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To *All sections and structures, members, partners, community-based organizations*
From *The International Committee for Strengthening Democracy*
Date *July 2008*

Strengthening Amnesty International's Democracy Consultation Pack 2

Part 3: Questions & Answers

Summary

This second consultation pack comprises the following documents:

Executive Summary (ORG 10/007/2008)

Part 1: A New Governance Model for AI (ORG 10/008/2008)

Part 2: Governance Systems and Processes (ORG 10/009/2008)

Part 3: Questions & Answers (ORG 10/010/2008)

Distribution

This consultation pack is issued to all sections, structures and interested members as well as to selected partners and community-based organizations. The Executive Summary "Strengthening Democratic Governance" will also be made accessible on the internet.

Recommended Actions

Please ensure that this consultation pack is brought to the attention of the chair, board and director of your section/structure, and to those members, partners and other organizations interested in and/or most directly affected by AI's decisions and decision-making processes.

1. In the opinion of the ICSD, what is the main objective of AI's democratic governance?

A strong democracy has always been and will continue to be one of AI's core principles, important to its activists and its members. It is not just enshrined in our statute; it is an intrinsic element of AI's identity. The main objective of AI's governance system should be to maximize AI's positive impact on human rights. In order to achieve this objective and be credible in furthering our mission, our democratic governance system should be as inclusive, participatory, diverse and effective as possible.

2. What does the ICSD consider to be the key new elements of the model proposal at the international level?

While the proposed structural changes in the composition and functions of the ICM and the IEC can make a substantial difference, they are basically optimizations of existing structures. The truly new and central proposal is the Global AI Forum. We envisage the Global AI Forum to become much more than just another tool. If implemented successfully, it would improve and completely transform the way we discuss, consult, interact and decide by giving mainly our membership, but also beneficiaries and partners much broader access to our strategic discussions. It would also lead to a much more open, lively and transparent discussion culture.

3. Why does the ICSD place so much emphasis on the role of beneficiaries and partners?

The lack of participation of an organization's intended beneficiaries in decisions affecting them directly or indirectly is often rightly seen as paternalistic. AI has set standards of good practice over the past decades, but has not been able to move decisively towards a system of true partnership with representatives of beneficiaries and partners, neither at the operational level nor in its governance. More important than sending the right signal to the outside world, such a partnership would be a gain in quality for our decision-making. If those we want to serve are adequately involved in our decision-making, this will lead to a number of important improvements in the quality of the process and its outcomes: strategy and policy discussions would have more grounding in the concrete challenges we want to address; there would be a higher probability that decisions are relevant to, and have a positive effect on, the people we want to serve; the legitimacy of our decisions and subsequent political action would be more obvious and easier to defend.

4. How would we make sure that the participation of beneficiaries and partners in the ICM does not become a sort of tokenism or that they are not selected arbitrarily to further specific agendas?

We would need to agree on standards and objective criteria for selection by the elected Global AGM (ICM) PrepCom and ensure a transparent and open process. By giving the sections and structures the possibility to propose beneficiaries and partners, we would contribute to diverse candidacies. Ideally, sections and structures would make proposals based on merit, skills, experience and proximity to relevant human rights situations. This could mean for example that one or more European sections could propose somebody from Africa, Asia or Latin America who has first hand experience on issues that are on the global agenda in the following years.

5. Are you proposing to increase the participation of beneficiaries and partners at the cost of reducing the participation of the membership?

On the contrary. The Global AI Forum is meant to facilitate, improve and increase the participation of our membership. It is designed for a substantial broadening of the access, meaningful participation and numbers of AI activists involved. It would allow us to leverage currently untapped know-how, expertise and potential inside (and outside) the movement for strategic discussions. It would offer the possibility to break through and expand the inner circle of people (probably not more than a few hundred right now) who currently have meaningful access to global strategic discussions. The main purpose of our proposals is to strengthen and increase both membership and external participation.

6. Do you expect the proposed changes in the ICM's composition, meeting frequency and responsibilities to induce any major changes in the ICM's general approach, the way it would work and see itself?

Yes. In some aspects, the current ICM resembles the United Nations General Assembly: national delegations come together to discuss and vote on resolutions, but they do this on implicit or explicit instructions "from home". They are there to represent the opinions, positions and interests of their national entities. In the plenary meetings, people are not called by their names, but by the national entities they represent. We are envisaging a slightly different ICM where people from the different sections and structures come together with representatives of beneficiaries and partners. Of course, they all bring with them the diverse experience, knowledge and perspectives from the countries and realities they live in. However, they are elected, not primarily to represent and "fight for" the interests and positions of "their" national entities, but to jointly find the best, evidence based answers to the human rights challenges the world faces and to collectively decide where and how AI as a whole could best contribute to improve the situation. In most cases their decisions will not come as a surprise to anybody, because their decisions will have been preceded by inclusive, open and broad discussions and consultations across the whole movement. The positions and opinions of all sections and structures, but also of many members and people outside AI will have been explained, discussed and considered and will have influenced the proposals put in front of the ICM.

7. Would we not be weakening AI's democracy by reducing the number of people attending the ICM?

The relatively small number of participants at the current ICM (if compared to the total number of AI members) does not seem to be the most relevant measure for the strength of our democracy. In fact, while several hundred people might attend, the ICM is basically a meeting of about 60 sections and structures. One could even argue that e.g. the current Chairs Forum is at least as democratically representative and legitimized as an ICM (but without the ICM's statutory powers). In addition, in terms of the number of participants, the larger and richer sections are usually "overrepresented" since the size of the delegations is mainly a question of the national budget. The strength of the democracy of a movement with more than 2 million members lies primarily in its ability to ensure that people can participate in the process at all levels on an ongoing basis, and not in the number of people attending a global meeting every two years. Also, as a responsible organization we would need to be able to explain the human rights benefits of such a large meeting in relation to its costs and environmental impact.

8. How would a weighted voting system for the elections of the ICM participants work? What would be the activists/beneficiaries/partners ratio at the ICM?

There are many possible models which we could use to define these ratios. The ICSD has not yet looked at them in depth, because we feel that we need to discuss the principles first. If we can agree on the principles, there is a good chance that we will find calculation and allocation models which are democratic, practicable and acceptable. However, we welcome any suggestions on a desirable voting system and/or the criteria it should meet.

9. What would happen with the Chairs Forum?

With an annual ICM there is no need or room for an additional decision-making body. As a discussion, consultation, training or coordination forum the Chairs Forum (and/or regional versions of it) could become an element of the non electronic part of the Global AI Forum. It could meet if and when required for specific purposes.

10. The current ICM fosters a sense of global solidarity and community in AI. How does the new model incorporate this aspect?

In the new model, the smaller ICM focuses on governance. However, global and regional thematic and other meetings could take place under the umbrella of the Global AI Forum, allowing for diverse and changing groups of activists, beneficiaries and partners to come together and exchange views and experiences, develop visions and ideas and build a sense of solidarity and community e.g. around campaigns or thematic issues.

11. To what extent are the ICSD's proposals influenced by what other global NGOs are doing in this area?

We looked at democracy in other global civil society organizations and found interesting approaches, although no "revolutionary" ideas directly applicable to AI. We do not believe that copying the models of other organizations would be helpful. However, we think that AI cannot ignore what is perceived as being best practice in good governance for global civil society organizations. The proposals are therefore the ICSD's translation of our vision of a strong, impact and mission focused AI democracy into a structural model that is in line with best practice.

12. Does the ICSD believe that the proposed changes in the governance model and the basic systems and processes will suffice to strengthen AI's democracy?

No. These changes would be a first step. We will need to elaborate and agree in more detail on systems and processes (accountability, relation between national and international levels, transparency, common standards across the movement, communication). Also, we will need to analyse, and adapt where necessary, the way we interact, discuss, deal with conflicts and exert power. This is what we call our democratic "culture". We are well aware that different models, structures, systems and processes will have a very limited impact if we do not explicitly address the questions related to our democratic culture.

13. What are the ICSD's ideas about the timing for the implementation of a new model and of adapted systems and processes?

In accordance with Decision 2 of the 2007 ICM, the ICSD has been tasked by the IEC to make proposals in time for the 2009 ICM. However, the most appropriate and realistic timing for any changes is a question to be discussed. The answer will depend on various factors, including the content and implications of the new ISP, the outcome of the discussions on "Assessment to Distribution", the amount of change the movement will be able and willing to implement at the same time etc. A phased approach to implementation would certainly be an option, among other things because any changes to our democratic culture will take time anyway.