

Three years ago the Governments of Netherlands provided \$ 513,810 to OSIAF-Armenia to provide grants to local NGOs with the purpose to improve the human rights situation in the country through enhancing the capacity of organizations working in selected areas to promote fundamental rights and freedoms. As a result of competition, the following NGOs were selected to implement 3-year projects in the areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms: *UNISON, Collaboration for Democracy, Fund against Violation of Law, Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Sakharov Human Rights Protection Armenian Center and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office.*

Unison, an organization that deals with issues of people with disabilities has reached remarkable results in promoting the rights of people with disabilities and establishing a Job Training and Placement Center. Thus far 220 people have been trained and a website for job seekers with disabilities (www.jobs.disability.am) has been created. Though the site has been developed recently, already over 750 people have visited the site and 24 people with disabilities are registered there. The site provides information on available vacancies, relevant legislative norms and CV samples to better assist the users. Additionally, Unison representatives talk to employers and try to place people at various organizations. These activities intend to break the stereotype that the employers have about people with disabilities and help them reflect on developing an equal opportunity hiring policy along with creating certain conditions for hiring such individuals. Due to these efforts, some have found jobs in a smith's workshop, VivaCell-MTS, Orange Armenia and elsewhere. Additionally, TV Programs and leaflets have covered a wide range of aspects, such as social security, pensions, disability and military service for all people interested in the rights of disabled persons. Another key aspect of the project was to provide legal counseling to such people and operate a hot line service. The beneficiaries mainly had problems related to getting free medications and violations of their labor and voting rights. Combating cases of discrimination against these people was also a part of the project. Policy Briefs about the problem of statistical data on individuals with disabilities, inaccessibility of public transport for wheelchair users and the inclusion of children with disabilities in secondary public schools and the challenges they face there have also been developed by the organization along with recommendations. The full policy briefs in Russian can be accessed here. More details about the organization and their projects can be found on www.unison.am

Collaboration for Democracy targets religious freedom and problems that religious organizations face. The project is particularly interested in religious tolerance via creating conditions that provide space for respect towards freedom of religion and proper implementation of relevant parts of Armenia Constitution. The organization had regular meetings with various religious organizations directed towards policy objectives, organized round table discussions and TV programs on the above issues; printed the quarterly journal "Society and Religion". In the above meetings, specific cases of religious intolerance have been discussed. Another target point of the project was to monitor religious intolerance in schools and publishing a report on the findings of the monitoring. The organization also created the first website (www.religions.am) on diverse religious denominations existing in Armenia. The website also includes various topic-related articles as well as relevant laws and their interpretations. The NGO also implements continuous research in secondary schools and higher educational institutions to sum up and present recommendations to the Ministry of Education for improvements. A report on religious freedom in Armenia will soon be ready.

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office (HCAV) – This project targets a different aspect of human rights protection. Namely, HCAV worked to enhance the effectiveness of mechanisms for free legal aid, increase civic control over the activities of local self-governance bodies by raising awareness and monitoring of the activities of these bodies. The organization provided free legal consultations in all cities of Lori region. Based on the results of these consultations the organization prepared monthly digests on human rights. So far, 290 people have been consulted. The lawyers of the organization also helped the citizen with applying to various state organizations with their claims. They organized numerous discussions on human rights issues and aired 20 TV programs. Preparation of policy briefs and making recommendations for legislative improvements was also a portion of the project. Apart from this HCAV was heavily engaged in development of the potential of monitoring human rights activities in psychiatric dispensaries of Armenia. For this purpose they organized training to develop tools and created working groups for monitoring of these dispensaries. The report on dispensary monitoring will be ready at the end of November 2009.

The A. D. Shakharov Armenian Human Rights Protection Center – This project aims to raise the level of civic activity among the population in the regions of Armenia, which will enhance protection of their own rights. They do this not only through building their own capacity by training the employees, but also via seminars and joint public actions. In addition they provide free legal consultations to those whose right have been violated. Till date, several thousand people have received free legal consultations, both collectively and individually (the Sakharov Centre Yerevan office from December 2008 till now rendered legal consultations to 2134 persons). There have been many success stories when due to help of the Center the rights of the citizens have been restored (19 citizens' rights were restored due to the Yerevan office). Seminars on various topics for selected participants have been organized in various communities too. The project staff also monitors the situation of human rights protection and proposes recommendations to improve laws, styles and methods of work of state bodies. Each month, they organize TV/Radio programs in cities of Goris, Gavar and Gyumri on the issues requiring wide public attention and response. Along with other organizations funded by the government of Netherlands, they also prepare articles for the site www.hra.am.

Committee of Protection of Freedom of Speech – This organization is more concentrated on Freedom of Speech as a fundamental human rights cornerstone and empowering journalists both in the capital city and regions. With their activities they tend to improve the potential of journalists unions and increase their role in protection of public interests. While increasing the capacity of the unions to protect public, the organization also protected the rights of journalists themselves. They also conducted a situational analysis in the sphere of freedom of speech and a qualitative monitoring of regional mass media and prepared recommendations related to pluralism in media. Also roundtable discussions have been organized with local media and journalists unions to discuss such important topics as access to information, combating censorship, protection of journalists' rights. In addition, the organization has prepared analytical reports based on the conducted research. All these activities are directed towards improvement of information freedom and providing the public with unbiased information via development and application of new mechanisms.

Fund against Violation of Law – Through capacity building of their organization and the efforts of civil society the Fund improves the protection of economic rights with special emphasis on the regions of Armenia. They organized roundtable discussions with relevant parties and government representatives, organized seminars for target people and conference on protection of economic rights. The seminars covered such topics like the right to be exempt from taxes and duties – basis and regulations, the right of obtaining property as inheritance, etc. A special component of the project was to assess the fulfillment of Armenia's international obligations through analysis of country reports presenting to ECOSOC (any data?). Along with this, they presented recommendations to improve the legislation and created Self-help groups to solve their own issues. They also worked with six Civil Centers in regions to strengthen their capacities so they could provide assistance with economic rights protection to those who need it. With their activities they strive to raise the level of protection of economic rights of vulnerable people. The organization also operates a hotline for those who need urgent consultations.