



Fleeing violence after disputed presidential election results, over 10,000 Kikuyu seek refuge in a camp for internally displaced persons in Kenya, February 2008.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Global Struggle for Open Society

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IN THE EARLY years of the Open Society Institute and the Soros foundations network, in the 1980s and the 1990s, our main effort was to take advantage of moments of transition to help set formerly repressive countries on the path to becoming more open societies. In addition, starting in the mid-1990s with the launch of our programs in the United States, we made an effort to address some of the flaws of an open society. We achieved some successes and suffered some failures.

The largest and most obvious failure was the hardening repression in Russia that took place under Vladimir Putin. Today's Russia, of course, cannot be compared to the old Soviet Union. There are no counterparts today to the pervasive use of imprisonment to punish peaceful dissenters; even in Russia's restricted media environment, there is far greater diversity and freedom of expression than in Soviet times; Russians may now travel freely to other countries; today, victims of human rights abuses frequently are vindicated by the European Court of Human Rights. Still, Russia's failure to become a more open society must be counted as the most severe disappointment for the network.

In contrast, however, there have been significant successes. Ten countries where we established foundations have become members of the European Union. In several other countries, the Soros foundations have contributed to developments that make it legitimate and reasonable for these countries also to aspire to EU membership in the foreseeable future. Though the European Union is flawed, it is the best institutional guarantor in its own territory of peace, stability, economic progress, and adherence to open society principles and values that has developed internationally since the end of World War II.

As we approach the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the main focus of the Open Society Institute and the Soros foundations network has shifted. We operate worldwide and we see ourselves engaged in a global struggle for open society. That struggle involves global campaigns and global institutions; also, many times, issues arise in particular countries or regions that become the focus of intense activity by OSI both because of their intrinsic significance in their own locality and because of their global significance. Some aspects of the global struggle for open society are addressed by OSI through our own operating programs. In other cases, we rely primarily on grantmaking to other organizations.

Global Campaigns

Some of the global campaigns that we have conducted in recent years and that continue today seek to do the following:

- > advocate for increased government transparency, including implementation of national freedom of information laws
- > develop and strengthen international criminal tribunals holding accountable government officials and leaders of antigovernment forces principally responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide
- > promote transparency and accountability for the revenues that governments derive from the exploitation of natural resources

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- > ensure adequate international funding for the global effort to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria
- > promote a harm reduction approach to the problem of injecting drug use and minimize its impact in spreading HIV
- > make the findings of government-funded scientific and medical research available to all without burdensome financial costs
- > increase the availability of free legal representation to criminal defendants who cannot afford a lawyer and a related effort to reduce pretrial detention
- > protect freedom of the press by strengthening associations of journalists and media defense groups and by establishing a new organization to provide legal representation to journalists facing libel suits and other legal challenges

Global Institutions

Some of the global institutions that are a focus of our work are the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the International Criminal Court (ICC). A notable feature of these three institutions, all created during this decade, is that they are free-standing. Though the United Nations promoted the establishment of the Global Fund and the ICC, both are independent of the world body. The three institutions are innovative attempts to secure global cooperation in addressing critical

issues: the misuse of public funds, public health, and accountability for atrocious crimes. In the years ahead, it is possible that other such global institutions will emerge, such as an institution that fosters efforts to mitigate climate change and that assists those countries most severely affected.

In addition to our support for global institutions that address important parts of our agenda, the Open Society Institute and the Soros foundations network are attempting to enhance the ability of regional bodies to address issues of concern to us. One recent example is our leadership role in establishing the European Council on Foreign Relations. Its main purpose is to help ensure that the European Union develops and implements policies promoting the values of the EU in relations with other parts of the world, such as Russia and the Middle East.

OSI has been deeply concerned with efforts to strengthen African institutions focusing on human rights, African regional courts, and the role of the African Union in addressing electoral disputes such as those that arose in the early part of 2008 in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Also, we have supported efforts to make the Association of Southeast Asian Nations play a role in its region in protecting human rights; and we have supported organizations that litigate in the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights because of the important role played by those regional bodies.

Expanding Geographical Reach

Our geographical reach continues to expand. In the last couple of years, we have enlarged the territory served by the Open Society Initiative for East Africa, based in Nairobi, by developing

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programs in Uganda and Tanzania as well as Kenya. The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, now in its 11th year, has developed a substantial program focusing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in addition to its work in the nine countries with which it has been concerned since its inception. The Open Society Initiative for West Africa has substantially increased its engagement in Liberia and Sierra Leone with the emergence of democratic governments in those two war-ravaged countries.

All of these OSI-supported activities in Africa seek to help Africans establish democratic institutions and procedures that strengthen their ability to find solutions to the social, economic, and political problems that have hindered the development of open societies throughout the continent.

We have also established a regional office in Amman, Jordan, to support our expanding work in the Middle East. OSI has taken the lead in establishing an Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, in which we have been joined by donors from Arab countries, to support theater, film, photography, literature, music, and translation in the region. We now operate in some 10 countries of Asia in addition to the countries of Central Asia that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. Most recently, we developed programs in Nepal and expanded our activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Declining U.S. Role

An important factor in our global struggle for open society is the declining role of the United States. America remains the lone global

superpower mainly in its unmatched capacity to engage in conventional military combat. Having recognized this advantage, America's enemies, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, challenge the United States by means of what is now commonly described as asymmetric warfare in which the military might of the United States is substantially reduced through unconventional strategies and tactics. In economic terms, America's power has declined as the relative power of China and India, and the economic significance of energy-exporting countries, has risen. Most important for our purposes, the moral and political power of the United States has also declined as it has lost its reputation as a country where human rights are zealously protected.

The identification of the Open Society Institute as an American organization was a major advantage in our early years. That is no longer the case. While the influence of the United States remains a positive factor in the promotion of open society values at certain times and in certain places, it is now necessary to examine each case individually to assess America's impact. This new environment heightens the need to develop global and regional institutions that are committed to open society values and that are effective allies in the global struggle for open society.

The shift that has taken place in the work of OSI and the Soros foundations network reflects the changed circumstances in which we operate. While our goal of promoting the development of more open societies has remained constant, it is increasingly evident that achieving our goal depends not only on local developments but also on the global context. And so we continue the struggle for open society globally.

I want to note two particularly significant transitions in the staff of the Open Society Institute. After each serving with OSI for more than a decade, Gara LaMarche left in 2007 to become the president of the Atlantic Philanthropies and Mabel van Oranje left in mid-2008 to become chief executive officer of The Elders, a group of eminent individuals, convened by Nelson Mandela, Graca Machel, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to contribute their insight, independent leadership, and integrity to tackle some of the world's most challenging issues. As director of the U.S. Programs, Gara was central in making it possible for OSI to address such issues in the United States as the deficiencies in the country's criminal justice system, racial inequalities, and violations of civil liberties.

As director of international advocacy, Mabel played a comparable role in making it possible for OSI to engage in global campaigns.

OSI is fortunate to have enlisted Ann Beeson, previously associate legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union, to succeed Gara LaMarche. At this writing, we are engaged in a search for a successor for Mabel van Oranje.

We wish Gara and Mabel well in their new assignments and we are pleased that, in both cases, they have taken positions where we will be able to continue to collaborate closely with them in promoting the development of more open societies.

Aryeh Neier
May 2008