



## Societies Without Borders

Volume 7 | Issue 4

Article 7

2012


# Of Tools and Houses: Sociologists Without Borders and the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition

Bruce K. Friesen  
*University of Tampa*

Mark Frezzo  
*University of Mississippi*

Brian K. Gran  
*Case Western Reserve University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/swb>

 Part of the [Human Rights Law Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Friesen, Bruce K., Mark Frezzo & Brian K. Gran. 2012. "Of Tools and Houses: Sociologists Without Borders and the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition." *Societies Without Borders* 7 (4): 447-469.  
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/swb/vol7/iss4/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Cross Disciplinary Publications at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Societies Without Borders by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzo & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

## Of Tools and Houses: Sociologists Without Borders and the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition

Bruce K. Friesen; Mark Frezzo; Brian K. Gran

University of Tampa; University of Mississippi; Case Western Reserve University<sup>1</sup>

*Received October 2012; Accepted December 2012*

---

### Abstract

Sociologists Without Borders (SSF) has played a key role in the Science and Human Rights Coalition (SHRC) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. This Coalition, which consists of nearly fifty scientific organizations, seeks to advance the human right to benefit from scientific progress and its application. This article critically evaluates SSF's role in the SHRC. After providing background on the work, organization, and objectives of the Coalition, this article then elaborates on how sociologists, particularly representatives of the American Sociological Association and SSF, have collaborated with other scientists on various projects designed to implement this human right. These collaborative efforts give reason for hope. They suggest that science is being used to work towards greater equality and justice, and that SSF plays a positive role in this effort through its alliance with the SHRC.

### Keywords

Science; Human Rights; Professional Ethics; SSF; AAAS

In addition to the initiatives of SSF chronicled in this Special Issue of *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences*, SSF members have made their presence felt in other organizations. One such organization is the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)—an NGO that represents the natural and social sciences by intervening in debates on science policy, engaging in science education, advocating for scientists who face danger in doing their work, and promoting the use of scientific research for the improvement of the human condition (AAAS 2012b). SSF members supported a new AAAS initiative, launched in 2009, known as the Science and Human Rights Coalition (SHRC). A major project of the AAAS Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights and Law Program, the SHRC is designed “to facilitate communication and partnerships on

~447~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

human rights within and across the scientific community, and between the scientific and human rights communities” (AAAS 2012c).

The SHRC pursues these objectives through the undertakings of five working groups: Welfare of Scientists, Science Ethics and Human Rights, Service to the STEM Community, Service to the Human Rights Community, and Education and Information Resources. In a variety of ways, these working groups contribute to public outreach on the potential applications of Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in 1966. Article 15 stipulates that all human beings have the right not only to enjoy the benefits of scientific research and technological advancement, but also to be protected from the misuse of science and technology (ICESCR 1966).

For SSF, involvement in the SHRC provides rare opportunities to advance the protection and promotion of the human right to benefit from the advancement of science on a national level. AAAS’ long and illustrious history of “advancing science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all people” has won it considerable national and international acclaim. The AAAS routinely advises national and international political leaders and policymakers on science-related matters. It publishes informational briefs, engages in advocacy work, and seeks to inform the public through its successful journal *Science*. AAAS serves 261 affiliated societies and academies, and boasts over ten million members worldwide. If SSF’s and the SHRC’s goals are congruent, affiliation with the AAAS has the potential for genuine broad-scale change and influence.

At the same time, the sociological literatures on social change, social movements, and organizations identify potential red flags with such affiliations. Arguably, the size and influence of the AAAS, relative to SSF, could be cause for concern as the goals of the former may co-opt or replace those of the latter. Can SSF maintain its unique personality within the context of a larger organization? Similarly, AAAS’ relative proximity to the halls of U.S. federal power no doubt makes some SSF members uneasy. Many sociologists prefer grassroots level organizing for social change. Given its organic, egalitarian, and democratic manifestations, grassroots action is often

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

deemed as righteous, while working within existing institutional frameworks is viewed by some as corrupting. Can meaningful and respectful change be achieved by working with a larger, more “mainstream” organization?

A third reservation by some would be the close alliance of SSF with institutionalized science *per se*. Students of history understand all too well how science has been used to bolster, rather than challenge, ideologies of inequality, power, and empire. Science has been a key component of hegemony. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ethnocentrism have too often been ignoble by-products of global imperialist efforts. In this, the United States has not been merely a bystander. Today, science and technology are used by governments, corporations, and other entities to control, exploit, and subjugate, instead of to free and empower. Does SSF do itself a disservice by associating itself with an epistemological mechanism historically associated with domination?

Finally, while a consideration of the feminist critique of science is beyond the scope of this paper (see Smith 1989), we center this paper—humbly, and with great respect—on a consideration of Audre Lorde’s cautionary speech title: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984). Lorde used the phrase to refer to the homophobia and racism practiced by women, against women, in the burgeoning second wave of the U.S. women’s movement. Lorde blamed patriarchy for homophobia and racism, which were used as tools to divide and conquer those who would otherwise challenge patriarchy’s legitimacy and power. In the context of this paper, we use Lorde’s metaphor to stimulate critical consideration of our own experiences in the SHRC. Could the SHRC be construed as a tool of the master, as something more benign, or perhaps something constructive?

To answer these questions, a brief history of the AAAS and SHRC will first be presented. A description of SSF’s involvement in the SHRC will follow, highlighting both the formal and informal activities of SSF members in the Coalition. For comparison purposes, the activities of ASA members (who are also Coalition members) will also be reviewed. We provide these deep descriptions in an effort to provide readers with the opportunity to perform their own critical

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

evaluation of these initiatives. Our own summary and analysis are provided in the final section.

#### ORIGINS OF THE AAAS

The AAAS was founded in 1848, establishing the first permanent national interdisciplinary scientific community in the United States. Formerly the Association of American Geologists and Naturalists, the AAAS was formed to "...give a stronger and more general impulse, and a more systematic direction to scientific direction in our country..." (AAAS 2012). The fledgling organization struggled off and on until after the Civil War, but continued to make important contributions to science and national science policy in its early years. In some ways the AAAS was a victim of its own success, as numerous new disciplinary organizations formed and modeled themselves on the AAAS. The AAAS found success by establishing *Science* in 1880 as its flagship journal and by inviting representatives of specialty professional societies to combined meetings in 1902. The social sciences were an integral part of the early history of AAAS as psychologist James Cattell served as the editor of *Science* for 50 years, beginning in 1894. By comparison, the ASA was organized in 1905.

Today, the AAAS serves 261 professional societies and seeks to "advance science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all people." To fulfill this mission, the AAAS Board has set these broad goals:

- Enhance communication among scientists, engineers, and the public;
- Promote and defend the integrity of science and its use;
- Strengthen support for the science and technology enterprise;
- Provide a voice for science on societal issues;
- Promote the responsible use of science in public policy;
- Strengthen and diversify the science and technology workforce;

~450~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

- Foster education in science and technology for everyone;
- Increase public engagement with science and technology; and
- Advance international cooperation in science. (AAAS 2012b)

The AAAS has been concerned with ethical issues of science since its inception, and more formally in the decades following WWII. A new constitution in 1946 refocused the AAAS on furthering cooperation between scientists, improving the effectiveness of science to promote human welfare, and increasing public understanding and appreciation for science in human progress (Dresselhaus 1998). A Special Committee on the Civil Liberties of Scientists was convened in 1947. The AAAS challenged Atlanta's segregation laws in 1955 by hosting sessions with the full participation of black scientists at the meetings in that city. The AAAS also issued a landmark report on Science and Human Welfare in 1960, and released a statement of conscience about the relationship between science and war the following year.

The social and political turmoil of the late 1960s and 1970s likewise impacted AAAS meetings and initiatives. A report critical of the use of defoliants in Vietnam was issued in 1970 after AAAS members visited the country to study the issue. Early 1970s protests by students and scientists disrupted meetings and spurred new initiatives to bring underrepresented groups into science and increase support for the growth of science in the developing world. Labeled by some as a fascist and racist, the controversial sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson was unceremoniously doused with a pitcher of water at the 1978 meetings (Science News 1978). Events such as these deepened the commitment of many AAAS members to ensure that the scientific enterprise would be open, inclusive, and engaged.

#### THE SCIENTIFIC RESPONSIBILITY, LAW, AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

AAAS' Science and Human Rights Program (SHRP) was launched in 1976, inspired in part by John Edsall's 1975 report entitled, *Scientific Freedom and Responsibility*. Over the years, SHRP has served as a catalyst for actions defending thousands of scientists, engineers and health professionals worldwide whose work or freedom of person has been threatened. SHRP has also engaged in fact-finding

~451~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

missions and gathered scientific evidence in order to prevent human rights abuses (AAAS 2012a). The Law program merged with the SHRP in 2011, earning the moniker of The Scientific Responsibility, Law, and Human Rights Program.

Responding to interest from member organizations, the AAAS organized a July 2005 conference to explore how the scientific community might better protect and promote human rights. A 2007 planning meeting laid the groundwork for the Science and Human Rights Coalition (SHRC), which was formally launched in January 2009. Seeking to avoid duplication and concentrate activities towards a unique goal, SHRC adopted a commitment to Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: to realize the human right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. Though often overlooked by scholars in human rights, Article 15 harbors profound significance for the design, implementation, and application of research in science and technology. For example, as the opening plenary at a recent SHRC meeting demonstrated, the practical implementation of Article 15 would have a decisive bearing on the right to development and its corollary the right to be protected from the excesses of development in the global South (AAAS 2012c). Drawing on scientific and technological expertise—particularly in the areas of agriculture, medicine, public hygiene, and environmental protection—the right to development represents an important test case for scientists interested in human rights advocacy.

From the outset, membership in the Coalition has been extended to scientific associations, academies, and professional societies sharing a commitment to the SHRC goals. Individual scientists similarly committed may also be involved as affiliated scientists. The SHRC has met twice a year at the AAAS headquarters in Washington, D.C. since its January 2009 inception. Conferences consist of plenary speakers, workshops, and meetings for working groups. Coalition attendees are provided with rare opportunities to both hear from, and pose questions to, a number of high-profile global leaders involved in the protection or promotion of human rights. These have included: Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland; Carmen Lomellin, Ambassador and Permanent OAS

~452~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzolo & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

Representative of the United States; Suzanne Nossel, State Department, Bureau of International Organization Affairs (instrumental in creating the U.S. Report for the UN's Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights); Stephen P. Marks, François-Xavier Bagnoud Professor of Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health; Assistant Secretary of State Michael Posner, and many others.

The SHRC has accomplished a good deal in its brief existence, as dozens of actions have been taken to promote the right to the advancement of science (AAAS 2012c). In addition to individual initiatives, the working groups of the SHRC are endowed with the responsibility of furthering the mission of the Coalition. These groups include those committed to the Welfare of Scientists, Science Ethics and Human Rights, Service to the Scientific Community, Service to the Human Rights Community, and Education and Information Resources. Each working group meets at least twice a year and seeks to further the mission of the Coalition by undertaking tangible projects throughout the year. A detailed Plan of Action was finalized in 2012 and ratified by the Coalition Council (AAAS SHRC 2012). For its part, the Coalition Council convenes twice annually not only to evaluate the progress of the working groups, but also to determine the themes and speakers for the January and July meetings. Finally, the Coalition Steering Committee meets in person twice annually and holds conference calls periodically to discuss possible recommendations to the Council.

#### ASA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SHRC

Near the start of 2008, Mr. Lee Herring was a participating member of the SHRC as the representative of the American Sociological Association (ASA). At the time, Herring was ASA's Director of Public Affairs. An experimental psychologist, Herring had previously worked on policy issues for the American Psychological Association, had served as Communication Director of the American Psychological Society, and had worked in the area of legislative and public affairs for the U.S. National Science Foundation. Mona Younis, a sociologist and then-director of the Science and Human Rights Program of AAAS, invited Herring to the first meeting of what would become the SHRC. It was in this context that the American

~453~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012



B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

Sociological Association became a founding member of the Coalition. During its early stages, Mr. Herring was one of the writers of the Coalition's Mission Statement.

Herring (2012) indicates that AAAS' interest in Article 15 was a "no brainer." Herring (2012) recalls that during his time with the American Psychological Association, he became aware of AAAS' investment in human rights. His impression is that AAAS leadership realized that such an immense issue as human rights required expertise and skills of individuals from various scientific disciplines and societies. Consequently, AAAS turned to other organizations to advance human rights, including the right to benefit from scientific progress and its application (Herring 2012). In addition, Herring (2012) believes that AAAS recognized it needed widespread support of other scientific disciplines and societies in its efforts in promoting human rights.

According to Herring (2012), the Coalition was deliberately organized into five or six working groups. Representatives of scientific societies, many of whom had backgrounds in public affairs and communication, served as chairs of working groups. Each of the working groups met independently of each other. At the semi-annual AAAS-SHRC meetings, the working groups were brought together to share information about their work and to provide updates on their progress. Herring (2012) was impressed by the hard work, organization, and motivation of Coalition members. Herring (2012) believes that his ASA successor, Dr. Margaret Weigers Vitullo, brings even more to the Coalition.

Dr. Margaret Weigers Vitullo joined the Coalition as the ASA's Director of Academic and Professional Affairs. A former Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Scholar and faculty member of Gallaudet University, Vitullo has consulted on human rights issues for AAAS, the Centre for Truth and Reconciliation of South Africa, and other entities. In commenting on the Coalition's ongoing work, Vitullo said that the Coalition's work is absolutely necessary to ensuring everyone will benefit from scientific progress and its applications. The work of the Coalition protects scientists, who "sometimes have things to say that are unpopular with their governments," which can lead to scientists becoming "subject of human rights violations" (Vitullo 2012). According to Vitullo (2012),

~454~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzo & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

“human rights are increasingly becoming part of the global vernacular.” “Deciding what Article 15 means is not something a single organization can do” (Vitulo 2012). The Coalition is capable of building “a community of scientists who are engaged with human rights and are working to, not only defend the human rights of scientists in their own discipline, but to increase the nature and level of dialogue between scientific disciplines and human rights concepts” (Vitulo 2012). It is from this work that Vitullo believes cultural shifts and norm building around the human right to benefit from scientific progress and its application will take place.

Becoming an ASA liaison to the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition in 2009, Gran has witnessed not only growth in the number of scientific societies participating in the Coalition, but increasing commitments. His primary responsibilities for SHRC is co-chairing the Welfare of Scientists Working Group and serving on the Coalition’s Council. For the Welfare of Scientists Working Group, Gran is spearheading efforts to develop indicators of the right to benefit from scientific progress and its application. While the indicators work is challenging, it provides insights into how scientists can work together to study, advocate for, and assist in implementing Article 15 rights. These efforts suggest potential collaborations for the future.

#### SSF’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SHRC

From the outset, the SSF leadership has taken a strong interest in the SHRC. As an individual member of AAAS, then-SSF President Judith Blau played a role in the formation of the SHRC (Wyndham 2012). SSF joined the SHRC in January 2010. Soon thereafter, Blau and Bruce Friesen became SSF’s official representatives to the SHRC. Both representatives joined the Council and the Working Group on Education and Information Resources, with Blau serving as co-chair. When Blau resigned from the SSF presidency in the autumn of 2011 to devote more of her attention to the Human Rights Center of Chapel Hill and Carrboro that she had founded in February 2009, she was replaced, both as a representative and as co-chair of the Education and Information Resources Working Group by Mark Frezzo, then Vice President of SSF. Since then, Frezzo has also served as Council Member, Steering Committee

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

member, and, more recently, member of the Directors' Circle.

Having taken a keen interest in the relationship between scientific research (broadly conceived) and human rights advocacy, Blau spearheaded SSF's entrance into the SHRC, with the support of the rest of the SSF Council. Doubtless, Blau was aware of potential conflicts between SSF and the SHRC—a network of natural and social scientists devoted to human rights advocacy through partnerships with scientific societies and the larger human rights community. It remained to be seen if such tensions would prove constructive or deleterious to the workings of the SHRC. For example, Blau wondered if SSF and the SHRC would have commensurable conceptions of human rights and scientific rigor—a concern that was, in all likelihood, shared by members of both entities (Blau 2012). In a similar vein, Blau wondered how SSF's critique of positivism and its attendant pretensions to value neutrality would be received in the SHRC. Nevertheless, she found herself willing to take a chance on a scientific society that not only affirmed the right to enjoy the benefits of science, but also took steps to bring this right to fruition in the real world.

In the course of her participation in the SHRC, Blau found that most participants in the SHRC did not subscribe to value neutrality; on the contrary, the vast majority of participants believed that scientific societies ought to inscribe a concern for human rights in their codes of ethics—a belief shared by many sociologists. This is not surprising, perhaps, since the scientists in question had opted to join the SHRC. However, Blau noticed communications difficulties between the “soft sciences” (including sociology, anthropology, and geography) and the “hard sciences” (including physics and chemistry). As a consequence, Blau felt that she had “failed to make the case that some societies (or communities) are better able to provide the framework whereby everyone benefits from, say, universal access to the Internet. Economist Joseph Stiglitz has interesting things to say about this; so does the solidarity-economy branch of the Occupy movement. Sociologists have these tools and knowledge” (Blau 2012). Thus, in leaving the SHRC, Blau encouraged the remaining sociologists to bring the fruits of engaged sociological research to bear on the undertakings of the SHRC in a more explicit and tangible way.

Following the precedent established by Blau, the SSF

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzolo & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

representatives have been particularly active in the Education and Information Resources Working Group. In helping to delineate the purview of the Working Group at the dawn of the SHRC, Blau had noticed a natural affinity between SSF and the Working Group's mission to generate, test, and disseminate educational materials on human rights. Since then, the Working Group has focused its attention primarily on the production of teaching modules, geared for undergraduate students, on science and human rights. Having already produced a module on psychology, the Working Group is currently preparing modules on applications of human rights in the disciplines of sociology, geography, history, and health sciences. The Working Group is actively seeking scientists, whether within or beyond the SHRC, to write modules for the natural sciences and engineering. For reasons that are being explored by the Working Group, the social sciences have proven more amenable to producing such modules. Arguably, this is attributable primarily to the fact that professors of social science have more flexibility in designing and implementing their courses than do their counterparts in the natural sciences and engineering. Nevertheless, Blau's original vision of producing modules for all of the major scientific disciplines remains an animating force in the Working Group.

Notwithstanding Blau's departure from the SHRC, SSF's relationship with the SHRC has progressed in the fashion she envisioned. Though fraught with complexities associated with relations between organizations with different purviews and structures, the partnership between SSF and the SHRC has been immensely productive. On the one hand, Blau's status as an eminent sociologist committed to the use of sociological theories and methods in both the analysis and the advocacy of human rights served not only to accord more weight to the fledgling SHRC, but also to bring more SSF members into the project. On the other hand, the partnership has brought SSF more credibility in its efforts to forge connections not only with other social scientists (especially anthropologists and geographers), but also with natural scientists. Previously, SSF had little or no contact with natural scientists. Throughout the partnership, SSF has continued to make significant contributions to the SHRC, with members serving in leadership positions. Owing to SSF's reputation as a scholarly-activist NGO, members are often consulted on matters of

~457~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

outreach. In sum, SSF has benefited the SHRC primarily through its capacity to connect scholars and activists in projects of human rights education. Far from being a purely academic exercise, human rights education entails contact with advocates in NGOs and activists in social movement organizations.

#### OTHER ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE SHRC

Nearly fifty scientific associations and societies are members or affiliated associations of the Coalition (AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition 2012). These organizations can be characterized as supporting research in the areas of science (e.g., the American Physical Society), social science (e.g., the American Political Science Association), engineering (e.g., the American Society of Civil Engineers), medicine (e.g., the American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene), and the humanities (e.g., the American Philosophical Association), as well as statistics (the American Statistical Association). These organizations have large numbers of members who are based in a variety of countries. The American Philosophical Association consists of 10,000 members (American Philosophical Association 2012) and the American Political Science Association has 15,000 members from 80 countries (American Political Science Association 2012), while the American Society of Civil Engineers has over 140,000 members from across the world (American Society of Civil Engineers 2012). The American Statistical Association is the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States, having been established in 1839 (American Statistical Association 2012).

The Coalition distinguishes between members and affiliated associations (AAAS 2012c). For an organization to become a member, its leadership must make an official decision to apply for membership. Upon becoming a member, the organization is expected to sponsor two representatives to the Coalition. AAAS representatives are expected to participate in at least one AAAS committee or working group, with one representing their organization on the Coalition Council. An organization is affiliated if its leadership has not yet decided to join the Coalition. To become an affiliated organization, the organization must sponsor a

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

representative to the Coalition, who must serve on one AAAS committee or working group. Affiliated organizations do not enjoy representation on the Coalition Council.

What benefits do member organizations enjoy? Benefits are organized around the contributions of the aforementioned working groups. Among the chief benefits member organizations enjoy is access to human rights expertise. AAAS offers assistance to member organizations in organizing science and human rights workshops, including providing support in holding sessions during a member organization's annual meeting. Associate Director Jessica Wyndham has participated in annual meetings of scientific societies, such as the 2011 annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America. Member organizations can receive assistance from AAAS in incorporating human rights into their codes of ethics.

A major benefit of coalition membership is the possibility of making connections between scientists across scientific disciplines and societies. During Coalition meetings, working groups hold breakout sessions to pursue their objectives. During these breakout sessions, members of the working groups often share expertise and experiences. For instance, members of the Working Group on Service to the Scientific Community are recognized for their expertise in statistics, linguistics, sociology, engineering, and psychology, among other disciplines. Working together they aim to develop indicators of the right to enjoy benefit scientific progress and its applications. Similarly, member organizations can make connections with human rights communities nationally and globally.

Many member organizations undertake work on science and human rights. Some member organizations have prepared statements and resolutions regarding rights of scientists. Other member organizations have taken stands to defend human rights of scientists. The International Studies Association has established an Academic Freedom Committee (International Studies Association 2012), and the other member organizations have worked on visas for academics (e.g., American Historical Association 2006), sought protection of American scientists undertaking research in other countries, and worked with Scholars at Risk in protecting scientists living in other countries whose human rights are or potentially will be violated.

Various member organizations have sponsored panels during

~459~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

their annual meetings, such as the American Public Health Association's (2012) panel on "Health as a Human Right." Some sponsor awards to recognize work on science and human rights. The American Physical Society sponsors the Andrei Sakharov Prize, which is given in recognition of a scientist's efforts in "upholding human rights" (American Physical Society 2012). Some organizations publish newsletter articles on human rights. Doug Richardson (2008), the Executive Director of the Association of American Geographers, published an article in the association's newsletter, entitled, "Geography and Human Rights." As noted above, different societies have established committees focusing on human rights, including the American Anthropological Association, the American Political Science Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Public Health Association, the Association of American Geographers, and the American Statistical Association.

#### LATENT CONSEQUENCES

While SSF has made positive contributions to the structure and process of the SHRC, its presence has also been felt in other areas less easily studied. Informal relationships and casual interactions take place in such arenas. SSF representatives are not only influential in these arenas, they are also affected by their contacts with representatives of other organizations. Informal conversations have inspired SSF members to think differently about the role of science in advancing the interests of human rights. What follows are examples of how the interactions between SSF representatives and other members of the SHRC have affected both parties. Taken together, these examples magnify the effects of the SSF-SHRC association.

- As mentioned, Judith Blau, an SSF member and involved in the AAAS, was a vocal advocate and supporter of the idea of the SHRC. Her contributions helped spur the formation of the Coalition and shape its direction.

~460~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

- Non-sociologists have made note of the unique relationship between the ASA and SSF. One coalition member, particularly frustrated at the restrictions their professional association has in limiting the advocacy of human rights, inquired aloud as to how they might form an organization similar to SSF within their own discipline.
- SSF members have gained new and valuable experiences in cross-disciplinary human rights dialogue. This has led to new questions and new insights in their own work. Inspired by his experiences with the SHRC, Friesen started a Human Rights Think Tank on his home campus of the University of Tampa, to spur similar cross-disciplinary dialogue and activism at the local level.
- SSF members have adopted leadership roles in various working groups of the Coalition, leading to a preponderance of syllabi, teaching modules, and other materials on the AAAS website.

SSF members have been instrumental in advocating for human rights in other organizations as well. Membership in the SHRC has been part of a larger initiative by SSF members to implement, honor, and promote human rights wherever possible. These same individuals have in turn been transformed by these initiatives. Thus, while the path of influence may be indirect, relationships between members and the following initiatives have been strongly intertwined and recursive.

- SSF was instrumental in founding the ASA Human Rights Section.
- SSF was instrumental in founding the ISA Thematic Group on Human Rights and Global Justice.
- SSF members were involved in drafting and promoting the ASA Human Rights Statement in 2009. At the 2011 meeting in Las Vegas, the ASA explicitly acknowledged this by co-sponsoring a session on the implications of the Human Rights Statement for sociological research, teaching, and service.

~461~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012



B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / Societies Without Borders 7:4 (2012) 447-469

## ANALYSIS

Having reviewed SSF's experience with the SHRC to date, we are now in a better position to entertain answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this article.

### *1. Can meaningful and respectful change be achieved by working with a larger, more "mainstream" organization?*

Based on SSF's experience in the SHRC, it is apparent that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"—an insight that is often lost on organizations when they interact with one another. Consisting of approximately fifty organizations, the SHRC demonstrates what efforts are possible when organizations cooperate. It is unlikely that one Coalition member organization like SSF could, on its own, instigate the broad types of efforts, and indeed, the sheer number of efforts, coalition members are pursuing. As Herring, Vitullo, and Wyndham all note, a key motivation of setting up the Coalition was the recognition that by working together, AAAS and its Coalition members have a much better chance of encouraging the United Nations and national governments to advance the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications.

The SHRC provides insights into how scientific societies may cooperate to pursue a common goal. Even when scientists believe that significant boundaries separate their disciplines, the SHRC is an example of how differences can turn out to be strengths. The work of Coalition members demonstrates possibilities of how different disciplines can collaborate, learn from each other, appreciate new perspectives, and even return to their home disciplines with new insights. Collaborative efforts such as those undertaken by Coalition members may not only remind scientists of our common goals and tools, they may help scientists identify common obstacles and potential dangers to our work.

### *2. Does collaborating with SHRC conflict with the goals of SSF and its members?*

The formal adoption of Article 15 as the goal of the SHRC ensures a high degree of goal congruence with SSF. This is most clearly manifested in the culture which permeates the SHRC meetings. Members understand the importance of defending the right to benefit from the advancement of science and technology. Informal

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

conversations with Coalition members reveal an awareness of past abuses perpetrated in the name of science, a sense of responsibility and humility in wielding the collective clout of the AAAS, and a genuine dedication to advancing the plight of those in the world today struggling to secure the most basic of human rights. For example, a recent Coalition meeting deliberately concentrated on rights of indigenous peoples to grapple with the questions related particularly to their plight. A variety of indigenous speakers addressed the audience and conducted workshops. The events gave voice to those often marginalized in discussions about science. By inviting individuals who are also practicing professionals, it recognized that expert knowledge is not the exclusive domain of one group of people. Thus, it has been our experience that meaningful and respectful change can be achieved within a larger, more “mainstream” organization.

*3. Can SSF maintain its unique personality within the context of a larger organization?*

Social science and its scientific societies provide essential tools and venues for the analysis and promotion of human rights, including the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications. Social scientists bring to the Coalition useful theoretical perspectives and methodological frameworks. For instance, Wyndham and Vitullo have directed focus groups with members of different scientific societies to gather their perspectives on the meaning of the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications. Other Coalition representatives are working to develop a database of indicators of this right. Members of SSF have been warmly received in the Coalition, with most taking leadership positions therein. Not only is SSF able to retain its own “personality,” but the perspectives, skills, and enthusiasm of its members appear to be both valued and shared in the SHRC.

SSF and its representatives have supported the Coalition’s efforts to connect science and activism through the combination of knowledge and outreach. SSF representatives have consistently raised concerns about what the right to benefit from scientific progress may mean to individuals and social groups who are vulnerable—including children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and historically

~463~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

underrepresented, marginalized, and exploited communities. For instance, as mentioned, SHRC has focused on impacts of article 15 on indigenous communities. In July 2012, the SHRC focused on the potential ramifications of Article 15 for a human rights-based approach to development in the Global South. In January 2013, SHRC will examine young people's right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications. Representatives of SSF and other organizations take cautious views of what the Coalition may expect from the United Nations and national governments in implementing this right.

A challenge for SSF is how to encourage SHRC members to keep in mind that AAAS' efforts will have global impacts—whether deliberate or unintended. While many Coalition members have an international purview, most organizations focus on U.S. issues. Along with other member organizations, SSF can continue to remind AAAS that as it continues to break ground in doing scientific research, leaders of international and national scientific societies, as well as governments and government organizations, observe and learn from the Coalition.

With its global focus, SSF has unique vantage points when it comes to human rights. SSF can offer insights into how specific human rights are connected. SSF members can demonstrate to the Coalition that human rights do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in concrete economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. Moreover, SSF members can remind the Coalition to prepare for both the intended and the unintended consequences of various initiatives. Finally, they can provide evidence of which conditions are necessary and sufficient to ensure that the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications is part of everyday life for everyone.

## CONCLUSION

Could the SHRC be understood as a tool of the master, as something more benign, or perhaps something constructive in advancing human rights?

The benefits arising from these collaborative efforts include getting social scientists to recognize connections beyond their own disciplines, and to consider how their work may shape lives of

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

individuals and groups who are in vulnerable situations. For example, a recent Coalition meeting occasioned a discussion of ongoing political attacks on the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). Despite NSF's sponsorship of scientific research that has significant and broad impacts on societies, including its vulnerable members, members of the U.S. Congress are attempting to impede political scientists from conducting their research. This intrusion cuts to the heart of the principle of scientific freedom. The discussion during the Coalition meeting prompted members to consider how these efforts may inhibit intellectual contributions and weaken and narrow impacts of scientific research to society. The Coalition discussion not only reminded scientists of their shared interests, it made clear that U.S. scientists face significant challenges to their rights to undertake science.

Science, and the authority it invests in individuals and organizations by which it is practiced, remain formidable and powerful tools in the contemporary world. Science has long been used as a tool of domination, but the knowledge it has produced has also facilitated projects of emancipation, growth, and opportunity. This article has explored the question as to whether or not the power and legitimacy of science might be harnessed to respect and extend human rights; particularly in a nation with a majority of citizens who remain unaware of the history, goals, and language of the global human rights movement. Though challenges remain, it has been our experience that the goals of SSF and the SHRC are in many ways complementary, and that *good* has been, and is being, produced through the relationship. In our experience with the Coalition we have found that science has more frequently been used to dismantle the "tools" of racism, sexism, homophobia, and ethnocentrism. Scientific knowledge has been produced and used in the Coalition to map rural areas of Haiti after an earthquake so supplies can reach needy populations. It has performed DNA analysis on the remains of victims of ethnic cleansing found in mass graves, providing necessary evidence to hold accountable violators of human rights.

As the Coalition moves forward, social scientists can share insights and information on manifold aspects of the right to benefit

~465~

© *Sociologists Without Borders / Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

from scientific progress and its applications. Social scientists, as mentioned, have studied and developed databases of information useful to studying structures, processes, and outcomes associated with measuring the advance of the right to benefit from scientific progress. Indeed, social scientists can help identify weaknesses of these data and how to overcome those problems. Social scientists can help the Coalition and other organizations, including governments, evaluate efficacy of efforts to implement the right.

Social scientists can also identify other necessary ingredients to implementing the right to benefit from scientific progress and its application. Social science research has documented how social movements, particularly at “the grass-roots level,” often are essential to advancing human rights. Scholars have provided evidence of de-coupling, the gap between what a national government says it will do and what it actually does when it comes to human rights. Social scientists have published groundbreaking studies explaining why national-level intentions sometimes do not match concerns and practices of local communities. They can indicate how institutions, whether economic, political, social, or otherwise, can hinder as well as serve as catalysts of the right to benefit from scientific progress. Social scientists have uncovered how and why organizations converge in making rights part of their structures. Social psychologists can shed light on how the right to benefit from scientific progress enhances the dignity of individuals. The ability of social scientists to give voice to marginalized and overlooked groups will prove critical to ensuring vulnerable members of society enjoy benefits of scientific progress. As work proceeds to ensure Article 15 becomes part of everyday rights, social scientific research will continue to be useful.

The Coalition has provided opportunity to question those who wield real political power. In a recent Coalition meeting, Assistant Secretary of State Michael Posner responded directly to questions submitted by an SSF member: “Is the U.S. losing legitimacy to lead in the area of human rights, by failing to ratify major international human rights instruments or refusing to be meaningfully involved in the International Criminal Court?” Posner’s answer (that the Obama Administration remains committed to human rights ideals regardless of an inability to get two-thirds of the Senate to ratify such instruments) is as important in this instance as the opportunity SSF

~466~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezza & B. K. Gran/*Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

had, as part of the Coalition, to remind global powerbrokers of the need to keep human rights front-and-center. Science and its authority can be used to either legitimate or dismantle the traditional tools of domination. As long as the SHRC remains committed to advancing human rights, SSF will have a meaningful role to play in the work of AAAS.

## References

- American Association for the Advancement of Science. 2012a. 150 Years of Advancing Science: A History of the AAAS. (<http://archives.aaas.org/exhibit/origins2.php>.) Accessed 8/19/2012.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science. 2012b. About AAAS. (<http://www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/>.) Accessed 8/19/2012.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science, Science and Human Rights Coalition. 2012c. "Introducing Our Members." (<http://shr.aaas.org/coalition/intromembers.html>.) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science. 2012c. Programs: Science and Policy." (<http://shr.aaas.org/coalition/index.shtml>.) Accessed 09/26/2012.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science Science and Human Rights Coalition. 2012. Plan of Action. ([http://shr.aaas.org/coalition/documents/2012-2014\\_Plan.pdf](http://shr.aaas.org/coalition/documents/2012-2014_Plan.pdf).) Accessed 10/15/2012.
- American Historical Association. 2006. "Press Release." ([http://www.historians.org/press/2006\\_02\\_13\\_VisaDenial.cfm](http://www.historians.org/press/2006_02_13_VisaDenial.cfm).) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Philosophical Association 2012. (<http://www.apaonline.org/>.) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Physical Society. 2012. Andrei Sakharov Prize. (<http://www.aps.org/programs/honors/prizes/sakharov.cfm>.) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Political Science Association. 2012. ([www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org).) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Public Health Association. 2012. Session 3317.0: Policy Advocacy for Health: Health as a Human Right. APHA 140<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Expo. ([http://action.apha.org/site/MessageViewer?div\\_id=34461&em\\_id=29721.0](http://action.apha.org/site/MessageViewer?div_id=34461&em_id=29721.0).) Accessed. 09/24/2012.
- American Sociological Association. 2012. Section on Human Rights. (<http://www.asanet.org/sections/humanrights.cfm>.) Accessed 09/26/2012.
- American Sociological Association. 2009. "Statement Affirming and Expanding the Commitment of the American Sociological Association to Human Rights." (<http://www.asanet.org/about/CouncilStatements/Council%20Statement%20on%20Human%20Rights%20%28August%202009%29.pdf>.) Accessed September 26, 2012.
- American Society of Civil Engineers. 2012. ([www.asce.org](http://www.asce.org).) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- American Statistical Association. 2012. ([www.amstat.org](http://www.amstat.org).) Accessed 09/24/2012.

~467~

© *Sociologists Without Borders/Sociólogos Sin Fronteras*, 2012

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzo & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

- Dresselhaus, Mildred. 1998. "The AAAS Celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup>." *Science*, 282 (5397):2186-2190, Dec. 18.
- Edsall, John T.. 1975. "Scientific Freedom and Responsibility." *Science* 188 (4189):687-693.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). 1966. (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>.) Accessed 09/26/2012.
- International Sociological Association. 2012. Thematic Group on Human Rights and Global Justice TG03. (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/tg03.htm>.) Accessed 09/26/2012.
- International Studies Association. 2012. Academic Freedom Committee. (<http://www.isanet.org/about-isa/academic-freedom-committee.html>.) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- Lorde, Audrey. 1984. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Pp. 110-113 in *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press Feminist Series.
- Richardson, Doug. 2008. "Geography and Human Rights." 43 (8) *The AAG Newsletter*. ([http://www.aag.org/cs/projects\\_and\\_programs/geography\\_and\\_human\\_rights/geography\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_by\\_doug\\_richardson](http://www.aag.org/cs/projects_and_programs/geography_and_human_rights/geography_and_human_rights_by_doug_richardson).) Accessed 09/24/2012.
- Science News. 1978. "AAAS: Politics... and Science." *Science News*, 113(8):116-117.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1989. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Holiston, MA: Northeastern Publishing.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks goes to the following individuals who were interviewed for this paper:

- Blau, Judith. Interview of Judith Blau, June 6, 2012. Conducted by Mark Frezzo.
- Herring, Lee. Interview of Lee Herring, September 27, 2012. Conducted by Brian Gran.
- Vitulo, Margaret Weigers. Interview of Margaret Weigers Vitullo, October 12, 2012. Conducted by Brian Gran.
- Wyndham, Jessica. Interview of SHRC Director Jessica Wyndham, July 23, 2012. Conducted by Bruce Friesen.

### Endnotes

1. Listing of authors is arbitrary; all contributed equally to this manuscript.

**Bruce Friesen** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University

B. K. Friesen, M. Frezzo & B. K. Gran / *Societies Without Borders* 7:4 (2012) 447-469

of Tampa. He is past Chair of the ASA Section on Human Rights and serves as a Sociologists Without Borders representative on the SHRC. Friesen is the author of several articles and book chapters, including “Globalizing the Human Rights Perspective” in Blau and Frezzo’s (2009) *Sociology and Human Rights* (Paradigm). He is the author of two books and is currently working on a monograph, conditionally titled *Moral Systems and the Evolution of Human Rights* (Springer), which develops a theory of human rights.

**Dr. Mark Frezzo** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi. In addition to several book chapters, he has published articles in *Sociology Compass*, *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, and *Societies Without Borders*, along with two books, *Deflecting the Crisis: Keynesianism, Social Movements, and US Hegemony* (2009) and *Sociology and Human Rights: A Bill of Rights for the Twenty-First Century*, co-edited with Judith Blau. He serves as Chair-Elect of the Human Rights Section of the ASA, Co-Chair of the EIR Working Group of the Science and Human Rights Coalition, and Past Vice President of Sociologists Without Borders.

**Brian Gran** is a former lawyer whose sociological research focuses on human rights and institutions that support and hinder their enforcement, with a particular interest in whether law can intervene into private spheres. He directs a NSF project that is developing an international Children’s Rights Index. Gran is president of ISA TG03, Global Justice and Human Rights. For his research on independent children’s rights institutions, he was a Swiss National Science Foundation Visiting Fellow. In January Gran will visit Reykjavik University’s School of Law as a Fulbright Scholar. He currently directs a project on human trafficking in Northeast Ohio.