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MAAC Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity

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MAAC Supports Civil Society Involvement in Armenia's New Anti-Corruption Strategy

The Government of Armenia launched the development of its new Anti-Corruption Strategy in 2007. After reviewing the benefits and drawbacks of the previous Anti-Corruption Strategy, the government and public alike now acknowledge that the success of Armenia's new Strategy largely depends upon transparency, openness, and civil society participation during the development process.

With this in mind, MAAC, a supporter of the new Strategy since its conception, awarded a grant to the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia (FOICA) on 5 June.

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MAAC Grants Manager, Naira Gyulnazaryan, FOICA President, Shushan Doydoyan, MAAC Chief of Party, François Vézina, and MAAC Public Administration Specialist, Garik Khachikyan, at the signing ceremony.

First Round of Orientation Sessions Completed

This April, MAAC conducted its final orientation sessions for civil society organizations, concluding its first round of orientation activities in four marzes and Yerevan. These final sessions, held in Kapan and Yerevan, presented civil society organizations with information about two MAAC grant competitions: one to open Advocacy and Anti-Corruption Centers and another for the Annual Program Statement (APS), a small grants program in which applicants submit anti-corruption projects of their own design. The orientation sessions, which had commenced in March, were designed to ensure high quality applications for both types of grants.

Over 10 NGO representatives in Kapan and 57 in Yerevan took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions directly to MAAC representatives and to receive insight about MAAC's ongoing activities, future grant opportunities, and potential areas for collaboration. MAAC staff made presentations on Requests For Applications (RFA) and then opened the floor to questions. Attendee questions were used as the basis for a Frequently Asked Questions list, now posted on www.maac.am.



APS/RFA Orientation Session in Kapan

MAAC has since received and reviewed a large number of applications for both grant programs. Awards are scheduled for next quarter.

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MAAC Partners with Chamber of Control to Enhance Armenia's Auditing Capabilities

Strengthening public audit institutions is required in order to improve the prevention and detection of corrupt activities. MAAC is assisting the Chamber of Control's (CoC) efforts in this area by designing and implementing anti-corruption activities that strengthen the CoC's auditing capabilities while promoting the office as Armenia's supreme audit institution.

After discussions with CoC representatives, MAAC identified three areas in which it could provide effective technical support: audit information and analysis, the role of the CoC in the fight against corruption, and staff training. MAAC recruited international expert and former chairman of the Bulgarian National Audit Office, Mr. Georgi Nikolov, to address these areas.

Over the course of a month, Mr. Nikolov held regular meetings with the CoC's Deputy Chairman, board members, and auditors during which CoC practices were examined, existing issues were addressed, and further challenges were discussed. In his report, Mr. Nikolov presented a series of recommendations to strengthen the audit information management system, improve CoC's analytical capabilities, as well as recommendations for a more vigorous mission and vision statements for CoC in the context of fighting corruption. The report also includes a training needs assessment, recommendations on required training inputs, and the design for the upcoming Bulgarian study tour.

MAAC Launches Website

This April, MAAC launched its website, www.maac.am, to serve as a comprehensive source for information about project activities. Different sections of the site are dedicated to MAAC news and announcements, forthcoming Advocacy and Assistance Centers, MAAC's cooperation with governmental agencies, and MAAC's collaboration with civil society.

The website is now particularly useful for civil society organizations interested in MAAC's small grants program, the Annual Program Statement. By visiting the site, potential applicants can find comprehensive information about the application process and all necessary forms in a downloadable format.

In addition to Activity specific information, the website also provides basic information about what corruption is, what types of corruption exist, whom corruption affects, the consequences of corruption, and useful links.

The website is updated regularly with electronic versions of quarterly newsletters.



MAAC Supports... from page 1

FOICA will join and support the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission Expert Group as it drafts the new Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan.

The grant's goal is to increase transparency, openness, and public awareness and collaboration during the development process by providing technical support to the Expert Group. With MAAC support, FOICA will develop sections of the Anti-Corruption Strategy document, organize roundtable discussions with civil society groups in Yerevan and the marzes, conduct television talk shows to discuss and publicize the development of the Strategy, organize public discussions about the drafted Strategy, and present press conferences as different versions of the strategy become available to the public.

"One of the most significant things about this project is that, for the first time, civil society is involved in the process of developing the Anti-Corruption Strategy from the outset" says FOICA President, Shushan Doydoyan. MAAC Chief of Party, François Vézina, agrees: "Civil society involvement is a crucial ingredient for the future success of the Strategy, and MAAC will continue supporting activities that strengthen the joint efforts and dialogue between civil society and the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission and its Expert Group."

The project will run from June to December 2008.

MAAC Informs Youth About the Fight Against Corruption

Youth is MAAC's target audience: changing the mindset of young people before corruption becomes fully ingrained in their way of life is critical to breaking the "cradle-to-grave" cycle of corruption. However, Armenian youth, especially young people from the marzes, often do not have access to information about corruption, its negative effects, and ways of fighting it.

While MAAC is planning many forthcoming youth-oriented activities, the USAID/AED Youth and Community Action Program recently presented MAAC with an opportunity to address youth from all marzes during its "Yerevan in Five Days" Civic Education Program. On 23 June, MAAC Media Specialist, Ara Brutian, delivered a presentation about corruption and its impacts to a group of approximately 35 program participants.

During the presentation, MAAC Media Specialist explained the definition of corruption, its main expressions, its short and long term negative impacts, and ways of fighting it. The presentation quickly became interactive, as student questions, comments, and interpretations erupted into heated discussions and impromptu brainstorming. The audience vigorously expressed a devotion to fighting corruption, since most of them already faced corruption-related situations in their schools and communities.

The presentation compelled participants' to think about their responsibility as citizens in Armenia's evolving democratic society. Hopefully, once these youth return to their communities, they will share their experience with other members of their generation and so spread the anti-corruption message to young people even in the most remote marz communities.

MAAC's next step in reaching youth will be awarding a media programming grant. This project will disseminate a youth-oriented, anti-corruption message in order to mobilize Armenian youth in the fight against corruption.

"Critical to breaking the 'cradle-to-grave' cycle of corruption is changing the mindset of young people before corruption becomes fully ingrained in their way of life."



MAAC Media Specialist, Ara Brutian, speaks about the negative impact of corruption

MAAC Reviews Chamber of Control Regulatory Instruments

Auditing standards and guidelines, ethical considerations, and codes of conduct are important in order for any country's Chamber of Control (CoC) to effectively fulfill its functions. In 2007, with the support of the World Bank Public Sector Modernization Project, Armenia's CoC developed and drafted new auditing standards, manuals, and an ethics code. However, due to its newly expanded role, the CoC requested the assistance of a MAAC expert to review these documents before they were submitted for official approval.

So in April, MAAC international expert and auditor from Netherlands, Mr. Jacques van Kempen, reviewed the drafted auditing standards, manuals, and ethics code. After conducting preliminary research, Mr. van Kempen revisited these documents and developed recommendations for their improvement, ideas which he discussed with CoC officials and auditors. These recommendations will ensure that the resulting CoC documents will truly improve internal policies, procedures, and regulatory framework to better support external auditing in Armenia.

"...Armenia's CoC developed and drafted new auditing standards, manuals, and an ethics code... however, CoC requested the assistance of a MAAC expert to review these documents..."

MAAC Attends Anti-Corruption Network Meeting in Tbilisi

Representatives from Armenia's ACSMC Expert Group, UNDP, OSCE, FSMB NGO, and MAAC Activity attended the 7th General meeting of the Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN), held 25-27 June in Tbilisi, Georgia. MAAC was represented by Chief of Party, François Vézina, who joined representatives from more than 100 organizations, hailing from Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. These international organizations were met by OECD, GRECO, and EU representatives, contingents from multi-lateral development banks, and members of academia, who gathered to continue the dialogue on combating corruption in the region.

The meeting addressed international anti-corruption conventions and monitoring mechanisms within the ACN region, the private sector's role in preventing and fighting corruption, investigation and prosecution of complex and high-level corruption cases, prevention of corruption through management of conflict of interest and asset declarations for public officials, and ways to mobilize societal support for the anti-corruption agenda. Participants learned about Georgia's recent experience fighting corruption, as described by Georgian government officials, while donor organizations shared their views on anti-corruption priorities for the region and planned activities. The ACN Steering Group also discussed the future of ACN activities, including that of the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. In addition to the official program, the meeting was a useful forum for informal exchanges of information about current anti-corruption activities in the region and worldwide.



Representatives from Armenia at the ACN Meeting in Tbilisi

Highlights from the Next Issue...

MAAC's next quarterly newsletter will present stories on the following events and more:

- MAAC organizes a workshop on human rights and the fight against corruption for the Human Rights Defender's staff
- MAAC organizes its first Anti-Corruption Forum to discuss Armenia's international anti-corruption obligations
- MAAC organizes a study tour for the Chamber of Control to help officials develop their identity as Armenia's supreme audit institution