

Open

Stories **2009**

Society

Open Society

“One of the essential characteristics of an open society is that all count equally and all should enjoy equal opportunities. Sometimes progress is frustratingly difficult. At other times we make substantial strides.”

–Aryeh Neier

30 Years and Counting

Thirty years ago George Soros began his philanthropic efforts in pursuit of open society by funding scholarships for black university students in South Africa and stipends for dissidents in Eastern Europe to study in the West. Today, the Open Society Institute operates in more than 70 countries supporting a wide range of activities to strengthen justice, human rights, and accountability. Our accomplishments over the past three decades are substantial.

We have helped establish the principles and practices of open society in more than 30 countries across the world, including places that have known only repressive, authoritarian rule for generations. The Open Society Institute has played a global leadership role in promoting freedom of information laws, which now exist in close to 90 countries and are increasingly used by civil society to make governments accountable and transparent to citizens.

Transparency is crucial to the issue of revenues that governments derive from the exploitation of natural resources such as oil. We have supported organizations working on revenue transparency and helped to launch new institutions, such as the Revenue Watch Institute, to expand efforts in this area. As a result, there is now a worldwide movement promoting transparency and accountability for natural resource revenues and advocating for using the money to benefit the public good.

Another movement OSI has helped build is the international human rights movement. Today we are a leading supporter of this movement, which, along with the international environmental movement, is one of the two largest, best organized, and most influential global citizens movements. To strengthen this effort, we have participated in developing the International Criminal Court, the first permanent court for prosecuting war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, and assisted the work of other international tribunals in Cambodia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the former Yugoslavia.

The Open Society Institute has led the way internationally in providing legal assistance to criminal defendants and reducing the arbitrary use of pretrial detention, often for long periods, of persons not represented by counsel. Recently, we have started promoting legal empowerment of the poor in civil matters, including support for paralegal programs.

Minorities are often the victims of unfair and ineffective legal systems. Mitigating the effects of such discrimination in law enforcement, education, health care, and other sectors of society is central to the Open Society Institute's work.

In the United States, we have focused on empowering minorities, including immigrants, whose lives have been affected by the discriminatory policies and practices of the criminal justice system and other government agencies. In Central and Eastern Europe, we have addressed the immediate harms and the long-term consequences of discrimination against

the Roma minority. In Russia, and also in Western European countries, we have focused on ethnic profiling and initiated efforts to secure legal remedies. In recent years, we have also monitored the problem of discrimination against Muslims in some Western European countries, and brought attention to the denial of citizenship or nationality to certain ethnic groups in African nations and elsewhere.

The Open Society Institute has engaged in a wide range of activities to mitigate discrimination, including support for education programs from early childhood to postgraduate training and access to health care for Roma; debate programs in schools attended by minorities throughout the world; and programs in the United States that assist immigrants in becoming citizens. We have created legal programs and directly engaged in precedent-setting litigation to challenge discriminatory practices; conducted training programs for local officials on governance of multiethnic communities; sponsored arts programs to promote cultural expression by minorities; supported minority media; and initiated economic development programs focused on minorities.

Problems associated with discrimination against minorities do not necessarily diminish when countries make transitions from repressive regimes to more open societies. Often there are more opportunities in relatively open societies for demagogues to exploit hostilities against minorities for their own political purposes. During a financial crisis and periods of uncertainty, vulnerable communities can be targeted as scapegoats.

Similar to our other priorities, diminishing discrimination against minorities is a long-term goal that the Open Society Institute is committed to pursuing in the knowledge that open society can only exist when everyone is treated equally.

2009 in Brief

In 2009, responding to the effect of the global recession on many foundations and nonprofit organizations, the Open Society Institute increased its funding commitments to make up for the budget shortfalls of important partners and to help people hurt by the economic crisis. Expenditures for the year were approximately \$636 million, up \$95 million from the previous year. OSI and the Soros foundations have given away over \$7 billion since 1979.

In a series of lectures at the Central European University in the fall of 2009, George Soros, the founder and chairman of the Open Society Institute, explained how his personal philosophy has brought him investment success and how it has informed his equally successful philanthropy (www.soros.org/soroslectures). Soros described himself as a risk taker in both his financial and philanthropic activities.

In his foundation work, Soros said, “the fact that I could do something positive to alleviate injustice increased my willingness to recognize and confront harsh realities.”

In 1989, Soros's foundations in Central Europe acted quickly as the Berlin Wall collapsed and communism began to crumble. The foundation network, expanding across Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, experienced both setbacks and substantial successes helping local populations and newly elected governments build open societies.

Today, the Open Society Institute still responds quickly when opportunities arise while adhering steadfastly to long-range goals. In 2009, we continued to take risks, knowing that we might win or lose but that the battle itself is always worth fighting. Many of the controversial positions OSI has championed over the years are becoming acceptable throughout the world.

In the area of health, for example, the U.S. government finally lifted its ban on needle exchange, an effective, proven approach to reducing the spread of HIV. OSI's campaign to increase access to essential medicines gained ground in Kenya and Uganda with major reforms in monitoring and distribution systems.

In justice, both New York and Baltimore in the United States initiated reforms in sentencing and parole that are reducing the number of people incarcerated for excessively long periods of time. OSI has helped develop legal cases against friends and family members of the president of Equatorial Guinea for diverting money from national oil revenues to purchase property and luxury goods for themselves.

In media and the arts, OSI launched websites to monitor the war crimes trials of Thomas Lubanga and Charles Taylor so that people in the region could follow the proceedings.

In governance and accountability, an OSI grantee's efforts helped Russia approve its first freedom of information law. Soros foundations in Eastern Europe succeeded in persuading the European Union to drop onerous visa requirements for neighboring countries.

In rights and equality, OSI's report on 11 cities in the European Union showed that Muslims were integrating in many places in Europe despite facing significant discrimination.

In education and youth, OSI joined other donors in committing 25.5 million euros for the Roma Education Fund. A parenting initiative developed by OSI's early childhood programs for Central Asia and Eastern Europe will be adopted by Head Start for the United States.

Open society has many meanings both personal and political, but its essential characteristics are few: the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and a diversity of opinions; democratically elected governments; and a civil society that helps keep government power in check. These are the values and goals behind all Open Society Institute activities, including the ones highlighted in the stories that follow.

Health

Throughout the world, people who face stigma and discrimination are often left with substandard or no health care. The Open Society Institute works to establish health policies and practices that are based on evidence and promote social inclusion, human rights, and justice.

United States Lifts Restrictions on Needle Exchange

The United States Congress and President Obama lifted a 21-year-old ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs for drug users. The effort to change U.S. approaches to harm reduction has been a long-time priority for many of OSI's public health grantees and partners. The lifting of restrictions will allow for national-level projects for needle exchange, long-regarded as one of the most effective ways of containing and preventing the spread of HIV. The lifting of the U.S. ban is also expected to increase acceptance and support for needle exchange internationally.

Campaign Increases Accessibility to Essential Medicines

In response to advocacy from the Open Society Initiative for East Africa and OSI Public Health Program grantees, the Kenyan government acknowledged widespread shortages in essential medicines and agreed to engage with civil society organizations to address the problem. Activists in Kenya—as well as in Malawi, Uganda, and Zambia—checked the availability of 10 essential medicines in public pharmacies and reported their findings using text messaging to immediately record stock-outs on a website. These efforts are part of a regional campaign to prompt African governments to take measures to increase access to essential medicines and include the participation of civil society in procurement oversight.

OSI Helps Improve and Sustain Global Fund Programs

OSI engaged with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to improve HIV-related services for people who use drugs, transgender populations, and men who have sex with men. A Public Health Program report on the poor quality of needles and syringes purchased with Global Fund monies in Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and Tajikistan prompted national organizations and UN agencies to replace substandard supplies with high quality needles and syringes. OSI worked with a coalition of activists in Russia to get a two-year, \$24 million extension of funding for needle exchange and HIV prevention programs. It also supported community-based organizations in seven South Asian countries to obtain a five-year, \$48 million grant to strengthen HIV-related services and advocacy for transgender people and men who have sex with men.

Armenian Government Recognizes Palliative Care

The Armenian government recognized the importance of palliative care by adding it to its official list of health care services. This move will help the health care system develop policies and services for compassionate end-of-life care that allows terminally ill people to die with dignity. OSI's International Palliative Care Initiative worked closely with the Soros foundation in Armenia and the Ministry of Health to promote palliative care, including funding two fellowships to Armenian physicians developing policies for the use of opioid analgesics to manage pain for people living with AIDS, cancer, or other life-limiting illnesses.



A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white floral-patterned shirt, looking thoughtfully to her left. She is in a social setting, possibly a bar or restaurant, with a blurred background showing other people and tables. The text is overlaid in the upper right portion of the image.

The Open Society Institute worked for access to HIV-related services for people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

People with Disabilities Gain Access to Health Care, Education

The Soros foundation in Montenegro supported the Association of Paraplegics' efforts to obtain equal access to health care for women with disabilities. Another grantee, the Association of Youth with Disabilities, developed a program to train high school teachers to work with students with disabilities and familiarize them with issues such as inclusive education and the human rights of people with disabilities. In Kyrgyzstan, the Association of Women with Disabilities made progress in obtaining access to education and public buildings, taking advantage of publicity from a film festival supported by OSI's Arts and Culture Network Program that highlighted the lives of people with disabilities.

Health Workers Help Slovakia's Roma Communities

Community organizing by a Roma health worker sponsored by OSI in the village of Spissky Stvrtok helped prompt the mayor to commit to building a community center and kindergarten. The health worker had impressed local authorities and gained the trust of the Roma community by teaching Roma children how to contact emergency services and helping the children organize community clean-up days three times a year. Public health efforts by Roma health workers in Spissky Stvrtok and other Roma communities in 2009 also contributed to significant improvements in water quality, child vaccination rates, and participation of youth in community activities.

Justice

The Open Society Institute furthers justice by supporting international tribunals, advocating on behalf of stateless people, and helping to institute national legal reforms that ensure freedom of information, promote sentencing alternatives, and protect the rights of criminal defendants.

Legal Cases Aim to Stop Oil Money Corruption in Equatorial Guinea

The Open Society Justice Initiative and two human rights NGOs prompted a Spanish court to begin investigating allegations of money laundering linked to the president of Equatorial Guinea. The complaint, filed with the assistance of the Justice Initiative, details how President Teodoro Obiang Nguema's relatives and cronies allegedly diverted money from national oil revenues to purchase real estate for themselves in Spain. Another complaint, filed with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, asserts that the Obiang government's squandering of Equatorial Guinea's natural resources has violated the rights of the people to benefit from the country's natural resource wealth.

New York State Passes Drug Sentencing Reforms

New York's 35-year-old Rockefeller drug laws that mandated long prison terms for even small amounts of illegal drugs finally gave way to reform efforts in 2009. The reforms limit harsh mandatory sentences, give judges greater discretion in using treatment as an alternative to incarceration, and expand drug treatment programs in the state. OSI promotes activities to end punitive and ineffective drug policies in the United States and globally.

European Court Takes "War on Terror" Torture Case

The European Court of Human Rights agreed to hear *El Masri v. Macedonia*, a case that seeks redress for Khaled El Masri, a German citizen seized by Macedonian security forces in 2003 and then held and tortured by the CIA in Kabul, Afghanistan, for four months. The Open Society Justice Initiative wrote to

the European Court arguing that the Macedonian government violated El Masri's rights by detaining him and handing him over to the CIA when they knew, or should have known, that he would be tortured. The European Court is El Masri's last resort since courts in both the United States and Macedonia have either rejected or stonewalled the case.

Mexican Law Students Overturn 20 Wrongful Convictions

A group of Mexican law students prompted the country's Supreme Court to order the release of 20 people wrongfully convicted for the massacre of 45 people in 1997. Working out of a legal clinic established by the Open Society Justice Initiative, the students conducted research that revealed the defendants were denied due process and lacked an adequate defense. The court's ruling touched upon core due process issues rarely dealt with in constitutional litigation in Mexico.

Court Rules Against Abuse of Suspects Extradited to Kazakhstan

The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, an OSI grantee, successfully brought a case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that reduces the risk of torture and abuse for those accused of crimes who are extradited to Kazakhstan. The court's ruling effectively imposes a moratorium on extraditions to Kazakhstan by any ECHR state parties unless the Kazakh government can provide credible assurances for the safety and fair treatment of the accused.

Peru's Fujimori Guilty of Human Rights Crimes

Belying the judicial system's reputation for corruption and inefficiency, a Peruvian court condemned former

President Alberto Fujimori to 25 years in prison for human rights violations committed during his presidency. He became the first democratically elected Latin American president found guilty of crimes against humanity. OSI's Latin America Program supported Peruvian organizations that built the case against Fujimori and U.S.-based groups that monitored the process and generated international pressure for justice.

Kyrgyzstan Reforms Legal Aid, Introduces Juries

The Kyrgyz Parliament passed laws guaranteeing free legal aid and introducing trial by jury. The Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan, with support from OSI and other groups, organized public discussions, seminars for judges, and study visits to other countries to promote the benefits of these concepts to the legal system. The foundation will follow up with a pilot legal aid program and support for implementing the jury system.

Reinvestment Strategy Reduces Incarceration in Baltimore

The Open Society Institute–Baltimore worked with the Maryland Parole Commission and the JFA Institute to increase Maryland's parole grant rate from 24 percent to over 40 percent, helping people return to their communities and reducing the costs of incarceration. Shorter incarceration periods resulting from an early parole and drug treatment program will work to reduce prison expenditures and ensure funds for community-based treatment and counseling. The Maryland Public Safety Compact, supported by OSI, is providing an initial group of 250 drug-dependent prisoners with six months of treatment. Upon completing the in-prison treatment, they receive early parole as long as they continue treatment upon release.

Media & Arts

A free, independent press and a dynamic arts sector are vital to any democracy, ensuring government accountability and a diversity of viewpoints. The Open Society Institute supports public access to knowledge, inclusion of minority voices in media, and the artistic expression of pressing social issues.



The Open Society Institute helped groups document government repression against journalists and activists in Kenya.



OSI Defends Journalists in Kenya and Uganda

With the International Criminal Court preparing to take over the investigation into the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, attacks against journalists, witnesses, and activists increased. The Open Society Initiative for East Africa supported human rights groups that documented the repression and provided information to the ICC. In Uganda, the East Africa foundation and OSI defended an outspoken journalist charged with sedition by the government after political rioting prompted a government crackdown that closed four radio stations and led to the arrest and torture of several journalists.

Documentaries Advance Open Society Issues

The Soros foundation in Armenia supported the production of *We Are Our Mountains* about the lives of the Yezidis, the country's largest ethnic minority, long marginalized from the larger society. The film *It's Our Money: Where's It Gone?* documents how an Open Society Initiative for East Africa grantee participated in the oversight of public funds in an effort to reduce corruption. A traveling film festival, supported by the Georgia foundation, offered people in the South Caucasus an opportunity to learn and discuss different viewpoints behind the conflicts in the region.

Films By and About Roma Win Awards

Me, My Gypsy Family & Woody Allen by young Roma filmmaker Laura Halilovic won numerous awards for the story of her family in a large, diverse Italian community. In Hungary, Csaba Farkas became the first Roma cinematographer to win a Golden Eye

prize for best cinematography while an episode of *Mundi Romani* on school segregation in Ukraine received a Best Visual Coverage Award. *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, broadcast on BBC World News, explored the reasons behind the wave of anti-Roma sentiment and attacks in Hungary.

Burmese Underground Journalists Receive Recognition

Footage of the 2007 uprising initiated by monks caught on film inside Burma by longstanding OSI grantee Democratic Voice of Burma was featured in the Academy Award–nominated documentary titled *BURMA VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*. After a police crackdown on these video journalists, OSI supported the training of more roving stringers, expanding the network of undercover reporters to more than 100 working inside the military-ruled country. The Democratic Voice of Burma created a small security fund to train journalists in risk-reduction techniques and assist detained and arrested journalists, as well as their families.

OSI Websites Monitor Lubanga and Taylor Trials

The Open Society Justice Initiative launched two websites to monitor the war crimes trials of Thomas Lubanga and Charles Taylor. Lubanga, the first person to be tried by the International Criminal Court, is accused of using child soldiers to fuel the Democratic Republic of the Congo's brutal conflict. Taylor, the former Liberian president, stands charged with numerous war crimes in the conflicts in Sierra Leone. The website coverage allows people in the region to follow the proceedings and participate in the commentary.

Governance & Accountability

A government accountable to its citizens is one of the cornerstones of an open society, helping to ensure fairness, economic equality, and civic participation.

The Open Society Institute works with governments and businesses to advance transparency, rule of law, and good governance.

OSI Responds to the Global Economic Crisis

George Soros and the Open Society Institute made a commitment to give \$100 million over two years to help communities in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union hardest hit by the global economic downturn. In the United States, Soros began a fund for poverty alleviation starting with \$50 million for efforts across the country and \$35 million in September for New York City children on public assistance for back-to-school supplies. OSI also funded coalitions in eight states for monitoring and advocacy activities to ensure that the U.S. economic stimulus package brings opportunity to all Americans.

Russia Gets First Freedom of Information Law

Russia's parliament approved the country's first-ever freedom of information law in 2009. The law is a validation of extensive research and public campaigns by the Institute for Information Freedom Development, an OSI grantee. The Open Society Institute has promoted freedom of information as crucial to good governance, helping to increase the number of countries with freedom of information laws to almost 90.

Coalition Acts against Buying Votes in Bulgaria

A coalition of more than 40 civic organizations, with assistance from OSI-Sofia, helped citizens become aware of voting corruption in Bulgaria's 2009 general and European Parliament elections. The coalition organized a campaign to inform voters how to avoid "trading" or selling their votes for cash to various political operatives and persuaded authorities to require that all election campaign materials carry

warnings that vote trading is a crime. Polls indicated that 12 percent of respondents said the campaign prompted them to go to the polls to counter possible vote-buying corruption.

Estonia Embraces and Exports e-Governance

The Open Estonia Foundation and the Estonian e-Governance Academy promoted a revised code of ethics for e-voting that strengthened voter security and privacy and prohibited political parties from offering computers for e-voting. In the year's local elections, 9.5 percent of votes were cast electronically. The academy, with the support of the Soros foundations in Estonia and Haiti, is helping encourage the development of e-governance in Haiti.

Azerbaijan Becomes First EITI Compliant Country

Azerbaijan achieved compliancy with the Extractive Industries and Transparency Initiative's criteria for transparency and accountability when the government agreed to establish a group of stakeholders from the oil industry, government, and civil society to oversee implementation of the country's EITI plan. The agreement resulted from the efforts of Azeri NGOs, Publish What You Pay, the Soros foundation in Azerbaijan, and the Revenue Watch Institute.

EU Begins Loosening Visa Restrictions for Eastern Europeans

The EU Commission lifted visa requirements for travelers from Serbia, as well as Macedonia and Montenegro. The cumbersome visa application process had stifled opportunities and openness, deterring many Serbians, particularly young people, from traveling to EU countries. The EU acted after Serbia met requirements for reducing corruption and organized crime and improving border control and migration policies. In Poland, the Soros foundation also continued its efforts to make the European Union more accessible for citizens from neighboring countries. The foundation in Kosovo supported a report that described the country's isolation from the European community, prompting leaders to request that the European Council drop onerous EU visa restrictions.

The Open Society Institute reported on the lives of Muslims in 11 European cities and found integration as well as discrimination.





Rights & Equality

The Open Society Institute advances human rights and equality in law, governance, and society through programs that emphasize the rights of minorities and raise public awareness of issues such as gender violence and the treatment of people with disabilities.

OSI Works to Eliminate Ethnic Profiling by Police in Europe

Two Open Society Justice Initiative reports showed that police in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom routinely profile by race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin when deciding whom to target for stops, searches, raids, and surveillance. In a case filed jointly by the Justice Initiative and Women's Link Worldwide, the United Nations Human Rights Committee declared that police identity checks motivated by race or ethnicity violate the international human right to nondiscrimination. The case involved Rosalind Williams, a naturalized Spanish citizen, who in 1993 was the only black person and the only individual on a crowded train platform stopped by the police for an identity check. OSI is working with law enforcement and other legal and human rights groups to develop policing and counterterrorism practices that do not rely on ethnic profiling, a discriminatory and ineffective practice that wastes police resources.

Most Muslims Are Integrating in European Cities, OSI Reports

Despite facing significant discrimination across Europe, a majority of Muslims surveyed feel integrated within the larger society and identify strongly with the city and country where they live. Many Muslims, however, believe that they are not seen by others as belonging to Europe. These are some of the key findings from a report on 11 cities in the European Union conducted by OSI's At Home in Europe project. The report, based on thousands of direct interviews and many focus groups, offers one of the first comprehensive surveys of everyday life for Muslim communities in Europe. Eleven city-specific reports will be released in 2010, with

positive examples of change and recommendations for addressing social inclusion in areas such as education, political participation, employment, health, and the media.

Native Americans Receive \$3.4 Billion Settlement in Land Trust Case

The U.S. federal government agreed in December 2009 to pay over \$3.4 billion to more than 300,000 Native Americans to settle a lawsuit claiming government mismanagement of Native American trust accounts. The circumstances of the case date back to the 19th century when Congress divided tribal lands into parcels and placed them into federally administered trust accounts. The lawsuit accused the government of mismanaging those accounts. OSI grantee the Native American Rights Fund served as cocounsel for the plaintiffs for 10 years. Once the settlement is approved by Congress and a federal district court, the government will create new trust funds worth \$3.4 billion and a higher education program for Native American youth worth \$60 million.

UN Responds to Sexual Violence in Countries Torn by Conflict

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as president of the UN Security Council, sponsored a resolution designed to implement UN directives against sexual violence in conflict-affected countries. The resolution, containing virtually all of the recommendations proposed by a group formed by OSI's International Women's Program, passed unanimously in the Security Council and gained another 60 UN member states as cosponsors.

Amended Election Law Improves Voting for Disabled, Elderly

After four years of advocacy by the Soros foundation in Poland, the government adopted an amendment to voting regulations that improved voting access for over 2 million disabled or elderly Polish citizens by allowing them to vote by proxy in local and presidential elections. Another amendment to the presidential elections act eliminated donations in cash or in kind from anonymous donors. Voter turnout in the 2009 European Parliament elections increased as a result of a campaign conducted by the Soros foundation and other NGOs.

Community Radio Promotes Women's Rights

The Women's Rehabilitation Centre, an OSI grantee in Nepal, is producing a weekly community radio program, *Our Voice for Equality, Radio Anabeshi*, to raise awareness on women's rights and disseminate information on preventing and responding to violence against women. The program includes survivors of violence telling their stories and advising listeners of their rights.

Communities in Baltimore Initiate Discussions on Race

To help cities like Baltimore that have been long marked by racial discrimination and segregation, the Open Society Institute–Baltimore launched Talking About Race, a year-long series of activities aimed at encouraging dialogue. All events in 2009—from film screenings to panel discussions to theater productions—drew standing room only crowds representative of the city's diversity and underscoring people's interest in dealing with how race affects their lives and communities.

Women of the Congo Speak Out

A three-day gathering in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, organized by OSI's International Women's Program and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, brought together women from across the country who are seeking to protect and promote women's rights. The gathering, which focused on sexual violence, peace and security, and women's political participation, provided a unique opportunity for the 65 civil society leaders and experts to discuss experiences and develop national action plans.

Migrant Workers in Jordan Assert Their Rights

A Jordanian legal group helped lawyers work with migrant workers in Jordan to assert their rights. The Tamkeen Center for Human Rights and Legal Aid focused on implementing existing reforms to improve conditions for Jordan's hundreds of thousands of migrant workers. With help from OSI, the center developed manuals and training courses to increase workers' access to legal resources and improve the ability of lawyers to enforce reforms. The center's legal aid unit successfully resolved dozens of cases by using either the courts or helping workers file simple complaints that were resolved by government agencies.

Education & Youth

The Open Society Institute's early childhood programs advance a holistic approach to teaching while its advocacy and debate initiatives strive to ensure that young people of different backgrounds have equal access to education and individual expression.

Academic Freedom and Knowledge Advance in Ukraine

The International Renaissance Foundation, working with OSI's Information Program and the Next Page foundation, supported the translation and publication of its 500th book in a project that since 1998 has sought to bridge the gap between Ukraine and Western Europe in knowledge about the humanities and social sciences. The translated books give Ukraine's intellectuals and civil society activists a strong base for promoting the values of democracy. The Ukrainian foundation also supported the efforts of a consortium of universities to obtain wider academic freedom, greater financial and institutional autonomy, and increased self-governance.

Head Start Learns from OSI's Early Childhood Programs

OSI and the International Step by Step Association are bringing a parenting initiative developed for Central Asia and Eastern Europe to the Head Start program in the United States. In 1994, Head Start helped OSI develop Step by Step, a program that has served millions of children in Eastern Europe. Now Head Start will use materials from OSI's Getting Ready for School Initiative to support parents from disadvantaged communities so they can prepare their children for the beginning of primary school.

Children's TV Show Reaches 95 Percent of Kyrgyz Kids

In Kyrgyzstan, where only 12 percent of children have access to early childhood education, an animated TV series supported by OSI, UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, and Kyrgyz National Television is watched by over 95 percent of the country's young children. The program *Keremet Koch* (Magic Journey), with its well-loved characters, prepares children for school through storytelling and problem solving, developing their creativity and teaching them about hygiene, nutrition, and ethnic tolerance.

Latvian Young People Form a Shadow Cabinet

The Soros foundation in Latvia supported a Youth Cabinet of Ministers, made up of politically engaged young people working with government ministers and their staff members on the country's socioeconomic crisis. The initiative sought to develop young leaders and stimulate youth participation in politics. The 17 young people in the Youth Cabinet contributed to the decision-making process by offering comments and ideas, monitored the work of the ministers, and informed the public through blogs and interviews. Youth Cabinet meetings were also broadcast live online.

OSI Commits Extra Funds for Roma Education

The Open Society Institute joined others at a donor conference in committing 25.5 million euros for the Roma Education Fund to provide Roma students with essential ingredients for success: scholarships, textbooks and educational materials, academic support, desegregation, and policy reform. The support will enable the fund to continue closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma children. Also, the Open Society Justice Initiative and the European Roma Rights Centre filed a complaint arguing that the Czech Republic had not complied with a 2007 European Court of Human Rights ruling that it segregated Roma children into schools for the mentally disabled.

New Libraries Help Build Community in Lebanon

A civil society organization prepared to open its fourth library in Beirut in 2009, creating a place to encourage a love for reading and bring the city's diverse communities together. ASSABIL (Friends of Public Libraries Association), a grantee of OSI's Arab Regional Office, operates municipal public libraries in Beirut and a network of libraries throughout Lebanon. The libraries are Beirut's first public library system and work as spaces where people not only get information, but also participate in cultural events and public debates on topics such as human rights and citizenship. In addition, ASSABIL operates two mobile libraries that bring books and information resources to refugee centers in Lebanon's most impoverished sections.

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Open Society

“In an open society,
people are free to hold
divergent opinions.
The rule of law allows
people with different
views and interests to
live together in peace.”

–George Soros

