

Open Society Institute

2007

Selected Stories



OSI

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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. At the heart of OSI's mission is 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 each foundation's agenda based on local priorities.

OSI and the Soros foundations network have given away over \$6 billion to build open, democratic societies. In 2007, the network spent approximately \$450 million to help people around the world.

OSI's priorities in 2007 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.

In the face of ongoing armed conflicts across the world, OSI sought to bring to justice government leaders who commit crimes against humanity. OSI continued to support and monitor 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.

OSI joined other funders to create the European Council on Foreign Relations as an organization with the potential for developing foreign policy that promotes open society values throughout the region and the world.

In the United States, with a national debate about the use of detention and torture in the war on terrorism, OSI brought attention to how race and ethnicity have shaped attitudes and international and domestic policies from arbitrary detention to profiling to overincarceration to hostility toward immigrants.

As drug-resistant TB spread alarmingly, threatening people living with HIV, OSI stepped up pressure to link more closely TB and HIV/AIDS programs in the struggle to contain

and reverse the twin epidemics. OSI increased its efforts to include human rights protections in the implementation of national and regional HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment efforts. OSI also kept up support for the inclusion of civil society groups in all programs fighting TB and HIV/AIDS.

As oil prices rose to record highs, the Revenue Watch Institute, with OSI support, expanded its programs to assure that governments account for their natural resource revenues and use those funds for the benefit of the country's people.

As part of its commitment to Roma rights advocacy, OSI and the Soros foundations supported organizations and initiatives that used policy reports, environmental activism, and photography exhibits to inform the public about the importance and benefits of including Roma in mainstream society.

OSI's work in 2007 also covered education, information, media, women's rights, local government services, economic and business development, and arts and culture.

On the following pages are a few selected stories from 2007. Some stories are about the efforts of OSI's grantees. Other stories are about larger themes and policies OSI is engaged in strengthening. Together these accounts represent just a small fraction of the work OSI and the Soros foundations accomplished in 2007. For a more complete picture of OSI's activities, see OSI's website at www.soros.org.

justice and human rights



Europe's Highest Court Rules Against Segregating Roma in Czech Schools

In a landmark decision for minorities across Europe, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that segregating Roma students into special schools is a form of unlawful discrimination that violates fundamental human rights. The decision, overturning a ruling by Czech courts, ended an eight-year legal case brought by the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), an OSI grantee. ERRC research showed that over half of Roma children were shunted into schools for children with learning disabilities.

OSI Launches Campaign to End Rights Abuses in Zimbabwe

In response to Zimbabwe's brutal crackdown on civil society activists, OSI and its partners launched an advocacy campaign to free detainees, end the violent persecution of activists, and raise awareness of the country's human rights crisis. The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa organized fact-finding missions, a widely signed petition, and the testimony of survivors of the crackdown before policymakers, diplomats, and media in Washington, D.C., and New York. (See www.eyesonzimbabwe.org)

Khmer Rouge Tribunal Moves Toward Trials in Early 2008

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), created by the United Nations and the government of Cambodia to try the leaders most responsible for the mass crimes of the Khmer Rouge 30 years ago, entered its investigations phase after adopting procedural rules to assure a fair trial. The Open Society Justice Initiative has assisted the ECCC since 2003 through technical assistance and advocacy efforts. It works to hold the court to account through monitoring and briefings for donor states and UN officials.

U.S. Judge Finds Widespread Abuse in Treatment of Immigrant Detainees

A federal district court judge upheld a nationwide injunction requiring the U.S. government to treat asylum seekers fairly. After reviewing reports by the UN, the American Bar Association, and the U.S. government itself on conditions at some 200 detention facilities, the judge found that the government is in serious violation of its own standards of treatment. Thousands of immigrants seeking asylum and legal residency lack access to lawyers, legal materials, and telephones. The case was argued by several OSI grantees, including the National Immigration Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Women Victims of Sexual Violence in Congo Receive Support

OSI's International Women's Program provided funding to organizations helping the hundreds of thousands of women and girls who have suffered rape and sexual violence during recent armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The program, focusing on women in conflict and postconflict situations, is seeking to challenge the culture of impunity that encourages sexual violence.

OSI Funds Public Defenders in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Until the public attention swirling around Hurricane Katrina exposed its failings, the Orleans Public Defenders (OPD), the New Orleans office that represents indigent adults and juveniles charged with crimes, remained underfunded, ineffective, and plagued by conflicts of interest. Now the OPD is transformed. It has instituted performance standards and top-notch training, and fostered an office-wide commitment to zealous criminal defense. OSI awarded the OPD a two-year grant to recruit experienced public defenders for tours at OPD, train recent law school graduates as public defenders, and provide rehabilitative services to juveniles charged with crimes. (See www.soros.org/katrina)

transparency and
access to information



Revenue Watch Reports Progress in Establishing International Standards

The Revenue Watch Institute, supported by OSI, expanded its efforts to promote standards for reporting payments by extractive industries to governments. Revenue Watch helped get the development of new disclosure standards for corporate payments onto the agendas of the International Accounting Standards board and U.S. policymakers. It participated in organizing the first workshop for activists working on revenue transparency in Asia and began to make strides in the Middle East, including working with policymakers on transparency in the management of Iraq's oil revenues.

Courts Rule Against Censorship, For Access to Information

In Argentina, the Supreme Court ruled that a provincial government violated the free speech rights of a newspaper by withdrawing advertising in retaliation for critical coverage. In Chile, the highest court declared that the right of access to government information is protected by the constitution's guarantee of freedom of expression. The Open Society Justice Initiative has worked in both countries to eliminate indirect censorship and to establish access to information.

WIPO Changes Course on Access to Knowledge

Public interest groups, with the support of the OSI Information Program, won two significant victories at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). First, WIPO committed to reforming international law so as to improve access among developing nations to knowledge and intellectual property-based products such as medicines. WIPO also rejected a proposed broadcast treaty that would have endangered vibrant information flow on the Internet.

education and economic development



Roma Schoolchildren Still Excluded from Equal Education

Two years into the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, Roma schoolchildren frequently remain segregated from non-Roma children and face disadvantages in every aspect of their education.

A report produced by OSI's EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program found that comprehensive approaches to improving educational opportunities for Roma had not been initiated in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia.

Young Palestinians Learn Photojournalism in the West Bank

Some 80 young Palestinians participated in Youth Citizen Journalism workshops, organized by OSI's Debate Program with local partners in the West Bank. Forty girls in Tulkarm learned to use a camera. Volunteers for Pyalara's *Youth Times* in Ramallah worked with a photojournalist to improve their publication. The Cultural Center in Baladna held classes for local teens. The workshops taught young people how to use photography to tell stories about their communities and the world.

Study Confirms Corruption in Romanian Higher Education

Twenty-two percent of Romanian university students say that on at least one occasion a faculty member has solicited a bribe from them, according to a Soros Foundation Romania study. Roughly the same percentage of professors say that students have offered to bribe them. Thirteen percent of the students say that they have complied with a bribe request while 7 percent of faculty admit to accepting bribes. Four out of ten professors hold a second job.

public health and access to care



Lesotho Project Targets Drug-Resistant TB and HIV/AIDS

OSI awarded a \$3 million grant to help health care workers in Lesotho, a small southern African country, more effectively treat people infected with drug-resistant TB and HIV/AIDS. Drug-resistant TB, found in 28 countries, is a growing danger for people who are HIV-positive. One study found that 85 percent of South Africans with both diseases died. The Lesotho project, which includes Partners in Health and Brigham and Women's Hospital, will develop the first global treatment guidelines for this deadly combination of diseases.

OSI Combines Human Rights and Public Health Advocacy

To improve advocacy efforts, OSI sponsored a conference on critical health and human rights issues, including HIV/AIDS, patient care, harm reduction, palliative care, sexual health, and minority health. Rule of law and public health coordinators from over 25 Soros foundations attended trainings for collaborative advocacy and grantmaking. Promoting the importance of human rights in public health work is a priority of OSI's Public Health Program.

Report Documents Discrimination Against Roma Women in Serbia

The European Roma Rights Center, with support from OSI's Roma Health Project, submitted a report on discrimination against Roma women in Serbia to the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Produced in partnership with three Serbian NGOs, the report highlights violations of Roma women's rights in health care, education, and employment, as well as incidents of domestic violence and racially motivated abuse.

Families with Mentally Disabled Relatives Receive Housing Help in Kyrgyzstan

OSI's Mental Health Initiative and Habitat for Humanity Kyrgyzstan joined forces to begin providing decent housing and support services to Kyrgyz families with mentally ill or disabled relatives. The project's first families have lived for years in deplorable conditions—in homes with no working plumbing, with doors hanging from broken hinges. This unprecedented partnership offers an alternative to institutionalizing mentally disabled relatives in decrepit government asylums. The Mental Health Initiative has helped secure alternatives to institutionalization in a number of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Indonesian Drug Users Rally for “Rehab, Not Prison”

Groups funded by OSI's International Harm Reduction Development (IHRD) program demonstrated against Indonesia's inhumane and ineffective national drug policy that relies heavily if not exclusively on incarceration. “Rehab, Not Prison” was the theme of demonstrations in Banten, Bali, Jakarta, Bandung, Sukabumi, Semarang, and Surabaya. The activists called for decriminalizing drug use and instituting treatment and rehabilitation programs. IHRD support also helped bring progress in drug policies and practices in many countries. Kyrgyzstan reduced criminal penalties for drug possession and adopted sentencing alternatives to incarceration. Needle exchange in Beijing expanded from 4,000 needles to 21,000 in a year's time.

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