



ISAR IN FOCUS

Initiative for Social Action and Renewal *in Eurasia*

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Local NGO Registration – Laudable Goal, Difficult Path

One of ISAR's greatest success stories involves an organization that is no longer officially a part of ISAR. Horizonti, the Foundation for the Third Sector in Georgia, was created from what was once ISAR-Georgia in 1997. Like other ISAR field offices, Horizonti strengthens the local NGO sector by distributing grants and providing consultations, trainings, and workshops. Horizonti receives most of its funding from USAID and the US Department of State, but because it is registered with the Georgian government as a *Georgian* NGO, it can receive funds from European institutions that would not normally fund a US-based NGO. Other US funders such as National Endowment for Democracy and the Eurasia Foundation are also more likely to fund locally registered NGOs. Local registration indicates that an organization, even if it began as a branch office of a US NGO, has made the transition to sustainable local ownership—a key goal of many civil society development programs, including ISAR's.

Horizonti is not an easy model to emulate. Georgia has provided a welcoming environment for NGOs and has maintained a positive relationship with Horizonti and its international donors. ISAR-Georgia, from 1993-1997, cultivated close ties with the Georgian government and contributed significantly to the content of Georgia's NGO registration law. Registration may not be so easy in other countries where ISAR works. Azerbaijan, Georgia's neighbor, has effectively frozen the registration of new indigenous NGOs in what is a de facto closing of the Third Sector to new participants.

Of the 41 NGOs ISAR-Azerbaijan helped register last year, 19 have had their registration rejected, 12 are still waiting for notification, and 10 were too discouraged to submit their documentation. This dismal record serves as a caution to ISAR-Azerbaijan as it weighs the merits of registering locally. Local registration is important for any NGO that seeks to open a bank account and receive the legal protections that most former Soviet states technically provide to indigenous NGOs. Some speculate that the Azerbaijani government's reluctance to register new NGOs dates from the early 1990s when quasi-political opposition organizations, frustrated by the lack of space in the political arena, began to register as NGOs. Given this context, Azerbaijani NGOs have had little input into the content of NGO law.

Despite this difficult environment, ISAR-Azerbaijan may yet take the legal steps to register as a local NGO. ISAR has operated in Baku since 1995 and has a knowledgeable local staff that is increasingly able to raise its own funds and design and implement its own projects. ISAR-Azerbaijan has reason to be hopeful for the future: the Azerbaijani parliament is said to be considering the final draft of a new NGO registration law. We can only hope that the government will properly implement its new law.

International organizations, like ISAR, have certain perceived privileges and can sometimes operate in environments that are difficult for locally registered NGOs. For instance, international organizations are less likely to be subject to arbitrary tax inspections. However, the key to a sustainable civil society is to give local NGOs an opportunity to create a vibrant indigenous NGO sector and, eventually, open the way to local ownership. To the extent local circumstances allow, ISAR-Azerbaijan hopes to do just that, by following the inspiring example that Horizonti set five years ago.

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ISAR Mission Statement

ISAR's mission is to strengthen the ability of citizens and social change organizations in Eurasia and their colleagues in the US to influence decision-making, advance social justice and promote environmentally sound stewardship of the earth and its resources.

Founded in 1983, ISAR is a nongovernmental organization that operates as an international association of NGOs. Our nine members (see above) work together to build civil society, protect the environment and support local NGOs. We share common values, including a belief in transparency, cooperation and mutual respect. These values guide ISAR members as we choose appropriate strategies to address the needs of the diverse communities we serve. ISAR is funded by public and private sources.

Become a Member of ISAR!

Your tax-deductible membership of \$35 (\$50 for organizations) supports ISAR's programs and entitles you to one year of ISAR's quarterly publications, *Give & Take: A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia* and *ISAR in Focus*. For more information, contact the membership coordinator at membership@isar.org or visit www.isar.org.

Nuclear Safety NGOs Share Strategies, Make Allies

In the Black Sea resort town of Gelendzhik, between Pitsunda pine forests and the sea, ISAR recently held the fifth in a series of conferences designed to unite nuclear safety activists from regions across Russia facing nuclear hazards. These seminars, funded by the Ploughshares and W. Alton Jones Foundations, have taken place in Krasnoyarsk, Saratov, Murmansk, and Novosibirsk—all communities with a vested interest in keeping their cities safe and secure from growing nuclear threats, whether from aging power plants or the cross-country transport of highly radioactive waste materials.

The Gelendzhik conference was facilitated by Vladimir Yakimets and Larisa Nikovekaya, two experts on organizational development and conflict resolution in Russia and veteran ISAR collaborators. Mila Bogdan and Oksana Strashnenko of ISAR-Moscow tailored the three-day conference for NGOs working in Southern Russia and the Caucasus, a region where collaborations among nuclear safety organizations have not been historically strong. The fifteen participating NGOs discussed principles of conflict resolution, with the goal of improving NGO alliances and encouraging successful working relationships with business, government, and the media.

Sergei Pashenko, a trained physicist with many years of experience leading public monitoring groups in the city of Novosibirsk, spoke about the scientific aspects of data-gathering, how to obtain Geiger counters and other equipment in a cost-effective manner, and how to make technical data accessible to a general audience. The enthusiasm generated by Sergei's presentation led participants to discuss the formation of a Southern Monitoring Alliance that could share data and collaborate on public information campaigns.

Other speakers included Ivan Blokhov of Greenpeace-Moscow, who covered the legal aspects of monitoring, and Olga Deryabina of Ecologia, who offered background on Agenda 21 and its implications for citizen involvement in decisions about environmental issues.

According to Alice Hengesbach, ISAR's Russia Program Officer, "There is no other regionally focused nuclear program that brings together all the sectors and supports dialogue among them. We give NGOs the tools to participate in decision-making processes."

For more information:

- **Ecologia:** <http://www.ecologia.org/nuclearcommunities/index.htm>
- **Greenpeace-Russia:** <http://www.greenpeace.ru/gpeace/>
- Read **Sergei Pashenko's** interview with *New Scientist*: <http://www.newscientist.com/opinion/opinterview.jsp?id=ns23551>

Women's Partnerships Bring Nuclear Safety Across Borders

During October, ISAR's Partnership and Exchange Program brought together a group of Russian and American nuclear safety experts to evaluate cooperative grants submitted by grassroots NGOs in Russia and the US. The projects were the fruit of an ongoing effort by ISAR to support collaborative and sustainable efforts by women in communities affected by the nuclear industry. All of the projects submitted for the grants program were exciting testimony to women's efforts to create cleaner, safer and more just communities. ISAR is pleased to present the two projects selected for funding.

Treatment for Radiophobia. Administered by Fannie Ball, founder and president of Scarborough Community Oak Ridge Empowerment (SCORE), and Tatyana Schoor, founder and director of Step Towards. Over a six-month period, beginning in November 2002, the partners plan to monitor the levels of radionuclides in the air, water, and soil in their hometowns of Ognjovo, Russia and Scarborough, Tennessee. With the information gathered, the women will conduct public awareness campaigns to inform their communities about local radiation hazards. Schoor and Ball believe that their work can counteract the stereotyping of activists, citizens, and environmentalists as "radiophobic" and bring legitimacy to the campaign for victims of radiation and environmental injustice. Assisting with this project will be scientist Nikolai Schoor from Siberia, public interest attorney Jacqueline Kittrell, and environmental researcher Michael Knapp from Tennessee.

Women, Populations, Health, and Radiation Safety. Administered by Cathie Sullivan, representative of Peace Action New Mexico, and Natalya Manzurova, Chairman of the Ozersk branch of the NGO Chernobyl Union of Radiation Victims. The partners will put together an exhibit on nuclear issues and arrange a seminar series in and around Chelyabinsk, Russia; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Paducah, Kentucky. The two women plan to partner further to produce a documentary film incorporating interviews with nuclear industry workers. Manzurova and Sullivan hope to encourage public participation in decision-making pertaining to nuclear issues, to promote the role of women in NGOs and social movements, and to provide accurate, independent information to help citizens reach well-informed opinions about past and continuing health, waste, and environmental costs of nuclear technology.

The grants program was sponsored by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. If you would like more information about either of these projects or would like to become involved, please contact program officer Lucy Roberts at lucy@isar.org or at (202) 387-3034.

A Village Takes to the Trenches: From the Frontline of Civil Society

What would it take to supply clean drinking water to 150 families in an impoverished village in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan? The price was small, but it was more than an unresponsive government could provide for the people of Kalday. For a full decade after the local, municipally managed well had stopped functioning, villagers would travel nearly two miles to draw water for their personal needs from an irrigation ditch—a scandalously poor water source, laced with pesticide runoff from farms upstream.

After ten years of getting by in these substandard conditions, local health was in ruin, with 60 percent of Kalday having fallen prey to hepatitis, tuberculosis, and a host of other diseases in some way attributable to the low quality of their water. It took an outbreak in 2001, mostly affecting local children, to motivate the people of Kalday to take action on their own behalf. Looking for a means of solving the problem on their own, the council of elders in the village approached a citizens' action group that had worked on a campaign to secure clean water in the nearby town of Nokat.

The citizens' group 21st Century Chernobyl Victims of Nokat was founded in 1998 to help veterans of the Chernobyl clean-up. Supported by ISAR with funds from USAID, 21st Century held meetings and consultations to find solutions to the problem. With this support, the people of Kalday mobilized to form a water committee. Men, women, and children literally took to the trenches to dig channels for the pipes and, within two months, every house in Kalday had been hooked up to the pipeline.

Tynybek Baitokov, an ISAR grant manager in Kyrgyzstan, notes that once the villagers had taken the initiative to begin the water project, the local government came through to provide three tons of cement for the construction.

Kalday provides an example of how citizens can be empowered to change their lives. All they need are resources—often more informational than financial—to get the job done themselves. Kalday's success has inspired other villages in Osh to take similar actions to improve water quality.

Editor's note: This story was featured as USAID's August 2002 "Success Story." To read their take on Kalday, visit http://www.usaid.gov/regions/europe_eurasia/car/successarchive/0208carsuccess.html.



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Environmental Ed Gets Interactive in Siberia

Last spring, ISAR-Siberia concluded its two-year program, funded by the Institute for Sustainable Communities and USAID, to support and develop environmental education in Siberia's regions. More than 300 educators and NGO leaders attended the 13 training seminars on "Using Interactive Methods in Environmental Education" held throughout Siberia. Six teaching manuals, inspired by the work of American naturalist Joseph Cornell, were developed by ISAR staff and participants. Teachers and students from regions across Siberia have benefitted from ISAR's training sessions and have started their own independent conservation and education projects. To learn more about the Environmental Education program, please visit us on the web at: <http://www.isar.org/isar/siberia/edu.htm>.

Welcome Miekal

ISAR-DC welcomes Miekal Erley as its new publications and outreach assistant. Miekal holds a BA in Russian Studies from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. Please contact her at miekal@isar.org with any comments or questions about this publication.

Standing Room Only for Central Asia Forum

ISAR proudly hosted a panel discussion on civil society in Central Asia at an October 29 forum at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Our distinguished panel of speakers included: Kent Hill, Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia at USAID; Pat Scheid, USA Program Coordinator for the Aga Khan Foundation; and Robert Kaiser, Associate Editor of The Washington Post and author of *Central Asia Diary*. The panelists seem to agree that long-term support for civil society is the best means we have for promoting security and democracy in the region. Read the full transcript at: <http://www.isar.org/isar/forum/hillforum.html>.

Good News on the Funding Front

ISAR has recently had good news from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The foundation has awarded ISAR a follow-on grant to extend its environmental small grants program in the Russian Far East another two years, until mid-2005.

ISAR-Belarus also received funding for its environmental grants program. This grant came from the Eurasia Foundation's Ukraine office.