity of the testimony's content. Therefore, a simple image without any angle changes and with a clear sound that renders the participant's voice understandable is sufficient.

It is important to record using a high-resolution cell phone, with the capacity to store large videos and enough battery power to avoid problems during recording. For framing, the phone must preferably be placed horizontally, with a reasonable but not too large space above the head. It should also be

set in “airplane mode” to avoid interference from calls or messages that could interrupt the interview. Also, it is advisable to use a simple tripod, or some device that allows a stable framing with characteristics similar to those already mentioned in the taking of testimonies with a professional camera.

It is very important to remember that at the end of the recording, a backup is always made on a laptop, memory stick or removable memory device. Likewise, if electricity and Internet access is available, uploading the files to a virtual storage space (cloud, Google Drive, Dropbox, email, etc.) is also a possibility. However, this last option should be considered provisional for reasons of interviewee and information security. Once the necessary conditions are established, making a copy of the testimony on an external hard drive, while blocking accessibility on the cloud is recommended.

One of the disadvantages of taking testimonies with a cell phone is the possibility that a record may get lost if there are unfavorable technological (there is no energy source to recharge the battery or access the internet) or

geographical (excess humidity that can affect the mobile device’s operation) issues. Therefore, it is important to anticipate these circumstances before deciding to use this option.

VIDEO RECORDINGS BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

In cases when it is impossible to access to the territory where the interviewee is located or other reasons prevent an in-person interview, it is possible to record it through videoconference sessions on any of various digital platforms: Zoom, Google Meet, Jitsi, Skype, Microsoft Team, among others.

To use this resource, it is necessary to consider that the informed consent must be given verbally. The taking of the testimony must be recorded using the platform’s tools and, once the session is over, it must be saved to a secure storage space, preventing it from being accessible on the cloud or on the computer on which it was made. This record can be immediately integrated into a documentary group in digital format on an external hard drive, to which the corresponding backup copies will be made (see Section 2 of this toolkit – *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*).

Some platforms require supplementary payment plans or corporate accounts to carry out recordings of the sessions, so the CSO should carefully assess which platform is most suitable for their needs.

1.4.2 AUDIO RECORDINGS – DICTATION MACHINE OR CELL-PHONE AUDIO RECORDING

A journalist’s dictation machine, or Dictaphone, is a classic tool when it comes to taking testimonies, since it does not take up a large space of memory and can be easily transported. There is a wide range of recorders on the market, from the simplest to the most professional encrypted ones.

One of the advantages of using an audio recording is that it offers greater discretion and is less invasive than audiovisual recording, to the extent that both parties can ignore its presence and have a more fluid and spontaneous conversation. The recorder consumes less battery, its files are lighter, and the machine can be easily hidden in risky situations. Its main disadvantage is that,



Community gathering to discuss the documentation program in the Colombian Pacific village of Tanguí. Photo: Community Council of Tanguí

as it is only an auditory device, the complete potential of non-verbal language is lost, as well as contextual information provided by the image.

Currently, audio-capture systems made by cell-phones can perform the same function as recorders, so their use is also recommended. In any case, if cell-phones are used, they must be placed in airplane mode to prevent an incoming call or message interrupting the recording.

1.4.3 TAKING TESTIMONY BY TRANSCRIPTION

A direct record made on paper is a modality that allows the taking of testimonies even in very adverse conditions, where there may not be access to other means. In other cases, some CSOs have opted for transcripts as the only means of recording to facilitate the use of archival documentation in court proceedings. Likewise, certain CSOs choose to use this resource in order to guarantee greater confidentiality, preventing the interviewee from being recognized by their voice or image. Information about their identity is collected, in these cases, in separate files that are never stored in the same place.

The taking of a written testimony is done by mutual agreement between the two parties. The interviewee recounts their story while the interviewer (or a team transcriber) carries out the transcription. It is the task of the latter to highlight the details, places, dates and names that may be related to data taken from other interviewees or to previous investigations. The transcriber must remain focused at all times and seek to maintain neutrality when writing the archival document.

At the end of the meeting, the interviewer reads the testimony to the interviewee and the interviewee makes any adjustments they consider necessary. Finally, if the interviewee agrees, their approval of what has been described is requested, declaring that the narration is faithful to the testimony provided.

As for the other modalities, the record on paper must be accompanied by the signing of informed consents, before and after taking the testimony.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

The original records must be preserved from the moment of taking of the testimonies, while considering basic factors such as the quality of the pen (when taken by hand) and the paper used. Do not use metal paper clips or tape to group the archival documents, as over time these will turn rusty and damage the material. These archival documents must be stored in suitable folders (four sided cardboard folders).

For more information on preserving paper archival documents, see Section 2 of this toolkit – *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.

1.5 Procedures During the Interview

LOCATION OF THE INTERVIEW

It is most advisable for the interviewee to choose the place of the interview, either for convenience or because of the meaning that that place holds for the interviewee. The place defined by the participants may vary according to the context and scope of the organization. Interviews can be conducted at the interviewee's home, at the facilities of a CSO, at an outdoor location such as a park, or somewhere that offers security and confidence to the interviewee.

Although the participant's choice is fundamental, it may be subject to changes and agreements when it does not meet the minimum standards necessary to guarantee the security conditions or the quality of the record.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

Additionally, the location of the interview, except in cases of group interviews, must ensure privacy and peace of mind and a guarantee there will be no interruptions.

INTRODUCING THE TEAM

Having addressed all logistical issues, it is necessary to arrange a formal presentation of the team (interviewer and additional technical support persons) and remind the agreements that will be put in practice during the interview. It is normal for people to feel unsure or scared to relate their experience before the interview, especially when this involves traumatic events. An informal, short and pleasant conversation can help make the environment feel more comfortable, and put the interviewee at ease with the interlocutor and the accompanying team. Finally, the informed consent must be reviewed and signed.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

During this conversation, the interviewee must be informed of the approximate length of the interview, in order to anticipate, as far as possible, the extension of the testimony so as not to leave it incomplete.

DESIGNING THE QUESTIONS

At the start of the interview, the interviewee should be asked if they have provided similar testimonies in the past, since inconsistencies between two testimonies can invalidate them when used in judicial processes. In the event that a prior testimony exists, but that the person is still considered of particular importance, it is advisable to record the interview as if it were narrated by a third

party, which is particularly complicated if the record is not a written account.

Special care must be taken in the selection and formulation of questions. The interviewer has an ethical commitment that must not go beyond the limits established by the interviewee. That is why “biased questions” must be avoided.

Questions that carry an ideological bias are those that contain a value judgment or qualifying adjectives and induce an answer. It is therefore important that the interviewer refrain from introducing their political and ideological opinions, even if they implicitly coincide with those of the interviewee. Likewise, questions such as the following must be avoided: “Don’t you regret what you did?”, “Didn’t you think that your decision could have had consequences?” Under no circumstances should the interviewee be instigated or accused, so these types of questions must never be included on the questionnaires.

In general terms, questions that lead to overly interpretive answers, such as those in which most of the content is appraisals or evaluations of the events, must be avoided. On the contrary, the use of descriptive questions in which the interviewee talks about a particular experience is recommended, with examples



Wayúu women from the Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu (Strength of Wayúu Women) collect community testimonies in the Guajira region in Northern Colombia. Photo: Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu

such as: “Can you tell me what your life was like before this event?”, “What impressions did you have of this place?”. These types of questions encourage interviewee responses to be elaborated and thus open up new concerns not considered. It is best for stories to encounter the fewest interruptions possible, thus allowing the testimony to flow.

These data may be relevant for the future cross checking of information and the definition of chronological or geographical descriptors in cataloging processes (for more information on cataloging see Section 2 of this toolkit – *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*).

It must be clear from the beginning that testimonies cannot be forced. If the case arises, the interviewee will always have the right to end the interview and demand that the recorded material not be used.

On average, an interview lasts approximately two to four hours, with possible breaks to allow for rest or for logistical issues (changing a tape, fixing the frame for changes in lighting, etc.). During these breaks, the interviewer should be aware of the interviewee’s mood and readiness. The interviewee may be asked

directly if they feel motivated to continue with their narrative, while assessing the time remaining to finish. It is not recommended to extend the meeting for too long a period. Tiredness, silences or monosyllables are indicators that the interview should end. If the testimony was not concluded within that time, one or more additional meetings may be arranged.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi’s Recommendations

In cases where the declarant does not remember exact dates of the events, the interviewer may ask about important events or periods around the period that their human rights were violated. For example during the REMHI project, following this procedure, many people cited the harvest season, their patronal festival etc.

In general terms, declarants must be left to express themselves freely in relation to the events and then complete information that the interviewer considers necessary according to the interview guide.

Memoria Abierta’s Recommendations

In cases where an “Oral Archive” is being created whose objective is fundamentally to contribute to memory processes, the following must be taken into account:

There is no single way to conduct an interview that is consistent with all cases. When asking questions, one should be attentive to the uniqueness of the experience of the person who is giving the testimony, while being careful with the terms chosen as well as the tone that is applied to interventions, accompanying the work of memory of the interviewee, facilitating the interviewee to start speaking, respecting their pauses and silences, organizing the opening and closing of the testimony, and providing the questionnaire based on the joint



Guatemala Never Again database consultation at the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi in the Archbishop’s office of Guatemala. Photo: ODHAG

testimonial task so that it does not interfere with listening.

During the duration of the interview, the interviewer should promote empathy and respect for the person and the stories being heard. Part of interviewer's talent lies in having the ability to understand when they should not intervene in the conversation, or when it is necessary to ask if the interviewee prefers to pause for a moment. Silences and omissions must be respected during the interview, as they are considered part of the testimony.

The person providing the testimony has the freedom to remember events in a disorderly way, prioritizing aspects of personal importance over what may seem more relevant to the public.

The person taking the testimony must adjust their questions not only to what they want or need to know but also to what they previously know about the testimony. It is thus necessary to recognize the interference of biographical and social aspects.

Therefore, results will not always be as expected and "surprises" may arise.

Regardless of the order in which the contents of the stories are presented, this information is always relevant, since it reflects processes and experiences of the subjects, groups and affected communities; and contributes to providing general meaning to the story in question by framing it within a context. The definition of topics to be considered in the testimonies, as well as their organization, must be carried out based on the objective of understanding a social or historical phenomenon, establishing its time frame and placing it within a conceptual framework.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

In concluding the interview, the interviewer should thank the interviewee for their time, disposition and contribution, and should also express a commitment to remain in contact, informing about the uses and products that may arise from their contribution.

When the registration is completed, a second informed consent is signed, and the CSO undertakes to keep the facts, names and situations mentioned in the testimony confidential. Furthermore, the CSO may suggest that the interviewee maintains confidentiality about the account they have provided, especially if it is suspected that interested third parties may distort the testimony, or that there could be a risk to the safety of the participant or other people. In any case, this last recommendation can never become an obligation. The interviewee is always free to manage the confidentiality of their testimony.

Memory Center Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

It is important for the interviewer to express the value that the willingness of a person to tell their testimony holds, not simply in an archival documental sense, but also as a liberating and constructive mechanism for victims and those being interviewed.

1.6 Special Risk Cases

In certain circumstances, the taking of testimonies can represent a risk for both witnesses and their families or even for the interviewers themselves. This is often the case in situations in which an armed conflict persists, where some of the perpetrators or their accomplices still have influence in local institutions, where the official narrative of the events seeks to hide some of the serious human rights violations of the past, or where stigmatization can lead to social isolation of the interviewees.

Despite this, gathering testimonies may be essential for communities and victims in future transitional justice or ordinary justice processes, where information gathered shortly after the events is especially relevant.

The "group interview" modality can be a viable alternative for taking testimonies in this type of context. These archival documents can also reconstruct the memory of the conflict through the voice of a population that is systematically

victim of the “imposition of contexts of terror”, while avoiding the individual mention of people who may become targets for armed groups.

Also, the accompaniment of religious institutions or the international community can offer safe alternatives. There have been several successful experiences in which organizations or religious leaders have played a vital role in establishing trust networks with affected populations to advance in memory and truth-seeking processes, and even to carry out psychosocial support tasks in such processes. Examples include the role of the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace in Colombia, the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala in the Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI); or the Cooperation Committee for Peace and the Vicariate of Solidarity in Chile.

In some cases, it may be necessary to exclusively collect records by audio or paper transcriptions. These two options offer greater security by protecting the identity of the interviewee. For audio records, it is also possible to carry out technical voice treatment procedures (distorting voices slightly or changing their tonal spectrum) to avoid direct identification by third parties.

To interview witnesses in areas that are difficult to access due to armed conflicts, some organizations have opted for videoconferencing or electronic voice-messaging platforms that allow testimonies to be taken using a remote connection. This allows the interviewer and interviewee to safeguard their integrity or that of the information provided, since it is immediately available for use. However, it should be kept in mind that none of these platforms or applications for virtual encounters can be considered totally secure, both in terms of information confidentiality, as well as protecting the identification of the participants from third parties. Therefore, the use of a digital channel is recommended only during the communication that takes place as part of the interview, which should then be immediately downloaded, saved and deleted from public digital platforms, or even from the devices that intervened in the communication, thereby reducing the risk of any unauthorized access to the interviews.

In some cases, it may be necessary to include periods of restricted classification for the access and publication of the testimony in the informed consent forms. Thus, an agreement can be reached with the interviewee regarding the number of years following the interview from which the archival document may be opened for consultation. Some clauses may even include a requirement for permission to open the archive when the interviewee has died or doesn't hold

any position in public office. This makes it possible to shield the information provided without jeopardizing the integrity or the development of the current functions of the participant.

However, any measures and precautions that may be taken will necessarily be different for each country, region and specific political context. It is therefore important for each CSO to carry out a detailed risk analysis. In some cases, it is advisable to carry out these analyzes with the support of the international community with experience in contexts of armed conflicts, or with the accompaniment of international organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

1.7 Procedures for Group Interviews

A group interview usually includes the following parts that must be prepared in advance.

OPENING AND PRESENTATION

This section includes several aspects that serve to create a friendly environment for the interview, and to clarify its purposes, procedures, and subsequent uses. These are as follows:

- Words of thanks to interviewees for their collaboration
- Identification: inform the interviewees of the origin of the interviewing team (institution to which they belong, entity that endorses them, activity they carry out, experience, etc.)
- Procedure: provide information on the procedure to be used (conversation based on questions, dialogue, taking turns, etc.).
- Topic: specification of the content that will be addressed during the interview. This will help guide the participants from not straying too far from the content and purpose of the interview.

- Attitudes: some guidelines on the forms of participation (informal conversation without judgments, relaxed dialogue, there are no good or bad answers, all interventions are timely and respectable, participation times, etc.)
- Purpose and consequences: clarifications about why the resulting archival documents are wanted, how the information will be used, guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality.
- Signature of the informed consents.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION

This is a question that helps break the ice and encourage the first intervention of one of the participants. The question should not address the central questions of the interview, and it is important to keep it open and to avoid asking anything very specific, so that the response given is not a simple yes or a no, or monosyllable.

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

As in semi-structured interviews, this is a list of central aspects to be addressed, and some examples of possible questions oriented to that purpose. By no means is the list a straitjacket that must be followed exactly. The script does not specify exactly when certain questions should be asked, and the moderator should feel free to introduce new questions if they consider that relevant aspects have arisen during the process that were not foreseen. The points recorded in the script should not be addressed literally (neither in the list's order, nor in the way questions are written), but should be adapted to the context of the discussion and the interventions. Likewise, a “funnel” approach is recommended, which is to first cover general aspects before touching on more specific topics of the interview.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

Considering how to close the interview must be prepared beforehand. Group interviews can be important experiences for the reconstruction or consolidation of the social fabric, intergenerational exchanges, or the start or continuity of collective projects. Therefore, the interview can be accompanied by closing activities, such as “community food sharing” or other cultural activities. Depending on the type of project and practices of the community, closure may end with a spiritual reflection or some sort of activity that provides a hopeful message.

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROUP INTERVIEWS

Just as in individual interviews, the team must be completely clear and honest about the purposes of the meeting. It must be made clear that any information provided will not be used for purposes other than those previously indicated. Likewise, the moderator must make sure that all interviewees are clear about the topics and the methodology to be used.

It is important that as the meeting unfolds, the interviewer has the ability to direct questions according to the context, without departing from the meeting's main objective. It is necessary to ensure that the participants are comfortable and feel that this is a space for feedback rather than an interrogation.

Furthermore, it is important that the interviewer knows how to keep track of time. Some people often speak longer than others or want to express their point of view on behalf of the whole group. In this case, it is advisable to respectfully encourage other participants to present their point of view, indicating that all positions are important and that listening to them enriches the discussion.

It is important to ensure that everyone has participated at least once, and that all issues have been addressed. When not enough time has been allowed for this to occur satisfactorily, it is not advisable to extend the day beyond the time originally established. Fatigue and tiredness can be counterproductive. If conditions allow, you can opt to hold a *new meeting*.

1.8 Stages After Taking the Testimony

POST-INTERVIEW RELATIONSHIP:

After taking the testimony, the CSO must maintain contact with the participant, communicate the uses that have been given to their testimonies and invite them to future events and participations. It is recommended not to lose contact with any of the contributors, with a view to establishing future collaborations.

PROCESS EVALUATION:

Once the testimony has been taken, it is recommended that the team meet to evaluate the process in order to define future changes, restructure their strategy if necessary and include elements not considered in other occasions.

FIRST STEPS IN THE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ARCHIVE

Once a significant number of testimonies have been produced, it is important to develop strategies for the creation of an archive (in the case of CSOs that start from scratch), or think about how to incorporate these testimonies into an existing archive.

The following sections of this toolkit describe an overview of the processes to follow after testimonies have been taken. These processes include the initial steps in the organization of an archive, the making of copies from the original testimonies, the principles and recommendations for the preservation of the archival documents, custody strategies and the modalities of accessing the archival documents in the future.

1.9 Considerations for the Organizations of an Oral Archive

It is very important, especially for CSOs that intend to build an oral archive starting from a first collection of testimonies, to bear in mind the need to think about a prior strategy for organizing the gathered archival documentation. Similarly, organizations that have testimonial documents and intend to integrate them into an existing archive can create a strategy to incorporate these items into their catalog.

This prior strategy will make future archive management easier and more consistent in terms of its organization and access.

Memory Centre Monseñor Juan Gerardi's Recommendation

An important recommendation when preparing data entry forms is to establish a classification system for interviews according to their reliability or the certainty of the information received. In the REMHI process and in the Historical Clarification Commission, testimonies were classified into one of three categories of reliability and certainty.

The cataloging of an archive must be developed according to the anticipated uses and forms of access. There are many possible strategies for this, but all are aimed at facilitating future access to the archival documentation. Recently, computer tools have been developed to transcribe long testimonies (such as GoTranscript) and to extract necessary information from the contents for organizations. However, IT tools only differ from manual transcribing equivalents in terms of time and volume of results. In any case, the fundamental idea is to design an information structure that facilitates quick access to the contents for the established purposes of the archive.

In this section, a series of possible strategies that some CSOs have developed for this first step in organizing testimonial documents will be explained. For more complete and detailed information on the process of organizing, classifying and cataloging an archive, it is recommended to consult Section 2 of this toolkit, *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.

Memoria Abierta Recommendations

All testimonies hold great value as pieces of archival documentation. Thus, organizations that already have some testimonial documentation are recommended to review these archival documents individually, develop an inventory, catalog the records, and only then preserve,

digitize, make backup copies and create protocols for their use.

Some questions that may guide these efforts are the following:

What types of testimonies are already part of the organization's archives? How and for which purposes were they taken? Within which context? What are the possible uses for these materials? What is the physical file format? What state are they in? Are they related and, if so, what is their connection to other types of archival documentation kept by the organization?

WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE OBTAINED AND SORTED FOLLOWING THE RECORDING OF A TESTIMONY?

The breadth and specificity of the data to be obtained following the recording of each testimony depends on the objectives and needs of each CSO, with a view to building an archive, or integrating these archival documents into an existing archive. However, the information listed below can be considered broadly applicable to most testimonies for human rights archives and is a basic guide for the subsequent process of organizing and cataloging an archive:

- **Data relating to the interviewee's identity. This can include simple personal data and the minimum elements that illustrate the reasons outlined for offering a testimony, through to biographical reviews.**

NOTE: Where there is a political context that represents a risk to the interviewee, this information should be stored in a separate archival document and be replaced with an alphanumeric code.

- **Data related to story content.**

These data include many types of information categories such as, for example, how a victim reports the different ways they have been affected, the types of persons responsible for human rights violations, the population groups that have been affected, etc.

These categories are known as **thematic descriptors**. The most common practice in the archival management process is for responsible institutions or organizations to develop an archival tool built for this purpose, known as a **thesaurus**.

A thesaurus is an ordered and hierarchical collection of terms (keywords) that define the contents and philosophy of an archive. The creation of a thesaurus generally implies a fusion of knowledge from several people: specialists in a subject (for example, human rights), specialists in lexicography (linguists, semantics) and the accumulated knowledge of organization members that create and manage the archive in accordance with its purposes, principles and values.

A general recommendation for organizations that are only just starting a process of managing their archives is that they choose to use an existing thesaurus, which is directly related to the purpose and meaning of their archive, especially if it is already used by other organizations in the region. Later, if they consider that a recurring term within their archival documents does not appear in the chosen thesaurus, they can make an additional list consistent with their themes. For example, they can add a descriptor such as "armed groups", and from there, add names of armed groups in the region; or "ethnic groups and populations", in the event that it is necessary to detail the indigenous groups in their region, under a unified list.

As organizations learn more about the particularities of their archive, and the terminology that best suits their policies and values, the list that they add will allow them to have more personalized thematic descriptors.

- Data related to the place (city, country) and the moment (date and time) in which the testimony was taken.
- Data related to the situation in which the reported events occur: Place (city, municipality, region, department, state, country, etc.), time (periods, years, months, days).
- Data relating to the persons responsible for taking the testimony (interviewers, recording team, translators, transcriptionists, etc.)

NOTE: In particularly risky situations, this information must also be kept separately.

- Data related to the information recorded in the informed consents, oriented to the uses and levels of future access to the archival document, in order to preserve the will and security of the interviewee, as well as the security of the information.
- Data related to the type of storage medium and file format in which the testimony was recorded. For detailed information on the types of storage mediums and file formats see Section 2 of this toolkit – *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.

1.10 Strategy Examples for the Organization of Testimonies

1.10.1 CORPORACIÓN PARQUE POR LA PAZ VILLA GRIMALDI

The Parque por la Paz (Park of Peace) Villa Grimaldi National Monument is a memorial site dedicated to the victims of state terrorism carried out by the military dictatorship in Chile. The Corporación Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, an active member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) through RESLAC (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Sites of Memory) registers, manages and offers testimonies for public consultation, mostly of people kidnapped and tortured in the same site where the Parque por la Paz is today located.

The main tool for the preliminary organization of testimonial documents registered by the Corporation is the identification document, comprising a biographical outline, a summary with descriptors and a questions registry (LOG). These descriptions can be included in a single archival document, specific for each testimony.¹

Each of these sections is explained below.

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE:

This type of document is suitable for CSOs focused on collecting archives for memory purposes. This type of text can be especially useful for the future

creation of informative pieces (in the case of the Villa Grimaldi Archive, these reviews are used to accompany each item in their DVD video collection). Furthermore, the outline helps build a provisional classification of the records. The biographical outline or “profile” consists of a brief text with basic information about the interviewee that helps characterize specific types of interviewees (for example, “a former detainee of Villa Grimaldi”, “human rights defenders”, “a member of the movement promoting the recovery of the site”). It also includes information on the context in which the record was made (place and date). The reviews are written directly by the interviewers, immediately after they have finished recording the testimony.

SUMMARIES WITH DESCRIPTORS

This is a synthesis of the testimony, summarizing every 10 minutes in a single paragraph and the content narrated by the interviewee. These summaries must include keywords (descriptors), either defined in the CSO’s own lists or those belonging to a human rights thesaurus.



Video interviews are preserved on DVDs at the Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

QUESTIONS REGISTRY (LOG)

This is a list of all the questions that were asked by the interviewer during the taking of the testimony. For each question, the time (minutes or hours) must be indicated within the testimonial record in which they were made.

For an example of this type of registry, please consult the experience of the Corporación Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi (Villa Grimaldi Park for Peace Corporation) in their book *Archivo y Memoria* (Archive and Memory), from pages 63 to 70.

1.10.2 MEMORIA ABIERTA

Memoria Abierta, an active member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) and coordinator of its Latin American and Caribbean Network (RESLAC), is an organization created in 2000 with the “objective of working for a social memory aimed at influencing Argentinian political culture, contributing to the construction of identity and the consolidation of democratic coexistence”. Memoria Abierta gathers, preserves, organizes and disseminates a collection of archival documents for human rights organizations and “other personal and institutional archives linked to state terrorism”. In particular, the organization produces testimonies on the social and political life of the 1960s and 70s, and works on the territorial and spatial memory of this period of political violence in Argentina.²

Memoria Abierta’s archive has an organization strategy for recorded testimonies similar to that of the Villa Grimaldi Archive, which consists of a process of creating

an identification record. Before integrating the testimony into the archive, it is assigned an alphanumeric topographic registration code and a title. For more information on the assignment of codes, see Section 2 of this toolkit *An Introduction*



Public viewing of interviews from the oral archive at Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

to *Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*. These data are added to the label of the storage medium that keeps the testimony. Other basic information is also added to this label, such as the date, names of the interviewers and videographers, as well as the duration of the session.

The data from this label will also make up the identification record, which features the following fields:

- Name of the person interviewed
- Number of sessions that were necessary to complete the testimony and the duration of each one.
- Total duration.
- Names of those who performed the interview
- Names of those who registered the interview
- Date
- Description of the interviewee
- Analytical summary
- Aspects highlighted in the summary through use of keywords (terms or statements that reflect concepts, dates, events or institutions relevant in the context of the testimony).
- Categories
- Topics covered in the testimony

As this is an existing testimonial archive, the organization emphasizes the need to understand all these fields in order to identify individual archival documents (especially analytical summaries, categories and topics), always as part of the archive’s a general sense and logic. Within this process, every effort should be made to preserve the connection of the archival document with its context within the general categories of organizing the archive. For more information on these aspects, see Section 2 of this toolkit *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.

1.10.3 INTERDIOCESAN PROJECT FOR THE RECOVERY OF HISTORICAL MEMORY (REMHI) OF GUATEMALA

The REMHI Project of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala consisted of the compilation, organization and creation of an archive of more than 5,000 testimonies related to the armed conflict in Guatemala (1960-1996). This project culminated in the presentation of the Guatemala Never Again Final Report, in four volumes (1,400 pages) addressing the following topics: “1) The individual, family and community impacts of the violence, the forms of survival and victim demands. 2) The mechanisms of horror (how massacres and torture were committed; the methods used by the intelligence apparatus and the insurgent and counterinsurgent forces employed against the population). 3) The historical environment (the political, economic and military process from the 1950s until the signing of the peace agreement). 4) The victims of the conflict (names of victims of the massacres, dead, disappeared and tortured) and general statistics of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law violations, as well as the REMHI Project’s Recommendations”³.

Given the large volume of interviews carried out, a standardized interview model was designed, based on seven questions: “What happened? When and where? Who were responsible? What effects did this have on your life? What did you do to deal with it? Why do you think it happened? And what should be done so that it does not happen again?”

This model made it possible to elaborate the instrument of the *interview form*, in which a team of coders extracted the most significant information aimed at creating a comprehensive database that would allow the quantitative and qualitative analysis of all the testimonies. Given its comprehensiveness, this instrument has enormous value as a tool for the description and subsequent organization of testimonies.

The interview form is divided into several parts. The first contains general information relevant to the project, such as identifying the type of human rights violation to which the testimony is related, the number of victims corresponding to each violation, whether there were material losses, and the place and the date on which these violations were committed. Data about the recording of the interview was also added (whether it was recorded or not, and the number of cassettes used). Each form or template has a unique identification number and fields on the date and place of the interview.⁴

The remaining parts of the form correspond to thematic aspects of the testimony, and were differentiated by color on different cards: blue, for aspects related to the *victims* of the event; green, for information regarding the *individuals responsible*; red, for specific data provided by the *declarant*. Finally, a yellow section was reserved for a *summary* prepared by the interviewer who asked each of the seven questions.

BUILDING THE THESAURUS

Based on listening to fifty testimonies, a team of three researchers drew up a thesaurus with 250 categories of analysis related to the facts, actors involved, consequences, ways of coping, perceived causes, and people’s demands. This tool was essential for the thematic analysis and description of the testimonies throughout the subsequent ordering and cataloging process.

CODIFYING THE FORMS

For a first processing of the information contained in the forms, a team of coders was selected and trained in listening, transcribing and identifying the different aspects of the constructed thesaurus. The coders listened to the testimonies, and simultaneously carried out the corresponding transfer of the forms into the different records (victims, perpetrators, declarants). In the final file, summaries were made corresponding to each question. In some cases, a complete transcription of the interview was necessary, by the same team.

COORDINATION OF FIELDWORK

The REMHI team worked in a decentralized way, due to the large number of testimonies and issues of geographic dispersion. In general terms, it worked on two levels. At a local level (region, diocese), testimonies were taken and some of these were then transcribed before summaries were written up. Meanwhile at a central level, a selection of testimonies was carried out according to the quality of the information and finally the – process of coding and building of the database was finalized.

1.11 Preservation

1.11.1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ORAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES

In terms of conservation and custody, oral memory and truth-clarification files deserve to be processed twice due to the importance of the information they contain. On the one hand, as with other audiovisual archival documents, these archive case files must be protected as cultural assets available to present and future users, due to the content of their historical values. However, the central protection of the truth and of people affected by human rights violations is also important for managing these types of archival documents. Furthermore, conservation and custody strategies imply the custody of the actual archival documents themselves, so they are not altered, stolen or destroyed.

The following points must be considered essential principles in the preservation of oral archives:

PRESERVING THE ORIGINAL RECORD IN AS GOOD A CONDITION AS POSSIBLE

The original records themselves, even when already considered obsolete such as in the cases of cassette tapes or CDs, contain information about the taking of testimonies that is important regarding the historical circumstances at the time they were made. The original archival documents themselves contain historical value, even if they no longer have a daily use, and they are the storage medium from which new copies are made in case the digitized version is lost.

A COPY IS NEVER JUST A COPY

All storage mediums for oral archival documents are susceptible to loss, damage, or obsolescence. It is therefore vital that copies from the original archival document are always managed properly. If information from the original archival document were to be irretrievably lost, then the first copies obtained from it would become the “originals”.



Revision of digitized transcriptions of interviews from the REMHI collection at the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi. Photo: ODHAG

ALL STORAGE MEDIUMS HAVE A SHELF LIFE

Storage mediums that host oral records are technological products that are always subject to continuous changes and updates. Some storage mediums that were very efficient a few decades ago are no longer efficient today. The same thing is very likely to happen with storage mediums that are currently in use (hard drives or memory sticks).

Most of audio archival documents that are functional to the needs of an oral archive must be digitized (i.e. digital copies made from originals in analogue, magnetic-digital or optical-digital file formats) unless they were created directly in a digital file format. All these digital records (originals or copies), like the analogue versions, are in a storage medium and a file format. Both elements are susceptible to becoming obsolete by rapid changes in the industry. Thus,

an archive saved on a CD may be unreadable in a few years, due to the lack of working devices available to reproduce it (Storage medium); or because its file format is no longer readable by the software in use; or because the version of the file format has expired; or because the file format itself is no longer in use.

Thus, it is always recommended to use standardized file formats, as well as open source (“free”) software, so as not to depend on rapid commercial industry changes. In any circumstance, constant monitoring of these obsolescence processes is necessary to carry out efficient migrations to new storage mediums that are of higher quality and durability, or to an updated file format.

FAITHFULNESS TO THE ORIGINAL

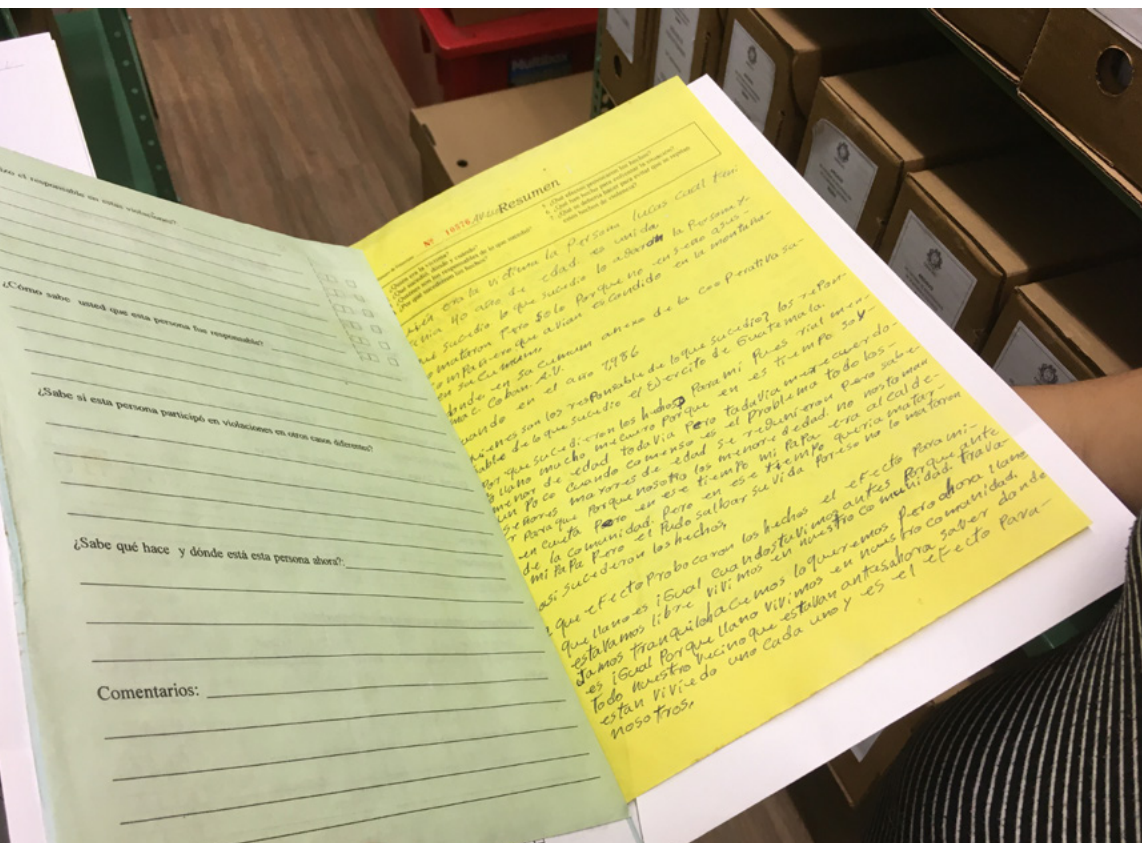
Copies made from the original must be performed without altering the content. It is even recommended not to alter the noises or distortions of the original signal (as long as these do not impede the understanding of the testimonies) or to make edits or cuts.

CONSTANT MONITORING

Both the originals and the copies must be regularly reviewed to verify that their content is unaltered. In the case of copies, it must be verified that their content always corresponds to the contents of the original. Likewise, storage conditions (temperature, humidity, etc.) must be maintained over time.

COOPERATION AND EXTERNAL COPIES

It is very important to always keep backup copies of the archives in locations outside the institution itself, or even in institutions in countries different from those of the origin of the archival documents (See Custody of oral archives). Therefore, it is recommended to establish trust networks with other organizations and institutions to ensure the custody of such archival documents without violating the principles mentioned here.



Transcription sheet in Spanish of a testimony originally collected in Mayan Language during the REMHI project in Guatemala. Photo: ODHAG

1.11.2 MANAGEMENT OF COPIES

From the taking of a testimony, it is essential to make immediate backup copies in order to ensure their conservation. Likewise, for archives that are already stored as oral archival documents in analogue or magnetic file formats, there must be a copy management strategy in place to avoid the use of such original storage mediums as much as possible, and to ensure their availability on digital storage mediums. There are three main types of copies for oral human rights archives:

CONSERVATION COPIES. DIGITIZATION PROCESSES

This is the transfer of original archival documents to updated (digital) storage mediums for custody and conservation purposes, and not for current use. Creating backup copies from analogue records involves digitization processes. In several cases, given the age of certain original storage mediums, this will mean hiring a specialized technician. Digitized copies must be made in high definition and in the most up-to-date file formats. As part of this process, it is important that the resulting digital copy does not alter the audiovisual content of the original, without adding or removing any element. Any alteration made at the will of those in charge will impose changes in the historical and memory value of the archival document.

Once the digital copy is produced, it should be checked against the original to ensure that there are no alterations.

At least two digital backup copies must be produced and stored in different locations. This way, different copies are not subject to the same risks of deterioration.

COPIES FOR REGULAR USE

These are copies that can be consulted by users searching archives at the premises or on virtual platforms. These copies can be kept in different resolutions or file formats that are not necessarily stored with the highest definition. The copies of these testimonies may be accompanied by corporate material (markings with the name of the institution, introductions, titles and indexes). Depending on the access levels for each testimony (see “Access and return” section), these copies may include restrictions in certain passages of the testimony, or feature

a type of editing that protects the testimony’s anonymity. As part of common file management protocols, these non-regular “editing” processes must thus be decided through internal agreements within the organization.

RETURN COPIES

These are copies delivered directly to the interviewee (individual or group) as the final stage of the testimony-taking process. Content may be accompanied by corporate material just as is the case for copies that are intended for regular use. In cases of personalized returns, the security of interviewees must be very carefully evaluated, especially considering any provisions in the informed consents.



Interview originals in digital cassettes. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

1.12 Custody of Oral Archives

The custody of oral human rights archives implies responsibilities that go beyond the preservation of the storage mediums and the management of its use. As this contains sensitive information that may compromise the security of both the interviewee and third parties, it is important that the team responsible has the minimum competencies in both aspects (preservation of the storage mediums and information security in relation to third parties that could make improper use or deliberately destroy the archive). Here are some general recommendations on the custody of human rights archives:

- It is very important to select a team of people responsible for the management and custody of the archives. Depending on budget capacities, archive size and the training of operators, this team may vary in the number of people employed. In some cases, given the restrictions of certain organizations or for reduced archive sizes, it is possible to appoint one or two people who are members of the organization.

Small organizations can even sign agreements with educational programs specializing in document management to invite students to carry out their internships at the archive's premises.

Furthermore, as the archive consolidates and grows, CSOs can promote the training of some of its members to carry out specialized management work of archival documents.

- The team responsible must carry out annual work plans that include: integrating new archival documents into the system (cataloging); updating the classification table (if applicable); maintaining physical archival documents and verifying their state of conservation, as well as maintaining the digital archive (converting and updating file formats to preserve access to content). If digital tools or websites for the management of archival documents are used, necessary maintenance and periodic updates must be carried out and reviews must be performed on the security levels for both physical (copy management) and computer storage mediums to avoid theft, manipulation or the destruction of archival documents by third parties.
- It is recommended that those responsible for managing archives establish cooperative relationships with trusted institutions that can host backup

copies of some groups of files or the entire archive. Likewise, encouraging collaboration and support networks between different CSOs can stimulate an exchange of knowledge and the adoption of successful strategies.

- Backup copies delivered to other institutions must be accompanied by the necessary documentation for their identification and delivery protocols, in order to ensure their good custody by a friendly institution.
- The custody of groups of archival documents that are the result of transitional justice processes must obey the processes stipulated in the mandates of the institutions created by Law for this purpose. However, it is important for CSOs who provided their testimony records to participate in making decisions regarding the institution that will serve as the final repository of such files. Ideally, these decisions should always include the effective participation of civil society, and with the participation of international observers as guarantors.



GIJTR workshop with the Colombian Truth Commission and CSOs on archival techniques. Photo: ICSC

1.13 Access to Human Rights and Memory Archives

Through access strategies to the archive, CSOs can establish the types of post-creation uses of the archive and provide levels of public access for people outside the organization. These strategies basically depend on two big decisions that the organization must make:

1. What is the meaning and purpose behind the creation of the archive?
2. What are the wishes of the interviewees regarding who has access to the details of their story (stated mainly, but not exclusively, in the informed consent).

Memoria Abierta Recommendations

If the objectives of the oral archive, as a memory archive, go beyond the generation, gathering and proper custody of the testimonies, it is advisable to explicitly establish the archive's degree of publicity.

In order to disseminate and facilitate access to the testimonies, it is recommended to generate materials that, through different storage mediums, help bring these types of stories to wider audiences in a contextualized way and with particular care given to the person who gives the testimony and their story. It is necessary to look after the forms and limits for the publication of the material, establish controls over the circulation of images, and avoid the publication of complete testimonials on web platforms.

In general terms, the organization can choose between having three main levels of access (private access of the CSO, partial public access or full access):

1.13.1 PRIVATE ACCESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

For private-use access, only organization members may consult the contents of the archive. These may be truth-clarification archives intended to accompany ordinary judicial or transitional justice processes, in which the information is covered by the confidentiality of the proceedings and may only be made public after corresponding sentences have been issued.

Recommendations:

- It may be important to integrate internal search-engine software that includes a robust security system (access codes) and encryption mechanisms (for more information see the section “*Digital management tools for archival documents*” in Section 2 of this toolkit – *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*).

1.13.2 PARTIAL PUBLIC ACCESS TO ARCHIVE CONTENTS

This type of access responds to the organization's need to disseminate high-value general content from its archives while preserving confidentiality of individuals. This information serves as a means of disseminating the violation of human rights in a particular population, raising awareness in the general population about recovering the memory of atrocious events, and helps as a symbolic reparation mechanism at a broad and cultural level. However, this information is usually kept anonymous and any sensitive information that may compromise the security of the interviewee or third parties will remain hidden.

It is quite common for the wider public to gain partial accesses to the archive through a main platform via the organization's corporate website. This is the case, for example, of Memoria Abierta's website. The purposes of this type of access may include the following:

- Provide general information about the archive, its main objectives, the reason for its creation and its importance for civil society.
- Serve as a means of dissemination and to raise awareness about the stories of human rights violations in communities, collective instances or minority groups that have been systematically affected.
- In general, as a mechanism for disseminating the heritage of memory on human rights and the way in which its legacy can be passed on to future generations.

Recommendations:

- A careful analysis of informed consents is necessary to define which particular information is appropriate for public access (especially, which information the witness would like the public to know about), and which other information should be kept confidential to preserve the safety of the

source or of any process related to their story. There are two general choices that some CSOs have made in this regard:

1. Allow access to a description sheet on each interviewee (individual or group) containing general information (name, number of sessions in taking the testimony, testimony duration, subject, region, names of the interviewers, date, etc.) that allows the user to identify archival documents that may be useful in case of requesting subsequent access to the archives (see the section on informed consent).
 2. Keep the information general and anonymous, in order to reveal the history of the events that occurred, but without the possibility of accessing any details that could “individualize” or reveal the identity of victims or people involved in the event.
- Based on analysis of the cataloging tables, those responsible for the archive must decide which type of information can be opened up to the public on a website. This implies choosing which descriptors and categories from the catalog can be used on the public platform. For more information on cataloging tables see Section 2 of this toolkit, *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.
 - The organization of archives requires the development of a repository, which is a digital space where the information is stored and accessed following protocols and access permissions, and through a search engine that includes the categories, descriptors and labels developed in the process of cataloging the archive.
 - It is always possible to use an existing repository, such as the Uwazi database application developed by Huridocs or the HRDI database developed by the University of Texas, or any other data management system for human rights archives already existing in the country. The CINEP in Colombia, for example, coordinates the Network of Data Banks on Political Violence and Human Rights, where affiliated human rights observatories share the same thesaurus and the same information structure.⁵



DVD circulation copies of interviews used in Parque por la Paz Vila Grimaldi. Photo: Villa Grimaldi

- It is highly recommended to place a person in charge of the administration and updating of the digital repository. This may be the same person who is in charge of managing all the computer tools in the archive.

1.13.3 ACCESS TO COMPLETE CONTENT AT THE ARCHIVE'S PREMISES

In this modality, potential users have access to the entire content (or, at least, to more extensive content than in the types listed above). However, this is reserved for special people who must make a formal request, and meet a series of requirements, previously defined by the organization. These cases especially apply for investigative purposes, or as part of legal proceedings.

When speaking of “complete content” in this type of access, this refers to the possibility of being able to listen to or view the totality of each testimony. However, it is also possible that the organization establishes other types of restrictions, for example, where the user is only granted access to the specific testimonials they previously requested, and not to others (for which they would need to make a second request). Another caveat is that the location of the files does not necessarily have to correspond to the headquarters of the CSO. A third institution may serve as a repository for the case files of a certain CSO, but, of course, it must respect the will of the latter in user-access protocols.

Recommendations:

- It is important that archive-cataloging systems are well coordinated with user search engines (if they exist). For more information on cataloging processes see Section 2 of this toolkit, *An Introduction to Organizing and Managing Human Rights Archives*.
- It is important to create request forms to access archives. The requirements that users must comply with in order to access information contained in the testimonies must be established on these forms. The decision criteria for these requirements must first begin with the wishes of interviewees in the informed consent, and secondly, be aligned with the purpose for which the archival documents will be used (judicial uses, academic uses, etc.).
- In this type of access, it is common for CSOs to only allow consultation of archival documents at the archive's premises. Therefore, as a general rule, archival documents will not be loaned to users to take home.
- For some organizations, such as Memoria Abierta, that are especially related to memory archives, it is important to avoid allowing fragmented consultations of testimonies. The user must listen to or view each archival document from beginning to end. The principle behind this decision is that each fragment of a testimony is only understandable in its full sense within the context of a complete story. Other organizations, such as Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, are more flexible with this principle, and provide the user with a thematic index containing time indications alongside the archival document, so that the user can locate the part that is of most interest.

NOTE: These three principal levels of access are not exclusive. In other words, an organization may perfectly keep the three differentiated types of access, while establishing special protocols for each access. Several organizations, for example, work with the last two, which allows them to differentiate between general “outreach and awareness” information, and information that is particularly sensitive, intended exclusively for “research”.

SECTION 2:

AN INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZING AND MANAGING HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES

This section not only refers to the organization of oral archives, but also archives in other storage media, such as digital media, paper and photography, which are often the case of archives produced by CSOs working on documentation of human rights.

The purpose of organizing documentation and systematizing it in a digital database is to make it more easily accessible for research and investigation for the purposes of memorialization, accountability and advocacy, not only for the CSO developing the archive, but also by other actors.

For those CSOs initially developing an oral archive based on testimonies collected to document human rights abuse, sometimes it is useful to start with an existing digital database structure that can be tailored to the needs of the organization, and streamline a process of uploading information from individual interviews and associated documents into a structured system, where each archival entity (interview, paper document, picture, etc.) in its digital version can be uploaded as an attachment. Some examples are the Uwazi digital database

application developed by Huridocs, the HRDI database developed by the University of Texas, or the proprietary database developed by the Humanitarian Law Center for some GIJTR projects in Africa.

However, in any case, the physical documents, such as recordings, transcriptions, informed consents, and any other supporting document will need to be organized, described, classified, catalogued, and adequately stored before producing its digital version to upload to these databases. Therefore, an archival procedure needs to be implemented and applied to all archival documents as a first step.

This section describes a general procedure that will help CSOs organize and manage their human rights archives, both for their physical disposition and for their future use to build a digital database.

NOTE: The terminology used in this document does not correspond exactly to the terminology of some archival standards, but is inspired by the functionality of the processes. If national archival standards are required to be followed, consultation with local archival specialists is recommended.

2.1 Guidelines for the Organization of Documents

The organization of groups of archival documents is always related to the meaning, purposes and values with which a CSO created or saved various archival documents. Knowing “where from?” “why?” and “for what purpose?” certain archival documents are collected is the key to successfully organizing an archive. Thus, the entire organization process starts in a general form and develops into something more specific: answers must first be given to these general questions; before criteria and categories consistent with these answers are created; and then, only at the end, can archival documents be taken one by one and organized according to these criteria and categories. The purpose of following this order is to organize information in a way that facilitates its access and preservation.

The most important activities in the organizing process are identification, classification and cataloging:

In the **identification** stage, the team recognizes the existence and value of a group of archival documents and organizes them provisionally through an “identification inventory”.

In the **classification** stage, the team establishes the main criteria and categories that will define the “archive’s logic” for the organization, according to the identity and meaning that it wants to give to the archive. The result of this process is a “classification table”.

Finally, in the **cataloging** stage, the team describes every document, and organizes them according to the criteria and categories established during classification. The end result of this process is a “cataloging table”.



Paper documents of the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos ANUC in Bogota. Photo: ICSC

2.2 Identification

Identifying a group of archival documents as the basis for an archive is the first step in the entire process for managing records (oral or otherwise). Identifying an archive means, first of all, recognizing the importance of a group of existing or potential archival documents to preserve and value the memory of a social organization.

FROM THE MACRO TO THE MICRO

In the first steps of creating an archive it is very important not to spend too much time on the particular details of each archival document. Instead, it is best to concentrate on more general aspects that facilitate its identification, while considering the archival document's value and foreseeing some simple measures for its preservation.

The main reason for this is that the particularities of each archival document (especially those related to its contents) are only clearly “identifiable” in relation to a general logic of the archive that unfortunately has not yet been established (since this will occur during the classification stage). Another reason, derived from the previous one, is that, if there is no prior organizational logic, the job of describing each archival document may take an enormous amount of time, or simply never be finished. This is basically down to the fact that we still don't know which elements to describe in each archival document. There is not, so to speak, “a light guiding us in the description” and therefore “we do not yet know what to describe”.

The identification process consists of:

- Mapping the existence and importance of a group of archival documents and a pre-classification procedure according to some basic components to be identified in each document.
- The preparation of an identification inventory.

BASIC COMPONENTS IN THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

As we have already mentioned, we should not worry much about the contents of each individual archival document in this identification process. The most important thing to keep in mind is to provide the set of archival documents with a provisional order that facilitates the next stages of the process (classification and cataloging).

THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF AN IDENTIFICATION PROCESS ARE:

- Defining existing types of archival documents.
- Establishing the types of storage media in which these archival documents are found.
- Verifying the preservation or state of the archival documents and their storage conditions.

In the identification process, information about each component is recorded in a table that we call an “identification inventory”.

One option that is widely used by some CSOs to start this first process is to group the documents while spreading them across large tables, following general criteria. This helps to visualize the set of archival documents, as well as creating greater familiarity with their general characteristics and their possible forms of future classification (see classification). These initial groupings may be carried out using broad criteria such as, for example, “archival document type” (see below), written on a piece of paper to differentiate each group, or the types of supporting mediums in which each archival document is found.



Paper documents before a structured archival organization and cataloguing procedure in the office of the Observatorio Surcolombiano de Derechos Humanos, OBSURDH. Photo: OBSURDH

Once this first grouping has been carried out, each archival document may be identified through general characteristics (components) that do not yet expressly refer to its contents. With this information, it is then possible to generate an identification inventory.

THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBES EACH COMPONENT, EQUIVALENT TO A COLUMN IN THE IDENTIFICATION INVENTORY:

Archival Document Types

This is a category that gives us a general idea of the different kinds of archival documents we hold before going into their individual analysis.

Archival documents may be organized by general typologies depending on their “nature” in a way that is commonly understood by all. For example, some audiovisual archival documents may include interviews, others could be community radio programs; some might be videos of a seminar or congress, others may include documentaries on topics related to the organization, etc.



Needs assessment conducted by GIJTR in 2019 in the Pacific region of Colombia. Photo: ICSC

On the other hand, some paper archives may include minutes of meetings or gatherings, the informed consents for the interviews, investigation material for the taking of testimonies, crime reports to authorities, copies of judicial process files, press releases, financial documentation regarding certain projects, etc.

These general categories are examples of “archival document types” and help us to establish the full picture of the future archive, in accordance with the materials that actually exist. Furthermore, this exercise allows us to gain a first basic understanding of its “internal logic”, that is, of the archive’s relationship with the organization’s history, meaning and purposes. This will make for an easier process during the classification stage.

Storage Media

It is important to have an initial notion of the types of physical storage media in which each archival document is kept in order to take the first steps in its preservation, while also foreseeing which technological tools will be necessary for its use. Paper archives can be handwritten, printed, press clippings, photocopies, paper photographs or drawings, while oral archives may be kept on magnetic (audio cassettes, video camera tapes, video cassettes), magnetic-digital (some types of video camera tapes), optical-digital (CD, DVD, BlueRay) and digital media (hard drives, memory cards), or on paper (oral testimonies transcribed onto paper), photographs on paper (for more information, see the section on preservation and custody).

State of Preservation

At this point we can make an intuitive assessment of the state of preservation of each archival document. This may add specific details such as “possibly with fungus”, or simply mention: “in good condition” / “in poor condition”.

Storage

This stage of the process simply refers to the current location of the archival documents, without yet establishing a storage strategy. For example, if the archival documents are in different boxes, we can make a provisional numbering of these boxes, and then indicate that corresponding number in the inventory box. We can do the same with archival documents stored in folders and, in general, in any other type of container.

2.3 Creating an Identification Inventory

The above components will make up the necessary columns of an identification inventory. This inventory is a tool that firstly allows us to rescue a group of archival documents from oblivion, or worse, from their degradation or destruction. Secondly, it helps us recognize, from a macro perspective, the value of the group of archival documents for the organization, in addition to giving us a sense of some of the criteria for classification in the future. Finally, the inventory allows us to provisionally locate the archival documents.

The following is an example of a classification inventory:

Archival Document	Archival Document Type	Support Medium	State of Preservation	Storage

2.4 Classification

The process of classifying an archive consists in finding a logic for ordering the archival documents corresponding to the organization's aims and objectives.

GETTING TO KNOW ONESELF THROUGH CLASSIFICATION

More than simply fulfilling a standard formula, classifying an archive is an exercise in the self-knowledge of the life, history, values and policies of an organization. In this sense, the first step in this process may consist of asking questions about the CSO's identity and mission. This will allow us to establish the first classification categories.

An initial question that the team may ask is: **what is the original order of these archival documents?**

Perhaps this may seem a bit strange. If we are going to order some archival documents, one assumes that they are disorganized, and that, therefore, they



Revision of paper archives of ANUC during GIJTR's needs assessment in Bogota. Photo: ICSC

need to be subject to archive management.

However, although some organizations are not aware of it, the archives they own already belong to a particular order. In other words, they got there for a reason, which could be any of the following:

- Someone decided to keep them for a reason, and this helps configure an order.
- They have been saved because they fulfill useful functions to the organization.
- They have been created as testimonies of the organization's work.

Answering these questions can help generate the first criteria for classification. Doing this “brainstorming” exercise on the original order can generate classification criteria such as the following:

- “These groups of archival documents contain surveys that were carried out to characterize communities that were displaced over a period, which Organization X carried out to obtain humanitarian aid.”
- “These were archival documents compiled in court and at the prosecutor’s



Initial organization of paper archives by blocks on a table. Photo: OBSURDH

office to document cases of human rights violations.”

- “These were testimonies from relatives of the disappeared collected to file criminal reports with the authorities.”
- “These were public statements by Organization X on acts of violence against communities in a certain region.”
- “These others are territory characterization reports for a cooperation project.”

ESTABLISHING CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES

The previous exercise will aim to show that, surely, within the “spirit” of each organization’s work, some questions are more pertinent than others to understand the logic behind the archive. By selecting one of these questions, classification criteria and categories can be established. These criteria and categories will not necessarily be the only ones, of course, but they will help start the process.

The following is an intuitive process used by some CSOs. It can be described in five steps:

1. The team asks a pertinent question, and some associated questions.
2. A **first general classification criterion** is generated.
3. Based on this first criterion, it is possible to create a list of **categories**. These **categories** are concepts, titles or phrases under which we can place various archival documents that have something in common.
4. In some cases, some **derivative criteria** can be generated from the **general criteria**, that is, criteria to create more specific categories within the categories that have already been created. It should be clarified that this is not a mandatory step. The generation of derived criteria and their number will depend on the archive’s complexity, and on how many of these criteria are considered pertinent by the team.
5. A list of **specific categories** is created corresponding to these **derivative criteria**.

Below, we can see three fairly common examples in CSOs, which show the operation of this process in its five steps:

EXAMPLE 1

- 1. If Organization X has several active lines of work, **how do the archival documents relate to Organization X’s mission?**
 - Which activities does Organization X carry out?
 - Which activities does each line of work or team carry out?
 - Which archival documents do these activities produce?
 - By what criteria were they requested or collected by members of Organization X?
- 2. **Criterion generated:** “Organization X’s actions”
- 3. **General categories:** “Human rights training documents”, “Legal support for victims of human rights”, “The taking and gathering of oral testimonies”, “Collective workshops on truth narratives”, “creating radio programs / radio program titles”.
- 4. **Derivative criteria:** “Organization X actions by dependency”, “Organization X actions by periods of time”, “Organization X actions according to the population that was targeted”.
- 5. **Examples of specific categories:** “archival documents from the communications section”, “archival documents from the training and dissemination section”, “archival documents produced in human rights training in the 2000s”, “archival documents related to the taking of testimonies in the communities of Río Sucio.”

The following table shows the result of this exercise. It is important to clarify that the **derivative criteria** in this table are only classification

options and therefore should not be taken as mandatory boxes. The number of these derived criteria ranges from “none” to all those that the CSO considers pertinent and functional for the management of its archive. This arrangement can be used to distribute the archival documents across tables:

PERTINENT QUESTION	CRITERIA GENERATED	CATEGORIES
How do the archival documents relate to the organization’s mission?	MAIN CRITERION: CSO’s actions	Training documents in human rights
		Legal accompaniment documents
		Archival documents on the taking of testimonies
		Archival documents from truth narrative workshops
		Archival documents relating to the creation of radio programs
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 1: Actions by dependency	Archival documents from the communications section
		Archival documents from the training section
		Archival documents from the legal section
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 2: Actions by time period	Archival documents produced on human rights training 1980-1995
		Archival documents produced on human rights training 1995-2008
		Legal accompaniment 1998-2010
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 3: Actions by population	Testimony taking in Río Sucio
		Testimony taking in Algeciras
		Truth-narrative workshops in Montes de María

EXAMPLE 2

1. It is also possible to ask about the types of human rights violations that each CSO accompanies: what are the main types of cases that may be represented in these archival documents?

Are they archival documents related to cases of forced displacement?

- About targeted killings?
- About extrajudicial killings?
- About arbitrary detention?
- About sexual violence?

2. **Criterion generated:** “Types of human rights violation”

3. **General categories:** “cases of forced displacement”, “cases of targeted killings”, “cases of extrajudicial killings”, “cases of arbitrary detention”, “cases of sexual violence.”

4. **Derivative criteria:** historical periods in which these cases occur; regions where these cases have happened; possible perpetrators; cases of victims outside the organizations; cases of victims belonging to the organizations, etc.

5. **Examples of specific categories:** “cases occurred between 1998-2005”, “cases of victims in the Alto Ariari sub-region”; “crimes committed by the National Liberation Army (ELN)”; “state crimes”; “cases concerning the Tangui community”; “cases of victims of the organization”, etc.

Resulting table:

PERTINENT QUESTION	CRITERIA GENERATED	CATEGORIES
What are the main types of cases that might be represented in the archival documents?	MAIN CRITERION: Types of human rights violation	Archival documents related to forced displacement
		Archival documents related to targeted killings
		Archival documents on extrajudicial killings
		Archival documents related to arbitrary detentions
		Archival documents related to cases of sexual violence
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 1: Periods in which they occurred	Archival documents of forced displacement between 1985-1991
		Archival documents of forced displacement between 1991-2005
		Archival documents of sexual violence between 2010-2014
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 2: Regions in which they occurred	Archival documents of arbitrary detentions in the Bajo Ariari region
		Archival documents on extrajudicial killings in Tolima
		Archival documents related to arbitrary detentions in Bajo Putumayo
		Archival documents of targeted killings in Montes de María
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 3: Cases of victims belonging to the CSO	Victims of the CSO
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 4: Cases of victims outside the CSO	Accompaniment of victims outside the CSO

EXAMPLE 3

1. If the organization's objective is to rescue the memory of a social movement, foundation or political party, it may be asked **which of the organization's important milestones do these archival documents correspond to?**
 - What are the most important events in Organization X's history?
 - What have been the main challenges or inconveniences that Organization X has suffered?
 - What have been the main effects in terms of human rights that have been suffered?
2. **Criterion Generated:** "Relevant moments in a timeline"
3. **General Categories:** "foundation of Organization X," "state recognition," "creating an international relations section," "creation of the Museum for the Foundation's Memory", "international prize for the defense of civil liberties," "recognition of the community or local government council," "collective title," etc.
4. **Derivative Criteria:** "legal aspects for the institution's establishment", "creation of new dependencies within Organization X", "impacts on Organization X", "international and national recognitions."
5. **Examples of Specific Categories:** "foundation charter", "charter for the creation of dependencies", "legal claims processes filed by Organization X", "crimes against Organization X during the 1990s", "international recognitions for the defense of human rights," etc.

Resulting table:

PERTINENT QUESTION	CRITERIA GENERATED	CATEGORIES
Which important milestones of the organization do these archival documents correspond to?	MAIN CRITERION: "Relevant moments in a timeline"	Archival documents relating to the founding of the CSO
		Archival documents relating to state recognition of the CSO
		Archival documents related to the creation of the museum of the foundation's memory
		Archival documents related to the collective titles of certain territories
		Archival documents related to the recognition of the international community
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 1: Legal aspects regarding the institution's establishment	Founding charter
		Charter for the creation of dependencies
		Charter related to agreements with other entities
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 2: Impacts on the organization	Archival documents relating to attacks on the CSO's headquarters in 1996
		Archival documents related to crimes against CSO members during the 2000s
	DERIVATIVE CRITERION 3: International recognition for the defense of human rights	International recognitions for the defense of human rights

2.4.1 CREATION OF SERIES AND SUB-SERIES

Once the above exercise has been carried out, it is very likely that the team will find ways of grouping that are repeated in the criteria or categories that have been obtained. Various archival documents may be grouped into a large category in which they seem naturally connected to each other (general or specific). This is a category that gives them a shared meaning.

Therefore, in **Example 2**, in the **“organization actions”** criterion, the team may discover that various archival documents correspond to human rights training activities carried out with people from various communities. These activities include minutes and educational material (physical archives) and some collective testimonies in recordings (oral archives). These **“human rights training activities”** may become the first major classification category.

In archival terms this large category or grouping is called a **series**.

Within some **series** it is helpful to think of some subcategories or smaller groupings using derivative criteria as in the above exercise. We call these internal categories **subseries**. These subseries are more specific groupings of archival documents within a series.

For example, in the previous case, within the **“Human rights training activities”** series there may be a subseries created under the **“Types of training”** criterion,



Revision of paper archives in the Casa Campesina, Sincelejo, in Northern Colombia. Photo: ICSC

such as the **“Seminars”** subseries, or the **“Workshops on how to present victim testimonies before international courts”** subseries.

However, not all the series necessarily include subseries. In other words, the criterion that was used to delimit a series may be sufficient to include all the archival documents that match with this, without the need to add new criteria. For example, if an organization creates the **“Agreements with cooperation entities”** series, it may not be necessary to add additional criteria to classify those archival documents. This series contains only archival documents related to these agreements.

These series and subseries are the main basis for the logical classification of the archive and, subsequently, the archive’s cataloging. The next step is to then make a list of all the series that are considered to make up the archive and, subsequently (if necessary), a list of all the subseries corresponding to each series.

2.4.2 CREATING A CLASSIFICATION TABLE

After creating a list with the main series and subseries, it is now possible to create a classification table that will be the main tool for managing the archive, before cataloging it. The classification table integrates items from the archival identification inventory but subordinates those columns to the new logic based on series and subseries. This is the main unit of analysis. Thus, a classification table may look like this:

Series				
Subseries				
Archival Document Type				
Archival Dates				
General Description of the Series				
Box / Folder				
Storage Medium				
State of Preservation (good, regular, bad)				
Notes				

At this point, we can already start to think about a provisional form of storage as follows: each storage box corresponds to a series. However, in the event that a series and its respective subseries contain too many archival documents, more than one box per series may be used.

The **archival dates** are data related to general categories such as series and subseries. They indicate the production dates of the first and last archival document of a subseries (for series that have subseries), or of the series. This allows a general period to be established within which the specific archival document was produced.

2.3 Cataloging

Once a *general* logic for the archive has been created in the classification stage, cataloging helps identify a *particular* description for each archival document.

At this stage it is already possible to efficiently make detailed descriptions of each individual archival document that makes up the archive.

The objectives of cataloging are the following:

- Be able to make descriptions of each archival document that later allow specialized searches by topic or category.
- Easily locate archival documents in their physical and digital storage locations.
- Know the specific characteristics of each storage medium and file format of the archival documents to facilitate their preservation.

We can think of the cataloging process in four steps:

- Grouping of each archival document by series and subseries.
- Description of the archival documents.
- Coding of the archival documents.
- Storage.

2.3.1 GROUPING BY SERIES AND SUBSERIES

Thanks to the fact that in the classification stage we established the logic of the archive by creating a table ordered by series and subseries, it is now possible to take each individual archived document and integrate it into a subseries or series. As we noted earlier, series may not necessarily include subseries.

An intuitive way to do this is to associate each series with a box, so that archival documents in the same series may be separated into different boxes. Associating a series with boxes is above all a visual aid to facilitate the process, but should not be understood as a strict rule for the following reasons:

1. It is possible that the archival documents belonging to a series are rather numerous and thus do not all fit into a single box. In this case it should be understood that a series might have more than one box.
2. Oral archives are contained on various storage mediums (magnetic tapes, CDs, DVDs, hard drives) that have different dimensions. This makes it difficult to keep them all in one box, which can also lead to complications in the preservation strategy. In the event that a series is composed of archival documents with different storage mediums, it is recommended to have special boxes of the same series for each storage medium.



Archive after classification, cataloging, and storing in acid-free boxes. Photo: OBSURDH

- 3. Oral archives are accompanied by physical archival documents on paper, such as “informed consents” or “research material prior to taking the testimony”. In this case, too, it is recommended to keep audiovisual storage mediums in separate boxes from paper documents.

2.3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

This is the central cataloging procedure. In fact, it could be said that describing is synonymous with cataloging. The description exercise allows future users of the archive to search for characteristics and the specific aspects of the content of each archival document. Furthermore, the use of descriptors allows relationships to be established between various archival documents, including data from different series or subseries.

A **descriptor** is a concept used in archival studies to designate certain “terms”, “keywords” or “short sentences” that have the ability to “describe”, which means informing us in a summarized and synthetic way about part of the contents or other aspects of an archival document.

The end result of the description process is a cataloging table, which will be the fundamental tool for using and managing the archive. This table will be made up of three types of descriptors:

- 1. General
- 2. Content
- 3. Technical

However, each organization is free to add columns with the descriptors it considers useful, and thus increase the level of description detail according to its needs.

In the description process we take each individual archival document, for example a video cassette, we find out about its complete content, and we fill in, one by one, the columns of a cataloging table. To make this exercise more understandable, in this manual we divide the cataloging table into three parts, each part corresponding to one of the descriptor types.

2.3.2.1 General Descriptors

These refer to the data that defines the archival document’s organization within the general logic of the archive. The main examples are the code, the **series** and the **subseries**. The last two have already been established in the classification stage. The code will be established at the end of the process in the coding stage.

Further categories may be added to these original three, such as the title (this can be a title that the archival document already has, or a title granted at the time of description), and those of producer/author (the person who made the archival document, for example, who carried out the taking of the testimony; or the dependency of the organization responsible for the production of the archival document and its organization).

An example of the section of the cataloging table dedicated to general descriptors:

Code	Title	Series	Subseries	Producer/Author

2.3.2.2 Content Descriptors

These refer to detailed descriptions of the contents that each individual archival document houses. This part of the process can be considered the central nucleus of the description. It establishes the main terms and information that will allow a future user to carry out specialized searches, as well as relating data from various archival documents to each other. Thus, this part of the description requires a full reading or viewing of the archival documents.

The main categories of content descriptors are: thematic, chronological, geographic, role and language descriptors.

Thematic Descriptors

This category houses a set of keywords or key terms that define the archival document’s content and that give it meaning within the archive’s general philosophy. For example, if it is a human rights archive, a testimony on forced

displacement could be described using the following terms: “dispossession”, “illegal appropriation of land”, “collective title”, “land rights”, etc.

The main instruments for thematic description are **thesauri**. These are ordered and hierarchical collections of terms that define the archive’s contents and its philosophy. Thesauri are tools that allow you to search and associate archival documents by their content. Thus, it always helps if several organizations working within a similar context (geographic, thematic) use a common thesaurus between them.

The creation of a thesaurus generally implies combining the knowledge of several people: specialists in a subject (for example, human rights), specialists in lexicography (linguists, semantics) and the accumulated knowledge of organization members who create and manage the archive in accordance with its purposes, principles, and values.

In the field of memory preservation and human rights claims, several of these efforts have been reflected in **standard thesauri** that include most of the content related to these areas. These thesauri serve as the basis for the cataloging of archives in many institutions and organizations around the world.

A general recommendation for organizations that are beginning to manage their archives is to use an existing thesaurus that is directly related to the purpose and meaning of their archives. The reasons for this decision are as follows:

- The preparation of a thesaurus is usually a time-consuming process, requiring specialists from various areas. Thus, it is a procedure that can generate high financial costs for the CSO.
- It is important that the terms used in the descriptions obey certain standard characteristics in relation to other human rights archives around the world. This is of utmost importance, for example, in the event that the archival documents are used for legal proceedings, whether in ordinary justice or in special national and international courts.
- In the future, other organizations, academics, students, or journalists may conduct investigations that require cross-searches across multiple human rights archives. This work will be greatly facilitated by the use of common thesauri.

After incorporating an existing thesaurus, the CSO may find that a recurring term within its archival documents does not appear in the thesaurus they had chosen. In that case, it is possible to make an additional list consistent with its themes. For example, a descriptor such as “armed groups” may be added, and from there, names can also be added of armed groups in the region; or “ethnic groups and populations”, in the event that it is necessary to detail the indigenous groups of a particular region, under a unified list. All major human rights oral archive or database will have developed their own thesauri, often based in standard use by similar organizations, with additional entries based on their own documentation experience.⁶

As organizations learn more about the particularities of their archive, and the terminology that best suits their policies and values, the additional tailored list that they produce will enable them to have more personalized thematic descriptors.



Testimonial archives from the REMHI Commission stored in acid-free boxes. Photo: ICSC

The most important thing, within the logic of using the archive, is to remember the following key points when a term is used from a thesaurus, or a new one is incorporated into a list:

Always refer to the same content (there should not be two different words to express the same idea, for example “victimizing act” and “violent act”).

Descriptors must always be written in the same way (there should be no typographical alterations between two terms that express the same thing), for example “FARC” and “Farc”.

The most important terms of the thesaurus and of the lists that define the thematic content of an archival document will be integrated into the cataloging table, in the **thematic descriptors** column. The standard way to include these terms is to write each one separated by a comma, leaving a space between each term (this allows them to be easily migrated later to specialized software applications).

Chronological Descriptors

Chronological descriptors refer to the most important dates within an archival document’s content. These are of two types of dates. The first one refers to the most relevant dates or periods with respect to the events that are reported in the archival documents. For example, the dates within which the mass displacement of people from a community occurred in a testimony about forced displacement. The second type refers to the dates within which an archival document was prepared. For example, the date that appears in the informed consent at the time the testimony was taken.

Geographic Descriptors

These refer to the places (municipalities, districts, departments, regions, etc.) connected to the archival documents. Places where the archival document was produced must also be mentioned. This information can be provided in the informed consents.

Role Descriptors

These describe the actors that are mentioned in an archival document. They may refer to three types of actors: first, the names of natural persons (proper names); second, the names of legal persons (entities, organizations, companies,

institutions); third, the roles that the actors assume in the archival document’s contents (community leader, entrepreneur, army brigade captain). Depending on the particularities of each archival document and, especially, on the security and information needs in the informed consents, this information may be kept partially or totally anonymous. Thus, proper names are often replaced by alphanumeric codes, protecting a person’s identification by saving this information in archival documents having high levels of security and in a separate archive.

Language Descriptors

This refers to the language or languages in which the archival document is written or recorded. This column can have specific variables. For example, a testimony of an interview with a foreign researcher may contain part of the content in English (the responses of the interviewee), but with subtitles in Spanish. Other similar cases are the testimonies made with members of indigenous communities who speak their native language.

Example of the section of the cataloging table dedicated to thematic descriptors:

Content summary	Thematic descriptors	Role Descriptors <i>(natural or legal person, role)</i>	Toponymics	Chronological	Language

2.3.2.3 Technical Descriptors

These refer to the technical characteristics of the archival document that facilitate the management of the archive in three fundamental aspects: the location of archival documents in their containers, the characteristics of the file format and storage mediums to identify the way in which they should be used or reproduced, and necessary data for a preservation strategy.

The main technical descriptors categories are: the preservation unit; the state of preservation; the storage medium, the file format and volume; and archival dates.

Preservation Unit

This refers to the physical location of the archival document within the whole archive. Three columns can be included in the cataloging table: firstly, a column referring to the **box** in which the archival document is located. As we've seen previously, archival documents of the same series are commonly found within the same box, although this is not always the case. A second column indicates the existence of **other containers** within the same box, for example, folders or smaller containers. And finally, a third column can be used to specify the location of archives kept on a digital storage medium.

For convenience, these fields can be filled out after the storage process has been completed.



Oral archive of the REHMI Commission with testimonies of victims of the armed conflict of Guatemala are available for controlled access at the Archbishopric Office of Ciudad de Guatemala. Photo: ICSC

State of Preservation

These descriptors help those in charge of the archive to establish preservation strategies for each archival document. In the corresponding box within the cataloging table, a general description of the archival document's status (good / bad condition) can be included, and, if at all possible, it is important to specify the risk factors that may be affecting the archival document.

Storage Medium, File Format and Volume

These are descriptors for technical characteristics related to the physical or digital qualities of the archival documents. The **storage medium** refers to the physical media that the different archival documents are stored on. For audiovisual files there are two main classes of storage medium: analogue and digital. Analogue storage media include audio or video magnetic tapes, of which there are various formats, while digital media include magnetic tapes, optical discs, memory cards, and hard drives.

The **file format** refers to the specific structure of a digital record. This may refer to text documents (txt, pdf, doc); images (JPEG, TIFF, PDF); video (mp4, MOV, WAV, etc.); or audio file formats (mp3, WAV, etc.).

Finally, the **volume** refers to the length of the archival document according to the storage medium or file format. It may indicate, for example, the duration (an audio cassette testimony lasting 40 minutes), the physical length (a paper transcribed testimony of 30 pages), or the weight of a digital archive (a digital video testimony weighing 450 Megabytes).

Archival Dates

These are data related to general categories such as series and subseries. They indicate the production dates of the first and last archival document of a subseries (for those series that have a subseries), or of the series. This helps establish a general period, within which a specific archival document was produced.

This may include two boxes. The first box is reserved for the creation date of the archival document with the other box used for a range of dates (archival dates) that are mentioned in the archival document.

Example of the section of the cataloging table dedicated to technical descriptors:

Preservation Unit	Technical Characteristics	Archival Dates	State of Preservation				
Box	Other	Route (electronic archive)	Storage Medium	File Format	Volume (folios, length, bytes)	Start	End

2.4 Coding of Documents on a Physical Storage Medium

The coding process helps easily locate each archival document within its containers while preserving the logic of the archive in its series and subseries. Even when archival documents of the same series are in different containers, the connection between each one is not lost thanks to this coding system.

Although standard coding procedures exist, it is recommended that each organization, according to the size of its archive, and the number of series and subseries, develop its own system that is functional to its needs.

Below is a simple example of alphanumeric coding:

1. Suppose we have the “Cases of human rights violations” series. The first two digits of the codes that correspond to this series could be the letters “HR”.
2. Within this series, there are also several subseries: “cases of forced disappearances”, “cases of extrajudicial killings”, “cases of arbitrary detentions”, “cases of targeted killings”, and so on. We can assign the following two digits of the codes corresponding to this series, with two letters corresponding to each subseries: “cases of forced disappearances” (FD), “cases of arbitrary detentions” (AD), “cases of targeted killings” (TK).

3. In this way, each archival document belonging to this series, and to a certain subseries, will be assigned a code that begins as follows:

HRFD = code for the “cases of forced disappearances” subseries that belongs to the “Cases of human rights violations” series.

HRTK = code for the “cases of targeted killings” subseries that belongs to the “cases of human rights violations” series.

4. Finally, we may add some consecutive numeric digits to identify each individual archival document within a series. For example, within the “cases of forced disappearances” sub-series, there is a cassette with the testimony of a community leader, and another with the testimony of a mother who is the head of the family. We would assign a title to each archival document and the consecutive digits. The coding would look like this:

HRFD0001 – Testimony of Abelardo Forero. Community leader, “San José” sector.

HRFD0002 – Testimony of Clara Ruiz. Mother head of family, “San José” sector.

NOTE: For security reasons, it may be necessary to replace the actual names of people with a code, while information containing their identification is protected in a separate confidential archival document.

5. In the case of an audiovisual storage medium, these data can be printed on paper and added to the storage mediums of each archival document. For example, in the case of compact audiocassettes, this paper can be placed between the plastic case and the cardboard label of these cassettes. For paper documents, these data must be related by means of tables added to the folder in which they are located. Thus, by keeping the archival documents in their boxes, we can be sure that they belong to a certain series or subseries.

2.5 Labeling and Storage

The cataloging process provides the final location of the archival documents within storage mediums such as folders and boxes. Paper documents can be placed in acid-free four-wing folders (see preservation section), identified by a labeling system. These can be carried out using some of the cataloging descriptors, especially the code of the archival document with the series and subseries to which it belongs. The choice of other descriptors or data depends on their effectiveness for quickly locating an archive. In general, the following data may be relevant for labeling:

- **Archival document code** (must correspond exactly with the code in the cataloging table)
- **Date of record**
- **Dependency to which the archival document belongs**
- **Series**
- **Subseries**
- **Start date**
- **End date**
- **Preservation unit** (folder, box, among others)

Once the folders have been labeled, the boxes can then be labeled. The information on these labels should be more general and there is no need to describe every archival document. The most important data is the codes and names of the series and the subseries it contains. Each box must also have a consecutive number and the extension of each subseries or series in folios (number of sheets, in the case of paper archival documents).

2.5.1 STORAGE OF ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS ON PHYSICAL MEDIA

The final physical storage of archival documents in their boxes, folders or other containers may be performed as they are being cataloged. For example, when you finish describing the archival documents of a subseries or series, they can

The diagram shows a form titled "Rotulo de Carpeta" from the "Observatorio Surcolombiano de DDHH, Paz y Territorio OBSURDH". The form has several fields with red boxes and arrows explaining them:

- Top Header:** "Observatorio Surcolombiano de DDHH, Paz y Territorio" and "OBSURDH".
- Title:** "Rotulo de Carpeta".
- Registration Info:** A box at the top right says "Registrar el Código y Nombre de la Serie-Subserie documental." with arrows pointing to the "Cod-Serie:" and "Nombre:" fields.
- Form Fields:**
 - Cod-Serie:** A text field.
 - Nombre:** A text field.
 - Cod-SubSerie:** A text field.
 - Nombre:** A text field.
 - Nombre del Expediente:** A large text field.
 - Fechas Extremas:** A text field.
 - Inicial:** A text field.
 - Final:** A text field.
 - Carpeta No. de:** A text field.
 - Folios del al Total:** A text field.
 - Funcionario Creador de Carpeta:** A text field.
 - Fecha de Archivo:** A text field.
- Explanatory Boxes:**
 - Bottom left: "Registrar las fechas extremas, de inicio y cierre de cada carpeta." (points to Fechas Extremas).
 - Bottom center-left: "Funcionario encargado de realizar y archivar la carpeta." (points to Funcionario Creador de Carpeta).
 - Bottom center-right: "Registrar el número de carpeta. Ejemplo: Carpeta 1 de 1." (points to Carpeta No. de).
 - Bottom right: "Registrar número de folio inicial, final y el total de folios, al cerrar cada carpeta." (points to Folios del al Total).
 - Far right: "Fecha en que se hace y archiva la carpeta." (points to Fecha de Archivo).
- Additional Note:** A box on the right says "Digite el Nombre de la carpeta que identifique clara y detalladamente el contenido de la misma." with an arrow pointing to the "Nombre:" field.

Labeling of archival boxes by OBSURDH. Photo: OBSURDH

then be stored in a folder or other small containers (usually the subseries), or in boxes (usually the series). When a box is full to capacity, a label is made that includes a table listing the series and subseries that were stored, as well as a consecutive number for the box. This label is attached to one of the outer sides of the box.

2.5.2 CODING AND STORAGE OF ARCHIVES ON DIGITAL MEDIA

The coding example explained for archives held on a physical storage medium is exactly the same as that for digital records (native or digitized). Instead of a system of smaller boxes, folders or containers, digital storage systems, of course, use virtual folders. Thus, storage must be performed through a hierarchy of folders. A folder may contain the name and the part of the code that corresponds to a series, while containing several folders with the names and the part of the code that corresponds to the subseries. Finally, inside these are the individual archival documents with their unique code.

This code is used as the name of the digital record and thus allows archival documents to be retrieved by name.

2.6 Digital Tools for Managing Archival Documents

There are multiple digital tools (software) for managing archival documents. These may be chosen according to the organization's needs and technical capacity. However, it is not essential to use any software, as we have explained in this toolkit. The cataloging tables can be designed without any problems on spreadsheets (Excel), which are sufficient for the effective management of the archives. Furthermore, they can be later used as a basis for more complex processes, since all software is able to read this file format.

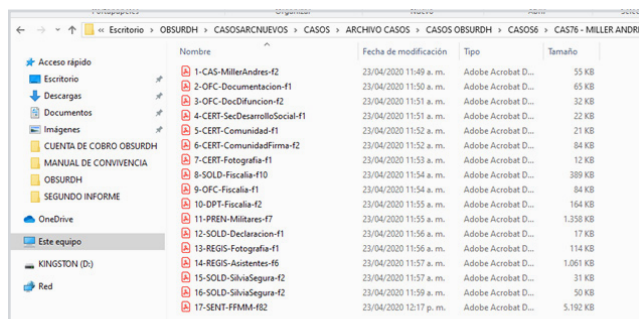
Depending on the software available, this may be either free or under commercial license.

As one might expect, free software is usually free of any charge and is designed to openly receive input from developers and engineers. Free software generally performs well but may have limited functionality that is only accessible with a paid option.

Proprietary or private software is developed by companies for commercial purposes. There are various types and uses depending on the developer. It is important that the decision to purchase or subscribe to one of these is made with the help of specialists. This is particularly applicable in relation to updates or new product versions, which may restrict access to work or future functionality.

2.7 Preservation and Copies

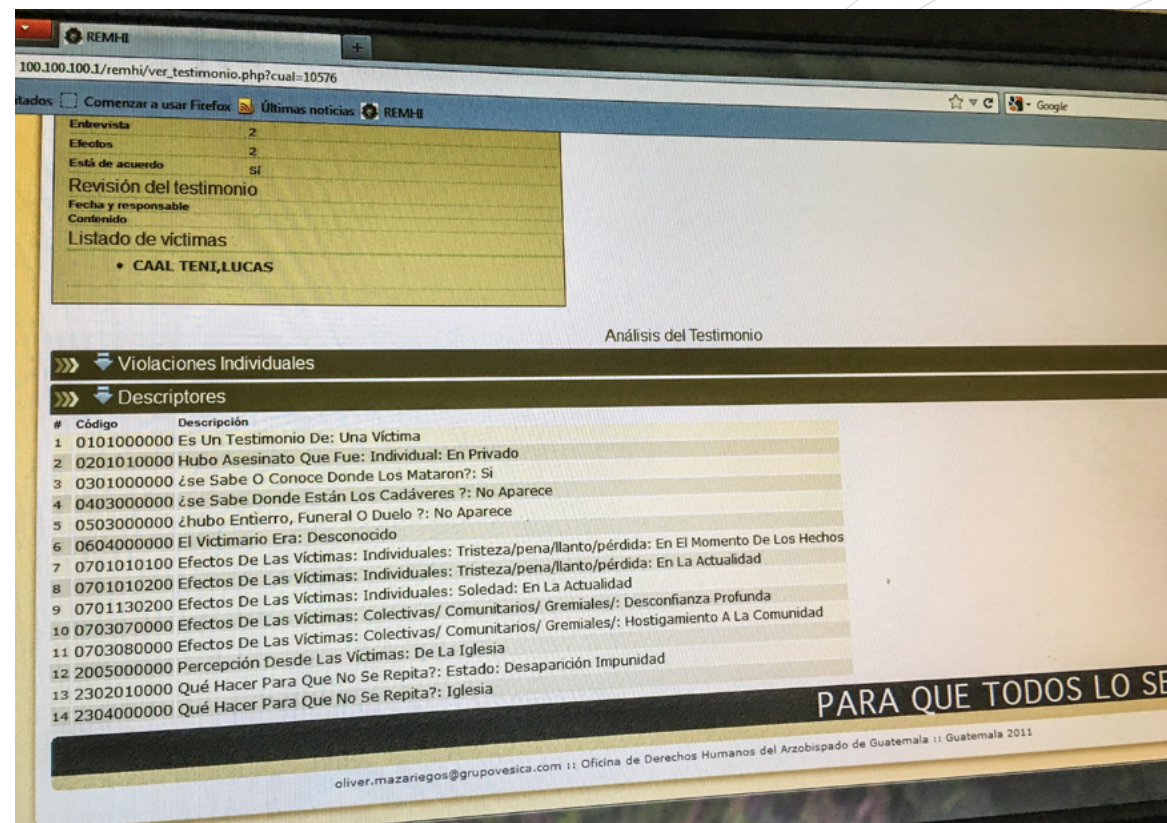
GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES



Nombre	Fecha de modificación	Tipo	Tamaño
1-CAS-MillerAndres-2	23/04/2020 11:49 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	55 KB
2-Ofc-Documentacion-f1	23/04/2020 11:50 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	65 KB
3-Ofc-DeDifusion-f2	23/04/2020 11:51 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	32 KB
4-CERT-DesarrolloSocial-f1	23/04/2020 11:51 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	22 KB
5-CERT-Comunidad-f1	23/04/2020 11:52 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	21 KB
6-CERT-ComunidadFirma-f2	23/04/2020 11:52 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	84 KB
7-CERT-Fotografia-f1	23/04/2020 11:53 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	12 KB
8-SOLD-Fiscalia-f10	23/04/2020 11:54 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	389 KB
9-Ofc-Fiscalia-f1	23/04/2020 11:54 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	84 KB
10-Ofc-Fiscalia-f2	23/04/2020 11:55 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	164 KB
11-PREN-Militares-f7	23/04/2020 11:55 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	1,358 KB
12-SOLD-Declaracion-f1	23/04/2020 11:56 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	17 KB
13-REGIS-Fotografia-f1	23/04/2020 11:56 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	114 KB
14-REGIS-Asistentes-f6	23/04/2020 11:57 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	1,061 KB
15-SOLD-SilviaSegura-f2	23/04/2020 11:57 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	31 KB
16-SOLD-SilviaSegura-f2	23/04/2020 11:59 a. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	50 KB
17-SENT-FRMM-f82	23/04/2020 12:17 p. m.	Adobe Acrobat D...	5,192 KB

Organization of digitized archives by OBSURDH.
Photo: OBSURDH

In terms of preservation and custody, memory and truth-clarification archives deserve double treatment in relation to the importance of the information they contain. On the one hand, as with other archival



Access to the REMHI database at the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi, at the Archbishopric Office of Guatemala. Photo: ICSC

documents, the document collections of these archives must be protected as cultural assets available at the service of present and future users, due to the content of their historical values. But, on the other hand, in this type of archival document management, the central protection of the truth and of the people affected by human rights violations is also important. The preservation and custody strategies imply, in addition to the protection of the people who have given their testimony or the people to whom the archival documents refer, the custody of the actual archival documents themselves so they are not altered, stolen or destroyed.

THE FOLLOWING CAN BE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES IN ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION:

Keep the Original Document in as Good a Condition as Possible.

Original archival documents are essential and should never be discarded under any circumstance. Even audiovisual archival documents that are stored on obsolete media, such as cassette tapes or CDs, contain relevant information about the historical circumstances at the time the testimonies were made. The original archival documents themselves hold historical value, even if they are no longer in daily use, and are the basis for new copies should digitized versions be lost.

A Copy is Never Just a Copy.

All storage mediums for testimonial archival documents are susceptible to loss, damage, or obsolescence. It is therefore vital that copies of the original archival documents are always managed properly. If information from the original archival document were to be irretrievably lost, then the first copies obtained from it would become the “originals”.

All Storage Media Have a Limited Shelf Life.

Storage mediums that host oral records are technological products that are always subject to continuous changes and updates. Some storage mediums that were very efficient a few decades ago are no longer efficient today. The same thing is very likely to happen with storage mediums that are currently in use (hard drives or memory sticks). Although paper has proven durable during the history of humanity, today it is a more fragile storage medium, because modern industrial production methods have made it less durable and more susceptible to damage.

Audiovisual archival documents in analogue format must be digitized. Furthermore, archival documents in magnetic-digital or optical-digital file format must be converted to up-to-date digital file formats. However, all these digital archival documents (originals or copies) are stored in a storage medium and a file format and are therefore susceptible to becoming obsolete due to the rapid changes in the industry. Thus, an archive saved on a CD may be unreadable in a few years, due to the lack of devices capable of reproducing it (storage medium); or because its file format is no longer readable by the latest software; or because the version of the file format has expired; or because the file format itself is no longer in use. For more information on storage mediums and file formats, consult the obsolescence table below.

Thus, it is always recommended to use standardized file formats, as well as **open source** (“free”) software, so as not to depend on rapid changes in the industry. In any circumstance, constant monitoring of these obsolescence processes is necessary to carry out efficient migrations to new storage media that are of higher quality and durability, or to the most up-to-date file format.

Faithfulness to the Original

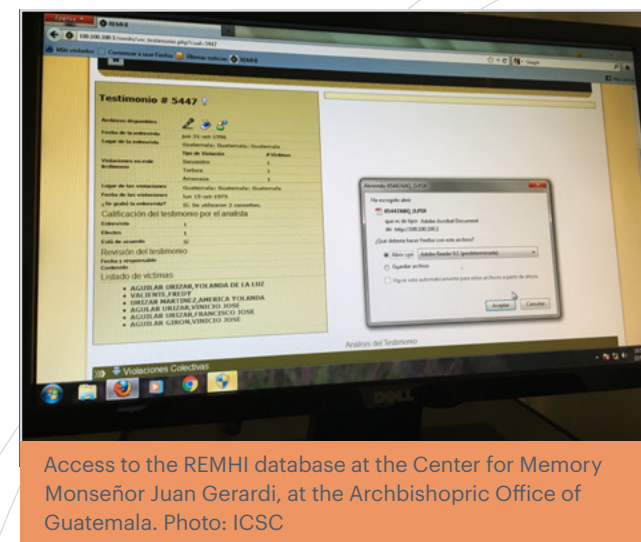
Copies made from the original must be performed without altering any content. It is even recommended to avoid altering the noises or distortions of the original signal (as long as these do not impede the understanding of the testimonies) or to make edits or cuts. The only exception that must be evaluated in the case of oral human rights archives is when the audio testimonies undergo a process to alter an interviewee’s tone of voice in order to guarantee their safety.

Constant Monitoring

Both the originals and their copies must be regularly reviewed to verify that their content is unaltered. In the case of copies, it must be verified that their content always corresponds to the content of the original. Likewise, preservation conditions (temperature, humidity, etc.) must be maintained over time.

Cooperation and External Copies

It is very important to always have backup copies of the archives located in places outside the institution itself, or even for institutions in different countries of those of origin of the archival documents (See Custody of oral archives) to hold copies. Therefore, it is recommended to establish trust networks with other organizations and institutions to ensure the custody of such archival documents without violating the principles mentioned here.



Access to the REMHI database at the Center for Memory Monseñor Juan Gerardi, at the Archbishopric Office of Guatemala. Photo: ICSC

2.7.1 MANAGEMENT OF COPIES IN ORAL ARCHIVES

After taking a testimony, it is essential to make immediate backup copies to ensure its preservation. Furthermore, archives that already have collections of audiovisual archival documents in analogue or magnetic file formats must have a copy management strategy to avoid the use of original storage media as much as possible, and to ensure their availability on digital storage media. There are three main types of copies for human rights archives:

PRESERVATION COPIES. DIGITIZATION PROCESSES.

This involves the transfer of original archival documents to updated digital storage mediums for custody and preservation purposes, and not for purposes of use. Creating backup copies from analogue archival documents involves digitization processes. In several cases, due to the age of the original storage medium, a specialized technician will need to be hired. Digitized copies must be made in high definition and in the most up-to-date standardized file formats. In this process, it is important to remember that the contents of the original record are not altered in the resulting digital copy, with nothing being added or removed. Any alteration due to the wishes of the person in charge would impose changes in the archival document's historical and memory value.

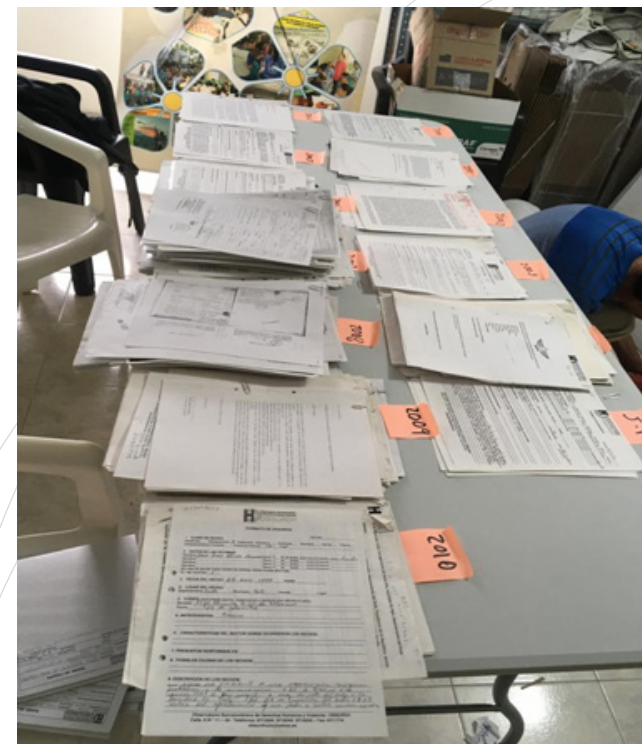
After the digital copy has been produced, it is important to verify it to check that no alterations have been made to the original archival document. At least two digital backup copies should be made and stored in different locations. This is to ensure that different copies of the same archive are not subject to the same risks of deterioration (see below: "Main enemies of analogue archives" and "preservation of digital archives") or security (see below: "Archive custody").

Consultation Copies

These are the copies that users can consult by searching the site of the archives or on virtual platforms. These copies can be in different resolutions or file formats that are not necessarily stored with the highest definition. The copies of these testimonies may be accompanied by corporate material (labels with the name of the institution, introductions, titles and indexes). Depending on the access levels for each testimony (see section "Access and return"), these copies may restrict certain passages of the testimony, or feature a type of editing that protects the testimony's anonymity. These non-regular "editing" processes, as part of common file management protocols, must thus be decided through internal agreements within the organization.

Return Copies

In the case of testimonial archives, these are copies delivered directly to the interviewee (individual or group) or to an institution trusted by the interviewee as the final part of the testimony-taking process. Content may be accompanied by corporate material just as is the case for copies that are intended for use. In cases of personalized returns, the viability of this practice in terms of security for the interviewee must be evaluated very closely, especially from the informed consents.



Initial organization of paper archives by blocks on a table as a preliminary step to cataloguing. Photo: OBSURDH

2.7.2 PRESERVATION OF PAPER ARCHIVES

WHAT ARE THE DETERIORATION FACTORS FOR PAPER ARCHIVES?

Paper archives are generally strong and durable. However, depending on their composition and, due to the fact they are exposed to different factors, these archives can deteriorate leading to the loss of information. Paper damage is caused by intrinsic factors, i.e. the properties of the paper and ink, or extrinsic factors, i.e. external to the archival document.

Intrinsic factors occur due to the acidity of the paper, which is manifested in yellow spots. This process is accelerated by light, which creates a weakness in these stained parts of the paper.



ANUC paper archive folder after removal of staples, clips and other metal objects. Photo: ICSC

Extrinsic factors may be environmental (physical), chemical, biological, or mechanical.

Physical or environmental damage is related to the microclimate in which archival documents are stored and this may be related to light, humidity or temperature. Light discolors archival documents and weakens the paper. Moisture and subsequently loss of moisture deforms the paper. This generates stains since it allows the concentration of dirt in some areas. Excess moisture encourages other damage such as fungi, in addition to attracting insects. A high temperature, meanwhile, accelerates the decomposition of cellulose and also leads to the appearance of fungi and microorganisms. On the other hand, dryness and excessive cold also turns the paper hard and weak.

Chemical damage is related to chemical compounds that are transported through the air before getting lodged in the paper, especially in cracks and weakened areas. Furthermore, the oxidation of metallic elements found attached to the archive such as staples, hooks or clips, or the hardening of the adhesives,

break and stain the paper. Plastic elements such as folders, not only introduce damage due to their acidity, but also lead to the accumulation of moisture.

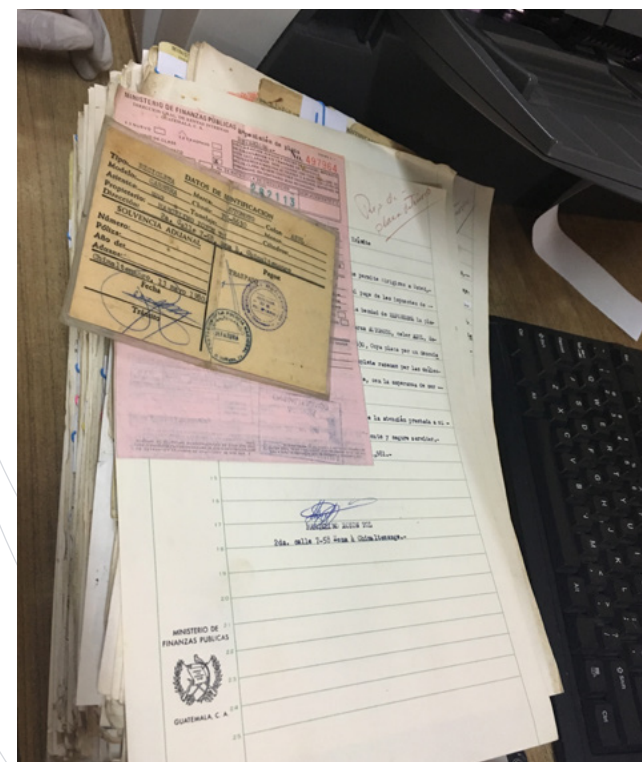
Biological damage refers to living agents that alter the archival document such as rodents, insects, fungi or bacteria. Some of these are characterized by their consumption of paper, such as cockroaches, worms, termites, and ants. These organisms tend to reproduce easily in humid and dark environments. The presence of these destructive organisms can be recognized when holes or galleries appear in the sheets.

Furthermore, fungi and bacteria change the texture of the paper by weakening it. Its presence can be evidenced by the appearance of black, reddish or brown pigmentation. To differentiate a stain produced by acidity from that produced by a fungus, a magnifying glass is recommended. The fungi will look superimposed on the paper, and in some cases may contain hairs.

Finally, mechanical damage occurs due to tension that is generated in the paper caused by the hooks in A-Z binders or, in general, any folder with metal hooks. Additionally, this may occur due to combining bound documents. This stress manifests itself in breaks or a weakening of the paper. The presence of tape or any adhesive also causes damage by crystallizing or breaking the paper.

Recommendations for Damage Prevention

Paper documents should be stored in acid-free four wing folders. Any



Paper documents ready for digitizing via scanner at the human rights Historical Archive of the National Police in Guatemala. Photo: ICSC

metal elements attached to the paper such as staples, hooks or clips should be removed. Plastic elements such as folders, should also be removed. For convenience, all paper folios (separate sheets) should be numbered using only pencil.

It is essential to maintain environmental conditions by controlling humidity, direct light, temperature and dust. The ideal temperature for the maintenance of the paper is between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius.

The ideal relative humidity should be between 45 and 60%, with a maximum daily fluctuation of 5%. A hygrometer is recommended to regularly check this.

It is important to ensure that there are no sudden variations in temperature as this accelerates any damage. Therefore, if an air conditioner is installed, this must be kept switched on 24 hours a day at the same temperature. Turning it on and off can cause abrupt changes that accelerate deterioration.

Humidity can be controlled by keeping the space ventilated. Archive boxes should never be stored in bathrooms, near a building's plumbing, or in places that have leaks or damp walls.

If the premises have windows, it is important to install curtains so that the boxes do not receive any direct light, while being covered with UV filter sheets to suppress ultraviolet radiation. However, darkness is not very convenient either, as this promotes the nesting of some of the organisms mentioned above. Artificial lighting should preferably be kept at a low intensity, with a maximum luminosity of less than 100 LUX. If fluorescent light is used, the lamps must be equipped with UV filter sheets. Incandescent-type light is not recommended either because this produces heat and emits infrared (IR) radiation. The most recently developed LED-type light is the most recommended because this source does not emit any heat, nor does it emit infrared or ultraviolet radiation if the type of lamp specifies a color temperature (CT) between 3000 and 5000 Kelvin, which is the majority of those sold for commercial use. The other advantage of LED light is that it consumes very little energy and has a long life, making it more economical.⁷

In protecting from both humidity and temperature changes, it is important to keep paper archives stored in boxes and archive folders. These must be made of de-acidified cardboard and kept on metal shelves.



Revision of digital storage media at the ANUC archives in Bogotá during GIJTR's needs assessment. Photo: ICSC

The archive space should be dry cleaned, preferably with vacuum cleaners, to avoid the accumulation of dust. If possible, it is recommended to use dehumidifiers in areas with high humidity. Furthermore, in areas with high atmospheric pollution, it is also advisable to filter the air periodically to remove solid particles.

Finally, it is important to keep CO₂ or multipurpose fire extinguishers, while avoiding the use of either extinguishers featuring chemical powder or water in the case of fire.

2.7.3 PRESERVATION OF AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES KEPT ON MAGNETIC MEDIUMS

Most of a CSO's audiovisual archives prior to the digital era were produced on magnetic storage mediums, which were either on tapes that recorded or reproduced sound or light waves in an analogue manner, or by means of binary (digital) codes passed through a system of magnetized heads. Below is a table of some of the major magnetic storage mediums produced since 1963, which includes the year that some of these were commercially discontinued. Furthermore, an evaluation is made of the risk of obsolescence, which refers to the possibility that the original archival documents in these storage mediums will be impossible to be reproduced.



Paper documents originally laid on the floor for preliminary organization at OBSURDH.
Photo: OBSURDH

TABLE OF THE MAIN MAGNETIC STORAGE MEDIUMS USED FOR AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES⁸

STORAGE MEDIUM	AUDIO	VIDEO	ANA-LOGI-CAL	DIGI-TAL	YEAR OF LAUNCH	END OF PRODUCTION	RISK OF OBSOLESCENCE
Compact Cassettes	x		x		1963	2000s	Vulnerable. Some risk.
Mini Cassettes	x		x		1967		Still in use. Low risk.
DAT (Digital Audio Tape)	x			x	1987	2005	Under threat. Moderate risk.
Video 8		x	x		1985	2000s	Under threat. Moderate risk.
Video Hi8		x	x		1989	2007	Vulnerable. Some risk.
Umatic		x	x		1971	1990s	In danger. High risk.
Betacam		x	x		1982	1990s	Under threat. Moderate risk.
Betacam SP		x	x		1986	2001	Under threat. Moderate risk.
MiniDV		x		x	1995	2000s	Vulnerable. Some risk.
Digital 8		x		x	1999	2007	Vulnerable. Some risk.
DVCam		x		x	1996		Still used. Low risk.
Digital Betacam		x		x	1993	2007	Still used. Low risk.
VHS (Video Home System)		x	x		1976	2000s	Vulnerable. Some risk.
Betamax		x	x		1975	2002	Under threat. Moderate risk.

What are the main enemies for archives kept on a magnetic tape storage medium?

There are several factors that can cause serious or irreparable damage to archives stored on a magnetic storage medium. Among the most important risks are water, humidity, poor temperature control, mechanical integrity (of the storage media and the machines that reproduce them), dust and other foreign matter, fungi, air pollution, excess light and some sources of magnetism. Below, we will explain the most important risks, and the prevention or “rescue” strategies to follow for each one.

WATER/HUMIDITY

“Water is the most important natural enemy of all individual storage media”, as it can produce serious chemical phenomena for a storage medium such as hydrolysis, oxidation or the so-called vinegar syndrome (very common in tropical countries). These phenomena can erase part of the contents of the tapes, change their shape or make them sticky, meaning it is impossible to reproduce them on the corresponding machines. Hydrolysis is caused by moisture in the air. If humidity levels exceed a certain range, there is a high probability that tapes will be damaged, as reactions to humidity can change their physical and chemical properties. Oxidation is another type of water problem that is especially damaging to audio and video cassettes.

What to Do if Archival Documents Come Into Direct Contact with Water?

If contact with water is brief, then the damage is less serious. The archives must first go through a drying process with special care being taken with the cases and labels. These must be completely dry before being used again. If these cases include information on paper that has been badly damaged, it is recommended to rewrite this on new paper. Subsequently, the tapes and the cassette heads should be cleaned with lint-free fabrics such as cotton.

FUNGI

The appearance of fungus on a magnetic storage medium is a direct consequence of a lack of humidity control or prolonged contact between the

storage medium and water. Thus, the best prevention mechanism is to maintain good temperature and humidity control (see below); as well as avoiding the possibility of archival documents getting wet at all costs (leaks, drinks near archives or water containers). One of the greatest dangers for a tape that contains fungi is during playback when the reading heads of the corresponding device also become contaminated. This will increase the likelihood that all other tapes used by the same device will also be contaminated, which could seriously compromise the preservation of the entire archive.

Fungi affect magnetic archival documents everywhere in the world, but they tend to be more frequent in tropical locations with high temperatures and high percentages of humidity.

Chemical prevention is not recommended and should only be performed by a professional restorer. The long-term impact that these products may have on magnetic storage mediums, and even on the health of those who handle them, has not yet been proven.

TEMPERATURE

Changes in temperature affect the dimensions of magnetic tapes. When the temperature rises, the tape expands and, when it falls, it shrinks. These changes in dimension can cause greater or lesser tension in the tape rolls, which can lead to them becoming useless in the future. It is advisable to ensure that there are no temperature changes greater than 3 ° C during a 24-hour period.

Temperatures that exceed certain ranges are also detrimental for analogue files. Generally speaking, it is advisable to maintain a stable temperature that does not fall below 8 ° C or exceed 35 ° C. This range ensures that only the physical dimensions of the storage medium is affected and not the actual tapes.

Temperature and Humidity Control

To achieve an ideal environment for the preservation of analogue archives, it is recommended to install an air conditioning system that helps maintain a stable temperature and humidity within the mentioned ranges, while also avoiding excessive changes in either parameter.

However, it should be noted that the air conditioning must be kept on 24 hours

a day, at the same levels of temperature and humidity control. Any interruption in the system may produce drastic changes to which the storage mediums are usually very susceptible, thus tending to accelerate their deterioration. Therefore, before deciding to install any system, it is essential to ensure that these conditions can be guaranteed, and that there are no frequent power shortages in the premises. To maintain a stable temperature and humidity, measuring devices such as thermo-hygrometers are recommended. When the conditions and resources of the organization prevent any guarantee of these conditions, it is at least preferable that the archive is kept cool with a stable temperature. Changes in temperature are much more damaging to almost all materials than the any other “enemies” mentioned here.

The following table shows the maximum or minimum values within which it is relatively safe to preserve archives:

Humidity	Absolute maximum for a prolonged contingency	60% RH
	Minimum	25% RH
Temperature	Absolute maximum	35°C
	Minimum	8°C for magnetic tapes

However, these parameter ranges are for extreme cases in which there is no impact on archives in the short term. For medium or long-term preservation plans, the following average values are recommended:

Humidity (Ranges)	Medium	40-50% RH
	Low	25-35% RH
	Variability ⁽¹⁾	tight ± 3%RH relaxed ± 5%RH
Temperature (Average Values)	Room	20°C in moderate climatic zones 25°C in tropical zones
	Fresh	Between 8 and 12°C
	Variability ⁽³⁾	tight ± 1°C relaxed ± 3°C

It is recommended to carry out all routine jobs with analogue archives in the same site where they are stored, under suitable temperature conditions. Otherwise, prior preparation of the place to which they will be moved is recommended.

The shelves where the archives are stored should be separated from the wall, and the archival documents should never touch the floor. This will prevent any leakage into the room from other rooms or an accident with liquids spilled on the floor from directly affecting the archives (see storage section for more information).

Furthermore, establishing adequate humidity and temperature parameters must also consider the accessibility, comfort and health of the people who are operating the archive.

PHYSICAL DEFORMATIONS

It is important to minimize the stress placed on magnetic tapes at the time of use, and when rewinding them in the playback equipment. The first recommendation in this regard is to use the latest generation playback equipment (even when these are already obsolete with respect to the digital world). This equipment helps exert less tension on the tape, as well as preventing close contact between the tape and the tape heads. Likewise, state-of-the-art equipment provides more stable and faster rewinding.

The most important aspect to remember is to avoid the tape becoming entangled or twisted inside the storage medium, due to defects in the playback equipment. These issues may significantly affect the playback of archives by adding noise or skipping and leaving gaps in the sound. To prevent this and other mechanical risks, digital copies should be made and the originals used as little as possible.

Furthermore, regularly cleaning the guide rollers and cassette play heads is recommended with soft, lint-free materials.

DUST AND FOREIGN MATTER

Dust or other particles can gather on magnetic tapes thus preventing good contact between the tape and the playback heads. This causes certain frequencies in the audio signal to be lost or the video signal to drop.

In arid or dusty places it is recommended that the archive premises be equipped with hermetically sealed windows and doors. It is important to avoid carpeted floors as they produce extremely damaging textile particles for audiovisual archives. If possible, it is recommended that the color of the floor does not prevent dust particles from being seen, thus allowing regular and effective cleaning. Air conditioning equipment should also include whenever possible mechanical filters that are very effective in preventing dust.

When handling archival materials it is important to remember to keep tape cases (and that of any other audiovisual recordings) closed, in addition to minimizing the time they are left outside their appropriate containers. Handling the tapes (for cleaning or any other operation) should be performed wearing lint-free cotton gloves, as fingerprints act as a kind of glue for dust particles.

Finally, the consumption of food and beverages must be prohibited on the premises where the archival documents are kept, and during all stages of their handling.

AIR POLLUTION

It is advisable that the archive's premises are located away from industrial areas, as gaseous industrial waste can seriously affect the conditions of magnetic tapes. Likewise, during any architectural renovation works, plans should be considered for the protection or transfer of archives to temporary premises. The use of paint and glue generates fumes that can seriously affect tapes. Finally, tobacco use must also be prohibited on the archive's premises and in the entire surrounding area.



Assembly of acid-free archival boxes. Photo: OBSURDH

PESTS

In tropical areas it is difficult to keep the premises free of insects or pests. The only possible recommendation is to try to maintain the archive's premises as sealed as possible and to perform external pest controls.

Any internal fumigation process at the archive's premises can be detrimental to audiovisual records. If necessary, during the fumigation process it is recommended to temporarily move the archives to another location, and only return them after the process has been completed.

LIGHT MANAGEMENT

Archives must never be exposed to direct sunlight, or even other internal intense light sources (light bulbs, reflectors, etc.). Such exposure can cause temperatures to exceed limits required for good preservation. Therefore, it is advisable to use low light sources at below 100 LUX.

MAGNETIC FIELDS

Some sources of magnetic fields can be harmful to archives. Among the most common issues are dynamic headphones or microphones, loudspeakers, and electromagnetic coil-activated instruments (level meters). All these equipment and other tape eraser machines must be kept at least 15 meters away from where the archives are stored.

Cleaning Magnetic Tape Archives

Archives on analogue storage mediums must be cleaned regularly to prevent all negative effects caused by the “enemies” listed above. In principle, any new collection of audiovisual records must go through a cleaning process before entering the storage areas. Special attention must be paid to dirty collections that have been stored for a long time in poor environmental conditions, that come from arid areas or have been under high exposure to dust, or which could be affected by fungi.



Scanning of documents at the human rights Historical Archive of the National Police in Guatemala.
Photo: ICSC

As a standard, three possible cleaning methods are recommended: 1. Using clean compressed air, 2. Using distilled water, and 3. Using chemical solvents.

The last two options must only be performed under the supervision of specialists and can only be carried out by qualified personnel. Thus, in this section, only dry cleaning is recommended, using compressed air where possible.⁹

Compressed Air

Compressed air cans costing US \$8.00 to \$12.00 may be used to perform a gentle cleaning of the archives. Brushes with softer bristles than the materials can be used to mechanically clean a storage medium. Soft lint-free fabrics such as polyester or cotton are also recommended for cleaning tapes.

It is advisable to carry out these operations outdoors or in places with fume hoods to protect the health of personnel. Likewise, protective masks must always be used.

2.7.4 STORAGE CONDITIONS

WHERE TO PLACE THE ARCHIVE

The archive must ideally be stored in a place in the center of the main building where it is located in order to exercise complete control over environmental conditions. Thus, this must not be somewhere located below street level (in a basement or anywhere similar) as this would increase air conditioning costs while also making the archive more susceptible to water leaks and humidity due to the phreatic level. Furthermore, locating the archive in rooms that do not directly adjoin the building's exterior is also recommended in order to allow a more effective control of the environment (temperature, humidity, water, dust, pollution, light and isolated magnetic fields).¹⁰

Shelving

It is best to use metal shelving protected with anti-rust paint. This presents no risk for magnetic storage mediums. Wooden shelving is not recommended because their chemical components can interact with storage media. As mentioned above, shelves must be separated from the wall, and the archival documents should never touch the floor.

All storage media must be kept vertically, while avoiding pressure between one



item and the next. At the same time, leaving too much space between each item is also best avoided to prevent archival documents falling over. Therefore, when a storage medium is removed for use, substitute cases must be inserted to maintain others in the vertical position.

Containers

It is recommended to store analogue oral archives recorded on magnetic tape in plastic boxes (polypropylene and polybutylene). Care must be taken to prevent these containers from being hermetically sealed due to chemical by-products that are produced by the cassettes themselves and moisture getting trapped inside, which may increase their degradation. If purchasing plastic boxes of these characteristics is not possible, another option could be de-acidified cardboard boxes.

2.7.5 PRESERVATION OF ARCHIVES IN DIGITAL FORMAT

Digital records are generated from bits of information in fixed values (high and low), while analogue archival documents record information by means of proportional wave signals. This characteristic of digital records allows them to be easily reproduced on different devices, multiple times, without compromising their quality.

There are at five types of storage mediums for digital archives:

1. Magnetic (Mini DV, Digital 8, DAT, DVCam, ZIP disks)
2. Optical or magneto-optical (MO, CD-R discs, DVD-R, Blue Ray or Minidiscs)
3. Hard disk drives (internal and external HDD drives)
4. Solid-state storage mediums (memory cards, USB memories y SSD disks)

5. Remote hosting (archival documents hosted on hard drives in other countries) and cloud hosting.

The first two options have practically fallen into disuse over the last decade, so they should only be considered for original archival documents. Below is a table with the most important types:

STOR-AGE MEDIUM	AUDIO	VIDEO	ANA-LOGI-CAL	DIGI-TAL	YEAR OF LAUNCH	END OF PRODUC-TION	RISK OF OB-SOLESCENCE
DAT (Digital Audio Tape)	x		x		1987	2005	Under threat. Moderate risk
MiniDV	x			x	1995	2000s	Vulnerable. Some risk
Digital 8	x			x	1999	2007	Vulnerable. Some risk
DVCam	x			x	1996		Still used. Low risk
Digital Betacam	x			x	1992		Still used. Low risk
CD – R		x	x		1992		Still used. Low risk
Mini CD – R		x	x		End of the 90s		Still used. Low risk
DVD- R		x		x	1997		Still used. Low risk
Mini DVD-R		x		x	1997		Still used. Low risk
Blue Ray-R		x		x	2006		Still used. Low risk
ZIP Disc	x		x	x	1995	2003	Under threat. Moderate risk

Hard drives and solid-state storage media are the modern foundation for managing copies made of the original. It is recommended that several copies be made of an original archival document on various digital support media, ideally located in different locations. The most recommended storage media are magnetic hard drives (HDD) and solid-state drives (SSD), as they provide better organization and storage. USB sticks and memory cards are more fragile through repeated use and more susceptible to loss.

HARD DISK DRIVE (HDD)

These may be internal or external and are characterized by their movable parts and magnetic recording/reading heads. Currently, they are the most widespread and used computer storage media with several versions available on the market (the most common range from 120 Gigabytes to 20 Terabytes). Internal drives are incorporated into the structure of a computer (whether a desktop or laptop) and are connected to the motherboard, which accesses the information quickly. External drives connect to the computer through a USB or external SATA (eSATA) port, but are not usually as fast as their internal alternative due to the distance information has to travel from the motherboard.

As a copy management strategy, it is recommended to keep a backup copy of the archive on a large capacity internal drive (from 1TB or higher) on a special CSO computer that is particularly designed for the storage and management of archival documents. At the same time, making one or more copies of archival documents on external disks is recommended. These can either be used for supplementary storage on the archive's premises, or for external copies to be kept in other institutions located inside or outside the country of origin.

SOLID-STATE DRIVES (SSD)

Just like HDDs, these drives can be internal or external. Instead of having movable parts, they are characterized by semiconductor cells that store the information. These disks are more modern and have some advantages over the HDDs: it is faster to read information because they do not depend on a head that must move across the disk; they are more resistant due to not having any moving parts; they require less power to operate (this is especially important for external drives); and

they are quieter. Their main disadvantage is the price, which is higher than that of HDDs, although costs have been progressively decreasing.

Their copy management strategy is similar to that of HDD disks. While it is possible to have an internal disk and external copies, it is also acceptable to utilize a mixed strategy such as holding a copy on the CSO's dedicated computer, as well as using SSDs for keeping copies on external hard drives.

MEMORY CARDS (FLASH MEMORY)

These are solid-state storage mediums of reduced dimensions. Although there are many types and uses, the most common are the popular USB memory sticks, which are connected to a computer through a port of the same name; and compact memories, mainly used in digital cameras or camcorders.

These storage mediums are not recommended for the management of copies and archive preservation, because they are quite susceptible to loss due to their small size. Although they can be used for taking testimonies on digital camcorders, it is very important to make copies as soon as possible on HDD or SSD disks.

CLOUD HOSTING

Finally, remote repositories and cloud hosting allow copies of archival documents to be kept in repositories managed by third parties. Although this may sound attractive in terms of cost reduction (if it does not exceed a certain capacity), it should never be used as the main preservation strategy, since it also puts information security at risk.

Hosting on the cloud can bring the risk of information being "hacked" or suddenly lost, as it remains in the hands of the company that owns the server. This means that the integrity and security of the information may depend on changes in the data policy that the company manages. That said, there are now service providers that are cooperatives made up of people committed to free technology and information security. These providers are growing in different countries, so it is useful to find out about them. In conclusion, the use of the cloud is a complement, especially effective for collaborative work with other organizations or with institutions internationally. However, it is recommended that you have a specialized person to manage the hosting.

PRESERVATION OF DIGITAL ARCHIVES IN MAGNETIC OR OPTICAL FILE FORMATS

Generally speaking, the same recommendations apply regarding those mentioned previously for water/humidity, temperature, dust and foreign matter, or light conditions over magnetic files.

Optical discs must be kept free from scratches and dust by using a dry lint-free cloth to clean them in a radial direction (from the center outwards). Special felt markers should be used to write the labels.

Do not apply a lot of pressure when handling the discs to avoid deformation. When introducing them into the playback machines, discs should be handled with the index finger placed in the central hole and the thumb on the outer edges, avoiding touching the parts where the data is located.

PRESERVATION OF DIGITAL FILES ON SOLID-STATE STORAGE MEDIUMS

The main recommendation is to never store a single copy of any archive on one single storage medium, and to make periodic updates and verifications, so that the different copies of a digital record can be kept as preservation copies. If there are sufficient resources, it is advisable to seek advice on the most professional brands and device models, as this will guarantee longer usage.

It is especially important to avoid dropping or knocking the solid-state devices, as this may bring irreparable damage to the integrated systems, representing possible partial or total loss of information. Likewise, proper steps must be followed when using computer operating systems regarding their insertion and removal, via USB or other types of connections.

It is advisable not to continuously erase and rewrite data on the same medium. These types of operations reduce their useful life, especially with SSD discs.

Furthermore, folders in which the archival documents are organized should be clearly identifiable within each medium, while obeying a hierarchical logic common to all archive operators and, in general, be coordinated with the cataloging systems created for the archives.

Finally, in the event that the storage media contain sensitive information, with risks posed to the security of the interviewees or archive members themselves, it is recommended that they be passed through encryption processes. A



Revision of paper archive during GIJTR's needs assessment in Sincelejo, in Northern Colombia

computer systems technician must carry out these processes, so that its content is only accessible through codes that are exclusively known to the members responsible for the archive. Furthermore, two versions of the cataloging tables are recommended: an anonymous version for public consultation, and a complete version under strict security conditions.

2.8 Custody of Human Rights Archives

The custody of human rights archives implies responsibilities that go beyond the preservation of the storage media and the management of its use. As this contains sensitive information that may compromise the security of the interviewees and third parties, it is important that the responsible team also has powers over the custody of the information in relation to any misuse of it or any intent to deliberately destroy it. Here are some general recommendations on the custody of human rights archives:

- It is very important to select a team of people responsible for the management and custody of the archives. Depending on capacities regarding budget, size of the archive and training of the operators, this team may vary regarding

the number of people. In some cases, given the restrictions of certain organizations or a small archive size, it is possible to appoint one or two people, who are members of the organization, as those responsible.

- Small organizations can reach agreements with educational institutions with programs in the management of archival documents to invite students to carry out their internships at the archive's premises. Likewise, as the archive consolidates and grows, CSOs can promote the training of some of its members to carry out specialized work in the management of archival documents.
- The responsible team must carry out annual work plans that include: integrating new archival documents into the system (cataloging); updating the classification table (if applicable); maintaining physical archival documents, verifying their state of preservation and maintaining the digital archive (conversion and updating of file formats to preserve access to its contents). If digital archival document management tools or websites are used, it is recommended to carry out regular maintenance and periodic updates; as well as review security levels for both physical (copy management) and computer archival documents to avoid theft, manipulation or destruction of archival documents by third parties.
- It is recommended that those responsible for managing archives establish cooperative relationships with trusted institutions that can host backup copies of some collections or the entire archive. Likewise, it is advisable to seek collaboration and support networks between various CSOs. This can encourage the exchange of knowledge and the adoption of successful strategies.
- Backup copies delivered to other institutions must be accompanied by the necessary documentation for their identification, as well as delivery protocols, so as to ensure their good custody by the friendly institution.
- The custody of groups of archival documents provided by CSOs and used in transitional justice processes will necessarily follow the processes established in the mandates of the institutions created for this purpose. However, it is important for CSOs who provide their testimony collections to work in a coordinated way so that they can ensure their effective participation in making the decisions about the institution that will serve as the final repository of such archives. Ideally, these decisions should always include the effective participation of civil society, and with international observers as guarantors.



Classified, processed and securely stored paper documents in the ANUC archive next to the original archive files awaiting processing. Photo: ICSC

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3.3 Footnotes

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