

Amnesty International-Strengthening Democracy  
First Consultation Paper

AI Members Only

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

**Strengthening Amnesty International's Democracy  
Consultation Pack 1  
Part 2 - Results of Earlier Assessments**

**Summary**

This first consultation pack comprises the following documents:

Part 1: The ICSD's first consultation paper, "Effective Democratic Governance" setting out its proposed overall approach to strengthening AI's democracy as well as a summary of the key areas the ICSD believes need specific attention

Part 2: Summary I: Results of Earlier Assessments

Part 3: Summary II: Governance in other organizations

**Distribution**

This consultation pack is issued to all sections, structures and interested members as well as to selected partners and community-based organizations. The consultation paper "Effective 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.

# Strengthening Amnesty International's Democracy

## Part 2: Background Notes - Summary 1

### Results of earlier assessments and Key Learnings

#### Executive Summary

For many years, AI has been involved in an extensive debate on how to strengthen its democracy and improve its decision-making. While this debate has continued, repeatedly tackling the same issues, it seems that very little has changed in Amnesty's democratic governance.

Although there have been structural changes such as the creation of the Chairs Forum and the granting of votes to structures, Decision 2 of the 2007 ICM reveals continued dissatisfaction with our democracy. After more than 20 years of internal research and discussion it is about time to reach some conclusions and start implementing them.

The **key features of Amnesty's debate** can be summarized in seven points:

➤ *Direct democracy does not work to AI's satisfaction*

Relatively few of AI's over two million members participate in its democratic decision making. Democratic forms for broader involvement of members have to be found.

➤ *Rights holders<sup>1</sup> are not sufficiently involved in shaping AI's agenda and policies*

Those who are most affected by - and who are supposed to benefit from - Amnesty International's decisions rarely have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the discussions and decisions. AI needs to find ways to include rights holders in relevant decision-making processes.

➤ *Diversity and growth in the global South requires a different approach*

Strengthening AI's presence in the South and specifically in Africa is one of AI's agreed objectives. Reaching this objective requires a different approach from copying successful concepts from the North.

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<sup>1</sup> Rights holders = people whose human rights are threatened and whom AI wants to support

➤ *Transparency and accountability need to be strengthened*

The allocation of roles and responsibilities in AI's decision-making process is often unclear and sometimes inappropriate. Democratic control is weak and, as a result, there is a considerable degree of distrust. AI needs to find ways in which to strengthen democratic control and thus to create "tough trust".

➤ *Global and national entities need to work together more effectively*

In order to realize AI's full potential both at national and global levels new and more effective forms of decision making, joint implementation and shared responsibility are required.

➤ *Leadership development needs to be undertaken more systematically*

AI must pay closer attention to how leaders are identified, assessed, selected, trained and supported. Skilled leaders should enjoy greater trust and flexibility in their decision making, and they should be enabled to direct, support, trust and control those they are supposed to lead.

➤ *Governance and management roles and responsibilities need to be clarified*

In order to increase AI's effectiveness the mandates of governance (ICM, IEC) and management (Secretary General, International Secretariat) need to be defined more precisely and roles and responsibilities allocated more appropriately.

**Key learnings - What the movement wants to see in order to change:**

➤ *The change process itself is conducted in an inclusive and democratic way*

AI members want to be adequately consulted and feel that their views are being considered throughout the change process.

➤ *Show exactly how changed structures and processes will work*

AI members want to see more than a proposed change of concept, they want to see exactly and in detail how change would look in order to assess precisely what it would mean for them.

➤ *Show how changes will benefit Amnesty's mission*

AI members want to understand whether and how reforms to AI's democratic governance will improve AI's effectiveness in reaching the agreed vision and mission.

## 1.0 Earlier assessments

During the last two decades, there have been three main reviews of AI's governance and democracy, as well as a recent series of linked papers. These include:

- **Committee on Long-range Organizational Development, (CLOD), 1985 – 1987** (ORG 31/001/1987)
- **Participlan, 1989 - 1991.** (ORG 30/005/1991)
- **The Decision-making and Accountability Working Group (DAWG) 1999- 2001**
  - (a) 1999 ICM Circular 23: DAWG interim report (ORG 21/01/1999)
  - (b) 1999 ICM draft resolution in "Appendix to Circulars 23-25" (ORG 51/04/1999)
  - (c) DAWG stakeholders meeting report (ORG 21/04/2000)
  - (d) DAWG evaluation of decision-making (ORG 21/06/2000)
  - (e) DAWG report: Changing the way we change (ORG 21/10/2000)
  - (f) 2001 ICM Circular 33: DAWG report (ORG 21/002/2001)
  - (g) 2001 ICM Circular 42: International decision-making in future (ORG 50/014/2001)

In addition to producing these reports, the DAWG also commissioned separate reports from individual experts. These included:

- (a) What does democracy mean? A resource paper on decision-making (Susan Waltz, ORG21/07/2000)
- (b) Decision-making in other organizations. A resources paper on decision-making (Helmut Anheier, ORG21/08/2000)

Recently, several documents have either contained substantial proposals on AI's democracy and governance, or have studied the subject:

- **Globalize Justice: the Integrated Strategic Plan 2004-2010** (POL 50/011/2003)
- **Globalizing Amnesty discussion paper** (2005 ICM Circular 56, ORG 30/011/2005)
- **Responsible and Responsive: International Decision-Making in AI** (ORG 81/IEC01/06)
- **2007 ICM Decisions** (ICM Circular 59, ORG 52/001/2007)
- **Review of the Committees serving the IEC of Amnesty International** (ORG 82/IEC02/2008)
- **International Secretariat Operational Plan 3 (ISOP3, 2008 – 2010) Strategic statement** (of 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007)

## 2.0 Summary of Earlier Assessments Selected by the ICSD

### **DAWG's Evaluation of decision-making structures (1997-2001)**

"Prior to the creation of the Democracy and Accountability Working Group (DAWG) in 1997 (...) AI had never attempted to examine what exactly it meant by internal democracy".<sup>2</sup> As part of laying the groundwork for its deliberations the DAWG asked several experts for their input.

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<sup>2</sup> Waltz, Susan: What does Democracy mean for AI? 21. July 2000. Susan Waltz was a member of the IEC from 1993 to 1999, and the IEC chair in 1998-9.

Helmut Anheier<sup>3</sup> looks from an academic's point of view into "Decision-Making and Accountability in Other Organizations". In 15 "Conclusions" he draws at the end of his text he provides advice to Amnesty International. He cautions against complex decision-making structures: "keep it simple" and against a franchising system "as it emphasizes standardization and centralized control". In his view "a federal model with strong local units that are democratically organized is potentially a strong option for AI". Anheier believes that "regionalization (e.g. Africa, Asia) can facilitate information flows and sensitivities to cultural and political variations". He recommends: "Do not model after firm structures or franchise systems. The democratic, federal system is the way forward for organizations like AI. Specifically, the model of democratic government rather than corporate efficiency seems appropriate for multinational NPOs. In other words, the challenge is to become more like a private government, with a clearly separated legislature (democratically elected by members), executive branch (both appointed and elected) and judiciary (elected by members). The choice of democratic governance and transparency may not lead to the most efficient way and means of decision-making; if democracy is held as a value and goal, then inefficiencies related to this ideal have to be taken into account."

Susan Waltz also comes from an academic background. She points out that "Democracy, quite literally, means rule (kratos) by the people (demos)" and that "the main perspectives on democracy commonly include two features: *popular choice* of leaders and the *accountability* of those leaders to the electorate". Waltz explains the differences between "presidentialism (a strong executive) versus a strong parliamentary system (where power [is] less concentrated)". She continues: "Presidentialism may produce strong leadership, but where democracy is fragile, a strong executive, i.e. presidentialism, may lend itself to demagoguery. On the other hand, a strong parliamentary form tends to be more inclusive but has the disadvantage that decision-making is likely to be cumbersome (or stalemated), and coalitions can collapse". Waltz points out that "experiments in direct democracy have not been successful except in some very small, cohesive, and well-disciplined communities. In AI's international organization today, direct democracy is generally seen as impractical. As a somewhat more practical alternative compatible with the ideals of *direct democracy*, AI might want to consider the ideal of *deliberative democracy*<sup>4</sup> as a means of thinking creatively about enhancing debate and dialogue."

#### Summary of DAWG's evaluation of the current decision-making structure in AI

A paper with that title was forwarded to all section and structures in June 2000.<sup>5</sup> The paper gives the DAWG's main findings:

*Empowerment:* DAWG has found that few in the organization have the necessary knowledge, tools, resources or skills to take decisions effectively. A high level of uninformed decision making takes place and there is an overall failure to communicate effectively with the organization's grassroots.

*Participation and Inclusion:* Language skills (English), experience and financial power remain important factors limiting full participation in AI's decision-making processes.

*Effectiveness:* Our decision-making process frequently is too slow; important decisions sometimes come back to several ICMs before a final decision is made and action can be taken. Moreover, the key players in the movement struggle under too heavy a workload.

*Transparency:* DAWG's findings show a high level of informal decision-making with the consequences of unclear responsibilities and lack of accountability. Furthermore, the

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<sup>3</sup> Anheier, Helmut: Decision-making and accountability in other organizations, 12 August 2000

<sup>4</sup> Waltz defines *deliberative democracy* as "policies and structures intended to promote thoughtful debate and dialogue among an engaged citizenry"

<sup>5</sup> For details: please see bibliography

process and criteria by which committee members are identified and appointed were found to be opaque.

*Accountability:* The implementation of decisions is rarely actively monitored and challenged, and the tools for enforcing accountability are limited.

*Cohesion:* AI needs a stronger definition of its mission and purpose, and those in authority need better access to the grassroots stakeholders to ensure that the impact of decisions is realized on the ground.

*Direction and Prioritization:* While the Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) provides a tool for prioritizing our work, the crowded agendas for many meetings leave very little scope for discussing the vision and broad directions for AI's work.

### Changing the way we change

In this paper DAWG points out a number of deficiencies in the performance of the organization:

- the decision-making process is too slow: some issues come back to successive ICMs before a decision can be reached and action taken;
- it is also too technical: many in our movement are unable to participate in the decision making process in a meaningful way due to language, financial or other constraints;
- our agendas are too crowded leaving little or no time for 'big picture' discussions, e.g. on important issues such as the future of our organization and its role in the human rights movement;
- we undertake evaluations but fail to learn the lessons for the future;
- that we engage in a large number of consultations which only a small proportion of our sections and structures respond to leaving the outcome of the consultation less than representative;
- we fail to hold those accountable to whom we delegate responsibility;
- the roles of the participants in the decision-making process are unclear; and finally
- we burden our leaders and decision makers with too many rules and regulations as well as a prohibitive workload.

This means that AI has to change: We must

- become more responsive and flexible
- simplify our decision-making processes
- assign clear authority to our decision-takers
- ensure strong accountability; and importantly
- we must create open spaces for debate, exchange and wider participation.

### Feedback on DAWG Consultation

A total of 16 sections replied to the DAWG's proposals. Most comments were critical in tone. The most common observations were:

- a) the proposals themselves were too vague or undeveloped to properly evaluate;
- b) that it was far from clear how the proposed changes served the stated objectives (specifically in serving democracy, increasing participation and inclusiveness and reducing IEC workload).

Whilst there was significant diversity in the responses to the specific proposals, several messages came through fairly consistently:

- a) that the reforms as proposed are underdeveloped;
- b) that a more comprehensive appraisal of decision making needs to take place, which makes transparent the input of sections/staff/IS/SMT/SG & other "informal" input

and which properly addresses the roles of networks and other disenfranchised structures; and that reforms to decision-making processes need to take place in the context of agreed vision and mission.

### **The Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) 2004 – 2010**

The ISP identifies three fundamental concepts guiding Amnesty International into the future, externally and internally: equity, accountability and sustainability. It states: "Within Amnesty International, we must value transparency in our internal democracies, demonstrate our accountability to all our stakeholders through the quality of our operating standards and practices, and ensure fairness in our internal operations. (...) Internally, we must view people and money as resources in which we invest to build capacity, to deliver sustained and effective action, and to provide accountable governance."

Part two of the ISP contains the *Organizational strategy: Releasing energy!* It points out: "The linchpin of the Organizational Strategy is action. It is imperative for Amnesty International to develop a critical standard for effective action. It is the assumption of this Integrated Strategic Plan that the measure of effectiveness will create greater latitude for all parts of the organization and increased responsibility and demands for communication and mutual accountability. The obligation to act effectively is a strategic necessity."

"In order to accomplish its Human Rights Strategy, in the period of 2004 to 2010 Amnesty International will focus its energy and resources to

- guarantee quality research;
- take effective action;
- communicate effectively;
- mobilize people;
- build a dynamic architecture;
- enhance our public trust

In working towards these goals the following notions will provide us with a systematic approach for our operational decisions

- releasing energy and creativity in the organization;
- capacity building and information;
- internal architecture and delivery;
- partnerships and alliances (internal and external);
- growth;
- evaluation and accountability;
- "brand" management;
- a focus on youth and action.

This is a resource-based organizational strategy that reflects an assessment of our strengths and weaknesses. It declares our intention to control our resources in order to build a strong organization, one that can deliver the Human Rights Strategy we have decided to implement. The feasibility of this strategy will depend on our ability to develop the competencies we need, to use effective forms of action and to have the necessary financial resources."

### **Globalising Amnesty (2005)**

“In many ways AI could now be described as an international collective of national entities: that is to say, sections of a global organization that favour independent activity at the level of the nation state. This is a long way from Peter Benenson’s 1961 idea of a global campaign for Amnesty, where international cooperation between AI’s first six sections was a fundamental part of how the organization worked. The inherent challenge is to ensure that we strike the appropriate balance between national effectiveness and international impact. The analysis set out here suggests that as currently operating AI is not able to win advantage internationally, and thus missing some opportunities.”

“There are a number of internal barriers that we need to overcome if we are to be in a position to exploit global opportunities:

*firstly*, a mindset in AI that national entities have exclusive territorial control and no responsibility or accountability for global action or impact;

*secondly*, structures that are unsuited to multilateral cooperation and hampered by a history of failed experiments and

*thirdly*, the absence of operational tools and procedures to promote transnational cooperation.”

“The national democratic representative governance systems and the autonomy vested in the sections by the international movement all contribute to an organizational culture that has located power at the national level, with often no real sense of responsibility or possible mechanisms among the national structures to bring about global impact through transnational or international activities. Furthermore, while sections have a well-developed system of accountability at the national level, their international accountability is unclear.”

“On the side of the IS, the lack of a clear mandate to exploit global opportunities and lead and coordinate international projects opportunities is hampering the efforts to encourage innovation and build capacity and also leading to frustration. The reluctance on the part of sections to cede territorial control and the failure of the IS to create confidence in its leadership role, combined with a mindset based on national rather than international interests, means that AI is unable to take operational decisions that would open up opportunities and assets at the national level for global results.”

“A new approach to working innovatively in international space should be framed by a set of principles to which all AI international and national entities subscribe. These principles should serve to build coherence, resist fragmentation and strengthen mutual dependence among AI entities”:

*Shared responsibility for global impact*: all AI entities – national and international – have “a shared responsibility to work together for global impact”. This requires acknowledging “that the presumption of territorial jurisdiction is subservient to global control which in turn must be exercised with mutual respect and responsibility.”

*Tough trust*: Shared responsibility for global action also means accountability at the global level. All AI entities must be held mutually accountable at the international level, including in particular for the resources that they raise, own and spend in the name of Amnesty International.

*Global vision*: The Integrated Strategic Plan provides a global vision for AI. Growth and human rights impact are the two overarching goals of the ISP and should form the basis of our own efforts to globalize AI.

*Global identity:* All entities in AI benefit from the organization’s global identity – this places on them a concomitant responsibility to promote cohesion and nurture a common, global identity through multilateral partnerships.

*Impartiality and independence:* All work in the international space must be scrupulous about addressing conflict of interests – real or perceived – that could arise, for instance, as a result of national identity or national interests. (...)

*Externally focussed and outcome oriented:* Analysis of opportunities through an external focus and an honest evaluation of our impact must guide our efforts. Relating our multilateral partnerships to concrete results will increase motivation for cooperation.

*Competency based and cost effective:* Partnerships and contributions – who does what in international space - should be based on the competencies of our different entities and make the most effective and efficient use of our resources as a movement”.

### **Responsible and Responsive: International Decision-Making in AI (2006)**

“The agreed purpose of the meeting was to explore and advise the IEC on future directions for a decision-making in AI, beginning with international decision-making institutions, but then looking at how all AI’s decision-making serves AI’s mission in terms of human rights effectiveness.”

“Given the external world challenges facing AI, internal decision-making in the future ought to be accountable, rapid and responsive, active and visible, genuinely having an impact, change-oriented, and based on deep diversity. There is a tension between lengthy consultation, as a basis for good decision-making, and AI’s need for quick, quality decisions. One of the key issues here is shifting attention and energy from the work that *precedes* a decision to subsequent accountability for how the decision was taken, what has been done to implement it, and what have been the consequences of its implementation. Key principles on which AI leadership ought to be based include:

- AI being led by people who are skilled in leadership;
- AI leaders trusting themselves and others;
- AI leaders being honest about their actions and ready to take responsibility for the consequences of those actions;
- AI leaders being less constrained by rules;
- AI leaders bringing in the voice of beneficiaries to balance the input on decision-making.

*Diversity:* (...) To create real diversity, it is not enough just to recruit diversity, but the psychology and culture of AI will have to change to attract and retain a more diverse supporter base. Finding mechanisms to encourage input for those with and for whom AI works—beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries—is a key component of develop AI’s diversity. It is also vital for AI to develop local relevance throughout the world.

*Accountability:* The concept of tough trust needs to be rooted in stronger accountability, and AI needs to develop robust methods for this. ICM resolutions reappear again and again because the IEC, IS and sections and structures do not do what the resolutions ask. (...) Would AI see it as being desirable (or possible) to see “accountability” as being having leaders held accountable by those who are led *and* having those who are led also held accountable by the leadership? A trusted system for accountability must be developed across the movement. AI should move quickly to establish a system of ‘fast trust,’

recognising that taking responsibility for decisions after the act is quicker than seeking permission before the fact. Accountability throughout the movement will depend on honesty, trust and frankness in everyone's communications.

*Leadership:* AI should examine how its international leaders are currently identified, selected, assessed, supported, appraised and held accountable. It needs to develop a leadership that is trustworthy, courageous and trusted, and needs to create safe space for unpractised leaders to practise and develop organically. Section and structure representatives at international decision-making meetings should enjoy greater trust and flexibility, and be empowered to use their own judgement rather than having to refer all decisions back to sections and structures. Leadership ought to effectively delegate power, be based on co-ordination and not control, and enjoy greater freedom in decision-making.

*Globalizing AI's Decision-Making:* AI has developed systems for globalizing governance, but not for globalizing operations. AI's economy is being globalised but its human resources and expertise are not. If we were to move to a global model of decision-making, resources (including financial) might be pooled towards a common goal of greater positive impact for human rights. Leaders might have to step out of the way to allow those with expertise the space to act and then hold them accountable to agreed goals afterwards".

### **Decisions of the ICM in 2007**

Decision 2 of the ICM instructs the IEC to establish a working group to review Amnesty's systems and structures for decision making, consultation and participation and for monitoring the implementation of decisions. It asks the IEC to "include in the working group's terms of reference consideration of:

- how to improve the adequacy of AI's international decision-making and governance structures to make the organization as efficient and effective as possible;
- how to increase the transparency and inclusiveness of consultation, democratic participation and decision making processes;
- how to support broadly inclusive and culturally sensitive involvement of all AI stakeholders in AI's consultation, democratic participation and decision making processes"

### **OP3 Strategic Programme 2008 – 2010**

"This strategic statement sets out the internal drivers that have led AI to initiate joint planning, prioritization and alignment of resources across the movement. It also provides a detailed analysis of external trends so that a common understanding can be developed in all parts of AI on the external drivers that shape our priorities. Finally, and most importantly, the strategic statement proposes movement-wide priorities, in the form of projects on campaigns and organizational changes that we need to implement for greater impact."

"As a movement we continue to tolerate too many lost opportunities, wasted resources, organizational incoherence and distorted outcomes, fragmented processes and structures: 'Disparate and disjointed efforts are dissipating energy and diverting resources'.

Many of these problems can be traced to AI's organizational architecture; to the ways in which we organize ourselves and operate as a movement which have remained largely unchanged over the past four decades. Today under the weight of globalization, rapid-fire communications and mass movement of people, national borders are more porous and national interests more mercurial. As these phenomena of distance, isolation and

separation take on different characteristics, the organizational structures and systems that were once strengths are now weaknesses. What was once the solution has now become the problem.”

After analyzing the external environment in which Amnesty International works the paper points out implications for AI. Some of these are:

- “New uncertainties require new alliances and support bases in parts of the world where AI is not well rooted or well recognized. Diversity is not just a moral imperative but a political and operational necessity for Amnesty International.”
- “Flexibility is key to our relevance. Rapidly changing scenarios require rapid crisis response capacity while simultaneously entrenched conflicts demand the capacity for sustained longer term work.”
- “As business and governments coordinate their efforts across borders, we must also learn to develop a trans-national and well-coordinated agenda for research and action on business and human rights.”
- “We need to work together as one movement and develop a global communications strategy to achieve the public profile essential for human rights impact in a crowded, highly competitive, fast-changing communications environment.”
- “Diversity and global presence are imperative for AI’s effectiveness and impact. AI needs to examine new opportunities for diversity brought by diaspora, internet, etc.”
- “More priority needs to be given by the entire AI movement to improving governance and developing better reporting and accountability, particularly to external donors.”

### **Review of the Committees serving the IEC**

*On behalf of the IEC the Berlin Civil Society Center undertook “an independent external evaluation of the work of the committees, working groups and task forces appointed by the IEC leading to a fresh consideration of how to make best use of volunteer participation at an international level. Its findings and recommendations were presented to and endorsed by the IEC on 15 February 2008:*

#### AI’s governance should be mission driven

Most of AI’s leaders are worried by the strong internal focus of the organization. For Amnesty’s future it is of utmost importance to refocus Amnesty on its EXTERNAL mission. Like all other Boards the IEC’s paramount driver should be the fulfilment of the organization’s mission. In AI’s case the mission is to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights. Lower objectives the IEC sets for itself and the organization as a whole should

- directly relate to the mission
- be defined much more precisely
- be better measurable and
- whether they have been achieved or not should be measured and reported.

#### Differentiate more systematically between governance and executive

Amnesty International should differentiate more clearly between the role of its governance (ICM, IEC, International Committees) and the role of its executive (SG and IS).

- The governance structure of all organizations is responsible for the long-term strategic direction, the overall audit, approval of the annual budget and appointment and oversight of the head of management.

- The executive structure is responsible for the implementation of the governance's decisions. Thus decisions concerning details of the implementation are with the executive.

The fact that Amnesty members play a role both in setting the long term direction and in implementing it does not change the value of the principle of a clear division between governance and management.

In performing governance roles members should report within the governance hierarchy (to the IEC and finally to the ICM) and in performing executive roles (activists) members should report within the executive structure (finally to the SG).

While AI's governance should be constituted democratically its management should be guided by the principle of efficiency

AI's democratic structure will be reviewed in a separate process. The recommendation from the perspective of this review is to follow through with democracy on the governance side but to maintain the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and timeliness on the executive side. The implementation of Amnesty International's strategy needs to be left to a professionally managed executive. Members should be welcome to deliver their contribution to implementing the agreed strategies but they should do so as part of AI's executive hierarchy with the Secretary General at the top.

Canvass members' opinions more widely and more systematically

AI's leaders rightly pointed out that they need to be in touch with the movement regularly to make sure that they do not come up with policies the movement will not carry. Due to their extremely limited reach committees not always were sufficiently successful in canvassing the members' opinion and they involved only a very limited number of international members in AI's decision-making process. The review of internal democracy should try to find out in which ways many more members can be encouraged and enabled to contribute more actively to AI's internal discussions.

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