

# A year of change

The United States is still in the throes of the attacks of September 11, having suffered the most significant incursions on civil liberties in at least a generation. The war in Iraq, launched without sufficient debate, left the United States isolated from much of the world. Meanwhile, a steadily worsening economy is creating joblessness and deep cuts in safety net programs at precisely the time that philanthropic resources are also shrinking. Yet even in such a disturbing climate there can be successes that reinforce humane and progressive values, as these 2002 developments supported by the Open Society Institute show:



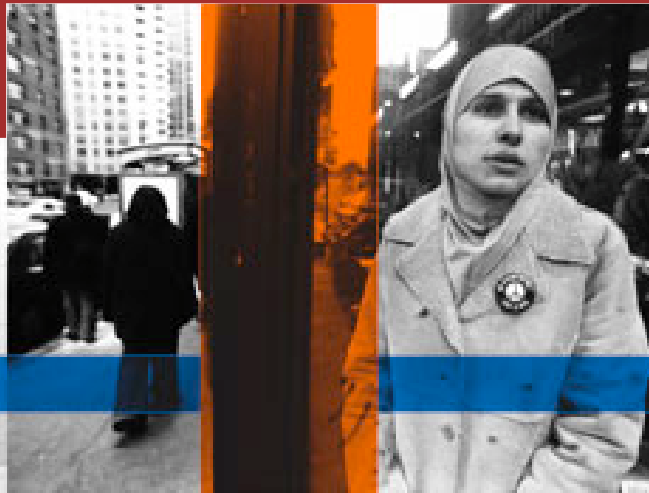
Passage of the bipartisan Campaign Reform Act demonstrates that there is public enthusiasm for reform and the political will to make it happen. While the Open Society Institute (OSI) continues to focus on broader reforms, including public campaign financing at the state level, the next test for the Campaign Reform Act is in the courts, where OSI-funded research will be critical in determining the constitutional parameters of reform.

Launch of The Baltimore Fund, a community development venture capital fund that will invest in growing companies in the Baltimore region and create 1,000 high-quality jobs for city residents. With an early \$5 million commitment from George Soros (in the form of a program-related investment), OSI-Baltimore raised another \$10 million from 14 foundations, banks, and universities, including \$5 million from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Increased access to emergency contraception through collaborative accords allows pharmacists to dispense the so-called morning-after pill without a doctor's prescription. The success of such measures has resulted in a near doubling of sales of Plan B, a dedicated emergency contraception product in which OSI is a principal investor. Recent research suggests that nearly half of the significant 11 percent decline in the U.S. abortion rate is attributable to increased use of emergency contraception—an extraordinary validation of our efforts to find common ground in the country's fractious abortion politics.

Illinois Governor George Ryan commuted 167 death sentences to life without parole and exonerated 4 innocent people on death row before the end of his term. OSI's Gideon Project has been the principal funder of research and advocacy that has begun to chip away at U.S. political and public support for the death penalty. The program supported the off-Broadway play *The Exonerated* and sent the cast to Chicago to perform for the governor as part of a conference for exonerees sponsored by the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law, which took the lead in forcing change in Illinois. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the death penalty in two cases, finally barring the execution of the mentally retarded.

North Carolina created the first-ever system of full public financing for judicial elections. This achievement marks a great step forward for the OSI-supported Justice at Stake Campaign, a partnership of national and state groups committed to fair and impartial courts that monitors and documents the insidious role of special interest money and partisan politics in judicial races in 38 states.



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It is particularly vital to highlight success and its ingredients as we gird up for more difficult times. For most of the period since 1996, when OSI's work in the United States began, our mission of advancing social and economic justice has been buttressed by an expanding economy. The vibrant network of state and local policy and organizing groups that OSI and other funders have helped to create and foster made a critical difference in pushing welfare devolution in more progressive directions in state after state. Now their stronger voice and bigger place at the table will have to be sustained and strengthened to deal with huge budget deficits that will hit the poor with great force even as the very richest among us are granted bigger tax cuts.

By the same token, the civil liberties crises we face are daunting—vastly increased government surveillance and detention powers, secret legal proceedings, and institutionalized discrimination against non-citizens. But the array of non-governmental organizations speaking out against these abuses, and fighting them in the courts and in the media, is stronger than it has ever been. And—in contrast to earlier periods of great strain for civil liberties, such as the World Wars and the McCarthy era—these organizations have been unflinching in their principled advocacy. OSI has been proud to support this work and will continue to do so. We need more partners in that effort.

The Open Society Institute underwent significant change in 2002. We launched an office in Washington, D.C., to increase our capacity to promote policies that protect civil liberties, foster more respectful global engagement by the United States, and promote fair globalization. In the years to come, we will move away from grantmaking in several areas and strengthen our work on the U.S. justice system, building on recent strides. But regardless of our shift in focus, we will always strive to be responsive to those who are fighting for justice and equality in a world that increasingly cries out for more of both.

Gara LaMarche  
OSI Vice President and Director of U.S. Programs  
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