

Give & Take

A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia

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NGO Advocacy:
Making Change Through
Law and Politics



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ISAR promotes citizen participation and the development of the nongovernmental sector in the countries of the former Soviet Union by supporting citizen activists and grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in their efforts to create just and sustainable societies.

ISAR's offices work to facilitate partnerships between and among NGOs in Eurasia and the United States, and to educate the public in the US and Eurasia about the unique role that grassroots organizations play in shaping a positive transformation in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Established in 1983 by Harriett Crosby and Nancy Graham as the Institute for Soviet-American Relations, ISAR originally served as a clearinghouse on US-USSR citizen exchange and published the journal *Surviving Together* until the end of 1997.

More information about ISAR's programs is available on our web site, www.isar.org.

To find out how to receive *Give & Take*, please see the back cover.

On the Cover: A Ukrainian student takes a poll on civil society development in a Kyiv market. Photo by James Hill.

Contact information on organizations in bold text throughout the journal can be found in the index.

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NGOs Begin to Use the System: Legal and Political Advocacy Gets Results

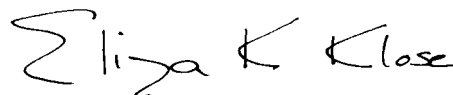
This issue of *Give & Take* demonstrates how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the former Soviet Union have begun to use political and legal mechanisms to advocate for change. The ability of citizens to use the law and the polling booth to influence the fate of their communities is a crucial step in the evolution of civil society in any country. It is particularly dramatic to see how quickly the process is happening in the post-Soviet world: until recently placards and protest marches were the primary tools of citizen advocacy; before that, public protest was an invitation to jail.

Today NGOs in many former republics are working with policymakers to address their concerns, mobilizing public support to generate political pressure and challenging government and industry in court to live up to their legal obligations. The authors in this issue illustrate the growing sophistication and effectiveness of the Third Sector. Irina Efremova gives an insider's view of a successful campaign to get a women's activist elected to the Russian Duma. Susan Casey-Lefkowitz of the Environmental Law Institute outlines how public interest lawyers in Ukraine are tackling environmental pollution in the courts. Gayane Ambardaryan tells how the League of Women Voters got out the vote in the politically apathetic Shirakskii region of Armenia.

We learn how the antinuclear movement in Russia is slowly but steadily making inroads against the formerly all-powerful nuclear industry and how residents of Sakhalin Island in the Russian Far East are demanding that Western oil companies follow Russian environmental law if they want to drill for oil in the Sea of Okhotsk. We see how NGOs that are successful at the local level gain confidence and start working in coalition with others at the regional and national level. And we find examples of FSU NGOs reaching out to international colleagues for help, especially when the issue at hand concerns international commercial interests and financial institutions.

Opportunities for NGOs in the FSU vary widely from country to country depending on local political conditions. Individuals and groups trying to work for social change under the totalitarian regimes of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are obviously limited in their ability to use the law or the political system. However, as our authors suggest, even in such countries, educating people about their rights and giving them access to information can serve as essential first steps to citizen action. Thus, although Belarusians may not be able to take government officials to court, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions has been able to set up legal centers to train its membership and the Minsk Consumers Union maintains a hotline that dispenses legal advice.

The current political and economic instability in Russia and its potential fallout in other countries of the region is bound to slow the rate of NGO development. Nevertheless, NGO activity will continue to be effective because it is rooted in the concrete problems of local communities and produces demonstrable results. In that way, it inspires belief in the power of personal initiative, keeps alive the hope of reform and creates a base upon which more open and responsible societies can be built in the future.



Eliza K. Klose
Editor in Chief

To the Editor:

Congratulations on your new publication, *Give & Take*. I think your recent refocus is quite timely and appropriate. Many of the questions and challenges raised and to be raised about civil society development in the FSU are actually applicable to other developing societies that also suffer from the lack or weakness of civil society and democracy.

In regard to your article “Western Assistance: A View From Azerbaijan,” let me draw your attention to a point that must have been taken into consideration when writing about NGOs in Azerbaijan. As you well know, Azerbaijan is the only republic among the newly independent republics of the FSU that is not allowed to receive American aid due to US sanction provided for in section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. It is only the private sector and NGOs, mostly on the side of the opposition, that can receive US support in Azerbaijan. This has naturally created extra tension and distrust between the Azerbaijani government and NGOs, a type of tension that is more severe than in other republics. My understanding is that the US sanction has played a negative role in NGO development and civil society building in Azerbaijan. It does not make sense to offer civic education and promote democratic ideas among members of NGOs, but to stop supporting them when they are empowered to join the governing organs. We are practically saying to Azeris that we will help you as long as you do not have any role in governing your country!

As you know, some NGOs and opposition groups are not necessarily of a more democratic nature than the government, nor are they all driven by real social causes. Some have simply found foreign aid enough of an incentive to create an “NGO” that can attract grants and foreign funds. Anyhow, this is a complicated subject and I am sure your new journal will provide a needed and open forum for further discussion and exchange of ideas and perspectives.

Dr. Nayereh Tohidi, UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, Los Angeles, CA

To the Editor:

Your letter of last July, introducing readers to *Give & Take*, included a hope that we will “like what [we] see.” It is my wish to respond with first impressions and a few serious and hopefully diplomatic comments.

I notice quite a change in reporting from *Surviving Together*, which featured a variety of topics and different, out-of-the-way places. Now we see a collection of reports on progress in civil society and the world of NGOs. Sorry to say, this one-target emphasis seems to have less appeal for me in the long run. You can’t have effective NGOs and a bankrupt economy at the same time.

The enclosed clipping [on the economic crisis in Russia] is but a sample of the kind of reports that are making the news every day, but you’d never know it from the pages of *Give & Take*. The only hint you provide reads, “USAID funds went to large contractors... distributed to only four firms.” This says to me that greedy American interests have insinuated themselves into the Russian economy to make a fast buck.

I have followed the fortunes of the Russian people ever since I was an idealistic supporter of the Young Communist League in High School in 1936. I have never wished them anything but success, despite all the “Red Scares” and cold wars over the years. It breaks my heart to hear what is happening from my penpals in Minsk and Moscow.

David R. Weaver, Visalia, CA

Editors: We designed Give & Take as a forum to explore topics related to the development of civil society, since the news generally available about the former Soviet countries often ignores this crucial element of transition. We don't, however, intend to portray the accomplishments of NGOs in isolation from the context in which they work, which includes financial crises, corruption and political instability. We have chosen to highlight and explore what has worked and why, in order to illuminate possibilities for change and encourage the replication of successful efforts.

NGOs Respond to the Financial Crisis

On September 18 a group of over 30 leading Moscow NGOs, including the No to Alcohol and Narcotics Foundation and the Agency for Social Information (ASI), convened a meeting for nonprofits to discuss the effects of the Russian financial crisis on NGOs. Participants at the meeting were concerned about the lack of government action on the freezing of nonprofit assets in state and commercial banks. While the Central Bank is taking measures to protect the accounts of private citizens, including offering compensation to individuals who lost their savings in failed banks, the problems of nonprofits and charities are being ignored. This is a particularly short-sighted Central Bank policy given that most of the assets of these groups are devoted to implementing programs for the disadvantaged, who have been hit hard by the crisis.

At the meeting, NGO leaders rallied the NGO community and laid plans to send a united appeal to the Presidential Administration, the Central Bank Committee and the leadership of commercial banks to take urgent action on this problem. The group sent out their appeal on October 8. They also plan to kick off a media campaign by publishing an open letter to Prime Minister Primakov in the Russian newspaper *Itogi*, in hopes of building public support for their cause. The group's polling shows that no NGO has yet folded because of the crisis, but several have had to scale back their programs dramatically.

For more information contact ASI at <asi@glasnet.ru>.

-Agency for Social Information

NGOs Support Law on Alternative Service

Across Russia, NGOs and concerned government officials are gearing up to fight for a new Russian law providing an alternative to military

service for Russia's youth. With wage arrears mounting and the instance of suicide among servicemen rising, the Committee of Soldiers Mothers and other groups have renewed their efforts to engage the government and the public in their push for military reform, organizing meetings, conferences and demonstrations throughout Russia. In a dramatic response to the problems plaguing Russia's military, the Soldier's Mothers of Voronezh held a funeral procession replete with icons and a Russian flag to commemorate the more than 1700 soldiers who have died in their region during peacetime. In a related story, Radio Free Europe reports that President Yeltsin has received an appeal from the Soldier's Mothers urging him to cancel the fall draft as a cost-cutting measure. The Committee suggested that revenues saved be used for the payment of servicemen's back wages.

New Grants Law Passed In Azerbaijan

In December 1997, a member of the Azerbaijani journalists' association "Yeni Nesil," in cooperation with a Parliament Deputy, wrote and submitted a law on grants to the Milli Majlis, Azerbaijan's Parliament. The law, later approved by President Aliev, was based in part on a Georgian grant law and is expected to improve the effectiveness of grant-making activities in Azerbaijan. Although the regulations have not been finalized, its authors say that the law will provide a legal basis for grant-making and certain beneficial tax exemptions for NGOs. While the Milli Majlis failed to act on a broader law that would simplify the registration process for NGOs, the passage of the grants law may signal an improvement in the climate for Azerbaijan's NGOs.

Ukraine's Legal NGOs Prove Powerful Environmental Advocates

by Susan Casey-Lefkowitz

UKRAINE INHERITED THE SAME DISASTROUS environmental legacy as the rest of the former Soviet Union. Air, water and land have been fouled by industrial pollution caused by overproduction and a general lack of concern for the environment. This pollution has led to serious health concerns, as seen in lowered life expectancies everywhere in the region. In Ukraine, every year 20 million tons of industrial waste goes into the atmosphere. More than one billion cubic meters of harmful substances flow into the rivers. These problems are compounded by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the health effects of which are being seen in the country's population.

As in other countries in the region, the solutions are not immediately obvious. Progress is hindered by the high costs exacted by economic reform, and

The legal system is a promising avenue for citizens seeking to make the high-sounding promises of democratic reform into reality.

environmental remediation and enforcement are not viewed as top priorities. The legal system is one promising avenue for citizens seeking to make the high-sounding promises of democratic reform into reality. But the

public is still looking for ways to participate in government decisions and to develop a culture centered on rights-based activism rather than protest.

Over the past six years, a movement of public interest legal advocacy has been growing in Ukraine to encourage and support citizens as they fight to make their country cleaner and healthier. The law is an important tool in the advocacy struggle to protect the environment. The few public interest environmental lawyers in each country in the region work in partnership with other citizen environmental organizations to make sure that citizens can use the existing governmental processes effectively, and to change them when they are not sufficient.

In 1992, a group of Ukrainian environmental lawyers founded **EcoPravo-Kyiv**, a public interest environmental law organization, followed closely in 1993 and 1994 by sister organizations in Lviv and Kharkiv. The EcoPravo organizations work to raise citizen awareness of their environmental rights and help them apply legal tools to environmental problems. Through the work of these organizations, both citizens and governmental institutions are realizing the benefits of transparent decisionmaking and working together to resolve conflicts.

Lessons Learned

The work of EcoPravo in Ukraine and other public interest environmental law organizations in the region provides a number of important lessons about environmental advocacy in transition countries.

Networks make for stronger advocacy: Most countries in Eastern Europe have only one or two environmental lawyers who are able to focus full-time on working with citizen groups. Ukraine has been unique in having an indigenous network of three public interest law organizations that support each other through an ongoing exchange of ideas. This has made the work of each more effective over time. With this network model, Ukrainian environmental lawyers have been instrumental in organizing a regional network of public interest environmental lawyers throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the NIS countries. The informal network evolved this summer into a regional association of environmental lawyers who are building their capacity to help each other with cases, strategies, and the exchange of information.

Education goes hand in hand with advocacy: With citizen environmental awareness at a very low level in Ukraine, even a strong network faces many hurdles in its efforts to help citizens understand the environmental dangers in their communities and what they can do about them. The Ukrainian government, including the judiciary, also suffers from a lack of environmental

awareness, compounded by corruption, especially in cases involving industrial facilities or developers. The public interest environmental law organizations work tirelessly with citizens in workshops and consultations, with government officials in training sessions, and with enforcement officials, such as police, prosecutors and judges, to raise understanding of environmental rights and the opportunities to preserve these rights. These efforts take many forms, from education of Parliament members about Western approaches to environmental management, to publishing and distributing Ukrainian environmental laws, which are otherwise unavailable to factory managers, local officials and citizens.

Improving access to information opens doors to citizens: Every citizen group throughout the region has encountered difficulties with getting necessary information in a timely and affordable manner from government officials. Over time, EcoPravo lawyers have used the existing system creatively to show that citizens have the right to access information held by the government and to push for clearer standards and procedures for accessing information in the future.

Clear environmental standards give citizens a baseline: Although environmental law exists in Ukraine, implementation and enforcement are weak. Ukrainian environmental regulations contain few clear emission level limitations and few requirements for monitoring and reporting of emissions information. This causes many difficulties in bringing citizen cases since organizations lack the resources necessary for adequate monitoring and technical analysis. For example, EcoPravo-Lviv has been involved in a case where the district drinking water supply is seriously contaminated with fluoride. As a result, thousands of children are suffering from tooth and bone disease. The EcoPravo lawyers have been working with mothers and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to identify the cause of this contamination. Because the community cannot afford to carry out adequate scientific analysis and the government has failed to monitor local industrial plants, this important case has foundered.

Litigation is the hammer in the advocacy struggle: Ukrainian public interest environmental lawyers understand that access to justice is necessary for preserving environmental rights when other mechanisms fail. The EcoPravo organizations regularly bring cases on behalf of citizen groups, usually to stop

harmful activities or require that the government adhere to the law or enforce the law. Last year, EcoPravo-Kharkiv won a precedent-setting victory in the High Arbitration Court requiring a regional government to abandon its illegal attempts to site a landfill. Asserting that the regional government had violated both the Land Code and public participation provisions of environmental law, EcoPravo was forced to go through a lengthy appeals process before finally receiving an unbiased hearing. The case was a major victory for EcoPravo's clients, a group of citizens who had fought the landfill.

Despite continuing difficulties and barriers, the public interest environmental law network in Ukraine has raised citizens' awareness of their environmental rights and has given citizens the capacity to do something about violations of these rights. The net results of their accomplishments are a higher citizen awareness of environmental rights, increased citizen participation in policymaking and improved access for citizens to environmental justice. Through their work, environmental law organizations are planting the seeds for future victories in the long, slow fight to improve human health and the environment in Ukraine. ●

*Susan Casey-Lefkowitz is a senior attorney at the **Environmental Law Institute.***

Ukrainian public interest environmental lawyers understand that access to justice is necessary for preserving environmental rights when other mechanisms fail.

Legal NGOs Empower Citizens In the Western Sector

by *Karin Krchnak*

REFORM OF THE LEGAL SYSTEMS OF THE former Soviet Union is a daunting challenge requiring the long-term effort of all stakeholders. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are a driving force in this process, helping to speed the establishment of a flexible, fair and effective judiciary. Since 1991, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, the Western Newly Independent States (NIS), have experienced an explosion of legal service organizations and other NGOs, which have become instrumental in increasing citizens' confidence in the political and legal processes and providing unbiased information to the public. These NGOs have learned to adapt to changing conditions, political instability and economic uncertainty in the countries in which they operate in order to help build a foundation for the rule of law.

Legal, Political and Socio-Economic Challenges

Once part of the Soviet Union, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova shared similar legal, political and socio-economic conditions. The common legal legacy of the Soviet Union continues to influence NGOs' standing and ability to challenge government bodies. Legal NGOs in the Western Sector still face problems of official corruption and the lack of human, financial and technical resources. However, since the fall of Communism less than a decade ago, striking differences have emerged between the three countries, particularly on the political level.

The November 1996 referendum on the Belarusian Constitution gave increased, some say dictatorial, powers to the current Belarusian President and the rule of law has since been under constant attack. Laws such as the Regulation on the Procedure of Issuance of Special Permits to Execute Activities of Distributing Legal Information keep groups from functioning effectively. NGO leaders are often questioned by authorities, and state security officials have tried to prevent legal NGOs from holding trainings.

Moldova, on the other hand, has taken positive steps in its transition to a democratic society. Free and

fair parliamentary elections held in March 1998 resulted in a center-right coalition with younger, more reform-minded leaders and an improved climate for NGOs.

Ukraine's diverse NGO sector has developed quickly, despite being affected by the country's strong shadow economy, rampant corruption, lack of coalition-building among political leaders and stalled privatization and economic reform. However, Ukrainian legislation does provide basic guidelines for NGOs.

The NGO Response

Legal NGOs have learned to adapt to the circumstances in which they work and have employed a variety of techniques to further their mission. Public education, pro bono representation and consultations to citizens and citizen groups are all ways in which NGOs not only help citizens to protect their rights, but also attempt to hold governments accountable for their decisions.

One public education program is taking place in Moldova, where the Young Lawyers' Association, with support from the **American Bar Association/Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI)** through funding from USAID, is producing a weekly radio program on legal issues in order to inform Moldovan citizens of their rights. The show features Moldovan attorneys discussing legal issues and responding to callers' questions. This program is unique in the former Soviet Union and, because of its popularity, negotiations are underway to produce a version for television.

In addition to raising awareness in the NGO community and the general public, legal NGOs in Ukraine have also been able to target the government and the private sector. CEELI has partnered with three environmental NGOs, Ecopravo-Lviv, Ecopravo-Kyiv and Ecopravo-Kharkiv, to create Environmental Public Advocacy Centers (EPACs). In May 1998, the EPACs hosted two seminars for prosecutors from the

NGOs are instrumental in increasing citizens' confidence in the political and legal processes and providing unbiased information to the public.

Khmelnitskiy and Kharkiv oblasts, where participants discussed the role of the prosecutor in environmental enforcement in the US and Ukraine and took part in a brainstorming exercise to identify problems facing them in their work and develop possible solutions. The prosecutors emphasized difficulties in the calculation of damages, as well as problems differentiating between administrative and criminal cases. The EPACs agreed to work with the prosecutors to develop legislative proposals to address some of the problems identified, particularly in the area of damage assessment techniques. Through these training programs, NGOs are forging closer working relations with government and becoming active participants in the legislative development process.

When working directly with the government is not a viable option for NGOs, they have made an effort to educate the general citizenry about their legal rights. In Belarus, the Brest Lawyers' Association, and more recently the newly-established Association of Women Lawyers of the Republic of Belarus, provide human rights training sessions for school children and general street law training programs aimed at giving practical information to citizens of all ages on the law, human rights and democratic principles. Many of the thousands of people participating in these programs have never before had the opportunity to engage in public discussion about constitutional and human rights. Moreover, the programs are educating the public on the valuable roles legal professionals play in a democratic society.

Belarusian legal NGOs are also trying to provide independent legal services to citizens and citizen groups. While Ukrainian and Moldovan NGOs have already been able to bring suits against their governments and have won some resounding legal victories, the Belarusian government controls advocate services, limiting citizen access to independent legal advice. The Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) is trying to counter this by developing Legal Centers. These Centers will provide advice to BKDP members on trade union activities, represent members before the courts, disseminate information and conduct training programs. With CEELI's assistance, the BKDP has already started the process of training

lawyers and union leaders on such issues as the legal guarantees of trade union activities, the rights and obligations of trade unions in concluding collective bargaining and tariff agreements and general labor law. Thanks to this training, legal NGOs have been able to address the public's lack of access to competent and independent legal services.

Conclusion

The fundamental tenet of the democratic system is that citizens are entitled to exercise their constitutional and legal rights. By educating the people of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine on ways to hold their governments accountable, legal NGOs in the region are

courtesy of ABA/CEELI



Members of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense participate in an EPAC meeting.

making a direct contribution to establishing the rule of law. If they can now find ways to work together, sharing what they have learned about dealing with post-Soviet attitudes and structures, they will become even more effective and increase the possibility for developing links between NGOs and the government and private sector. In so doing, legal service NGOs in the West NIS can have an important influence on the growth of democracy in the region. ●

Karin Krchnak is director of the Western NIS and the Environmental Law Programs for ABA/CEELI. The views expressed are those of the author and should not be attributed to ABA/CEELI.

Disabilities Activists Look to the Law

An interview with Brad Johnson

*Brad Johnson, director of the **Institute of World Affairs (IWA)**, has over 15 years experience in the field of disability rights. Johnson has used his law degree to advocate for the needs of disabled children in the US and internationally. In partnership with the Center for Independent Ecological Programs (CIEP) in Moscow, Johnson has worked with groups in the former Soviet Union (FSU) to increase their skills in evaluating and addressing the needs of disabled children. Working primarily in areas where disabilities have been caused by environmental degradation, Johnson and CIEP have brought together parents and policymakers to explore legislative options.*

In an interview with Give & Take's Amy Forster, Johnson explained some of the ways in which disabilities and environmental health NGOs in Russia are using the legal system to advance their work of providing education and care to children with disabilities and ensuring a safer environment for future generations.

How has the development of the Russian legal system affected the work of Russian environmental health and disabilities groups?

Legal reform has helped make the activities of NGOs more valuable and effective. There have been a number of US-sponsored initiatives going on in the background that have been helpful in this regard, such as the American Bar Association programs and the work of the Center for Communication, Health and the Environment (CECHE). There have been attempts to implement jury trials and to help private practitioners set up their offices, as well as numerous professional development activities, which provide a context for some of the work that IWA has done. You can see some semblance of appreciation for the rule of law, and for the ability to resolve disputes in ways that are predictable as opposed to the arbitrary and capricious nature of the old Soviet legal system.

Another development that I think has been useful is the fact that lots of major US law firms have set up in Russia. These US lawyers are bringing Russian lawyers into their firms, creating almost an expectation of legal reform.

The Soviet constitution and many of the regional Soviet laws were very good if you look at the black and white on the page. They provided for due process rights and freedoms, but obviously the problem was in the implementation and enforcement of the laws. I think that has been one of the most difficult things for the Russians and other people of the former Soviet Union. They have laws that say, for example, that disabled children have the same rights as nondisabled kids.

When a parent group goes and complains to a regional authority, he can just say, "well we have the law, what are you complaining about?" So it gets down to enforcement of the law.

What have FSU colleagues gained from looking at the American legal system?

In about 1991, we were sitting around talking about environmental laws and environmental health laws, and I remember that one of the things our former Soviet colleagues did not really grasp was how responsibility for a particular environmental health or disabilities problem is determined. You have a kid that needs to be educated in Nizhnii Novgorod. Who is responsible for doing it? Is it the city of Nizhnii Novgorod, the region, the national government? Once we explained to our colleagues that the power in this country resides in the States, and the only time the federal government gets involved is when they have explicit permission by the States to do so, they could understand the relationships that we were trying to explain. This was a concept that was very foreign to the Russians. When trying to solve environmental issues, environmental health issues and disability issues, you have to use a multifaceted problem-solving approach. You can't just rely on one agency or one entity to solve such complex problems.

One thing I think the Russians have taken away from our interaction with them is that when you're trying to develop laws affecting how children are habilitated and educated, you don't simply spell out "a kid with cerebral palsy gets this, a kid with mental retardation gets that." Instead, the approach in the US has been to look at process. Each case involves a process that is designed to provide an appropriate educational program or habilitation program for the child. The law

People are increasingly citing law as justification for what they want done.

doesn't dictate exactly what that program will be, but it dictates that there will be a process and that everyone will be able to participate in the process. It ensures that parents can do something if they are not happy with the decisions that are reached. And that's what a lot of our interlocutors over there have taken away from our programs: a real focus on process, on integrated approaches to decisionmaking, on how to provide a life and an education to kids with environmental health problems.

It seems that many of the groups in the FSU that do advocacy work also provide a lot of services directly.

I think that's right, and I think that's the way it used to be here, too. It was NGOs and parents who took care of kids with so-called disabilities before government got involved. In the late 60s-early 70s, I remember that in our high school we used to have one class that was just a hodge podge of kids with disabilities of various kinds; there was one classroom and they all went there. They were off to the side and no one paid any attention to them. And that is just not possible anymore. Schools have to provide appropriate education, which means that a kid who has the mental acuity to be in a regular classroom should be there, even if he has some kind of physical disability. The only services kids were getting in this country as late as the late 60s-early 70s were from their churches, the Cerebral Palsy Foundation and similar organizations.

So you think disability advocates in the FSU are at a stage in the process ...

Yes. But without NGOs you wouldn't get to where you need to go. Because they are the ones who do the advocacy. And parents too. But parents and NGOs are usually one and the same.

Have you seen instances of policymakers being willing to work with NGOs in thinking through the best way to address the needs of kids with disabilities now, given the difficult economic situation?

I think I saw it the most clearly in Petrozavodsk, because we were in a small community and local legislators were actively involved in the project. I don't know exactly what the status is now, but I know they were talking about a draft law on transportation issues, and several of the legislators took an active role in promoting it. I think there is a recognition in Russia that NGOs are not necessarily a bad thing. That's not

the case elsewhere. In fact, I've been involved in places like Sri Lanka, where NGOs are seen as Trojan horses and it's believed they are just doing the bidding of some other power. The same is true in Latin America, to a certain extent. In Russia, I get the sense that NGOs are a valuable segment of the political landscape, although sometimes they are seen as a thorn in the side of the political establishment.

Are parent groups in Russian cities getting the sense that they can use the legal system, that they can band together and do something through a process, as opposed to relying on personal connections to get what they need?

It depends. One of the things that CIEP has done, and I think they have done it very well, is to make the texts of laws available to groups all over the former Soviet Union. I think a lot of people never knew that these laws existed. People increasingly, at least in my experience, are citing legal precedent or laws as justification for what they want done.

On the other hand, when you are a parent, you will do whatever it takes to get services for your child. And it will probably be that way forever. Even today in this country, if someone has political clout and connections they may use the legal process, but they're also going to use their connections. So the question really is, to what extent are relevant laws starting to appear in various localities. And in my experience, the laws are appearing and people are interested. There was a big case in Northern Russia, about 500 miles from Petrozavodsk having to do with, if I'm remembering correctly, the closing of an institution. People in Petrozavodsk were following the case very closely. It wasn't as if the trial were next door, but people in Petrozavodsk were writing legal briefs. ●

NGO Lobbies for Improved Disabilities Legislation

The All-Russian Society of the Disabled (ARSD) is rallying disabilities NGOs to pressure the Russian government to honor the commitments it made to the disabled in the 1995 "Law on the Social Protection of the Disabled." The ARSD's involvement with this law goes back to 1989 when, in conjunction with the All-Russian Societies of the Blind and Deaf, it wrote a letter to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev requesting improved legislation for the disabled. A new disabilities law was approved by the Supreme Soviet in 1990, but when the Soviet Union collapsed, Russian disabilities activists had to start the process over again in the newly-formed Russian Duma. For four years, the ARSD and its allies lobbied legislators, forming working committees with Duma deputies to hammer out a disabilities bill. In 1995, after two vetoes by President Yeltsin, the Duma was finally able to marshal the two-thirds majority needed to sign the bill into law. As part of its continuing efforts to level the playing field for Russians with disabilities, the ARSD together with the Russian NGO Perspektiva and the US-based World Institute on Disability is planning to hold a conference in Novgorod to discuss disability advocacy and ways in which NGOs can push for the implementation of the "Law on the Social Protection of the Disabled."

Central Asia's NGOs Draft Environmental Legislation

One way in which Central Asian NGOs have been able to make their voice heard in the political process is by getting involved in environmental policymaking. One Central Asian NGO active in the legislative process is the Almaty-based Green Salvation. Familiar with Green Salvation's commitment to environmental protection, the Kazak government has invited Green Salvation to participate in developing draft environmental legislation. Through their participation in legislative working groups, Green Salvation was instrumental in the passage of the Law on Environmental Impact Assessments and the Law on Specially Protected Areas. Currently, Green Salvation serves on a working group to develop radiation safety law.

In Tajikistan, NGOs are also playing a role in environmental policymaking. More than twenty Tajik

NGOs have formed a coalition called the Citizen's Council on the Environment, which has been advising the Deputy Minister of the Environment on national environmental policy issues and pressuring the government to abide by international environmental conventions. The Council successfully lobbied for the passage of the 1996 environmental education law, an expansion of the Tigrovaya Balka Zapovednik and ratification of the Convention on the International Trafficking of Endangered Species. This spring, the Council and the Tajik government jointly planned a conference on the International Convention on Desertification, which resulted in the Convention and a law on social organizations being submitted by the Council for parliamentary review in the fall. ●

-Kate Watters, ISAR director of programs

Human Rights NGOs Encourage Legal Activism

As the rule of law becomes more established in Russia and citizens search for new ways to handle disputes that formerly would have been referred to Communist Party officials, legal approaches to resolving problems have become increasingly important. Human rights NGOs in Moscow as well as in Russia's regional cities are turning to the law to advance their causes. They are also trying to get young people interested in public service law.

The Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), one of Russia's oldest human rights organizations, has been particularly active in exploring ways of using the legal system to further the work of human rights NGOs. MHG's director Luda Alexeeva explained that the Russian human rights movement is now made up of a different set of people than during perestroika or the first years of Russia's independence, when the main activities of human rights NGOs were protests and public speeches. Alexeeva believes that citizens have recovered from the culture shock that characterized the period immediately after the breakup of the former Soviet Union, and human rights NGOs have developed an increased professionalism and a renewed commitment to their cause. Many regional activists have gone to law school, having seen the possibilities for addressing injustices through the legal system and the need to

develop a cadre of skilled lawyers outside Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Very few Russian lawyers do pro bono work, which limits the access of most citizens to the legal process. Therefore, legal advice has become a major new service that NGOs can provide. NGOs are also eager to involve young people in their work in order to encourage them to pursue public interest legal careers. Through these relationships, human rights organizations provide students with practical legal experience while gaining access to their legal skills. Law students also make their services available to the public through legal clinics.

MHG has 16 law students working with them in Moscow and has established a young lawyers' association with 100 members. Alexeeva explained that through this outreach the group is helping to educate a future generation of judges and prosecutors, who will take the place of today's Soviet-educated judiciary. MHG also encourages law students to use human rights cases for research projects and plans to work more intensively in law schools to broaden student understanding of legal issues relating to human rights as well as to encourage them to consider public service law as a career choice. ●

-Amy Forster, managing editor, *Give & Take*

Citizens have recovered from the culture shock that characterized the period immediately after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Russian NGO Promotes Women's Involvement in Politics

by Irina Efremova

THE RUSSIAN STATE IS OFFICIALLY MOVING along the road of reform, but the further it goes in this direction, the fewer women there are at all levels of political decisionmaking. The result has been a sharp drop in social expenditure and the growing inability of women to protect their interests. In fact, unofficial statistics indicate that while male unemployment rose by 574,000 between 1991-1996, female unemployment grew by 7.6 million. In response to disparities such as these, a group of women NGO and business leaders including Galina Karelova, then a member of the upper house of the Russian Parliament, founded the **Urals Association of Women (UAW)** in 1994 to create opportunities for women to participate in government and business, support women's associations in the Sverdlovsk Region and coordinate efforts to achieve genuine gender equality. One year later, the UAW endorsed Karelova's independent candidacy in 1995 elections to the State Duma, the lower house of the Parliament, in order to create a constructive dialogue between women's organizations and government agencies and champion the interests of women.

Karelova's long history of public service made her involvement in the UAW a natural step. She began her career as an activist for cooperative housing before becoming deputy chair of the Sverdlovsk Regional Council. Karelova went on to get elected to the Russian Federation Council, where she headed the Committee for Social Policy, which is responsible for areas such as pensions, health care, child care and education. Karelova's experience on the Committee helped prompt her to seek ways for the Third Sector and government agencies to work together to solve the serious social problems facing the country.

This emphasis on cooperation and encouraging women to take a leadership role in society underlies much of the UAW's work. The Association is involved in a range of projects from providing women with start-up capital for new businesses to involving women in the debate on military reform and helping prepare draft federal laws, primarily on social issues concerning families, veterans, retired people and education.

Karelova's campaign reflected her commitment to the social issues addressed by the UAW. The campaign was incredibly challenging - Karelova's 17 competitors, all of whom were male, had money, connections and support from the major parties and movements that nominated them. Karelova had political experience, faith in her platform and a strong team of hard-working, like-minded volunteers. She also felt a deep sense of responsibility to the voters, ordinary people tired of the political upheaval wrenching the country. The main points of Karelova's election platform were education issues, including a moratorium on the privatization of educational institutions and regular payment of salaries for educators at universities and colleges; reform of the pension system; and social security for women, families and children.

Participants in Karelova's campaign were proud that her candidacy represented an attempt to prove that money and connections need not be the deciding factors in an election. The Urals Association and Karelova herself spent a great deal of time working to educate voters, publishing the newspapers *Golos Nadezhdy* (Voice of Hope) and *Zhit, a Ne Vyzhit* (To Live, Not Simply Survive) and participating in numerous debates on social issues important to the UAW and Karelova's platform. The campaigners also arranged meetings with voters for Karelova and other members of the Urals Association. Members went door-to-door to generate interest in the UAW's and Karelova's work and to explain why it was important for voters to cast their ballots for the Association's candidate. The grassroots approach paid off, and Karelova and the UAW won the election, leaving her male competitors far behind.

Since the elections, Karelova has maintained her commitment to promoting dialogue between the government and the Third Sector and increasing the

Irina Efremova

UAW volunteers count votes.

participation of women in government. Because of her track record, Karelova was asked to assume the position of Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Development, and in this position she organized an all-Russian conference, "Women and Development: Rights, Reality and Perspectives," to discuss strategies for improving women's status in society and to emphasize the importance of partnership between NGOs and government structures. However, perhaps the biggest success of Galina Karelova and the UAW's campaign on her behalf is that it provides an example of the power of

women's leadership. There are distressingly few women in Russia today who are successful in politics, a fact which contributes to political apathy among women. Galina Karelova and the UAW are sending the clear message to Russian society that women can make a powerful political impact. ●

Irina Efremova is a Public Administration graduate student at the University of Delaware specializing in gender issues and civic education. In 1996-1997, Irina served as assistant to Duma Deputy Galina Karelova.

Armenian NGO Gets Out the Vote

by Gayane Ambardaryan

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL systems are still taking shape in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In Armenia, the one-party communist system was replaced by a multi-party system, but the Armenian people were ill-prepared for the change. The public has yet to demonstrate informed participation in elections, with people 45 and older instinctively voting for the

Communist party and younger voters having difficulty making any decisions at all. Schools in democratic societies are charged with teaching young people how a democracy functions and their duties as citizens, but currently no such political education exists in Armenia.

Recognizing the importance of informed public participation in elections and involving women in governance, the League of Women Voters was established in Armenia in 1996. With branches in all eleven regions of Armenia, the League draws women of all professions and ages and tries to ensure that its membership includes Armenia's ethnic minorities, such as the Greeks, Kurds and Ukrainians. The League works to assist in the development of a democratic society, foster dialogue between legislators and

voters and promote public participation among women. The League does not support or oppose any one candidate, but tries to ensure that the electoral process is free, fair and transparent.

In March 1997, a branch of the League of Women Voters was set up in the Shirakskii region, the largest

and most densely populated region in Armenia. The Shirakskii region, devastated by the earthquake in 1988 that killed over 25,000 people, has a low level of citizen participation in governance and elections. Many people, still living in railroad cars or in housing without utilities, have become apathetic in the face of poverty and a declining standard of living. About 50% of the population does not vote, citing distrust of the authorities and the election process and the belief that their vote does not make a difference. Political indifference is particularly apparent among women, and the Shirakskii region has no women legislators in its federal parliament or its city council.

The Shirakskii League was particularly active during Armenia's presidential elections, organizing 42 events, including meetings, debates, roundtables, seminars and public gatherings, in the course of one month. The League also implemented a program called Voting for the First Time, in which League members from the Shirakskii region's colleges and universities helped educate young voters. Using television, newspapers and radio, the League called upon these new voters to become active and responsible citizens and recognize the impact of their vote.

Members of the League put in 18-hour days, even as government election staff worked an eight-hour day. When asked by journalists to explain the frenetic activity and long work days, the staff answered that while government election employees are appointed to their positions, the League's members work only because they recognize the importance of their programs. This hard work paid off, and during the second round of the presidential election, public

courtesy of the Armenian Assembly of America

Earthquake damage in Shirakskii.

participation increased sharply. Members were able to reach people living in homes where apathy and uncertainty about the future reigned and get them out to polling locations. The League also engaged the region's other public organizations in a major collaborative effort and public knowledge of the League grew markedly following the elections.

Based on its experience in the presidential elections, the League designed a new program called Women in the Pre-election Process and during the district's elections for Parliament, the League will hold forums at which candidates will present their platforms. Each candidate will be given ten minutes in which to speak and the opportunity to answer four questions. By encouraging dialogue, the League hopes

to help the candidates understand that the point is not merely to be elected, but to implement their platforms once in office.

Armenians are a hard-working and intellectual people capable of creating a democratic society, but social change takes real effort. As Hegel said, each nation gets the government it deserves. By encouraging the public to become involved in their governance, the League of Women's Voters is helping to ensure a future for democracy in Armenia. ●

Gayane Ambardaryan is chair of the League of Women Voters of the Shirakskii region and head of the Russian Language Department at Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute.

Women's NGOs Speed Implementation of Beijing Platform

In 1995, the Ukrainian government delegation to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing signed the International Platform for Action, a commitment to take concrete measures to improve the lives of Ukrainian women and increase government cooperation with women's NGOs and charitable organizations. However, ratification of the agreement stalled in the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, and two years later, women's groups were still waiting for the government to take even the first steps towards fulfilling its obligations. In 1997, several women's groups decided to take action, and with the support of the Kyiv office of the NIS-US Women's Consortium, held a conference in Alushta, Ukraine, to put pressure on the government to implement the platform and broaden the NGO role in its proposed programs, such as information campaigns and women's employment projects. Several months later, the Verkhovna Rada approved a new National Plan of Action for the Platform, incorporating many of the suggestions from the Alushta conference.

As part of a series of directives to government ministries outlining women's programs to be implemented before the year 2000, the National Plan of Action stressed the necessity of "building local women's centers with the cooperation of NGOs." Several Kyiv women's groups, including the humanitarian group *Rozrada* (Consolation), the Women's Information-Consultation Center, the League of Women Voters 50/50, the Kyiv office of the NIS-US Women's Consortium, *Spadshina* (Heritage) and the Association of Women in Mass Media, decided to take the government up on their offer. The group's proposal

got a favorable response from Kyiv deputy city mayor Irina Holubeva and began to work with the city administration to set up the first of the Women's Centers, with the intention of duplicating the project in Ukraine's regional capitals. The NGOs and city officials agreed that the government would renovate a building for the Center and cover a portion of operational funds, and each of the women's groups would contribute a different resource or program, including psychological consultations from *Rozrada* and computer training from Women in Mass Media. The Center opened in August of this year, and in addition to providing a venue for government agencies and women's organizations to convene and implement their programs, it operates as a shelter for battered women.

While the goals of the women's NGOs and city officials were not always identical, negotiating these disagreements resulted in increased understanding on both sides. For example, the government initially questioned the importance of including a women's shelter in the Center, but the NGOs were able to educate city officials about the prevalence of domestic violence. When the Center opened, it was the city administration that assumed responsibility for running the shelter. The Center stands as an example of the power of NGOs to apply political pressure and the good that can come from NGO-government cooperation. As Olena Suslova from the Women's Information-Consultation Center said, "(The Women's Center) was a major precedent for the direct involvement of the state in women's issues. ... It gave both government and NGOs the opportunity to understand that we can and should find ways of cooperating." ●

-Rachel Griffiths, assistant editor, *Give & Take*

Strong Russian Antinuclear Movement Mobilizes Government and Public

by Vladimir Sliviyak

THE ANTINUCLEAR MOVEMENT THAT appeared in the Soviet Union after the Chernobyl accident was a strong mass movement involving millions of people in protests against nuclear power. While the movement wasn't able to put an end to the use of nuclear energy, between 1988 and 1992 it did close down more than 100 sites controlled by the Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom). During the last few years there have been several successful campaigns in Russia that have proved

that antinuclear groups are still working effectively. These groups and others like them that are challenging government policy, working with politicians and mobilizing the public to influence decision makers are a vital element in the construction of a new democratic society in Russia.

The character of the antinuclear movement in the Soviet successor states has changed since the early days of mass protest. Since 1991, the number of environmental activists has greatly decreased—from the millions that participated in demon-

strations at the end of the 1980s to the hundreds working against nuclear power today. Today's activists are much more professional and savvy, and have been able to use the legal system and apply political pressure in ways unimaginable in the early days of antinuclear

activism. The nuclear industry now confronts a team of knowledgeable campaigners, who have successfully worked on the international, national and local levels against the further development of nuclear technology. The story remains somewhat of a David and Goliath struggle: activists aren't able to raise the hundreds of millions of dollars that Minatom makes every year, in part because donors believe that the Russian nuclear industry and weapons complex don't pose a danger anymore. Nevertheless, by mobilizing public support, campaigners can put a great deal of pressure on elected officials, and, in some cases, they have prevailed upon local officials to work with them to ensure nuclear safety.

In November 1995, antinuclear activists in Kostroma, Russia organized a local referendum asking the public's opinion on a nuclear power plant scheduled to be constructed in the Kostroma region. The project was stopped when 87 percent of the people who voted in the referendum said no to nuclear technology. The activists were victorious despite the hundreds of thousands of dollars the nuclear industry spent on propaganda related to the referendum. One reason for their success was that the activists had started the educational process in Kostroma several years before, working out of their homes and covering the costs of telephone bills and other expenses themselves.

Antinuclear groups have also forced the government to abide by the rule of law and acknowledge existing legislation. In the summer and fall of 1996, antinuclear activists from the organization **ECODEFENSE!** began a campaign against nuclear transport in Kaliningrad, an area of Russia on the Baltic Sea. The Russian nuclear industry regularly transports radioactive materials to foreign countries using a sea route that includes Kaliningrad as a transit city, which is illegal according to several laws and the Russian Constitution. As a result of lobbying by "Ecodefenders" and the support of the mass media, a ship transporting

courtesy of the Nuclear Information Resource Center

Antinuclear demonstrators and police.

uranium hexafluoride was denied permission to enter Kaliningrad's port on July 30, 1996. After nuclear officials spent two weeks unsuccessfully attempting to reverse the decision, the ship left the harbor.

In September 1996, the nuclear industry filed a lawsuit against ECODEFENSE! and the main prosecutor responsible for marine transport ordered an investigation. The investigation showed that transit of radioactive materials through Kaliningrad did in fact violate several laws, and the lawsuit was rejected. The transport situation reconfirmed that federal authorities and the nuclear inspectorate remain weak in Russia, and that citizen groups are the only power able to force industries to respect federal legislation when it interferes with their commercial interests.

The nuclear industry lost about one million dollars over the course of the two weeks that the ship sat waiting for permission to enter the Kaliningrad sea port. But its troubles didn't end there—in the autumn of 1996 the Kaliningrad regional Duma (parliament) formed a special commission to develop a law on the protection of the population of Kaliningrad from radioactive pollution. The law will be heard by the parliament in 1998-99, and it is expected that it will be approved and will specifically forbid future transit of nuclear material in the region. Representatives of ECODEFENSE! sat on the parliamentary commission that drafted the legislation, a first for Kaliningrad NGOs.

Political pressure from activists also played a role in the dismissal of Russian Minister for Atomic Power Victor Mikhailov. Mikhailov was one of the strongest Russian politicians in the 1990s, having survived many political crises. Environmental groups had strong objections to Mikhailov, most recently over his support for the transport of spent nuclear fuel to Russia from Hungary for reprocessing. ECODEFENSE! and anti-nuclear groups in Chelyabinsk organized several actions in 1997 and spring 1998 against this transport, eventually winning the struggle. An article criticizing Mikhailov, written by antinuclear activists, was published in the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* two weeks before he was fired. The newspaper had strongly supported the Russian nuclear industry up until this time, and had never before published articles by activists or anything critical of the minister. When asked who could have pressured the government to fire

him, Mikhailov responded, "Minatom and the government always understand each other, but the public was always against Minatom." It's likely that the former minister is right—through the article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and other actions, the public had made its concerns about Mikhailov known and thus were able to influence the Russian political situation.

These examples and others show that antinuclear groups have been effective in working against the illegal actions of the nuclear industry and at the same time have been able to work with politicians

to develop progressive environmental legislation. It is now impossible for the nuclear industry to ignore the antinuclear movement. But while the antinuclear movement has achieved much since the beginning of perestroika, and the nuclear weapons and reactor industries have weakened since the time of the Cold War, the former Soviet nuclear industry remains probably the strongest nuclear lobbyist in the world. Now, however, there are people responding to this challenge, and as a result, there is a growing chance that future generations will be able to avoid new Chernobyls and Cold Wars. ●

Vladimir Sliviyak has been involved in the environmental/antinuclear movement in Russia since 1989. He is an international campaigner for the antinuclear campaign of the Socio-Ecological Union, and is on the Council of ECODEFENSE!. He also serves as a commissioner for the Kaliningrad regional Duma.

Antinuclear Activists Gather On the Kola Peninsula

In July, over 150 environmental activists gathered on Russia's Kola peninsula, near the Kola nuclear plant and the site of the proposed Kola mixed oxide reactor, to take part in the first Kola antinuclear camp. Organized by the Socio-Ecological Union in conjunction with the NGOs Gaia, ECODEFENSE! and Utopia, the camp attracted antinuclear activists from around the globe. Participants in the two-week camp divided their time between trainings on protest techniques, workshops with lawyers on antinuclear legislation and a public education campaign aimed at involving residents of the Kola peninsula in the fight against nuclear power. The camp was covered by Russian and international media, including BBC, ITAR-TASS and NTV. Vladimir Sliviyak, the camp coordinator, commented, "The camp fulfilled its mission. We were able to interest the press and call attention to the Kola plant, one of Russia's most isolated atomic energy facilities. This is another important step towards our goal of completely eliminating the use of atomic energy in Russia."

-ECODEFENSE!

Combining Legal Experience and Local Activism: NGOs and Sakhalin's Offshore Oil Development

by *BJ Chisholm*

FEW PEOPLE KNOW WHERE THE ISLAND OF Sakhalin is located and even the famous Russian author Anton Chekhov called it the "end of the world." However, the rich oil deposits, bountiful marine resources and complex geological and climatic conditions that characterize the island and its neighboring ocean, the Sea of Okhotsk, have made it a focal point for many differing interests since the region was opened to foreign investment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian government, a number of transnational oil companies and the international financial institutions that fund development projects are eager to explore the possibilities for offshore oil while Russian and Western environmentalists seek to ensure that any development of the region is carried out in a legal and sustainable manner. Since the region is highly seismic and the ocean freezes over half of the

year, oil drilling may pose serious threats to Sakhalin's rich and pristine marine ecosystem. The effort to bring these concerns to local, national and international attention has galvanized a coalition that demonstrates one way that Russian NGOs are using the legal system to address environmental issues.

Offshore Oil Development

The Russian government opened Sakhalin's offshore oil reserves to foreign investors in 1991. Although a number of oil fields are slated for development, to date only two consortia of oil companies have signed agreements with the Russian Federation for offshore oil development.

This has resulted in the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 projects. Sakhalin-1, which began exploratory drilling in 1997, is being implemented by a consortium made up of Exxon-Neftgas, Sakhalin Oil Development Corporation, Russian partners Rosneft and Sakhalinmorneftegas and a group of Japanese firms. The Sakhalin-2 project is being carried out by Sakhalin Energy Investment Company (SEIC), which includes two US companies, Marathon and McDermott; Royal Dutch Shell; and the Japanese firms, Mitsui and Mitsubishi. The two projects plan to develop reserves estimated at over 3 billion barrels of oil and 29 trillion cubic feet of gas.

NGOs Join Forces

Until late 1997, Sakhalin's NGO sector was the least active and experienced in the Russian Far East. A few scientists and individual environmentalists had raised concerns about oil development's impact on the island's ecosystem at hearings held in 1991, but were unable to spark a real public discussion of the projects. In late 1997, a young NGO, **Sakhalin Environmental Watch**, began to address the issue anew. The Watch's mission is conservation of the island's biodiversity, specifically forest ecosystems; therefore, as the oil projects progressed, the organization began to inquire as to what impacts the projects would have on Sakhalin's wildlife, including rare bird and whale populations and abundant fisheries that form the basis for much of the island's economy. Unsuccessful attempts to obtain full information from the oil companies, international banks and federal agencies demonstrated to the Watch that they needed outside support. Responding to the offshore oil projects challenged the organization to tap new sources of expertise and develop new ways of organizing.

When Dmitry Lisitsin, director of the Watch, began to look for more experienced partners, one of the first organizations he found was the **Ecojuris Institute** in Moscow. Founded in 1991, Ecojuris Institute is the leading public interest environmental law organization in Russia. The group has taken on large, environmentally destructive projects such as the proposed Saint



Petersburg-Moscow high-speed railway and oil development in the Siberian Khanti-Mansisk region. Ecojuris' primary focus is the enforcement of environmental legislation, the environmental impact assessment process and ensuring citizen participation in project review. This summer, it won a landmark case in the Supreme Court against the Russian Forestry Service, which was trying to change the protected status of national forest land in order to sell logging permits. Ecojuris began monitoring the Sakhalin projects in 1995, when it learned that no environmental impact assessment (EIA) had yet been done, although the projects were slated to come on-line in the near future. Under Russian law, a project involving exploitation of any federal natural resource must submit an EIA for review by the federal State Committee on Environment and hold federal hearings.

The importance of Ecojuris' involvement became clear when, in 1997, three international financing institutions, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Japan Export-Import Bank and the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) were about to approve major loans to the Sakhalin-2 project. Ecojuris saw that the project had still not submitted an EIA for review nor held hearings as required by Russian law and bank environmental policy. Therefore, Ecojuris and several other Russian and international organizations wrote a letter to the directors of the EBRD, expressing their concerns, and as a result all three finance institutions decided to delay their loans. After the letter, Sakhalin Environmental Watch approached representatives of the oil consortia, asking for information on the anticipated impacts of the oil development projects. In response, the oil company, SEIC, distributed environmental materials to several local libraries around Sakhalin for public review and held local consultation sessions, which were attended by residents and representatives of the international banks. Subsequently, SEIC submitted documents to the State Committee on Environment, which reviewed them and approved the project. Each of the international financing institutions then approved \$116 million in credits for the first stage of Sakhalin-2.

In the summer of 1997, Sakhalin Environmental Watch opened a dialogue with representatives of the Sakhalin Environmental Committee, the local branch of the State Committee on Environment. Some Sakhalin committee members expressed their concern that little baseline research had been done to determine the current status of Sakhalin's wildlife and the potential adverse effects of oil development. These discussions raised further concerns about the inad-

equacy of the oil spill response plans of both Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 and the lack of calculation of the drilling's cumulative impacts. When representatives of several financing institutions interested in funding Sakhalin-2 visited the island in the fall of 1997 for the public consultations, Lisitsin and other local NGO representatives met with them to present their concerns. The questions raised by these organizations and by the residents of Sakhalin's northern villages, which will be most affected by Sakhalin-2, have done much to alert the public about the potential environmental impacts of the projects.

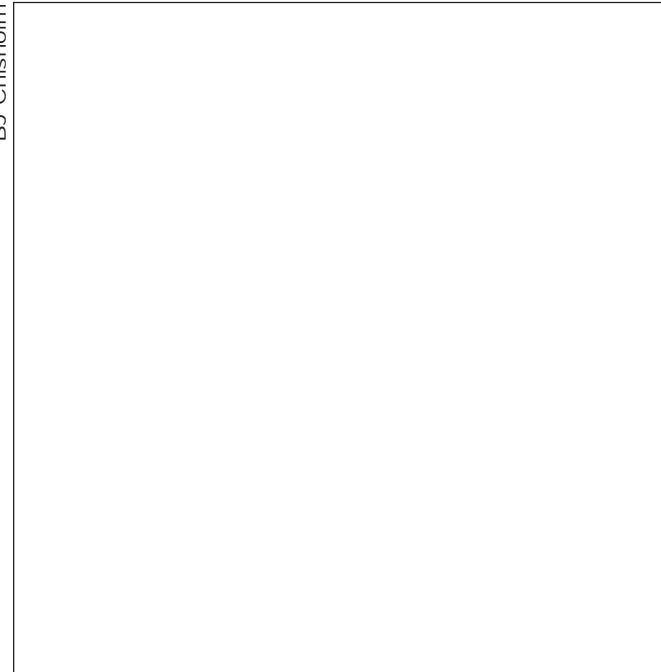
Developing a Joint Strategy

In December 1997, Sakhalin Environmental Watch and the US NGO Pacific Environment and Resources Center (PERC) sponsored a roundtable for the Sakhalin public on environmental issues and oil development. Vera Mischenko and Olga Yakovlevna of Ecojuris traveled to Sakhalin for the event, contributing to the debate and meeting with

local environmental protection officials. Even more importantly, the roundtable offered an opportunity for Ecojuris and Sakhalin Environmental Watch to share strategies and experience and coordinate their efforts. Ecojuris described its plans to focus on the legal issues related to the projects and push for national hearings; Sakhalin Environmental Watch offered to work locally to ensure that the regional government and international organizations working on Sakhalin pay attention to local opinions and concerns about the projects.

The Watch's efforts are concentrated on three principal areas. First, it tries to involve scientists—marine biology experts, fisheries specialists, oil engineers and others—from throughout the Russian Far East in reviewing the publicly accessible material on the projects. Ecojuris supplements this work with reviews from Moscow economic and environmental specialists. Secondly, the Watch, with help from organizations like PERC, Greenpeace and Earth Island Institute, contacts international experts on the environ-

BJ Chisholm



A workshop on government-NGO cooperation.

mental and social impacts of oil development. They publish this information and share it with the public by organizing roundtables and public forums around the island. The views of experts from Alaska have been particularly interesting for Sakhalin residents since Western oil companies and local officials often compare the potential role of oil development in Sakhalin to Alaska's oil-based economy.

Thirdly, the Watch has engaged the international financial institutions that support offshore oil development. In addition to participating in the public consultations on Sakhalin-2, they have begun to cooperate with international watchdog organizations such as Bank Watch and the Bank Information Center that monitor the international finance institutions. The Watch is in contact with the Sakhalin-2 funders, the EBRD, OPIC and Japan Ex-Im and the Dutch bank Amro, which has considered funding Sakhalin-1. The Watch has become a crucial link between the indigenous Nivkhi population in the northern region of Okha, which may be affected by Sakhalin-1 plans to store drilling discharge in an unlined pit near Nivkhi villages, and the Dutch bank, relaying information from villagers to the bank with the help of international

BJ Chisholm

Dimitry Lisitsin, director of the Sakhalin Environmental Watch.

environmental organizations.

Ecojuris, in the meantime, has been communicating with the federal agencies and institutions responsible for regulation of the Sakhalin projects. Much of this work would be impossible to undertake without a constant presence in Moscow. Ecojuris has, for instance, submitted several information requests and petitions to the State Committee on the Environment and to the Moscow office of SEIC. It has also sent the Committee detailed analyses of the violations it found in the EIA process and public participation requirements of Sakhalin-1 and -2.

Ecojuris works extensively with the Federal Duma committees concerned about the Sakhalin projects,

providing them with expert analysis when requested. To date, the Duma's attention has focused on two specific questions: the legality of the Production Sharing Agreement between the Russian Federation and the oil companies for development of the Sakhalin shelf and the degree to which environmental regulations are enforced by the State Committee on the Environment and its Sakhalin division. Ecojuris has also sought to bring the oil development issue to the attention of interested citizens throughout Russia, by urging them to request the right to review Sakhalin-2 documentation and participate in federal hearings.

In October 1998, Ecojuris held a press conference to call attention to recent developments in the Sakhalin projects. They wished to highlight, among other things, the fact that the chairman of the State Committee on Environment had, just days before, liquidated the Sakhalin branch of the Marine Inspection Agency. In 1997, this agency brought suit against Exxon's Russian partner in the Sakhalin-1 project, Rosneft-Sakhalinmorneftegaz, for the illegal discharge of oil and drilling muds from two drilling platforms. The agency won the suit at the local and appellate level, and then again in federal court with the help of Ecojuris. The former head of the Sakhalin Marine Inspection Agency participated in the Moscow press conference, and helped to emphasize the connection between legal issues and conservation of Sakhalin's marine resources. Also attending the conference were representatives of the national and international press, the Federal Duma, State Committee and environmental NGOs. Concurrently, the Watch and Greenpeace publicized similar issues on Sakhalin, emphasizing the great importance of protecting marine resources and developing alternative sources of energy.

Ecojuris' legal expertise and Sakhalin Environmental Watch's local activism have proven to be essential components of building a strategy to address the Sakhalin-1 and -2 projects. While each organization's concern with oil development is rooted in its own knowledge and experience, the two groups have successfully joined forces to implement an integrated approach to encouraging local participation and the protection of Sakhalin's environment. ●

BJ Chisholm, now the DC liaison for ISAR's Far East office, was the director of that office from its inception in 1993 until summer 1998. She is also enrolled at Howard University School of Law.

Saratov NGOs Combat Oil Giant

In 1997, with the support of the Saratov regional administration and in defiance of Russian environmental law, the Russian giant Lukoil began preliminary drilling in the Saratovskii Nature Preserve, a pristine tract of land set aside under federal law for the preservation of endangered species. Worried about the environmental impact of the project and aware that Lukoil had not received the approval of the Saratov Committee on Ecology as required under law, the Saratov branch of the Society for the Preservation of Russian Birds launched a campaign together with Greenpeace to stop the drilling. As a first step, they alerted the media and brought the matter to the attention of the State Committee on Ecology, which sent out a directive requiring an environmental impact

assessment of the project. Upon receiving a negative assessment, Lukoil ignored repeated orders to stop the drilling and increased pressure on the Saratov oblast administration to support the project. The NGOs responded with a media blitz and a series of protests, and kept the State Committee on Ecology abreast of Lukoil's illegal actions. The situation heated up when the State Committee on Ecology froze Lukoil's financing for the project, but the drilling still did not stop. Currently, the matter is in the hands of the Saratovskii prosecutor's office, which has been ordered by the Attorney General to launch an investigation of the project. ●

-Greenpeace Russia

Consumer Groups Effective throughout FSU

NGOs defending consumer rights have flourished throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union, working effectively even in regions where other types of NGOs have met with government opposition. Consumer groups are educating the public about unsafe products and about their legal rights as consumers, as well as successfully getting unsafe products off the streets through consumer education, working with vendors and, when necessary, taking legal action. The groups are well networked, with ties to other FSU groups as well as to European and international networks.

In Belarus, the Minsk Consumers Union fills a need the government has been unable to address. According to the director of the Union, there is no governmental body to educate consumers about their rights, and no government funding to support such education. With funding from the Eurasia Foundation, the group maintains a hotline through which consumers can obtain legal advice. They also produce a weekly newspaper insert.

Azerbaijan's **Independent Consumers Union (ICU)** has 23 branches working throughout the country to educate the public about dangerous goods and services. Visitors to the Consumer Union's Baku office are greeted by a dramatic display of poisonous products from the streets of Baku. Eyub Guseynov, director of the ICU, explains that the Union has successfully rid the streets of Baku of these products,

and is now monitoring vendors to ensure that the products do not reappear. The Union also maintains a hotline that provides consumers with product information and legal advice and is assembling a database on product quality. They plan to establish their own laboratory for product testing in order to more easily spot tainted products.

More than 200 citizens have come to the ICU for help when their rights have been violated. In most cases the Union has been successful in obtaining a response to these grievances, usually by working with vendors or government agencies. However, legal action is also a weapon in their arsenal; the Independent Consumers Union brought to court the first consumer rights case in Azerbaijan's history.

The Azerbaijan Consumers Union has cooperated with the **Consumers Union of Georgia (CUG)**, an active NGO that unites seven independent regional Georgian consumer organizations. In addition to supporting the regional groups, CUG educates consumers about their rights and lobbies for improved consumer protection and enforcement measures. CUG members are currently advocating for the improvement of the Georgian law on consumer protection, in cooperation with the Georgian Parliamentary Commission for Consumer Protection, the Anti-Monopoly State Committee and a Belgian consumer rights organization. ●

-Amy Forster, managing editor, *Give & Take*

Consumer groups are successfully getting unsafe products off the streets through consumer education and, when necessary, legal action.

Community Foundation Established in Georgia

On September 25, the community-based organization (CBO) Varketili founded "Genius Loci," the first community foundation in Georgia. The aim of the new foundation is to support CBO activities through small grants and to develop educational programs to strengthen community activities. The first grant round will be announced at the end of this year, to be followed by the introduction of low or interest-free loans to NGOs. The foundation's programs will be supported by the income from newly established business ventures, established with the help of the US and European Union.

For more information, contact Society Varketili, Varketili III, Kindergarten Building, #181, Tbilisi, Georgia; ph: (995 32) 73-38-06.

-Georgia's NGO Sector News

Mediation Introduced in Ukrainian Courts

The Ukrainian Mediation Group (UMG), a network of seven conflict resolution centers in Ukraine, has partnered with the Search for Common Ground to introduce alternative dispute resolution in Odessa and Donetsk courts. The process started when UMG began inviting judges to UMG mediation trainings and educating them about Ukraine's alternative dispute resolution resources. Impressed by the caliber of UMG mediators and eager to clear overburdened dockets, judges in Donetsk and Odessa began referring cases to the UMG. Based on the success of these mediations, Odessa and Donetsk judges are now planning to work with UMG to draft legislation on integrating the mediation process into Ukraine's legal system. The partners' other programs include a mediator training and certification program, a program aimed at reducing ethnic friction in Crimea and a project promoting innovative conflict resolution in Ukraine's high schools.

For more information, contact Gillian Huebner at Search for Common Ground at 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009;

ph: (202) 265-4300; fax: (202) 232-6718; e-mail: <ghuebner@sfcg.org>.

NGOs Take On International Financial Institutions

As the media grows rife with stories about international financial crises sweeping across Russia and the world, it is clear that Russia's future is being influenced to a large degree by foreign finance institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and other public and private international financial institutions (IFIs). These IFIs are particularly active in financing potentially damaging foreign joint venture projects in the mining, oil and gas and forestry sectors. Considering the difficulties that NGOs in the former Soviet Union encounter in working with their own governments, trying to influence IFIs in distant power centers such as Washington or London seems far-fetched. But that is exactly what a few environmental groups have begun to do.

Through an effort coordinated with international environmental groups including the Pacific Environment and Resources Center (PERC), NGOs in the FSU are learning how IFIs operate, how they affect economic development and where pressure points exist to leverage progressive change. As a result of this engagement, a proposed mine that would have harmed the Volcanoes of Kamchatka, a World Heritage Site, did not obtain international financing. Lessons from a deadly cyanide spill in Kyrgyzstan may result in improved safety for IFI-backed mines. These victories are setting precedents for future IFI-backed projects in the FSU. Having initially directed their advocacy campaigns only at companies or governments, environmental groups are now adding an important "third leg" to their strategy by attempting to influence IFI's.

For more information, contact Douglas Norlen at PERC by phone at (202) 785-8700, by fax at (202) 785-8701 or by e-mail at <dnorlen@igc.apc.org>.

-Douglas Norlen, PERC public policy advisor

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Can't make a long-term commitment at this point? Turn the page to find out more about subscribing to Give & Take and joining ISAR's annual membership program.

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