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ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE CENTER IN YEREVAN OFFICIALLY OPENS

**T**he Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) of Yerevan opened its doors to the public on 2 March. U.S. Ambassador to Armenia

Marie L. Yovanovitch, representatives from the international community, local NGOs, and the media attended the opening ceremony hosted by Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center NGO.

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mobilizing Action Against Corruption (MAAC) Activity, the Center will help citizens resolve corruption-related problems by providing legal advice and assistance in the processing of their complaints. The

AAC will also provide citizens with channels for reporting corruption and directing complaints to government agencies, as well as stimulate reforms by recommending systems-level changes to the Government of Armenia.

In her opening remarks, Ambassador Yovanovitch reiterated the U.S. Government's commitment to democratic reform and good governance in Armenia. "Successfully reducing corruption requires an integrated approach that includes the development and implementation of government systems and policies to make corrupt practices more difficult and detectable," said the Ambassador, noting the importance and role of civil society institutions and independent media in bringing corruption problems to light.

The centers in Tavush, Lori, Shirak, Syunik, and Yerevan are fully operational and equipped with a toll-free hotline for legal consultations. By May 2009, MAAC expects to open AACs in the six remaining marzes of Aragatsotn, Ararat, Armavir, Gegharqunik, Kotayk and Vayots Dzor.



U.S. Ambassador Yovanovitch addresses the media at Yerevan AAC Opening Ceremony

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## YOUTH FROM MARZES LEARN ABOUT CORRUPTION



Experts address students on the issue of corruption

On 23 March, MAAC Communications Expert Erich de la Fuente and Media Specialist Ara Brutian addressed the participants of the “Yerevan in Five Days” program. Organized by the USAID/Academy for Educational Development (AED) Youth and Community Action Program, the students participating openly discussed the issue of corruption. More than 40 teenagers representing all of Armenia's marzes attended.

The students used this opportunity to learn about the nature of corruption, how it reveals itself in society, its affect on their lives, what they can do to combat it and how to protect their rights. Very involved in the discussions that ensued, the students shared how they have experienced different acts of corruption in their daily lives and asked questions about possible ways to confront this problem. By the end of the assembly, several of the participants expressed their desire to support the Advocacy and Assistance Centers as volunteers.

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On 4 March, AAC Vanadzor hosted the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Marie L. Yovanovitch

## U.S. AMBASSADOR MARIE L. YOVANOVITCH VISITS ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE CENTER IN VANADZOR

On 4 March, the Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) Vanadzor hosted the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Marie L. Yovanovitch, as well as USAID Democracy Advisor Mark Levinson and members from the MAAC team. The AAC Program Coordinator for the Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor centers, Sona Ayyvazyan, provided the Ambassador with a detailed briefing on the AAC's operations. Also during the visit, the AAC staff briefed their guests on some of the most significant cases the Centers have thus far dealt with related to local government decisions on land allocations, illegal constructions in Vanadzor, as well as cases related to alleged abuse of power by local police.



U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Marie L. Yovanovitch, discusses cases with Vanadzor AAC staff and MAAC COP François Vézina

## MAAC SUPPORTS ENHANCED PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ON THE NEW ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY

Civil society participation in a government's efforts to fight corruption makes the latter more trustful, legitimate and effective. When in 2007, the Government of Armenia (GOAM) began elaborating a new Anti-Corruption Strategy, its concept paper emphasized the principle of civil society participation in the Strategy development process. Within this context, MAAC, which has supported the development process of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy from its onset, strongly backed public participation in the Strategy's discussion stage. Additionally, MAAC also offered to provide technical assistance to the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission (ACSMC) Expert Group in the preparation of the draft Strategy. To better achieve this objective, MAAC awarded a grant to the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia (FOICA) NGO in June 2008, which completed the project by December 2008.

Within the scope of the project, FOICA organized six roundtable discussions with civil society representatives during which a variety of suggestions, comments and recommendations were made and discussed, totaling 46 in all. FOICA also arranged for three experts to provide technical assistance to the ACSMC during the Strategy drafting process.

The FOICA project offered a unique mechanism that made it possible for civil society's voice to be heard from the beginning of the Strategy drafting process. As a result, civil society representatives were provided with various channels and events during which they could make inquiries and obtain answers on issues of concern. For instance, during a roundtable discussion, NGO representative concerned about insufficient knowledge on different

parts of the drafted Strategy content, requested to have the draft Strategy posted on the GOAM's official website ([www.gov.am](http://www.gov.am)) for greater accessibility and transparency. The request was granted and the GOAM posted the entire draft document onto its website for the public to access.

**Thanks to the role FOICA played, Armenia's civil society was an integral part of the Strategy development process**

FOICA also recorded the public feedback generated during each of the roundtable discussions and submitted it to the ACSMC Expert Group for consideration. The majority of the suggestions and comments provided have been taken into account and referred to both the Strategy drafting process and Strategy content. Some examples are:

- The laws are sound but with little implementation; the Strategy should clearly describe who and which institutions will be responsible for realization of the Strategy;
- The network of public anti-corruption centers should be expanded and should ensure the confidentiality and protection of whistleblowers;
- The public should be educated through incorporation of anti-corruption in schools, universities, employment relationships, etc.
- The draft content of the Strategy should be simplified by extracting the description of the past and publicizing a separate report, the description of situation should

be summarized in order to have a more reader-friendly document.

Thanks to the role FOICA played, Armenia's civil society was an integral part of the Strategy development process.

Another aspect of this project was the provision of technical expertise to the ACSMC Expert Group. To that light, FOICA secured three experts which provided technical input on a variety of aspects of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy. FOICA's extensive local knowledge and experience in governance, and specifically in freedom of and access to information, played a crucial role in helping the ACSMC Expert Group shape the respective chapters and the draft Strategy overall. FOICA played a pivotal part in the drafting of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy, positioning itself as both a partner to the ACSMC Expert Group and as an intermediary between the Expert Group and civil society. This arrangement helped ensure the majority of the provided public input was reflected in the draft version of the Strategy paper.

During the development and implementation of the first Anti-Corruption Strategy in 2003-2007, the weak participation of civil society was the major issue noted. MAAC took this seriously into account thus helping facilitate FOICA's role and involvement in this process. As a result, FOICA was able to organize nationwide public consultations on the draft Anti-Corruption Strategy document, which yielded important commentary and feedback. Almost two-thirds of the Strategy content proposed by FOICA, as well as the majority of recommendations generated during public consultation events, were incorporated into the draft Anti-Corruption Strategy paper.



## AACs RECEIVE ADVOCACY, LOBBYING AND COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

During 23-27 March, MAAC hosted a quarterly retreat for all of the current and prospective AACs' personnel, which included several training sessions. The retreat agenda included: presentation of cases by AACs; up-to-date progress reports; discussion and development of systems-level and procedural reforms draft recommendations; presentation and discussion of website and e-register; discussion of perspective collaboration between AACs and Human Rights Defender's office; discussion of sustainability of AACs; Advocacy and Lobbying training by MAAC Expert Luis Pinto; and Communications training by MAAC Communications Expert Erich de la Fuente.

The Advocacy and Lobbying training session provided 23 of the AACs' staff, including soon to be established AAC representatives from Armavir, Gegharkunik, and Vayots Dzor, with a comprehensive training on techniques of the trade. Some of the areas covered in the session included, influencing the decision-makers, mobilizing

communities behind a cause and leveraging resources for achieving a desired change. During the course of the training, participants simulated real-life cases of advocacy, forming coalitions between citizens and NGOs and campaigning against the policies of a mock-administration.

The accompanying Public Relations and Communications training session provided participants with interview skills and techniques, skills for drafting press releases and other media related materials as well as the development of success stories. The session also addressed different communications initiatives aimed at facilitating fundraising efforts with potential Armenian diaspora donors.

These training sessions were key in helping the AACs establish the advocacy, lobbying and communications skills they will need in the successful implementation of their activities and goals; particularly in achieving systems-level and procedural reforms as is anticipated in the project.

## NEW ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE CENTER TO OPEN IN ARMAVIR

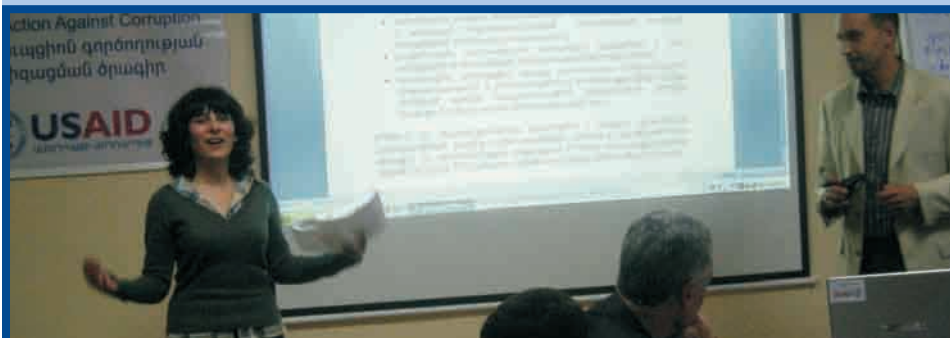
On 31 March, MAAC awarded a grant to Armavir Development Center NGO to establish an Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) in Armavir marz. The grant contract was signed by the Director of Armavir Development Center Naira Arakelyan and MAAC Chief of Party François Vézina. The Center will provide legal assistance with corruption related complaints to the citizens of Armavir marz and will help raise awareness among them on anti-corruption legislation and procedures. Expected to open in May, the Armavir Center will complement the network of already existing centers in Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Syunik and Yerevan.

Established in April 2005, the Armavir Development Center NGO's mission is to foster collaboration amongst the public and private sectors of Armavir marz, with the vision of achieving social-economic progress.

## ANNUAL PROGRAM STATEMENT COMES TO A CONCLUSION

On 6 February, the MAAC Annual Program Statement (APS) was concluded and thus MAAC stopped accepting new applications for funding. During 2008-2009, in response to its APS, MAAC received 59 applications (concept papers) and awarded seven small grants ranging from 2,316,000 AMD to 7,500,000 AMD to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from Yerevan, Armavir, Syunik, and Tavush to implement innovative anti-corruption projects related to education, healthcare, customs, condominium management, public awareness and traffic police. At the moment MAAC is in a process of pre-award negotiations with the last four APS grant applicants.

The NGO Marketplace, to be held in April 2009, will be the next opportunity for CSOs to apply for MAAC small grants.



AACs' staff participates in training sessions

## MAAC CONSULTS ARMENIAN DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS ON THE FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE AACs



Representatives from three influential diaspora organizations in Armenia - Armenian Assembly of America, Fund for Armenian Relief of America and Tufenkian Foundation meet with MAAC Media Specialist Ara Brutian and MAAC Communications Consultant, Erich de la Fuente

MAAC met with representatives from three influential diaspora organizations in Armenia - Armenian Assembly of America, Fund for Armenian Relief of America and Tufenkian Foundation. Aimed at informing the diaspora representatives on the work of the Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs), the meeting served to showcase examples of success stories involving resolved cases, in an effort to garner interest

for the future sustainability of the Centers.

The meeting also helped generate ideas on how to best establish links between the different AACs and diaspora communities in the U.S., as well as how to market the AACs amongst these communities; these ideas will serve as a core input for the Action Plan MAAC is developing to link AACs with diaspora communities in the U.S.

## MAAC SUPPORTS ITS MEDIA GRANTEEES

On 31 March, MAAC Communications Expert Erich de la Fuente and Media Specialist Ara Brutian met with MAAC youth-based media program grantees 'Banadzev' Production Company and NGO Center of Vanadzor. As part of its grant, 'Banadzev' Production Company is preparing a series of reality TV programs, based on 'front-line' reporting carried out by a select group of young people representing different aspects of Armenian society. Media grantee NGO Center of Vanadzor is working on organizing talk shows and youth-media meetings on corruption in different sectors of society such as healthcare and education, among others.

During the meeting, the MAAC grantees presented their up-to-date progress, pending issues, and posed questions regarding next steps; the MAAC team offered recommendations on how they can ensure better performance and answered the questions posed by the grantees.

## CORRUPTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS – OUTLINING THE CONNECTION

That corruption directly or indirectly has an effect on human rights seems to be intuitively true; however, showing how corruption violates human rights is a new challenge. To help shed light on the direct link, MAAC has cooperated with the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), a Geneva-based NGO specialized on matters of international human rights. Earlier this year, ICHRP published a report titled 'Human Rights and Corruption: Making the Connection', for which MAAC provided comments on the draft text of the report and has agreed to sponsor the publishing of the report in Armenian.

Centered on the premise that where human rights are recognized and implemented, corruption is as a result diminished, the report aims to encourage those involved in the promotion and protection of human rights to engage in the anti-corruption cause. It also seeks to persuade those involved in combating corruption to recognize the value of human rights in their work. This report will serve as a great tool in helping raise public awareness of the relationship between corruption and human rights, helping diminish public tolerance of corruption and increasing public support of the battle against corruption.

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia, Armen Harutyunyan, welcomed the idea of having the report published in Armenian and has written a foreword for the Armenian publication. The report in Armenian is expected to be available for distribution in June 2009.

**This report will serve as a great tool in helping raise public awareness of the relationship between corruption and human rights**

## AAC ADDRESSES AND HOTLINE NUMBERS

Marz	Address	Hotline
Yerevan	Aygestan 9th Street, House 6, Yerevan 0025, Armenia	0800 01 110
Shirak	Gyumri, Pushkin 96	0800 01 121
Lori	Vanadzor, Tigran Mets 59	0800 01 112
Tavush	Ijevan, Ankakhutyun 4/14	0800 01 113
Syunik	Kapan, Shaumyan 4	0800 01 114
Armavir	Armavir, Shahumyan 68a	0800 01 118
Kotayk	Hrazdan, Kentron A-2 district	0800 01 119
Aragatsotn	Ashtarak, V. Petrosyan 51/2	0800 01 115
Gegharkunik	Gavar, Sayadyan 2/1	0800 01 116
Ararat	Ararat, Charents 2/4	0800 01 117
Vayots Dzor	Yeghegnadzor, Narekatsi 18a	0800 01 120

## MAAC INVITES APPLICANTS TO PARTICIPATE AT THE NGO MARKETPLACE

On 9 February, MAAC issued a Request for Applications for the NGO Marketplace and received a total of 32 applications by 9 March, the application deadline. MAAC pre-qualified 24 applicants to promote and campaign for their proposed projects at the NGO Marketplace.

The NGO Marketplace scheduled for 22 April will be a highly transparent and open process of awarding grants to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through a competitive event, where participants will do their best to “market” their ideas and “sell” their proposed projects to the public, a panel of judges, and a team from MAAC. The score assigned by the panel of judges will account for 50% of an applicant's total score, the results of ballots/votes received during the public voting will account for 30%, and the MAAC scoring team's results will account for 20% of the total score received by an applicant.

Up to ten winning applicants on NGO Marketplace Day will be invited for pre-award negotiations with MAAC; funding will be provided upon successful conclusion of negotiations and USAID approval.

## In the Next Issue...

- The NGO Marketplace takes place on 22 April;

- Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs) open in Armavir, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Aragatsotn, Ararat, and Kotayk marzes; and

- MAAC grantee the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) disseminates the 2008 Armenia Households Corruption Survey findings throughout Armenia, provides training on how to use the database and supervises anti-corruption research.

## ABOUT CASALS &amp; ASSOCIATES, INC.



Casals & Associates, Inc. (C&A) is an international management consulting and communications firm helping public and private clients promote ideas and create change in a variety of languages and cultural contexts. C&A's major areas of focus include democracy and good governance, health and nutrition, energy efficiency and the environment, immigration, housing and urban development, and international broadcasting and telecommunications. Since its establishment in 1986, C&A has worked all across the United States and with more than 30 countries around the world.