

Internal OSI Discussion Note: Education and Open Society

To: National Foundation Boards

From: OSI's Education Support Programme (ESP)

Date: April 2008

Introduction

This note was prepared by the Education Support Programme (ESP). It draws on contributions of the 42 OSI education staff, representing 19 national foundations, who attended the National Foundations' Education meeting in Tunisia on the 29th February and 1st of March 2008. We would like to express sincere thanks to participants for their very helpful input and advice.

Education is essential for achieving and sustaining open societies; it is also a key means to creating and sustaining the demand for social change. This note suggests that OSI should aim for a tighter synergy between its work on the 'core' areas in OSI's mandate – free media, access to information, non-discrimination, access to justice, properly conducted elections and so on – and its work on education at pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Integrating comprehensive education reforms into national strategies, while utilizing ESP's resources for consolidation and global advocacy, will deepen OSI's role in enabling social transformation.

This note discusses five ways in which education can contribute to achieving open society goals in the current global context. We invite national foundation boards to contemplate the relevance of these five considerations as you develop national foundation strategies. We shall be happy to arrange for an ESP staff member or one of the other participants from the Tunisia meeting to present this note at a discussion of your board if you would consider this to be helpful.

The argument

Two basic questions present themselves in countries where OSI is engaged or considering engagement: What signifies an opportunity for achieving an open society? And what needs to be put in place to build and sustain momentum towards it? The urgency of these questions rests in the understanding that an open society is an achievable goal, not a merely utopian one.

Generally, OSI emphasizes the primacy of civil and political rights in the transition towards an open society. This typically incorporates a range of priorities that include strengthening the democratic process, promoting peace and justice, establishing the rule of law and human rights, ensuring open access to information, securing freedom of speech and free media, and so on. OSI has, in recent years, gone beyond the traditional civil and political rights framework to support good governance in a broader sense, including monitoring corruption and the utilization of national resources. For educationists, this raises questions about where education fits within these urgent priorities; and how the relationship between education and open society can be understood.

