Position Paper on Participatory Democracy
Swedish Section of AI

August 13th 2013

We are all proud of Amnesty International as an organization based on worldwide voluntary membership. We are proud of our democratic decision making procedures and the systems by which the elected officials (as well as sections and structures) are held accountable. We are also proud of seeing that we are growing and going through a challenging transformation process at the same time as we are sticking together and honouring the idea of ONE AMNESTY. This short paper is written in order to highlight the importance of never forgetting the fundamental role of the individual members as active, informed decision makers within the organization. We see a risk that the AI members´ powers, and their possibilities to exercise those powers, are sometimes challenged when organizational reforms are proposed in order to foster efficiency, flexibility, growth and other goals and values that are also of importance.

1. Electing the IEC and holding it accountable (RE: IEC Resolution 2.12)

In a democratic organization, the voting members of the IEC must be elected by the ICM in order to be fully accountable to the ICM. This important principle would be violated if co-opted, non-elected members were also given full voting rights. Co-opted members can make important contributions to AI without also being given the right to vote. We believe there are ways to promote increased flexibility, balance of skills and continuity within the IEC without paying a price in terms of democracy and accountability. Thus, the Swedish Section does not want the ICM to approve part B of Resolution 2.12.

2. Frequency of the ICM (RE: Resolution 2.01)

As AI is presently in a process of important organizational change we doubt that this is the right moment to decide to limit the number of ICMs. Instead, we see that ICMs - as democratic tools - can serve to promote consensus and thus smooth and harmonious change. We do understand that an ICM demands a lot of resources, in terms of time and money, and that this is especially burdensome for small sections and structures. However, after weighing the pros and cons, we conclude that the form of participatory democracy that regularly held ICMs offer, is worth the cost - at least for the coming years. The Swedish Section is thus sceptical towards Resolution 2.01, unless combined with robust proposals on how to strengthen the democratic forums in the organization.

3. Organization or Movement? (RE: IEC Resolution 2.13i)

We tend to believe that prospects for safeguarding institutional arrangements for democratic decision making are somewhat higher in an organization than in a movement. We therefore hesitate to support the idea to formally change the AI from being an organization to a movement in the statute.

4. New – and democratic - forms of presence (RE: IEC Resolution 4.10)

AI has shown great ingenuity and flexibility when finding the forms for accommodating an expanding movement. We fully support this ambition. However, we see a need to highlight the importance of democratic structures and participatory democracy within the entities, as well as in the relationship between the global AI and the local forms of presence. As so well expressed in ICM Decision 8 (2011) we want to stress the "long-term desirability of AI having strong, democratically led, self-governing entities with vibrant activist memberships", and we believe and expect that this will guide our work on NFP as described in Resolution 4.10.