Project Overview:

The Amnesty International digital verification corps has been established to assist Amnesty International researchers to use content sourced from social media sources that may depict human rights violations. Due to the proliferation of smart phones, improved internet and mobile phone networks and open social media platforms, increasingly events are first reported on social media. However, verifying that the content found on social media truly depicts what it is said to is frequently a time-consuming endeavour requiring specific skills. This is where the digital verification corps comes in.

Following training on various verification techniques, members of the digital verification corps will be expected to undertake verification on pieces of social media content provided by Amnesty International researchers. Verification will require either a speedy turn around or be long-term project based.

Project Utility:

The Digital Verification Corps will be working at the cutting edge of contemporary human rights investigation with the potential to influence future research into human rights violations. This is a new, but critical field of human rights research and monitoring. Demand for the open-source investigation skills that will be developed through participation in the Digital Verification Corps is also growing amongst grassroots and international human rights organisations. Participation will give you this applied knowledge and involvement in the real research work of a major international human rights organisation.

Examples of social media that has required verification and has had an impact within Amnesty International in the past includes:

Syria – Russian Airstrikes
Using verified eyewitness video, Amnesty International was able to challenge the claim by the Russian government that its air strikes had not harmed civilians. The video verified by Amnesty shows that the strikes do appear to have actually killed hundreds of civilians and destroyed or damaged hospitals and dozens of homes and other civilian objects.

Burundi Mass Graves
Verified eyewitness video footage was used by Amnesty International to corroborate other evidence (from satellite images, and witness accounts) that dozens of people killed by Burundian security forces in December 2015 were later buried in mass graves. Without the verified eyewitness video, Amnesty International would not have been able to use the satellite evidence alone.

Who Is Involved?
The Digital Verification Corps will be managed by Sam Dubberley. Sam is co-founder of [Eyewitness Media Hub](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/burundi-satellite-evidence-supports-witness-accounts-of-mass-graves/) and research fellow of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University. He is an expert in social media verification. Sam is based in Berlin and is the main point of contact for this project.

Further volunteer members of the Digital Verification Corps will come from Berkeley University Human Rights Centre in the United States and Pretoria University Human Rights Centre in South Africa. It is expected that all universities and Digital Verification Corps members will take the opportunity to collaborate on projects.

University of Essex Project Output:
The project has two main outputs:

1. Ongoing verification of content as Amnesty International researchers require and in terms of one or two ongoing verification projects as yet to be determined.
2. A guide to social media for human rights investigation that can be used as a basis for training for future Digital Verification Corps members. This guide should cover all aspects of verification that the participants have learnt, include an evaluation of the successes and failures of the Digital Verification Corps with the goal of understanding the lessons learnt in order to make recommendations for the future development of the Digital Verification Corps and highlight any other issues of which participants believe future members should be aware (e.g. impact of viewing traumatic imagery etc.)

**Project Outline:**

1. 01 / 02 November 2016: Social media for human rights investigation training - attendance compulsory for participation in the project. Two days of training with experts on verification, ethics and discovery. This will cover use of software for the project, awareness of trauma and viewing distressing imagery. Attendance to the training is compulsory for participants.
2. Ongoing: weekly meetings with Essex HRC / AI project leader (to be conducted online). Attendance is compulsory.
3. Each participant is required to write a minimum of one blog post to be published on Amnesty’s website: www.citizenevidence.org This can be a case study of verifying a particular piece of content (i.e. steps taken to authenticate or debunk a piece a video or photograph), a lesson learnt etc.
4. Regular presence (2 to 3 times a week) in the online tools used for this project - Slack / Check Desk (TBC).

**Final Guide**

The final guide should be a document to be published on www.citizenevidence.org for future verification corps members and other human rights investigators interested in learning about collaborative human rights investigation using social media. The format, content and the layout of the guide is to be decided by the verification corps participants, but it is expected, at a minimum, to include: description of the group experience of taking part in the verification corps, outlining the achievements of the Essex cohort, the lessons learnt (in particular, where you went wrong and what the learning points are from that), tools used and recommendations for further tools, and a summary of case studies of human rights violations monitored during the project.

The guide should be around 10,000 words plus audiovisual content (links, social media embeds etc.)

Project Bibliography:
“Ethical Guidelines: Using Eyewitness Videos in Human Rights Reporting and Advocacy”, WITNESS
http://www.mediafire.com/download/pbahxdv48bi3m01/VaE_Ethical_Guidelines_v1_2.pdf

Citizen Media Research and Verification: An Analytical Framework for Human Rights Practitioners by Christoph Koettl
https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/253508/Koettl_Citizen%20Media%20Research%20and%20Verification_FINAL%20%282%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
I work on the Digital Frontline – how should I protect myself from the traumatic content I’m seeing?, S Dubberley
https://citizenevidence.org/2015/12/18/protecting-yourself-from-trauma-on-the-digital-frontline/