



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE ASSISTANCE
FOUNDATION-ARMENIA

Activity Highlights

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Quarterly Publication of the Open Society Institute
Assistance Foundation-Armenia

Dear Reader

We are happy to present the first issue of what we hope will become a quarterly publication intended to inform the Armenian society of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation's activities in Armenia. The Foundation's mission in Armenia is to assist in the process of the democratic transformation of the country. In particular, the Foundation aims to:

(1) promote the rule of law, education, human rights and the rights of minorities, women, and vulnerable groups, and combat corruption and human rights violations; (2) promote Armenia's integration into European and international structures and legal standards in the areas of media, human rights, criminal justice and access to information, and assist Armenia's integration into European reforms in higher education; (3) ensure access to justice for vulnerable groups, improve conditions in closed institutions, and promote strategic litigation and civic monitoring of institutions; (4) support independent media, alliances of civil society actors, skills and tools for effective policy research and advocacy, and monitoring of reforms; (4) create a polycentric structuring of the mass media, including alternative production of content in both broadcast media and the internet for Armenians in and outside the country, and; (5) support the collaborative exchange of information, experience, expertise and knowledge through multi-national initiatives that seek to build international networks of informed and empowered actors.

In our work we try to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the country and the society and, therefore, would like to use this publication to solicit your feedback about the work we do. Please share with us your views and opinions via email or by contacting us directly.

Thank you for your interest in the Foundation's activities in Armenia.

Larisa Minasyan
Executive Director

"I wish to see Armenia a democratic sovereign state, with open-minded and dignified people who respect human values and contribute to the well-being of their country. I believe we can make it happen."

Amalia Kostanyan
Board Chair

Chairwoman, Transparency International Anti-corruption
Center

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EMERGENCY FUND

To mitigate the impact of crisis on disadvantaged people, Mr. George Soros pledged \$100 million to charities in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, including Armenia. ▶ see p. 5,6

- Helping Needy Children in Vanadzor
- Assistance to Families with Newborn Babies in Tavush
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- Ensuring Basic Nutrition to People in Armavir and Aragatsotn
- Providing for Transportation Costs to Boarding Schools

PARTNERSHIP FOR OPEN SOCIETY

Partnership for Open Society Presented Third Report on ENP Implementation

January this year marked the third year of Partnership for Open Society Initiative's assessment of the ENP implementation in Armenia. A number of civil society organizations presented the report in Brussels in meetings attended by European diplomats from the Eastern Working Party of the Council, European Parliamentary officials, and Head of Staff of the European Parliament's Rapporteur on the South Caucasus. ▶ see p.6

HUMAN RIGHTS

Human Rights NGOs Are Strengthened

The Foundation, with co-funding from the Government of The Netherlands, implemented a three-and-a-half year project to improve the human rights situation in Armenia through capacity building of selected NGOs. Working in different spheres of human rights, the NGOs completed their projects in December 2009. Due to the successful implementation of the project the Government of The Netherlands provided funding for yet another year. Below are some highlights of the activities of these NGOs.

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office Monitored Psychiatric Medical Institutions

For the first time in Armenia, monitoring of psychiatric medical institutions was conducted. The monitoring was carried out by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office. The organization studied the human rights situation of the patients in these medical institutions. The organization also carried out an awareness raising campaign on patients' rights in Tavush, Lori and Shirak marzes. The purpose of the campaign was to raise the awareness of citizens about patients' rights and involve local NGOs and lawyers in the protection of patients' rights. Based on the monitoring results, the organization is now developing recommendations to submit to the Ministry of Health. ■

Collaboration for Democracy NGO publishes "Religion and Society"

The project made it possible to have a special publication devoted to issues of religion and society. The journal now serves as an excellent source of analytical and informational materials on the topic. The electronic copy of the journal, including articles, publications, information on religious organizations as well as pieces of legislation can be found at www.religions.am, a unique website on religious issues in Armenia and abroad, created with the support of the Foundation and the Government of The Netherlands. ■

Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression Presents "Media and Advocacy"

In February, 2010 the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression presented a book on Media and Advocacy, which summarizes the monitoring activities of the organization in the regions of Armenia and presents the findings of the organization's annual monitoring on violations of rights of mass media and journalists. The book is available in Armenian, Russian and English. Its electronic version is available on www.partnership.am under Publications. ■

Unison's Project Promotes Job Opportunities for Disabled

Employment of disabled people is still one of the most pressing issues. According to the official data, only 8% to 9% of employable persons with disabilities have jobs. In order to improve the situation, Unison negotiated with many large and middle-size employers on recruitment policies. As a result of their negotiations a few companies, such as VivaCell MTS and Orange Armenia started hiring people with disabilities.

Another important step to promote job opportunities for people with disabilities was the creation of www.jobs.disability.am web-portal designed for disabled job seekers and their potential employers. This web-portal will facilitate the process of job search, establish links between companies and individuals with disabilities. ■

Young Regional Human Rights NGOs Receive Support from the Foundation

At the end of 2009, the Foundation initiated another project directed to supporting human rights NGOs. In a competitive process, five regional NGOs were selected to carry out projects in fields such as women's rights/domestic violence, rights of disabled women, labor and property rights and awareness raising activities among detainees. ■

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Foundation Supports 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

In December 2009, the Women's Rights Center, with the Foundation's support, organized a campaign to mark "16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence." The organization effectively used art component by staging an interactive theatre performance on domestic violence with participation of young artists. The performance was attended by hundreds of young and middle aged people and proved to be a good tool for awareness raising. During these 16 days, the Center distributed information leaflets on the streets of Yerevan and organized an award ceremony. About 15 local and international organizations received awards for their input and assistance.

PARTNERSHIP FOR OPEN SOCIETY

Launched in November 2003 the "Partnership for Open Society" Initiative (Partnership) is an open coalition of civil society actors in Armenia. The Partnership strives towards promotion of democratic reform process in Armenia. The Foundation is an active member of the Partnership.

Partnership for Open Society Presented Third Report on ENP Implementation

► cont. from p.1 The presentation of the report in Yerevan will take place in March, 2010. The Partnership for Open Society is a coalition of civil society representatives, and the Foundation is an active member of the Partnership. Partnership acknowledged the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as an exceptional opportunity for implementation of democratic, political, economic, and social reforms in Armenia.

Partnership has had a systemic engagement with the ENP process in Armenia since the early stages of the ENP in Armenia, promoting and supporting the ENP process. Partnership members have monitored the Action Plan implementation in key areas and reported on the progress made by the country in annual reports. This was the third Annual Report on the Country Action Plan implementation by the POS members and experts with the support of the Open Society Assistance Foundation – Armenia. Previous reports are available on the POS website www.partnership.am.■

Partnership Prepares Assessment of Armenia's Human Rights Situation

In 2009 experts from the Partnership for Open Society Initiative and partner organizations prepared a report on Armenia's human rights record prior to the country's review of its human rights record under the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism. UPR provides an opportunity for all States to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situation in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. UPR Working Group, which consists of the 47 members of the Council, prepares its review and recommendations based on the information provided by the State under the review, as well reports submitted by independent human rights experts and groups, non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions.

The report covered the state of basic human rights and freedoms in the country for the past five years, and outlined the civil society's concerns with the human rights situation in the country and provided recommendations for each area - elections, judiciary, torture and ill-treatment, meetings and rallies, freedom of conscience and religion, property rights, women's and children's rights, freedom of expression and media, and right to healthy and safe environment.■

MEDIA

Interactive on Public Television

In February *Interactive* weekly TV program series on Information Technologies kicked off on Public Television. The program features news in the sector, developments and problems, the most popular websites and news sites and a wide range of IT related topics. The weekly TV Program is supported by the Foundation and prepared by Banadzev Company. The program is aired every Saturday at 4:30 p.m. on the Public Television.■

◀ *Interactive* every Saturday at 4:30 p.m. on Public Television



Online Media Upgrade their Websites

The Foundation is supporting a number of online media, selected in a competitive process, to upgrade their websites technically and provide more and better quality analytical content that would be non-partisan and unbiased. Among them are www.lragir.am, www.A1plus, www.ecolor.am, www.7or.am. The competition was aimed at promoting online media and alternative content. The respective organizations, with the Foundation support, have been able to have more features on their sites, and hire more personnel to cover more areas and generate more analytical content.■

Regional Media Get Support

The Foundation supports regional TV companies, selected in a competitive process, to organize TV programs in the form of debates that discuss problems prevailing in the specific region. The TV companies selected are Fortuna TV/Stepanavan, Ankyun +3/Alaverdi, Lori TV/Vanadzor, ALT TV/Armavir, Sosi TV/Kapan and Tsayg TV/Gyumri. Reportedly, some problems in the regions have been solved due to the fact that they were brought to the attention of public officials. As an example, in Armavir there were many complaints related to additional payments for electricity, especially in winter, complaints that ambulances do not respond to calls and do so only having been promised additional payment, and conflicts between the provider and consumer at the start of the agricultural season among many other problems. ALT TV company reports that as a result of the TV debates where they had invited all stakeholders these issues were discussed and solved.■

PUBLIC HEALTH

Campaign Human Rights and HIV/AIDS: Now More Than Ever

In Armenia, the OSI Law and Health Initiative supported a campaign in two cities to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS from the human rights perspective. The campaign focused on 10 reasons mentioned in the OSI produced declaration *Human Rights and HIV/AIDS: Now More Than Ever*, endorsed by over 600 organizations worldwide, calling on governments and international donors to protect the human rights of stigmatized groups. On 1-8 December, 2009 the Foundation and a coalition of human rights and AIDS organizations organized round table discussions on HIV and human rights with participation of high-level officials, international donors, non-governmental organizations, as well as activists and people affected by the epidemic to address the critical need of including human rights in the AIDS response. ■



Round-table dedicated to HIV and human rights protection of marginalized groups, December, 2009, Gyumri

Palliative Care Introduced as New Public Health Area in Armenia

In November, 2009 the Armenian government acknowledged “palliative care” as a medical aid and medical service and integrated it into relevant legislation. This was a result of joint efforts and continuous cooperation of the Foundation's Public Health Program and its partners, OSI International Palliative Care Initiative and the Ministry of Health of Armenia. The new legislation will promote integration and development of palliative care services and corresponding policies, and will pave a civilized way of resolving issues related to the conditions of terminally ill patients. ■



Stephen R Connor, PhD, OSI International Palliative Care Consultant presenting Needs Assessment on Palliative Care Situation in Armenia, December 14, 2009

EDUCATION

Winter School for Education Administrators

The Foundation supported a Winter School on “Promoting European Dimension in Higher Education” held November 30-December 11, 2009. The Winter School was organized by the Scientific and Educational Center for National Development NGO. Twenty-nine education administrators from regions and Yerevan representing both state and private universities participated in the school.



YSU Vice Rector Alexander Grigoryan making a welcoming speech at the opening of Winter School, November 30, 2009

assessment, as well as quality assurance and program endorsement. Among trainers were two UK experts Andy Gibbs, (Napier University, Edinburgh) and Terrence Clifford-Amos (Christ Church University, Canterbury). Presentations were also made by Armen Budaghyan and Gevorg Tamamyanyan, representing the Yerevan State University and Education and Information for Development NGO respectively. At the end of the Winter School round tables were held at the Eurasia University and the Yerevan State Conservatory to discuss the outcomes of the Winter School project and ideas for the future. ■

Czech Republic Inclusive Education Model to Guide Special Education Reform in Armenia

In December, a team of Armenian experts in the field of special and inclusive education visited the Czech Republic to learn about its special education system and support structures. The Czech Republic was chosen by the experts based on presentations by international experts in the field during the international conference, held earlier in the year.

► see p.5

The school aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of education administrators and faculty in the areas of teaching/learning methodology, planning and strategy, and

► cont. from p.4 The group was given an opportunity to study the special and mainstream school systems, policy and legal frameworks. The Basic School of Dr. Malika in Chrudim was an ideal example of an inclusive environment for children with disabilities thanks to the excellent team work and child centered methods of teaching.

The team also visited the special kindergarten and special basic school ELPIS in Brno for children with severe mental, physical and other disabilities, League of Human Rights in Brno to learn about the role of human rights organizations in promoting the rights of children with a specific focus on education and health. A visit to the secondary school, basic school and kindergarten for children with hearing impairments was also arranged. The group was given an opportunity to attend several lessons in preschool groups and classes in basic and higher schools.



Children in Dr. Malika's School, Chrudim, Czech Republic
December, 2009

The team also visited the Ministry of Education to meet with education policy makers with special emphasis on inclusion, as well as the Institute of Pedagogical Psychological Counseling (IPPP CR), which helps to solve the current needs of the system of educational and psychological counseling.

The team members are now developing recommendations on special education reform to present it to the Ministry of Education for consideration and, possibly, subsequent adoption. An international expert will be invited to guide the process. ■



Armenian experts at Dr. Malika's School, Chrudim, Czech Republic, December, 2009

ARTS AND CULTURE

Armenian Documentary Film Gets First Prize in German Film Festival

On November 14, 2009, the documentary film "We Are Our Mountains" directed by Nika Shek received the first prize in the nomination "Best Documentary Film" in the German Documentary Film Festival *OK-Videowettbewerb Tiefenschärfe*. The film is about the lives of Yezidis in Armenia, their culture, daily life and traditions. The film competed against 26 professional films. Nika Shek also took the first prize in the second nomination for the "Best Fiction Film" for the film "Piano." ■

EMERGENCY FUND

The global economic crisis impacted most societies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized groups. The allocation to Armenia is up to \$2 million for 2.5 years. The emergency funds will be used to support humanitarian projects that will help people hardest hit by the crisis and will target innovative interventions aimed at maintaining support for open society values. The Foundation conducted research to identify needs arising from the financial crisis and to find possible partners and implementers to address them, met with major donors, NGOs in the capital and the regions, Diaspora and faith-based organizations to present the Fund, with the purpose of building partnership and soliciting co-funding.

In Armenia, some of the most affected groups are needy children, lonely elderly and families living in bordering areas. ► see p.6

Providing for Heating for Elderly in Winter

The Emergency Fund allocated \$25 000 to support the Winter Heating for Elderly project by providing a source for heating their houses in wintertime. The project is implemented by the Armenian Caritas, and currently assists 560 lonely and disabled elderly from Gyumri, Vanadzor, Gavar and Tashir. For this project Caritas Europe Office provided co-funding of \$57 000.■



Helping Needy Children in Vanadzor

Orran benevolent NGO serves more than 120 elderly people and children through its Yerevan center. Due to the crisis the need for such centers has grown, especially in the areas outside the capital city. Orran approached the Foundation with a request for funding to establish and run an "Orran" Center in Vanadzor. The Foundation allocated \$74 000 from the Emergency Fund that allowed Orran to serve yet another 50 needy children in Vanadzor. The project strives to divert children from the streets and engage them in academic, cultural, and extra-curricular activities, fight the concept of beggar children as the principal breadwinners of their families, help families "in crisis", assist the lonely and needy elderly, identify and develop children's interests and talents toward a working career and prevent the spread of destitution and begging among Armenia's children and elderly. Viva Cell MTS donated another \$25 000 to this project.■

Ensuring Basic Nutrition to People in Armavir and Aragatsotn

The Emergency Fund provided \$24 500 in assistance to over 550 villagers (about 104 vulnerable families) from 8 villages of Armavir and Aragatsotn marzes to survive the winter, through provision of basic nutrition to these villagers, vitamins for the most vulnerable individuals within the group, and basic medication to treat a range of medical problems arising from the physical conditions the villagers live in. The Children of Armenia Fund, the implementing partner for this project, contributed \$12 023 as co-funding.■

Additional Funding to "Zangakatun" Project to Expand its Services

With funding from the Emergency Fund, "Zangakatun" project of the Tufenkian Foundation, providing comprehensive rehabilitative services to impoverished, marginalized, or otherwise vulnerable families expanded its services of Yerevan and Vanadzor Centers in January, now serving 58 more families, a total of 150 families. The project is jointly funded by the Foundation and the Tufenkian Foundation, with contributions of \$90 500 and \$98 650 respectively.■



Varsik Alekryan, living alone in a domik Gyumri, December, 2009

Assistance to Families with Newborn Babies in Tavush

"Orotots" project assists 120 families with newborn babies in borderline areas of Tavush region by providing them with items of first necessity. The Foundation's allocation for this project is \$25 000. Diaspora Armenians contributed \$7 500 to the project through the "Hayastan" All Armenia Fund. The project is implemented in partnership with the Association of Women with University Education, and "Hayastan" All Armenia Fund.■



Families in Tavush receiving "Orotots" package, December 2009



Providing for Transportation Costs to Boarding Schools

With emergency funding, the Foundation provided \$12 870 for transportation costs to three boarding schools from October to June, 2010: Medical Psychological Pedagogical Assessment Center of Yerevan, Special School # 8 for Children with Speech Problems, and Yerevan Special Educational Complex for Children with Hearing Impairments, serving a total of 90 schoolchildren. The in-kind contribution is \$2 766 from schools. The state budget for school transportation was dramatically cut due to the crisis. As a consequence children with special educational needs simply could not reach the schools. The Foundation has a preliminary agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science to attend to this problem.■

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM ACADEMIC FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

invites applications for the

RETURNING SCHOLARS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

2010/11 Academic Year

The **Returning Scholars Fellowship Program** invites applications from talented scholars who seek university positions and academic careers in their home countries after studying abroad. The Returning Scholars Fellowship Program supports scholars from these countries who have received (or will receive by September 2010) an internationally competitive Master's or postgraduate degree in the following fields:

anthropology, area/cultural studies, economics, gender studies, history, human rights & public law, international relations, journalism/media studies, philosophy, political science, psychology, public policy/ environmental studies, public policy/public health, social work, and sociology. The program does not support scholars in philology, the visual and performing arts, and business.

The program supports placement of Returning Scholars only in AFP partner departments. An interested scholar already associated with a department that is not supported by AFP either will be ineligible or may discuss the possibility of relocating to a qualifying department. A list of current AFP partner departments can be found on the program's website (<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/hesp/focus/afp>). The list is subject to change in the 2010-11 academic year.

Applications should be submitted via the **Online Application System** (<https://oas.soros.org/oas/>).

For application procedure and guidelines, please see the program's web site: <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/hesp/focus/afp>

For additional information or inquiries in Armenia please contact:

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Application deadline: April 7, 2010.

CALL FOR DEPARTMENTAL PARTNERS

2010-2011 Academic Year

The OSI HESP Academic Fellowship Program is seeking departments interested in forming a partnership with the program in the academic year 2010–2011. An ideal AFP partner department is part of a classical state university and is in one of the following disciplines: **anthropology, area/cultural studies, economics, gender studies, history, human rights & public law, international relations, journalism/media studies, philosophy, political science, psychology, public policy/environmental studies, public policy/public health, social work or sociology.**

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Application deadline: April 15, 2010.

2011 FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Application Deadline: March 10, 2010

The Open Society Institute, Network Scholarship Programs, is pleased to announce the 2011 Faculty Development Fellowship Program. The Program is designed to enhance the academic careers of outstanding full-time faculty teaching American Studies, Art History, Cultural Anthropology, History, Law, Philosophy, Political Science, Religion, Social Work, or Sociology at an accredited university in participating countries (incl. Armenia).

Faculty Development Fellowship is a non-degree program that seeks to encourage faculty to generate innovative approaches to curricular and pedagogic reform, to develop and introduce new content in university courses, to raise the quality of instruction in higher education in the countries served, and to build and sustain local and international academia networks. Each award supports up to three non-consecutive semesters at a US university. Up to 20 awards will be granted for the Spring Semester 2011.

For an application and more information please visit the Program website:

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/scholarship/focus_areas/facult_scholarships/guidelines/view

Application forms and details about the program are available at www.osi.am.

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