



**Global Cooperation November 2006**

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**Brazil Report of ICSW 32<sup>nd</sup> Global Conference**

The final report of the Conference held in Brasilia is now on the web in Portuguese and English. When accessing the site <http://www.icsw32finalreport.com/> you will find three separate areas - the final report, “conferences” which contains selected speeches and photos.

**Social development challenges – Black Sea**

This month the ICSW global president, Solveig Askjem spoke to an international forum in France on social development in the Black Sea countries. The following is a précis of the full speech which can be found at <http://www.icsw.org/whatsnew.htm>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of the former USSR experienced great difficulties. For example, in the Russian Federation, life expectancy for males has dropped from 70 years in the mid 1980s to 59 years today – lower than in India. The number of people living on less than two US dollars a day in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) increased from 23 million in 1990 to 93 million in 2001. This is a rise from 5% to 20 %.

The Black Sea Region includes Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine. The regional economic body is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

Globally many states have discarded social development from state policies in response to neo liberal policies that favour targeted social provision. Emphasis has moved from benefiting the population as a whole to targeting the poor.

ICSW disagrees with targeting policies. We work with different governments to strengthen social development and social policy.

All actions taken to reduce poverty are steps in the process of social development. These include improving human rights, educating children and young people; training adults in

social participation; teaching people about social rights; feeding vulnerable groups; giving children vaccines and building shelter for people without houses.

The three main actors in developing civil society in the Black Sea region are Mission Armenia, the National Committee of ICSW in Norway and ICSW.

Armenia is a small country with less than 3 million inhabitants. There are another 10 million Armenians living elsewhere in the world. Armenia is a landlocked nation with a long border with Turkey and is one of the three so-called Trans Caucasian republics, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Three main events or incidents have caused tremendous problems for the Armenians over the last twenty years. There was the devastating earthquake in 1988 which killed more than 25,000 and left half a million homeless. The long-lasting war in Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan in the nineteen nineties has resulted in many refugees. The transition from being a member of the USSR to being a democratic and capitalistic society in 1991 has not been without its problems.

Mission Armenia is undertaking most of the social services provided in Armenia. Mission Armenia runs 30 soup kitchens, 10 community centres, 40 health posts and many other activities.

The Norwegian ICSW National Committee has been an active force in building social welfare in Norway. It is an old organization, founded in 1909. Over its history there have been many fights for weak groups in Norwegian society. In the last fifteen years the Norwegian committee has changed its focus to work more internationally. We started work in Lithuania in 1992 and in 2002 we started our work in Armenia.

In 2000 I was asked by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Armenia to assist the refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh war. At that time I was the president of ICSW European Region and vice chair of the National Committee in Norway.

I joined a shelter project in Yerevan working with the rehabilitation of big, old buildings to make them more acceptable as housing for human beings. The houses had leaking roofs, the sewerage system did not work and the garbage had not been removed for a year. I worked with the people in the building. I helped them to find the best way to rebuild the house and how to maintain the building after we had left.

The people in the Soviet Union were not trained to take care of the houses in which they lived. The state repaired and paid for the accommodation of the inhabitants. Very often this resulted in bad looking buildings. But when I visited the private flats I found the inside was pleasant and clean. Many suppressed people lose their initiative. They do not dare care for the house they live in because it belongs to the state.

During my stay in Armenia I found a lot of poor, starving, old and bedridden people who were refugees without health care. I asked about social and health services for them. The refugees only received 20 US dollars a month to live on and unemployment was up to 80% for the refugee population.

The middle classes had lost their jobs and the upper class had left the country. I only met poor people.

I met with representatives from Mission Armenia. They served people in need and promised to serve “our” refugees after we had left the buildings and ended our mission. I went back to Yerevan in 2001 and 2002 and we discussed future cooperation with Mission Armenia. I learned that Mission Armenia, in addition to the work done by foreign NGOs, was undertaking most of the social services provided in Armenia. Mission Armenia was running 30 soup kitchens, 10 community centres, 40 health posts and many other activities.

Mission Armenia has taken the lead in the Black Sea region to strengthen civil society. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway sponsored a visit to Brussels for representatives of the Black Sea civil society. It included meetings with representatives from the European Parliament, the EU Information Centre, the European Council of Ministers and the European Economic and Social Committee.

The group left Brussels with new knowledge. Later Mission Armenia hosted a regional civil society forum in Yerevan sponsored by ICSW. The Black Sea Non Government Organisations Network was formed.

The new Network has a firm commitment to combat poverty and ensure sustainable development in the countries of the region. The Network has declared its willingness to cooperate with governments, intergovernmental structures, international organisations and institutions that aim to reduce poverty.

The major regional issues identified are unemployment, declining public health, labour driven mass migration, violation of human rights and women’s rights in particular and deterioration of the environment. (Much more detail is on the ICSW website)

The progress has been amazing. I reflect that in the Soviet times a speaker outlining the regional problems I have referred to would have spent their life in prison. It is only 12 years since many of the Black Sea countries granted freedom to their citizens to gather and have freedom of speech.

In 10 years I hope to see the Black Sea countries as well-developed democracies with a respect for human rights and with well operating welfare systems.

### **International Civil Society Forum for Democracy, Qatar, October – November 2006**

The Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) is a tripartite event involving governments, parliamentarians, and civil society. ICSW was represented by ICSW Regional President for Central and West Africa, Charles Abbey.

The conference had six thematic workshops:

- 1) *Freedom to live in dignity* which took up the situation of indigenous peoples, women, minorities and others deprived of means to participate in political processes and having access to media.

- 2) *Conflict prevention and peace building* which attempted to provide continuity to the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Civil society representatives from Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Uganda and Liberia spoke about their problems.
- 3) *Participatory governance* which focused on transparency, accountability and participation of women.
- 4) *Citizenship, responsibility and participation* with emphasis on civic education and the costs of running democratic institutions.
- 5) *Democracy assessment and promotion tools* with an emphasis on the Middle East which considered tools to measure advancement of democracy and how civil society and media can contribute to monitoring.
- 6) *Democratization, international institutions and global governance*.

The Global Action Agenda: The conference developed the following global agenda which links to parts of the ICSW global programme:

- To achieve a shift from reaction to prevention,
- Need for acknowledgement of the roles civil society plays in the prevention of violent conflict,
- Need for partnerships between local, regional, and international organizations,
- Need to promote human society: link between peace & development.

### **UNDP Working Papers**

The following papers are on the UNDP International Poverty Centre website:  
<http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/>

*Operational Poverty Targeting in Peru—Proxy Means Testing with Non-Income Indicators,*

*A note on measuring unemployment,*

*Linkages between Pro-Poor Growth, Social Programmes and Labour Market: The Recent Brazilian Experience,*

*Poverty, Old-Age and Social Pensions in Kenya*

*Can Privatisation and Commercialisation of Public Services Help Achieve The MDGs? An Assessment*

There are also one-page papers including:

*Inequality and MDG's education goal for Latin America,*

*What is Poverty? Do CCTs Reduce Poverty?*

*Women's earning power and wellbeing*

*The Gender Pay Gap over Women's Working Lifetime*

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