

# Open Society Institute

2006

Selected Stories



OSI

# OSI

The Open Society Institute works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens.

Open societies are characterized by the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and a diversity of opinions; democratically elected governments; market economies in which business and government are separate; and a civil society that helps keep government power in check.

To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI builds alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. OSI places a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of marginalized people and communities.

Investor and philanthropist George Soros in 1993 created OSI as a private operating and grantmaking foundation to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI has expanded the activities of the Soros foundations network to encompass the United States and more than 60 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Each Soros foundation relies on the expertise of boards composed of eminent citizens who determine individual agendas based on local priorities.

OSI and the Soros foundations network have given away nearly \$6 billion to build open, democratic societies. In 2006, the network spent approximately \$390 million on programs around the world.

OSI's priorities in 2006 included advancing international justice and strengthening domestic justice systems, monitoring and supporting reforms in public health, advocating for transparency and the fair distribution of natural resource riches, improving the lives and securing the human rights of the Roma, and protecting the rights of other marginalized groups such as the developmentally disabled and injecting drug users.

OSI continued its leadership role in establishing a system of international justice by supporting and enhancing the work of special war crimes tribunals, including the permanent International Criminal Court, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and the Khmer Rouge tribunal in Cambodia.

Across the world, OSI built on more than a decade of activities and achievements in supporting programs that strengthen the rule of law and human rights. In the United States, and elsewhere, OSI fostered new thinking and effective advocacy about equality, justice, and opportunity.

OSI increased its efforts to monitor public health and advocate for reforms with the release of a series of publications, including five country reports on the effectiveness of their TB policies and practices. OSI programs contributed to progress in providing health services for injecting drug users and integrating the developmentally disabled into the community.

Other OSI monitoring efforts included support for revenue and budget transparency in resource-rich countries in order to curb corruption and ensure that citizens benefit from the natural resource wealth of their countries.

As a leading supporter of Roma rights advocacy organizations and initiatives, OSI and the Soros foundations continued to promote policies and public education to help bring about the inclusion of Roma in mainstream society.

OSI's work in 2006 also covered education, information, media, women's issues, local government services, economic and business development, and arts and culture. Programs in education, such as early childhood education and debate, sought to promote democratic values and improve opportunities for young people.

On the following pages are a few selected stories from 2006. Some of the stories are about OSI's grantees and people OSI helped. Other stories are about larger issues and policies OSI is trying to improve. Together the stories represent just a small fraction of the work OSI and the Soros foundations accomplished in 2006. These stories are only a snapshot. For a more complete picture of OSI's activities in 2006, contact the Communications Office.



# justice and human rights



## **Civil Society Monitors African Governments**

OSI's AfriMAP and Open Society Justice Initiative, with other partners, held a civil society workshop on good governance and human rights in order to provide guidance for the African Union's summit of country leaders. In Malawi, high-level officials attended the launch of AfriMAP's report on justice and the rule of law in that country. To strengthen democracy and open society, AfriMAP is monitoring the African Peer Review Mechanism and issuing reports on political representation and civil service, in addition to justice and law, in five countries: Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa.

## **OSI-supported Sierra Leone Paralegals Receive World Bank Grant**

The World Bank awarded a three-year \$879,000 grant to Timap for Justice, a small paralegal organization in Sierra Leone cofounded by the Open Society Justice Initiative. Timap provides justice services in rural areas, often navigating between formal law and customary law to deal with cases such as a man cheated by a local chief and a woman accused of being a witch.

## **New Effort Targets Violence Against Women in the Middle East**

OSI collaborated with the organization V-Day to launch V-Day Karama, a three-year initiative to end violence against women in the Middle East and North Africa. The new program will raise awareness about the problem in nine countries. OSI's Women's Program has helped put violence against women on the agendas of Central and Eastern European governments and the international community.

## **DNA Clears Man Coerced into Confessing to Murder**

DNA evidence, presented in the courts by the Innocence Project, an OSI grantee, exonerated Douglas Warney, a man with a history of mental health issues who was convicted of homicide on the basis of a false confession elicited by police. The Innocence Project is one of many OSI grantees working to guarantee a fair and impartial justice system in the United States.

## **Integrating Roma Benefits Economy**

An OSI-supported survey in Bulgaria revealed that full integration of Roma would increase the nation's gross domestic product by 7.5 to 15 billion euros over 10 years. The increase reflected savings in welfare payments, lower crime rates, and increases in employment numbers, labor efficiency, and income. These important findings will be used to help persuade the public of the benefits of integrating Roma into mainstream society. OSI and the World Bank are prime supporters of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2015, an unprecedented international effort to eliminate discrimination against the Roma and improve their living conditions.

## **Katrina Prompts Dialogue on Inequality in U.S.**

A year after Hurricane Katrina and other storms devastated the Gulf Coast, OSI's U.S. Programs awarded 31 investigative journalism grants to promote and sustain a national conversation on racism and inequality in America. In addition to the Katrina Media Fellowships, which include print, radio, film, and youth journalists, OSI is supporting 15 Gulf Coast nonprofits working to rebuild and vitalize the region.





**transparency and  
access to information**

## **New Revenue Watch Promotes Transparency**

OSI, Norway, and the Hewlett Foundation launched the Revenue Watch Institute, a major initiative to tackle corruption in countries rich in natural resources. The new institute represents the expansion of an effective OSI program and priority into an independent organization. Revenue Watch, as a leading force in a growing international movement, promotes better oversight of resource revenues to benefit people living in resource-rich countries such as Azerbaijan, Iraq, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia. OSI donated \$4.5 million to the institute, Norway \$3 million, and Hewlett \$1.5 million.

## **Court Establishes Right to Information**

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights became the first international tribunal to recognize access to government-held information as a basic human right. The eight-year-old case involved the Chilean government's refusal to provide information about the environmental record of a U.S. logging company. The Open Society Justice Initiative, which with others filed an amicus brief in the case, has helped strengthen access to information rights in a number of countries.

## **Open Access to Scientific Research Gains Momentum**

The National Research Foundation of South Africa, the Ukrainian cabinet of ministers, and four out of eight national research councils in the United Kingdom all joined the global movement for open access to publicly funded research. The OSI Information Program is a leading force in the effort to open up research to academics and students in developing countries.



education and  
economic development

## **Soros Gives \$50 Million to Fight Poverty in Africa**

OSI founder and chairman George Soros donated \$50 million to the Millennium Village project to reduce extreme poverty in Africa. The project, working in 78 villages in 10 countries, will clean up water sources, provide basic education, and teach people how to diversify crops. In a two-year-old pilot program in Kenya, a village increased both food production and school test scores.

## **Students in Rwanda and Uganda Join New Debate Programs**

With the support of the U.S. Department of State and the European Commission, the Open Society Institute launched debate programs in Rwanda and Uganda to inform young people about HIV/AIDS. The program in Uganda will include student exchanges with the United States. Active in more than 35 countries, OSI's Debate Program over the past decade has taught more than 100,000 secondary students, 30,000 university students, and 20,000 teachers about critical thinking and tolerance for opposing views.

## **OSI in Baltimore Targets School Suspensions and Expulsions**

OSI-Baltimore and its partners initiated a \$1.5 million effort to reduce the city's high number of school suspensions and expulsions by introducing more positive solutions to replace these destructive disciplinary tools. The Baltimore office is engaged in a fundraising campaign to match contributions by George Soros and continue its effective work for five more years on school reform, drug addiction treatment, prisoner reentry, and juvenile delinquency.



public health and  
access to care

## **Serbia Moves to Deinstitutionalize People with Intellectual Disabilities**

Serbia plans to replicate nationally a pilot project to deinstitutionalize people with intellectual disabilities and provide them with support services in the community. The government's commitment is the first of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe. Since 2003, the Open Society Mental Health Initiative has supported the pilot program, Down's Syndrome Aid Society Serbia, as well as other organizations throughout the region working to integrate people with intellectual disabilities.

## **AIDS Conference Hears About Drug Users and TB/HIV**

The Public Health Program increased OSI's presence at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, raising the profile of key issues often neglected and underrepresented in the policy discourse on HIV/AIDS. OSI staff and grantees participated in over 25 presentations, satellite sessions, and news conferences on issues including harm reduction measures for drug users, the interaction between the TB and HIV epidemics, sex worker health and rights, palliative care, and human rights protections in the fight against HIV.

## **Public Health Watch Raises Awareness of Escalating TB Epidemic**

George Soros, speaking at the World Conference on Lung Health in Paris, and OSI's Public Health Watch called for massive social mobilization to defeat the deadly resurgence of tuberculosis. OSI reports on TB policy in Bangladesh, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Thailand highlighted how TB, HIV/AIDS, and poverty combine to cause almost 2 million preventable deaths each year. "The emergence of extensively drug-resistant TB," Soros said, "sounds the alarm that the world is facing an urgent health crisis."

## **Backpacking Medics Alleviate Burmese Suffering**

OSI grantee Eh Ka Lu and the Back Pack Health Worker Team, operating out of Thailand, travel on foot into dangerous, remote areas of Burma to provide medical care to people displaced by the Burmese military government. Eh Ka Lu will be featured in *National Geographic Adventure* magazine as the humanitarian winner of its Best of Adventure issue. OSI's Burma Project, which nominated Eh Ka Lu and Back Pack, supports organizations that help Burmese people and raise global awareness of the suffering inflicted by the dictatorship.

## **Lithuania Adopts Effective Harm Reduction Guidelines**

OSI's International Harm Reduction Development Program's partners and grantees advised the Lithuanian Ministry of Health on its new harm reduction guidelines, which called for confidential or anonymous needle exchanges, safer injection and safer sex education and supplies, counseling, and educational, legal, and medical support for drug users and their families. IHRD advocacy to ensure medical and social support for drug users also included analysis of ways in which drug users in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Asia are excluded from HIV treatment; IHRD conducted a media event and released a peer-reviewed publication on effective HIV treatment of drug users at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto.

[www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org)



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