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AUG 28 1995

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The United Nations On-line Crime and Justice Clearinghouse (UNOJUST)

Presentation by

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United States of America

At the Workshop on
International Cooperation and Assistance in the Management
of the Criminal Justice System: Computerization of
Criminal Justice Operations and the Development, Analysis
and Policy Use of Criminal Justice Information

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U.S. Department of Justice
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Cairo, Egypt
May 2, 1995

Thank you, Graeme. (and other acknowledgements)

It has been my pleasure, and part of my personal and professional growth as a manager of criminal justice information resources, to participate since the inception of UNCJIN, in its electronic discussion forum and to use computer-based document files.

My job at the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the United States Department of Justice, is to manage our National Criminal Justice Reference Service, NCJRS, or "the reference service," as we call it. The Reference Service is a large information clearinghouse with a number of functions. We share information about our criminal justice research and evaluation, work, statistical analysis, policy, and programs; we learn about the work of other criminological institutions, and

refer clients to publications and services where available. We assist in publishing the reports of the component bureaus of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs and allied agencies. These cover a range of areas - victims services, juvenile justice, and illicit drugs. The Reference Service currently holds over 130,000 documents, which we publicize to a wide audience and make available to over 5,000 requesters per month. NCJRS assists in publishing and distributing some 200 document titles per year, and some of our periodicals reach more than 80,000 subscribers per issue. The volume of documents we handle has been growing, and as it does it is becoming increasingly costly to handle by paper-based or the traditional processes. So over the past few years we have been exploring and applying computer technology to automate the Reference Service. Within the last year we have joined the Internet, -the

International Information Infrastructure, which permits us the greater efficiency we need, plus a global reach.

As you know, the Internet is vast and although conceptually simple - a worldwide, computer network of computer networks - it is a challenge in practical terms. We needed to find out precisely how use the "Net" to best advantage - how to relate our specialized field of research and development of improvements in the administration of justice. This required an in-depth re-analysis of virtually all our functions - acquisition of materials, referral services, communication, publication printing, and general management. Our re-analysis formed the basis for the development of what became known as "NCJRS Online". Essentially, we put our entire information clearinghouse online and accessible via the Internet. That is the subject of another

workshop address, symposium presentation, and exhibit here at the Congress. I will be speaking about NCJRS Online on _____ at _____.

Although primarily serving users in the United States, the NCJRS has an international mission and "presence" as well: and has long participated in an international document exchange with many criminological institutions like our own around the world, especially those associated with the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch. Because of our experience with online communications and our relationship with the international community, the Branch asked NIJ to assist in designing the prototype of an Internet- based system of information exchange. It would strengthen information exchange, communication, and clearinghouse activities among

the Branch, associated institutes, and other government and education organizations worldwide.

The system requested was created with input from NIJ staff and visiting fellows, NCJRS staff and consultants a worldwide project team, and technological and systems engineering and telecommunication expertise from the Mitre Corporation of the United States. The World Wide Web technology-based, Internet service we built in prototype form has been given the working name UNOJUST.

UNOJUST takes advantage of state-of-the-art Internet technologies. One is the World Wide Web, which is easy for the novice user because features like computer graphic screen displays and word-based, or hypertext, search, linkage, and...

retrieval software. The Web does away with most of the esoteric directory, sub-directory, routines that require a lot of effort to find things. You're probably thinking that these terms "World-Wide-Web", "hypertext", and "graphical user interface" are just as arcane! But their advantage is that users don't have to master the underlying technology; they just connect to UNOJUST. And because of the graphics and word-based guidance it makes available, they can use the system much more easily to find and retrieve information to help them develop programs, projects and policy. Just as a crime that takes a few minutes to perpetrate but days or even weeks for the prosecutor to prove in court, the actions of UNOJUST, which can be performed in seconds, take more time to describe than to do. At our exhibit you can experience the simplicity of the use of UNOJUST, hands on.

To find out exactly what was needed for UNOJUST and what would be most useful, we first conducted a survey. We obtained information from most of the 13 institutes closely associated with the Branch. Information was collected about the institutes library or documentation collections, their communication needs, and the types of interchange and collaboration they wanted. We then developed a structured approach intended to link each of the institutes via the Internet in order to find and retrieve the documents and files each want to share. UNOJUST builds on what UNCJIN has demonstrated. It provides a way for those still in the process of automating to ensure compatibility and ease of communication with those who have already begun Internet operations. It builds on the electronic mail and electronic discussion forum, the United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network listserv, UNCJIN-L, and

recommends that others emulate the gopher-based document directory and textfile routines of the UNJCIN gopher, with a goal of moving everything to the easier-to-use graphical image and hypertext based World Wide Web as soon as feasible. Mr. William Zeiner will lead a symposium discussion of UNOJUST and these technologies with us at _____ on _____.

Almost all of the projects being discussed over the four days of this workshop and symposium, will be (or can be) Internet connected. UNOJUST has been constructed to encourage and assist with such connectivity. The UNOJUST team will be learning at this workshop additional ways to refine the software for both the server and client uses of UNOJUST. We look forward to meeting with you in the exhibit area and hope that

you try the prototype. Please stop by our National Criminal
Justice Reference Service exhibit to learn more about
UNOJUST and to let us know how it might help your country
increase the interchange of information in the criminal justice
area.

Thank you.

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