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A Guide to the 20th Century Research Archive on Slavery and Trafficking



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Introduction

The following Guide is meant to assist researchers in accessing the material of the *20th Century Research Archive*.

The *Research Archive* was my personal archive of material photographed and gathered in conducting research in the first instance on the international framework of slavery from 2007 to 2012, then on trafficking from 2014 to 2024 at the archives housed at the *Palais des Nations*, Geneva, Switzerland. It appears that there may also be some material gathered from the Peace Palace Library in The Hague, Netherlands.

The material gathered in the *Research Archive* is not complete, though comprehensive. It is idiosyncratic, driven by my research agenda in regard to the evolution of the *legal* frameworks of slavery (and other types of exploitation) then trafficking, before the League of Nations and the United Nations.

More than 90% of the material gathered is in English. Only where no English translation of material was made, are the reproductions in French. French having been the language of diplomacy up to the establishment of the United Nations, the further one goes back in time in this Archive, the more likely to encounter French material.

Primarily in photographic form, the material in the *Research Archive* becomes of better quality as the technology of photography develops throughout the first two decades of the 21st Century: originally a digital camera gave way to a smart phone (as each was called at the time). *Fair warning*: material gathered early (re: slavery) is sometimes blurry – mandating zooming in – and can be challenging to read. It is worth scrolling down to the bottom of the folders, as this is where one might find PDFs of the same material

The material photographed from the League of Nations, both in regard to slavery and trafficking is, I would say, no longer of value for consulting its substance. As the League's material has been digitalised, their digital photographs are of a better quality and are searchable; whereas the photographs I have taken may be of value in identifying document symbols to then seek out from the League of Nations Archive.

The Slavery Archive

Where the material in the 'Slavery Archive' is concerned, it will be seen that it is sub-divided into four folders, the first includes material on the 1890 General Act of Brussels, which was the first universal instrument addressing the slave trade. This is followed by folders on the League of Nations and the United Nations; but also includes a folder of annual reports, from 1892 to 1912, of the International Maritime Bureau established in Zanzibar as called for in of Article XXVII of the General Act of Brussels. Unfortunately, the material related to the Brussels/Zanzibar is in French and German.

The League of Nations material related to slavery focused on the Temporary Committee on Slavery and later the Expert Committee on Slavery, the drafting of the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 1930 Liberia Commission. That said, it would be better to turn directly to the League of Nations Archives to access their digital material.

As for the United Nations material on slavery, the 1949 reports provide good insights of what came previously, within the League and before. As with the League, the United Nations had a committee considering issues of slavery, later a human rights working group on contemporary forms of slavery, and now the special rapporteur mandate. There is material in regard to the negotiations of the 1956 Supplementary Convention, and also includes both the 1955 Engen Report and 1966 Awad Report (available as PDFs). As my interest in regard to slavery also focused on other types of exploitation, there is material related to labour as it relates to Apartheid.

The United Nations material is gathered up to 1991. This is so, as the relevant material is available online and in PDF form, allowing for searches and the cut and pasting relevant material.

The Trafficking Archive

The material gathered in regard to trafficking is more comprehensive, the result of my growing engagement with archival material, the technology of photography, and diligence giving more consideration to better accessing this material. While the League of Nations and United Nations is the core of the material available, also included is material: provided to me by Jean-Michel Chaumont, from various Belgium archives in regard to the 1880 Brussels Affair; from research trips to the Women's Library at the London School of Economics and Political Science; the Library of Liverpool University; and the International Heritage Centre at the headquarters of the Salvation Army. All of this material deals with the early evolution of the anti-trafficking framework; the source and origins in its first manifestation: the white slave traffic.

Researching United Nations Material

Most valuable, as of the time of writing this *Guide*, is the material gathered in regard to the United Nations. This is so as, in the main, much of the material has not been digitalised (as yet) and thus is not accessible but for a visit to the United Nations Library & Archive in Geneva.

In carrying out research on the United Nations, the entry point is to consult, in general terms, the [Yearbook of the United Nations](#) (1945-2015), and with more precision, the [Index of Proceedings](#) (1953-2023), in regard, specifically, to the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council.

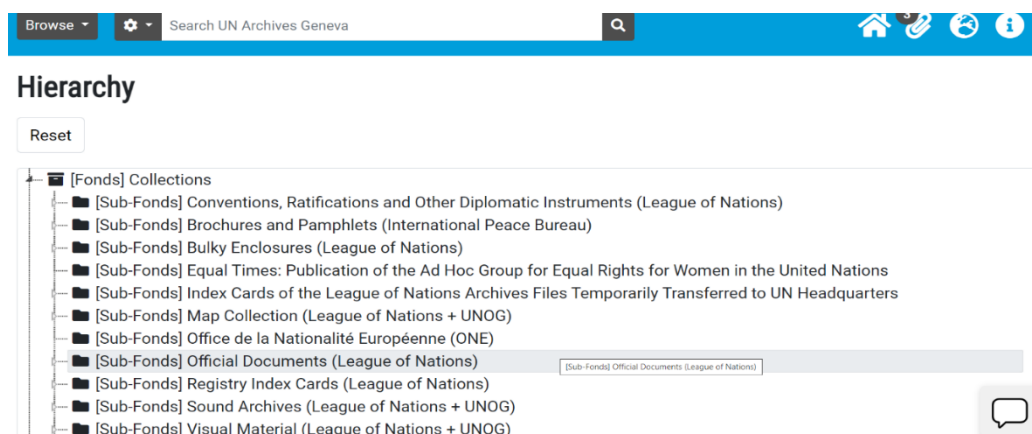
To consider the holdings of the United Nations, the [UN Library & Archives](#) website may be visited online. The UN has an online [Official Document System](#) portal – the hyperlinked page explains what material is available – and a [United Nations Digital Library](#) – run out of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library in New York – which may be consulted.

If you require assistance, the UN Librarians are helpful and can be consulted on-line via the [“Ask a Librarian”](#) function.

Researching League of Nations Material

By contrast to the United Nations material, the League of Nations Archives completed, in 2022, the digitalisation of its holdings and made it, in its totality, accessible online. While the manner in which the League of Nations Archives is catalogued is a challenge to comprehend, the following page is dedicated to [Researching the League of Nations Archives](#) and includes a tutorial video.

The [League of Nations Archives](#) can be accessed through a [Hierarchy](#) tree. It is worth spending some time familiarising yourself with the logic of the manner in which the League's Archives was collected and thus is accessed. Of the various collections, an entry point might be to consider the Official Documents, as set out below.



If you need assistance, turn to the [“Ask an Archivist”](#) function, as I have found their knowledge and helpfulness to be impressive. Note the speech bubble, on the bottom right of the above image, which allows for the consulting of an archivist in real time.

I hope this *20th Century Research Archive on Slavery and Trafficking* might be of benefit to those reading this and wish you the best in carrying out your research.



Prof. Jean Allain pictured, in 2010, in front of a Portrait of US President Woodrow Wilson in the Reading Room of League of Nations Archives, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

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