



STATEMENT

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REGISTRAR

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**Archivists: from the backroom to the boardroom
*In memory of Tony Newton***

**By
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Good afternoon everybody,

I am not an archivist, I am a lawyer. Nor am I an information manager; rather I manage international criminal courts. And yes, Tom Adami, I struggle when my archivists run me through the requirements of the certified trustworthy digital repository for the 2 petabytes of archives of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (ICTR and ICTY).

Nonetheless, I am deeply honoured to be here amongst such a vibrant community of dedicated professionals, coming from nearly a hundred countries. I am especially thrilled to be here because I have been part of a monumental transformation in the archives world which I want to share with you.

In less than a decade, in my trade, archives management went from a "necessary evil" to "mission critical". Archives are no longer perceived as an unwelcome drainage of resources for projects unintelligible to all, but the archivists themselves. Today, they are rightly recognised as a fundamental asset for the success of the Organization. At the International Criminal Tribunals, the archivists moved from the backroom to the boardroom.

And once the archivists moved from the backroom to the boardroom, a virtuous cycle was set in motion. Through the support gained in the boardroom, archivists started to receive funding for complex digitization processes, attracted the advice of

communication experts to make their collections more accessible, and gained the backing of lawyers to strengthen confidentiality and information security. In turn, the Tribunals' mandate to bring justice and promote reconciliation in war-torn communities was bolstered by this new found energy and blossoming growth in the archival work. The action of the archivists and that of the Tribunals mutually reinforced each other.

Over the past couple of days, I heard the struggles many of you face for funding, governance or simply to have the voice of the archivists, your voice, heard by management. I hope that sharing the story of how the archivists at the Tribunals moved from the backroom to the boardroom, will help you take your own seat at the boardroom table and enter the virtuous cycle.

It only took one person to get me into the loop. Probably, many of you knew him. A fellow Australian, a world-class archivist, a pragmatic visionary.

He was guided by the firm belief that archives' can incisively contribute to the wellbeing of society, yet this resource remained largely untapped. He was armed with decades of experience and ground-breaking work which pushed the Australian National Archives to the forefront of international practice. He was empowered by the warmth of his smile and the candour of his eyes. This was Tony Newton for me.



His vision, his expertise, and his amiability opened the closed doors of many colleagues at the ICTY, including my own. Tony Newton made us see that archives are not just about the past, they are also the present and they are the future.

Tony's message was as clear and compelling, as it was unnoticed, just like the invisible gorilla who strolls into the room. In order to see something - even when it is blatantly obvious - you must be looking at it. Tony made us look. He opened our eyes.

Let us turn back the clock to 2007, before Tony joined the ICTY. Back then, we did not have an archives section let alone an archive strategy. Some of the archives functions were carried out by court managers and IT staff. The United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (ARMS) in New York, headed by the ever inspiring Bridget Sisk, was doing everything to steer us in the right direction, but we did not have the technical capacity to change course. Then, Tony arrived.

With the unwavering backing of the New York archivists, Tony started a far-reaching process of sensitization on the role of archives across the entire Tribunal. This resulted in some initial support from senior management and an infusion of resources. At the same time, a similar process was taking place at our sister Tribunal, the ICTR in Arusha, Tanzania.

It was however, only when the ICTR and ICTY started to reach the end of their judicial caseload, that the discourse on archives became increasingly central.

Very concrete questions started to be asked: what to do with the archives of the Tribunals? Where should they be located when the Tribunals close? How much would it cost to preserve them?

Working groups were established, experts consulted and papers written to respond to these questions. I want to acknowledge that some of those experts are here with us today. The various options generated through this exercise culminated in a 2009 report of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Security Council. The report called on the Tribunals to develop, for the first time, an archives strategy.

The Tribunals had to implement retention policies in order to identify records for permanent preservation; they had to prepare all hard-copy and digital records for future transfer and migration into the recordkeeping systems of the institution that would one day succeed them; and they had to develop governance regimes that would guarantee the widest possible access to the public judicial records and the tightest possible security for confidential information.

It did not take us long to realise that that this was not going to be easy. It quickly became evident how much more expensive and laborious it was to start preparing archives some fifteen years into our work, rather than from the outset. Take for example, our large-scale digitization of the audio-visual records of our court proceedings: 10,000 witnesses, 72,000 hours and counting. The ICTR broke ground in the use of digitization as an audio-visual preservation strategy, at a time when this was a relatively new field and had only become feasible a few years earlier. If you ask Martha Hunt, the audio-visual archivist who led this six-year project, she would talk with pride of the challenges they overcame: the clearance of robots never seen before by custom officers, the limitations of the local ICT infrastructure, and the unavailability of vital spare parts. This digitization remains one of the largest and most technically complex audio-visual preservation projects completed in Africa, where some similarly impressive initiatives have been undertaken in recent years.

As the Tribunals continued to clear their dockets, their archivists continued to forge ahead despite limited resources, technical constraints, and incomplete governance systems. They turned challenges they overcame, into convincing awareness-raising leverages for colleagues and management. Their excellent work became known beyond Arusha and The Hague, and reached New York, where with the help of ARMS, archives were slowly but surely starting to be recognised as a key function of the Tribunals.

And this recognition came in the historic resolution 1966 of December 2010 of the United Nations Security Council, which established the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (Mechanism). A small and efficient institution tasked to continue those essential functions that must be carried out even after the international criminal

tribunals have closed their doors. Equal amongst these functions, stands the management of the Tribunals archives.

Archives management was now recognised as a substantive function of the Organization, alongside the tracking of the remaining fugitives of the Rwandan genocide, the appeals proceedings in the cases of alleged masterminds of atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans, or the supervision of the prison sentences imposed by the Tribunals' Judges. No longer a backroom function, archives management had moved to the boardroom. My chief Archivist, Elizabeth Emmerson, has her seat at the table.

This managerial change brought about another equally necessary change, a change in the office culture. Just like subway passengers constantly hear: "security starts with you", in any office, staff must hear "archiving starts with you". Archivists cannot do their job without the support of the entire office they serve. All my Chiefs of Sections are today evaluated and held responsible for the records management of their respective sections. If you walk in the corridors of the Mechanism in both its Arusha and The Hague offices, you will hear building assistants as much as lawyers effortlessly dropping concepts like "office of record", "appraisal and disposal" or "continuum". The archives jargon that, as recently as ten years ago belonged to just a handful of people in the office, has today become part of the daily language of our work.

As a testament of this managerial and broader commitment to archives management, on International Archives Day this year, I endorsed the Universal Declaration on Archives on behalf of the Mechanism, which became the first United Nations institution to subscribe to the Declaration at the management level. And more than that, we also translated it into Kinyarwanda.

But were the Tribunals particularly lucky? Was this virtuous cycle just a fortunate set of circumstances, facilitated by the nature of the Tribunals' work and the prescience of exceptional archivists? I do not believe so. In fact, I am convinced that this is only one of other examples across the globe, or a model for many more institutions which are ready to follow.

Valuable lessons for a more impactful role of archives in our institutions could perhaps be drawn by what's happening in Business and Human Rights, recalled by Ms. Lisa Ott in her informative presentation. An ever increasing number of businesses - multinationals and small firms alike - are voluntarily seeking to respect human rights in their operations, within a politically endorsed international framework. While still embryonic, this extraordinary achievement was the result of a deliberate strategic process spearheaded by Harvard Professor and former Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, Mr. John Ruggie.

In his years-long journey, I want to isolate one moment, I would say, a moment of disarming obviousness, but, mostly, of irreversible awakening. By showing the dollar cost directly related to human rights abuses - that, for example, trigger a miners' protest resulting in lost hours and lost income - Ruggie swayed the company's top management. By illustrating the potential legal risks that might arise from those same protests, he swayed the corporate lawyers. Ruggie had compellingly demonstrated that human rights were business critical. When CEOs understood that respect for human

rights was wedded to the core of their profit-generating businesses, then human rights moved from the backroom to the boardroom.

It is this awakening, this prise de conscience that archivists should strive for.

At the Mechanism, as at the Tribunals before, archivists like Tony Newton and his successors, did precisely that. They showed us, the management, that without systems which ensure the security of confidential information, the Tribunals would not succeed in protecting the lives of the very witnesses who were vital to deliver justice. The archivists showed us that, without searchable records, we could not support the work of the many courts around the world who continue the United Nations' Tribunals fight against impunity. The archivists showed us that, by making the records of our work accessible, we could offer some comfort to victims, and send clear signals to accused at large and perpetrators of tomorrow. In sum, the archivists compellingly showed us that archives are inherent to our operations, that they are mission critical.

There is no one-fits-all solution that will move archivists who struggle for funding, backing or simply recognition, to their deserved seat in the boardroom. You will have to show, just like John Ruggie did for human rights, or Tony Newton did for the Tribunals, why and how your archives affect, serve and will bolster the very essence of your institutions. The key to the boardroom lies in that unique interdependence between your archives and the core business of your office, which is too often astonishingly invisible. Thought-provoking conferences such as this, the contagious energy they generate and the lasting connections they form will certainly bring you closer to unveil that interdependence which will help you lever open the door of the boardroom. And at that point, the virtuous cycle of mutual benefits for the archives and your organization will be set in motion.

At the Mechanism this cycle is ongoing.

I am proud that the Mechanism Archives and Records Section, called MARS, is one of the largest archives sections within the United Nations. By the way, with MARS we do not imply that our archivists are from another planet, even if it does have water now – but I must recognise that they are quite stellar.

They manage to the highest international standards half the records created by the Tribunals in over twenty years. The majority of our archives are paper, and audio-visual records, but we also preserve photographs, large-format maps, and objects collected during investigations after the end of the violence, such as pieces of clothing removed from exhumed bodies in mass graves or weapons used in the commission of mass violence. But let the images speak for themselves. [Play Video](#)

Our archives tell the story of the pioneering era of modern international criminal justice, in which perpetrators of atrocities, even those considered once untouchable or beyond the law, can be brought to justice, and if found guilty after a fair trial, will serve their punishment. Our archives are also a tool for the future enabling us to recognise the early signs of atrocities, so that we can do more to help prevent them.

It is therefore only logical that now that the challenge of paper preservation is behind us, and the work on the certified trustworthy digital repository is well underway, our next test is access.

The Tribunals are required by a Secretary-General Bulletin to provide public access to their unclassified judicial records.

In furtherance of this commitment to public accessibility, the Mechanism is developing a user-friendly, full-text searchable, public interface to its judicial records database, which will become the most comprehensive source of public access to the Tribunals case-law.

Next year, you will be able to access our records in the very first, and only, United Nations purpose-built archives building, currently under construction in Arusha. This is a privilege, considering that most times we do not choose our archives buildings, as Mr. Johnathan Rhys-Lewis reminded us yesterday. In the heart of East Africa, modern technologies will blend with local construction methods and green initiatives, to enable the preservation of the ICTR archives in accordance with the highest standards. I am looking forward to welcoming the 2017 conference of the ICA Section on International Organizations in our new building in Arusha, as part of the advocacy arm of the Africa Strategy.

Notwithstanding these achievements, a daunting responsibility still looms ahead. We are taking up the challenge of redacting 20,000 hours of audio-visual recordings of the ICTR - the only record of testimonies available in Kinyarwanda. This collection is largely inaccessible to the general public. And it will remain so for the next generation, if we do not find adequate support for the redaction of the confidential information they contain. It takes six hours to redact one hour of proceedings in the three languages of the Tribunal. As I heard in many presentations these two days, it is now my turn to have my own call for help.

Tony Newton passed away on 24 September 2013. He never got his seat at the boardroom. But through his persuasive, passionate awareness-raising on the relevance of archives to our core business he ensured that his successors did. And when this happened, archivists and the Organization mutually fed into each other's business and bolstered it. Do not remain behind in the back office. Go out in the world and make a difference, as ICA President, Mr. David Fricker told today over lunch a group of New Professionals. Sometimes, it only takes one person, one archivist, to move up to the boardroom.

Thank you.