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MAAC Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity

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MAAC Forum Discusses Armenia's International Anti-Corruption Obligations

MAAC holds regular forums on a variety of anti-corruption related topics to engage citizens, state institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), the media, and the donor community in a public dialogue about corruption and anti-corruption approaches. The forums invite attendees to share their knowledge about the fight against corruption and to learn from their peers working in anti-corruption. MAAC's first anti-corruption forum, which was co-sponsored by UNDP, took place on 2 July at the Marriott Hotel in Yerevan. The forum addressed Armenia's international obligations in the fight against corruption to an audience that encompassed the



Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan addresses the participants of the Forum

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MAAC Facilitates Public Discussion of Strategy Drafting

Anti-corruption initiatives are more effective when they incorporate the public's active participation. In order to make Armenia's new Anti-Corruption Strategy more effective, MAAC-grantee Freedom of Information Center of Armenia NGO organized regional public discussions during September 2008 about the first two chapters of the draft strategy. These events provide the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission with continuing feedback from civil society as they draft the strategy.



The participants of the public discussion in Lori

The first discussion took place on 11 September in Vanadzor, Lori marz, and was attended by representatives from twelve regional NGOs. Shushan Doydoyan, director of the Freedom of Information Center, presented the main achievements of the previous anti-corruption strategy, as well as gaps and lessons learned. Ms. Doydoyan also presented the content of the new strategy's first two chapters before opening the floor to discussion. Some participants expressed concern about the efficiency of the document's implementation, while others concluded that political will could greatly impact the strategy's effectiveness.

The round table discussion was followed by a TV talk show on Lori TV. Ten NGO

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MAAC Study Tour Exposes Chamber of Control to Best Practices

Ever since acquiring independent status last year, Armenia's Chamber of Control (CoC) has undertaken a process of institutional development. MAAC supports the CoC's efforts to build its capacity and become an effective auditing institution. To assist the CoC achieve these goals, MAAC organized a CoC study tour to Bulgaria over 20-30 July to enhance its knowledge of organizational management.

The study tour had several objectives: to support the CoC develop its role as Armenia's supreme independent audit institution; to familiarize the participants with the information and analytical systems used by the Bulgarian auditors to detect fraud, prevent corruption and the misuse of public money; and to observe Bulgaria's auditor training facility. Professor Valeri Dimitrov, chairman of the Bulgarian National Audit Office (NAO), welcomed the participants of the study tour. Professor Dimitrov delivered a lecture entitled "The Role, Legal Framework, Competences, Functions, and Structure of the Bulgarian NAO" and presented the NAO's strategic development plan.



*CoC delegation at Bulgarian National Audit Office
(Source: Bulgarian National Audit Office website)*

Representatives from the Armenian CoC learned about the Bulgarian NAO's audit standards and procedures and how they implement audit systems to manage audits and ensure quality auditing. The Armenian CoC also observed the administrative side of the Bulgarian NAO, learning how it recruits personnel, manages its IT policy, and implements a communication strategy. Study tour participants also learned how the Bulgarian NAO maintains its independence while working with the Bulgarian National Assembly and other state bodies.

Participants visited a regional NAO office in Plovdiv to observe the practical aspects of auditing at local level. This leg of the study tour addressed the relationship between the NAO, the local government, and other bodies of local self-governance, highlighting areas for cooperation.

Bulgaria was selected as the destination for the Armenian CoC study tour because of the historic similarities between the two countries' external auditing systems. Furthermore, the Bulgarian NAO's recent structural and organizational changes in response to the country's accession in the European Union and Bulgaria's successful implementation of international audit standards to detect fraud and fight corruption positioned the Bulgaria NAO as an excellent model for the Armenian CoC.

MAAC Conducts its First National Household Corruption Survey

In order to gauge the public's perception of corruption, MAAC organizes national household, business owners and public officials corruption surveys. The first national household corruption survey, conducted in September, will produce valuable findings to inform anti-corruption decision-making. The household corruption survey measures citizens' tolerance of corruption, victimization by corrupt practices, knowledge of tools to fight corruption, and awareness of governmental anti-corruption initiatives. In all, more than 1500 households of voting-age citizens were surveyed. The survey covers all of Armenia's marzes and conducts interviews in proportion to the population of each marz.

Survey fieldwork commenced in mid-September and will be completed in early October. The resulting data will be processed and analyzed during October and November, and the results are scheduled to be presented by December 2008. MAAC will organize seminars on how to utilize the survey dataset, so that interested parties can use the survey data to conduct their own research.

In 2009, MAAC will conduct its first bi-annual Business Owners & Public Officials corruption survey. The findings of these surveys will be combined with those from the household survey in order to better diagnose the extent of public corruption.

MAAC Selects NGOs for Youth-Based Media Grants

When generations of youth accept corruption as an inevitable aspect of daily life, corruption can become ingrained in a society. In hopes of breaking the “cradle-to-grave” cycle of corruption, MAAC is awarding grants for youth-based media initiatives to mobilize youth in the fight against corruption. Through these grants, MAAC hopes to create greater awareness among youth about the essence of corruption, its short- and long-term impacts, and new social attitudes about corruption. The grants will use broadcast media to convey vivid anti-corruption messages to a wide audience.

Recently, MAAC identified two NGOs with innovative grant proposals and the potential to spread knowledge to a wide youth audience. MAAC is currently working with these grantees to fine-tune their initiatives before awarding the grant funds.

“This grants program is unique in the sense that it has a dual goal: first, it increases youth awareness of corruption and its effects and engages youth in anti-corruption; second, it strengthens the capacity of youth-based media, which will have long-term anti-corruption impact,” says François Vézina, MAAC Chief of Party. “We are very much inspired about these grants projects and their anticipated results.

MAAC Workshop Addresses Human Rights in the Fight Against Corruption

In order to familiarize Armenia’s Human Rights Defender (HRD) staff with the link between protecting human rights and fighting corruption, MAAC organized a one-day training workshop for HRD staff on 1 July led by Mr. Christian Gruenberg of the International Council on Human Rights Policy in Geneva.

The workshop introduced HRD staff to the conceptual and practical links between human rights and corruption, provided them with examples of how some HRD staff and Ombudsmen in other countries are involved in the fight against corruption, and facilitated a discussion on how the HRD could implement an action plan to enhance its ability to fight corruption in Armenia.

The workshop was the HRD’s first attempt to integrate anti-corruption into their agenda. MAAC is planning future collaborations with the HRD to support further capacity building and organizational development.



ICHRP’s Christian Gruenberg delivers the workshop

MAAC Organizes More Annual Program Statement Orientation Sessions

Strengthening the role of civil society in the fight against corruption is a top priority for MAAC. In February, MAAC issued its Annual Program Statement to provide grants to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who are interested in carrying out projects and one-time events aimed at preventing and/or reducing corruption. This August, MAAC once again publicized its Annual Program Statement through announcements in the media and orientation sessions in four cities: Sevan, Gavar, Martuni, and Yeghegnadzor. MAAC is encouraging CSOs throughout Armenia to apply for funding for innovative anti-corruption initiatives.

Overall, 40 representatives from a variety of CSOs participated in the orientation sessions on 9-12 August. During the sessions, MAAC staff presented the goals of the APS, described the application procedure and answered participants’ questions.

To read the Annual Program Statement please visit <http://www.maac.am/aps.htm>

MAAC and ACSMC Develop Interactive Anti-Corruption Website

One of MAAC's priorities is to assist the Government of Armenia's (GOAM) institutions as they devise and implement internal and external communications strategies to increase the visibility of their anti-corruption initiatives. MAAC is currently working with the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission (ACSMC) to build an ACSMC website as an interactive tool, empowering the public to aid in GOAM's fight against corruption.

Earlier this year, MAAC conducted a survey of ACSMC's vision of and expectations for the website. Based on the findings, MAAC developed a fully functional prototype of the website and presented it to the Commission, who in turn provided MAAC with feedback and comments. MAAC has since selected the local web design firm Broncoway to complete the website.

The website will present information about the developing Anti-Corruption Strategy and its Action Plan. The site will present Anti-Corruption Strategy related news and events, a Frequently Asked Questions page, and pages with information tailored to the needs of civil society organizations, businesspeople, citizens, students, public officials, and journalists. A separate section will host all kinds of corruption and anti-corruption related resources and documents.



Designing the future ACSMC website

The interactive features of the website will include an online Public Reception Center, where citizens can ask anti-corruption questions to ACSMC experts online. Visitors will also have the opportunity to participate in online corruption surveys and view the results of past surveys.

The website's tentative launch is scheduled for January 2009.

Grievance Experts Busy at Work

MAAC's strategic goal is the creation of a mechanism for addressing grievances and effecting systems-level and procedural changes: Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs). The AACs will provide citizens with channels for reporting corruption and directing complaints to governmental agencies along with legal assistance in processing their complaints. Grievance experts trained in administrative, civil, and criminal law will help AAC staff acquire skills to assist citizens.

MAAC has recruited four local grievance experts to conduct basic training for AACs' lawyers. The experts are conducting an in-depth analysis of Armenian legislation, compiling examples of existing corruption-related cases, and developing a toolkit of legal measures at their disposal to secure the rights of citizens who pursue legal action. Once the centers are open to the public, the grievance experts will build the AAC lawyers' legal capacity through on-the-job trainings on the specific corruption issues raised by citizens.

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representatives discussed the major achievements and short-comings of the old strategy and their expectations for the new one.

The next roundtable took place on 18 September in Gyumri, Shirak marz and was attended by representatives from 26 NGOs and media outlets. The main speaker was Mr. Armen Khudaverdyan, Head of the Expert Group of the Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission. Mr. Khudaverdyan spoke about the best international practices before presenting the content of the newly drafted chapters. The resulting discussion produced several participant suggestions; these will be submitted to the Expert Group for further consideration. "This process of public discussions is extremely important; it provides the Expert Group with the opportunity to take into account the opinions of the marz civil society representatives," says Ms. Doydoyan. "Thus, civil society adds its voice to the new Anti-Corruption Strategy."

The process of public discussions will continue in October, with round tables and TV talk shows in Armavir City, Armavir marz, and Yerevan.

MAAC Organizes Corruption in Healthcare Training

Healthcare affects all people; therefore, there must be decisive advances in the fight against corruption in this sector. With this in mind, MAAC organized a training session on corruption in healthcare for future grantees and other representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on 27 September. MAAC international consultants Taryn Vian and Yemile Mizrahi delivered the training.

Overall, representatives of twelve CSOs surveyed the best anti-corruption practices and equipped themselves with methodologies, tools and resources that CSOs can apply to monitoring healthcare programs and services.

The interactive workshop included a group exercise, during which participants designed a model monitoring plan that would be best conducted by external monitors such as NGOs and would increase citizen participation in the design and implementation of government policies and programs.



Taryn Vian and Yemile Mizrahi delivering the workshop

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“The forum created a dialogue on how Armenia’s Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission and the government’s new Anti-Corruption Strategy will comply with country’s international obligations... The forum witnessed an intense, yet fruitful, discussion on anti-corruption.”

public and private sectors, local CSOs and large international organizations.

The forum created a dialogue on how Armenia’s Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission and the government’s new Anti-Corruption Strategy will comply with country’s international obligations. The three main commitments discussed were the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan), and the obligations within the framework of the Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO).

The Prime Minister of Armenia Tigran Sargsyan, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Joseph Pennington, UN Resident Coordinator Consuelo Vidal, and Head of OSCE’s Yerevan Office Sergey Kapinos all delivered opening remarks.

Mr. Sargsyan emphasized the importance of civic involvement in the fight against corruption. “We need public support because if entities opposed to these reforms unite they will become a powerful force,” he said. “If we don’t have public support we won’t be able to prevail in this struggle.”

In his opening remarks, Mr. Pennington stated, “The U.S. government recognizes the important steps the Armenian government has already taken by becoming signatories to several key international obligations. Today’s forum provides an important arena for government, the private sector, and civil society to come together in a joint fight against corruption.”

The forum witnessed an intense, yet fruitful, discussion on anti-corruption. The next anti-corruption forum will take place in autumn 2008.

MAAC Requests Applications for Second Round of Advocacy and Assistance Centers

As the first round of five Advocacy and Assistance Centers prepare to open their doors for business, MAAC issued a Request for Applications (RFA) on 12 September for the second round.

MAAC is inviting interested CSOs to submit their proposals for the establishment and operation of Advocacy and Assistance Centers in the administrative centers of the remaining six marzes: Ashtarak (Aragatsotn marz), Armavir (Armavir marz), Gavar (Gegharkunik marz), Hrazdan (Kotayk marz), Ararat (Ararat marz), and Yeghegnadzor (Vayots Dzor marz). Once operational, MAAC will have established 11 anti-corruption facilities throughout the Republic of Armenia.

After the RFA was announced, MAAC staff travelled to spread the word and take questions from potential applicants in Gavar, Yeghegnadzor and Yerevan. The deadline for submitting applications is 11 October 2008.

Highlights from the Next Issue...

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

- MAAC opens the first five Advocacy and Assistance Centers;
- MAAC announces the results of its first National Household Corruption survey;
- MAAC organizes a workshop on corruption in education sector for its grantees;
- MAAC awards grants to two youth-based media grantees on anti-corruption communication;
- MAAC marks the International Anti-Corruption Day...

... and more

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