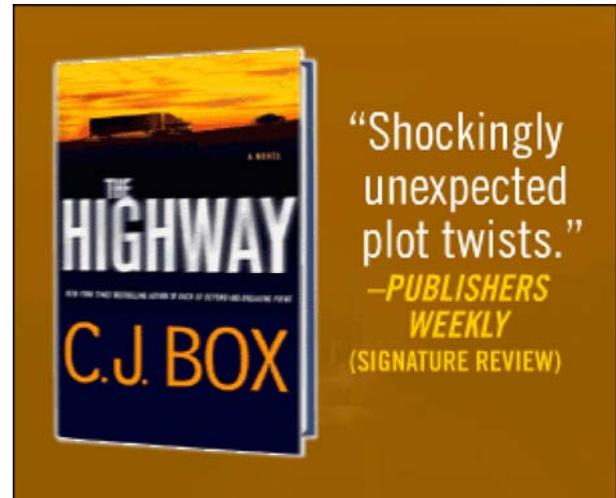


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More than 2,200 documents from World War II war crimes archive are online for the first time

By Associated Press, Published: August 3



UNITED NATIONS — Scholars, campaigners and lawyers can for the first time readily access more than 2,200 documents from a largely unknown archive housed at the United Nations that documents thousands of cases against accused World War II criminals in Europe and Asia.

The unrestricted records of the United Nations War Crimes Commission were put online in early July by the International Criminal Court after an agreement with the U.N., a move spurred by British academic Dan Plesch, who has been leading the push for greater access to the archive. The documents relate to more than 10,000 cases.

Plesch said Friday that following his research at the archive in New York he was invited to give a guest lecture on the War Crimes Commission at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, in March 2012 by Hans Bevers, the head of the prosecutor's research office. Bevers suggested the ICC might be interested in obtaining the archive and Plesch said he put him in touch with the U.N. office that manages the archives.

"It was a happy coincidence of him doing research here, him doing research there, and the ICC wanting to put as many archives as possible online," U.N. chief archivist Bridget Sisk said Friday.

"Our goal is to make available as widely as possible open archives of the organization," she said. "The collaboration with ICC adds to the world's permanent war crimes tribunal the historical record in international criminal justice."

U.N. spokesman Martin Nesirky said putting the unrestricted part of the archive online "will greatly enhance the availability of these materials to those engaged in research into the development of international criminal law, as well as to researchers from other academic disciplines."

The War Crimes Commission was established in October 1943 by 17 allied nations to issue lists of alleged war criminals — ultimately involving approximately 37,000 individuals — and examine the charges against them and try to assure their arrest and trial.

The commission was shut down in 1948, three years after the now 193-member United Nations officially came into existence. In 1949, the U.N. Secretariat drew up rules making the archive available only to governments on a confidential basis. In 1987, limited access was granted only to researchers and historians.

Plesch and his colleagues continue to seek access for researchers to the still restricted sections of the files, which he said contain some 30,000 sets of pre-trial documents submitted to the commission by national and military tribunals to judge whether the case should be pursued.

“These files contain details of many charges of crimes that are not being prosecuted extensively today, including rape and forced prostitution, and crimes by ordinary soldiers,” Plesch said.

He said that following representations by his team to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is a federal agency, is pursuing access to the commission’s entire archive — hundreds of thousands of pages in 400 boxes.

The International Criminal Court said more than 2,240 documents, totaling 22,184 pages, with search data for each document, have been added to the ICC Legal Tools Database.

The records include meeting minutes and other documents from the commission and its subordinate bodies as well as “a small but wide-ranging portion of the war crimes trial reports sent to the commission by national authorities” from Australia, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Norway, the ICC said.

Research on the War Crimes Commission conducted by Plesch and colleague Shanti Sattler will be presented at a conference Sept. 10-11 at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies where Plesch heads the Center for International Studies and Diplomacy. The conference is supported by the International Bar Association and will be chaired by South African Judge Richard Goldstone.

Online:

<http://www.legal-tools.org/en/>

<http://archives.un.org/ARMS/Records-Predecessor-Organizations>

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