

## **INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON ARCHIVES & HUMAN RIGHTS. ACCESS TO AND DECLASSIFICATION OF DOCUMENTS.**

The issues involved in **Access to and declassification of public documents** were discussed in the framework of the International Congress on Archives & Human Rights organised by Archivists without Borders, the Town Council of Sarrià de Ter (Girona) and Diputació de Girona (Girona Provincial Council) on 2, 3 and 4 October 2008. A number of experts of international standing attended the Congress to talk about the projects under way in various countries around the world to make documentation classified as secret accessible and available to courts, researchers, historians, jurists and the general public. Such documents are of the utmost importance in investigating crimes against humanity perpetrated by states in the periods of unrest associated with democracies turning into dictatorships or vice versa, armed conflicts, cases of genocide etc.

Specifically, attention was devoted to the case of recovering the archives of military dictatorships in South America, the European case of the opening of the archives of the Stasi (the security force in the former GDR) to public inspection, the Freedom of Information Act in the USA and the declassification of archives being arranged by National Security Archive; attention was also given to how information for the Catalan television channel TV3's documentary "The lost children of Franco's regime" was obtained and pieced together, and to the organisation of intelligence-service information, security and the defence of states etc.

The following conclusions were agreed upon in the wake of the discussions and talks by the guests and the participants:

### **CONCLUSIONS**

1. We call for the drafting of a statute on access to public documentation, standardising consultation criteria and facilitating citizens' rights to gaining access to public information. In this area, greater transparency should be encouraged on the part of public authorities, giving citizens greater participation in and control over governmental decisions in political democracies.
2. Legal provisions are essential regarding the declassification of public documents now held under tight access restrictions, in order to put an end to indiscriminate policies of secrecy based on the lack of time limits for those restrictions.
3. Archives must be organised in accordance with the archiving methods promulgated by the International Council on Archives to ensure proper treatment of the documents to facilitate their preservation and, in particular, the accessibility and dissemination of those documents for all citizens.
4. We urge public bodies to devote all necessary material, human and financial resources to overcoming the obstacles now preventing free access to documentation from being a reality.
5. Archive documents must make it possible to find out the truth and the facts concerning past events. They must also enable citizens to exercise their individual and collective rights and, if necessary, to draw on documentary evidence in pressing for their dignity to

be restored and in demanding the right to truth and justice in their dealings with public authorities.

6. Documents produced in the context of repressive action by totalitarian regimes, and in particular those produced by police and military bodies charged with implementing such repression, must be organised and preserved as a priority for democratic societies in order to enable the citizens to exercise their rights.
7. Apart from the establishment of historical-memory centres or museums addressing the general public and intended to act as exemplary memorials and as resources for educational purposes, any specific institutions set up to organise documents from times of repression and to make them accessible must be temporary, their contents being compulsorily transferred afterwards to the national archive institutions belonging to the state's public-archive system.
8. Archive preservation and conservation is a pre-requisite for assuring people's historical memory and collective memory as an integral part of their cultural identity and of humanity's documentary heritage.
9. Governments should promote the social and democratic role of archives as essential factors in serving citizens and underpinning their rights, in accordance with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).