



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

BAHAMAS—ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND FREEDOM OF PRESS MAY RECEIVE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

Subsequent to the submission of the Constitutional Review Commission's report to the Prime Minister, it is expected that the right of access to information and freedom of the press will receive constitutional protection. According to a news article published by [THE BAHAMA JOURNAL](#) on 27 March 2006, the report says that media organizations and other stakeholders have expressed deep concerns about the lack of legislation protecting access to information in the country.

HONDURAS—CONGRESS MEMBER INTRODUCES NEW “TRANSPARENCY BILL”

A member of Congress, Jorge Ramón Hernández Alcerro, has introduced a new “Transparency Bill.” A news article published by [IFEX](#) on 20 March 2006 states that the new bill vaguely distinguishes “restricted” information from “confidential” information and limits the exercise of freedom of expression, journalists' work and citizens' right to information. Civil society in Honduras has expressed deep concern over the introduction of the new bill in the Congress, because they believe it will not only delay discussion of the original “Transparency Law” bill, but will also confuse matters, to the detriment of the original proposal and the public.

MALDIVES—MEDIA REFORM PACKAGE INCLUDING DRAFT FOI BILL GOES TO PARLIAMENT

The government's media reform package was introduced in the People's Majlis (Parliament) in early March. According to a Ministry of Information and Arts [press release](#) issued on 28 February 2006, the media reform package includes; a Freedom of Press Bill, a Freedom of Information Bill, a Maldives Media Council Bill, a Bill on the Registration and Publication of Newspapers and Magazines, a Media Code of Ethics and a News Policy. The draft bills on freedom of media and information were finalized after months of extensive consultations involving major stakeholders and journalists.

NORWAY—GOVERNMENT PLANS TO LIMIT MEDIA OWNERSHIP TO SUPPORT FOI

Norway's government plans to tighten media ownership by reducing the current limit of 40 percent to 30 percent to curb growth opportunities at home for Norway's top media group, Schibsted. The proposal means that the group could not have more than a third of the total daily circulation of all newspapers, a third of total television viewers or a third of the total radio audience. A news article published by [Media Channel](#) on 24 March 2006 suggests that the new limit will prevent any media outlets from becoming so concentrated in a few hands that freedom of information and expression are weakened, according to the Culture Minister.

SIERRA LEONE—CIVIL SOCIETY PREPARES FOI BILL

Civil society in Sierra Leone has drafted a Freedom of Information bill, according to a news article published by [AWARENESS TIMES](#) on 3 March 2006. The main objective



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

of the bill is to initiate and strengthen an open society, and it seeks to ensure that the government share and disclose relevant information to the public. The Society for Democratic Initiative is currently spearheading the effort to encourage Parliament to pass the Freedom of Information Act.

FISCAL MATTERS

CANADA—

- **CRA ISSUES UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR REGISTERING A CHARITY - MEETING THE PUBLIC BENEFIT TEST**

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has issued updated “[Guidelines for Registering a Charity - Meeting the Public Benefit Test](#).” According to a CRA news item on 10 March 2006, the guidelines clarifies the meaning of the term "public benefit" as CRA understand and apply it while making determinations of charitable status under the ITA.

- **CRA ANNOUNCES INFORMATION SESSION FOR REGISTERED CHARITIES**

The Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) will hold its ninth year annual free information session “The Roadshow,” designed to assist registered charities in complying with the Income Tax Act. According to a CRA [news alert](#), this year’s information sessions will focus on the Registered Charity Information Return (form T3010A), GST/HST, Disbursement Quota, Sanctions, and important reminders. The deadline to [register](#) for the session is 5 May 2006. [More details](#) on the session are available at CRA web site.

- **NEW MUNICIPAL POLICY REQUIRING CHURCH TO PAY PROPERTY TAX CHALLENGED**

A congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Coquitlam says it is the victim of discrimination because of a new municipal policy that made it the only church in Canada required to pay property tax on the land around its place of worship, according to the news article published by [GLOBEANDMAIL INSIDER EDITION](#) on 3 March 2006. The Westwood Congregation has argued in British Columbia Supreme Court that the policy violates the freedom of religion guarantees in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and should be struck down. The court challenge could have a broad impact on whether municipalities in British Columbia can impose property taxes on the land that immediately surrounds any new church constructed in the province.

CZECH REPUBLIC—PROPOSAL FOR 1 PERCENT TAX DESIGNATION TO CHARITIES ON THE TABLE SOON

The Finance Ministry is pushing a plan to allow Czechs to designate 1 percent of their taxes to a charity or church from a list the government would compile, according to the news article published by [THE PRAGUE POST ONLINE](#) on 29 March 2006. Currently, Czechs who donate to charities can only deduct that contribution on their



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

tax returns, and they do not have any say in how the state spends tax revenue. The Ministry is currently drafting a bill for the proposal and plans to submit it to Parliament in June.

INDIA—BUDGET PROPOSED AMENDMENTS CAUSE CHARITIES PAY MORE TAX ON ANONYMOUS DONATIONS

In the [Union Budget for 2006-07](#) presented in the Lok Sabha (parliament), the Finance Minister, Shri P. Chidambaram, announced a number of initiatives including amendments in the Income Tax Act that will result in charities paying more tax on anonymous donations received by them. According to a news article published by [THE HINDU](#) on 13 March 2006, a major amendment has been proposed by insertion of [new Sec. 115BBC](#) under which anonymous donations received by trusts or institutions would all be liable to pay tax. An exception has been made for public religious trusts. More information on this proposal is available on the [ICCSL website](#).

UNITED KINGDOM—BUDGET 2006 TACKLES TAX RELIEFS ABUSES

On 22 March 2006, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, delivered the [UK government's 2006 budget speech](#). One of the [key pieces](#) of legislation coming out of the Budget 2006 is aimed at tackling abuses of tax relief for charities, according to the Charities Finance Directors group [press release](#). Draft [clauses of the new legislation](#) are available on HM Revenue & Customs web site.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

BAHRAIN—

- **NEW LABOR LAW GIVING WORKERS RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY EXPECTED SOON**

A new draft labor law, granting workers the right to peaceful assembly and to form trade unions will be submitted to the Cabinet before the summer recess, according to a news article published by [TRADE ARABIA](#) on 1 April 2006. The draft labor law (framed under two International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining) may be enacted by the end of this year.

- **GOVERNMENT DRAFTS NEW LAW REGULATING PUBLIC GATHERINGS**

The government plans to submit a second controversial law regulating public gatherings, according to the news article published by [GULF DAILY NEWS](#) on 23 March 2006. The new draft of the law reportedly includes a ban on demonstrations, marches and rallies near the airport, malls, embassies, international organizations, hospitals, security areas and main roads. Anyone violating the new draft law will face a year in prison and a BD100 fine. It also authorizes the security authorities to change the route and specify the time of any demonstration two days before it is due to take place. With the introduction of the



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

new draft, the government has withdrawn the earlier draft that civil society claimed was more repressive. The new one, they say, is no better.

MOLVANIA—DEMONSTRATIONS PERSIST IN EASTERN STEPPE CITY

Beginning on 13 March 2006, demonstrators in the Eastern Steppe city of Lublova have been protesting daily regarding the slaughtering of a sacred pig on Sunday 12 March 2006. Although pigs are used throughout [Molvania](#) for food and milk, they are only permitted to be slaughtered Monday through Saturday. Students at Molvania's largest university (Unjverstad Nazjonal), located in Lublova, have joined the protests. Included among the protestors are medical students from the university, who have been engaged in significant embryonic stem cell research. The police prevented the protestors from occupying the "beautifully preserved" Royal Way (Svej Rojal), which the current Prince of Lublova traveled by forklift on 15 March 2006 to celebrate the anniversary of his coronation. The Prince suffers from gout, and he could not walk the Royal Way by himself.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AFGHANISTAN—AD HOC COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION COMMISSION MEETS

The Ad Hoc Independent High Commission of Communication and Information for Afghanistan held its week-long inaugural talks from 13 to 17 March 2006 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. According to the [UNESCO daily news service](#), a range of issues central to developing a sustainable and accountable media and to consolidating press-freedom in Afghanistan was discussed. These included the role of the media law and current legislation to enhance the rule of law, the importance of journalistic self-regulation and the contribution of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). This meeting of the Commission is the first in a series aimed at developing a final report to be ready by the end of the year.

EUROPE—COUNCIL OF EUROPE PUBLISHES PAPER ON DEFAMATION LAWS

The Council of Europe (CoE) has published a [paper](#) examining the alignment of the laws on defamation with the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, including the issue of decriminalization of defamation summarizing in the forty-six member States of the Council of Europe, according to [CoF's Media Division](#) news update on 15 March 2006. This paper sets out information about the existing legal provisions on defamation in the Council of Europe member states, examines the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and other Council of Europe standards with regard to defamation, and overviews other international standards on the subject. It also seeks to identify trends in developments concerning the regulation of defamation both in the domestic legal systems and international law.



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

GLOBAL—

• **IPDC TO DEVELOP INDICATORS TO PROMOTE FREE MEDIA**

The Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) will launch a broad consultation to develop indicators for media development, according to a [UNESCO daily news service](#) alert on 24 March 2006. These indicators will help strengthen free and pluralistic media. The IPDC Council in its 25th session at UNESCO Headquarters from 21 to 23 March discussed the activities of the Program, assessed its achievements, and appreciated the important reforms the program has undergone in recent years. Representatives of the 39 Member States of the Council participated in the session.

• **UNESCO TO HOST ANNUAL “WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2006” CONFERENCE**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will host its annual World Press Freedom Day conference in Sri Lanka on 1-3 May 2006. According to the [UNESCO Communication and Information Sector's daily news service](#), the conference will help foster dialogue on the role of independent media in fighting poverty through the empowerment of disadvantaged peoples and groups, its contribution to sustainable economic development through improved communication between different stakeholders, and the impact of transparency, accountability and good governance on poverty eradication efforts. Around 150 participants, representing media institutions, NGOs, universities, and other organizations are expected to attend this event.

KUWAIT—NEW PRESS LAW APPROVED

Kuwait's Parliament has passed a new press law. According to a news article published by [EAST MIDDLE TIMES](#) on 6 March 2006, the law allows the licensing of new dailies, deprives the government of the right to close down newspapers and ban imprisoning journalists without a court ruling, waives all jail sentences on journalists for all but religious offenses. Criticisms of the Emir, and calls to overthrow the government are offenses may attract one year in jail for these offenses and fines ranging between US\$17,000 and US\$70,000. The new law replaces the existing legislation issued in 1961. The new law will become effective when the government issues by laws within the next six months.

NEPAL—FINAL REPORT OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA GROUPS RELEASED

Releasing its final report about the situation of press freedom in Nepal, international media groups have [expressed](#) grave concern over the worsening media situation in Nepal. According to a news article published by [KANTIPUR ONLINE](#) on 25 March 2006, the mission that visited Nepal criticized the government for not respecting press freedom and urged that media professionals in districts be allowed to report independently without pressure from the government and the Maoists to reveal news sources. The report also asked that the government refrain from introducing any new



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

ordinance or provisions that would alter or override media rights as enshrined in the 1990 constitution and in Nepal's international obligations, and withdraw an advertisement policy that has threatened the financial viability of media. The mission also asked the international community continue to support and promote press freedom and freedom of expression in Nepal.

THAILAND—COURT UPHOLDS CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO FREE EXPRESSION

The Bangkok Criminal Court has dismissed the defamation charges against media activist/ journalist Supinya Klangnarong and the Thai Post newspaper. In 2004, the Shin Corporation -- a satellite and telecommunications giant -- sued the Thai Post newspaper for defamation on printing comments linking the company's soaring profits to policies introduced by its founder, Thaksin Shinawatra, after he became prime minister in 2001, according to the news article published by [SOUTHEAST ASIAN PRESS ALLIANCE](#) on 15 March 2006. Finding the newspaper not guilty of criminal defamation, the court ruled that both Shin Corporation and the prime minister were public entities that could not be exempted from public questioning, especially on matters touching on transparency, governance, and public interest. The local media and international human rights groups closely watched the trial and applauded the court verdict.

UZBEKISTAN—

• NEW REGULATIONS FOR FOREIGN MEDIA CORRESPONDENTS PASSED

During the first week of March, the Uzbek government passed a set of restrictive new regulations establishing necessary conditions for media correspondents of foreign states to work in Uzbekistan. According to a news article published by [RUSSIAN NEWS & INFORMATION AGENCY NOVOSTI](#) on 7 March 2006, the conditions include: accreditation by the Uzbek Foreign Ministry, regulation of obligations of foreign journalists on the basis of bilateral agreements with the countries concerned. Under the regulations the Foreign Ministry is authorized to issue warnings, cancel accreditation, annul visas, and may expel journalists from the country where they are found guilty of violating the regulations. The full [text of the new regulations](#) (in Russian) is available on the Web site of the Moscow daily Gazeta.

• MEDIA BILLS GO TO THE PARLIAMENT FOR DEBATE

New media bills covering issues such as protection of professional activities of journalists, principles and guarantees of information are currently being debated in the Uzbek Parliament, according to a news article published by [RFE/RL](#) on 28 March 2006. According to Uzbek officials views of all stakeholders were taken into full consideration and the parliamentary debate is not meant to suppress media.

VENEZUELA—IAPA DELEGATION TO EXAMINE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

An observer mission of the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) slated for April 2006 will examine the freedom of expression situation in Venezuela, according to the



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

news article published by [EL MUNDO](#) on 21 March 2006. The mission will study the democratic values of press freedom in the wake of legal actions against Venezuelan journalists.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

ALGERIA—EFFORTS FAVORING CONVERSION TO RELIGIONS OTHER THAN ISLAM CRIMINALIZED

The Algerian parliament has approved a law banning efforts to embrace other religions than Islam, according to a news article published by [ARABIC NEWS](#) on 21 March 2006. Under the law anyone found urging, tempting, or forcing a conversion by a Muslim to another religion will face imprisonment for two to five years and a fine between 5 to 10 thousands EURO (6,020 to 12,040 USD). Any other means including publications or audio-visual aimed at destabilizing attachment to Islam are subject to the same penalty. Practicing any religion other than Islam outside buildings assigned for such purposes is also banned.

AUSTRALIA—RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ENFORCED IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

As part of the state's new outcomes-based education system to be implemented in 2008, Catholic upper school students in Western Australia will be forced to study religion in preference to other subjects, according to a news article published by [THE AUSTRALIAN](#) on 23 March 2006. Currently, religion is compulsory in Catholic schools but it is studied in addition to a combination of six TEE (Tertiary Entrance Examination) and non-TEE subjects a student may choose. From 2008, students will have to study religion as one of their six subjects, forcing them to forgo a more traditional academic course.

CANADA—COURT ALLOWS SIKH STUDENT WEAR HIS CEREMONIAL DAGGER AT SCHOOL

Maintaining the cultural and religious diversity of the nation, the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of [Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys](#) overturned a decision that banned a Sikh teenager from wearing his ceremonial dagger (kirpan) to school. According to a [press release](#) of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the case began in 2001 when Gurbaj Singh Multani, a 12-year old orthodox Sikh student in Montreal, was suspended from school in Montreal for carrying the kirpan to school due to a "no weapons" policy. The board of education alleged that the kirpan presented safety issues, while Multani's family argued that banning the kirpan violated his religious rights. In its decision, Canada's highest court stated that "Religious tolerance is a very important value of Canadian society...By disregarding the right to freedom of religion, and by invoking the safety of the school community without considering the possibility of a solution that posed little or no risk, the school board made an unreasonable decision." A Case Note on this case will appear in the April 2006 issue of [IJCSL](#).



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

CUBA—NEW RULES ON HOME CHURCHES

Fidel Castro's government has issued new measures regulating worship in home churches. According to the news article published by [KANSAS.COM](http://www.kansas.com) on 13 March 2006, the new rules received mixed reaction from pastors. Some maintain that the measures are similar to U.S. zoning regulations, designed to impose rules on fast-growing evangelical congregations. But the measures worry other pastors and church activists, who see them as another way for the communist government to curb religious freedom.

FRANCE—TURBAN BANNED FOR DRIVER'S LICENSE PHOTOS

France's highest administrative body has ruled that Sikhs must take their turbans off for driver's license photos, calling it a question of public security and not a restriction on religious freedom, according to the news article published by [ABC NEWS](http://www.abcnews.com) on 6 March 2006. French Sikhs have [appealed](#) to President Jacques Chirac over the ruling. The symbolisms of wearing a turban are many from it being regarded as a symbol of sovereignty, dedication, self-respect, courage and piety but the reason all practicing Sikhs wear the turban is just one -- out of love and obedience of the wishes of the founders of their faith. The dastar (Sikh turban) is an article of faith that has been made mandatory by the founders of Sikhism.

INDIA—

• STATE GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS REPEAL OF ANTI-CONVERSION LAW

Chief Minister of the state of Arunachal Pradesh has announced that the State Cabinet should consider repeal or amendment of the anti-conversion law enforced in the tribal State since 1978, according to the news article published by [THE HINDU](http://www.thehindu.com) on 24 March 2006. The Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act prevents conversion of people from one religion to another by force or through inducements.

• NUNS AND PRIESTS TO PRACTICE LEGAL PROFESSION IN KERALA

Catholic priests and nuns will now be able to practice law in Kerala. A Kerala High Court judgment handed down on 21 March 2006 stated that “clergy would not attract the bar for entry into the profession as created under the Bar Council Rules.” According to a news article published by [ASIA NEWS](http://www.asia-news.com), the decision nullifies an appeal filed a year ago by the Bar Council of India (BCI), which was against the decision to admit a Catholics priest and two sisters to the practice of law. The state Bar Association had earlier debarred two nuns and a priest from practicing law because the association ruled their “religious professions” were incompatible with legal practice. Rejecting the BCI contention that priesthood/nunhood was a profession, the HC stated it was a lifestyle and not a profession and ban on entry into the legal profession to a class of the clergy “will be wholly illegal,” reports [KERALA NEWS](http://www.kerala-news.com).



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

INDONESIA—NEW DECREE ON PLACES OF WORSHIP GOES TO THE PRESIDENT FOR APPROVAL

The revised version of the 1969 Joint Ministerial Decree on building places of worship goes to the Indonesian president for approval. According to a news article published by [ASIA NEWS](#) on 8 March 2006, “the revised law retains the basic principles of the old law, but now requires local government officials to issue permits upon consultation with local religious forums and branches of the Religious Affairs Ministry.” Residents of areas where a new place of worship is slated to go up must also give their consent.

ITALY—CARDINAL BACKS TEACHING OF HOLY QURAN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A leading Cardinal has backed a proposal by an Italian Muslim umbrella group allowing Muslim pupils in Italy to study the Quran in state schools, according to a news article published by [MSNBC](#) on 9 March 2006. The Cardinal’s support of such proposal is being viewed as the Vatican’s latest gesture of concern for good relations with Islam. Currently, Catholic pupils who do not attend Church schools have such an arrangement.

MOLDOVA—COUNCIL OF EUROPE WANTS LEGISLATION REGULATING THE REGISTRATION AND FUNCTIONING OF RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS TO BE ENACTED SOON

The Committee of Ministers of the [Council of Europe](#) has urged the Moldovan authorities to enact legislation regulating the registration and functioning of religious denominations as soon as possible, according to a Council of Europe [press release](#) on 29 March 2006. In an interim resolution, the Committee pointed to a number of shortcomings in the latest draft bill pending before the Moldovan parliament and urged the government resolve those issues that will affect the registration procedure. The Committee also asked the government seriously to consider the expert opinion expressed by the Council of Europe by making the desired legislation comply the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights in the field of freedom of religion.

TAJIKISTAN—PARLIAMENT TO DEBATE CONTROVERSIAL DRAFT LAW ON RELIGION

The Tajik Parliament is set to debate a new draft law on religion. According to a news article published by [FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE](#) the draft law is the most repressive of all the Central Asian religion laws. The draft bans all unregistered religious activity, sets high thresholds for the numbers of citizens required before a religious community can apply for registration, limits the numbers of mosques that can function, secures government control over who can teach religion within religious communities and hands the organization of Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca to the state.



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

IRELAND—GENERAL SCHEME FOR THE CHARITIES REGULATION BILL 2006 PUBLISHED

[General Scheme for the Charities Regulation Bill 2006](#) was published on 9 March 2006. The General Scheme gives an indication of the basic structure and content foreseen for the new legislation, and forms the basis for legislative drafting of the Bill. In summing up the intention behind the legislation, the Minister of State Noel Ahern, said “an integrated system of mandatory registration and proportionate regulation and supervision of the charities sector will be introduced for the first time in Ireland. For the first time, too, there will be a statutory definition of what a charity is,” according to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs [press release](#) on 9 March 2006. The press release also contains the selected highlights of the General Scheme.

JAPAN—LEGISLATION TO REFORM NPO SECTOR’S LEGAL FRAMEWORK INTRODUCED IN THE DIET

Legislation to reform the current Civil Code provisions governing “public interest legal persons” was introduced in the Diet after the Cabinet approved three draft bills. These are: a bill on the “general incorporated association and foundation law,” which consists of 344 articles; a bill on the “charitable status recognition law,” which consists of 66 articles, and a bill on the “relative transition & modification law,” of which only the part of modifying the Civil Code of Japan covers 115 articles. More information on the legislation is available on the [ICCSL website](#), and background to the bills is available in the January 2006 issue of [IJCSL](#).

KYRGYZSTAN—OMBUDSMAN PROPOSES REVISION IN NPO LAWS

The Kyrgyz Ombudsman, Tursunbay Bakir Uulu, has asked both the Ministry of Justice and the prime minister to consider a set of revisions he is proposing in the current laws affecting NPOs, according to a news article published by [AKI PRESS](#) on 22 March 2006. Among his proposals are a ban on NPOs funded by governments, political parties and individuals from abroad if these donors are pursuing political goals and harming the constitutional system, the state, and national security. The Ministry has rejected the proposals; nevertheless, the Ombudsman’s initiative may reflect wider unease about the strong and sometimes politicized NPO sector.

RUSSIA—GOVERNMENT VOWS TO CONSIDER COUNCIL OF EUROPE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING NEW NGO LAW

Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has announced that Russia will pay close attention to recommendations from the Council of Europe (CoE) when drawing up documents for implementing the law on non-governmental organizations, according to the news article published by [RIA NOVOSTI](#) on 3 March 2006. Lavrov was talking at a briefing after talks with CoE Secretary General Terry Davis. The CoE response



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

[came](#) in early March. While it welcomed the changes made to the draft law before its second and final reading, the CoE nonetheless remains concerned the possible effects of the draft law on NGOs and has pledged to pay close attention to how the law is put into practice so the legitimate activity of civil society organizations in Russia is not hampered by the implementation of the new NGO law.

TAJIKISTAN—CONTROVERSIAL DRAFT NGO LAW MAY NOT BE ENACTED BEFORE NOVEMBER

Tajik Foreign Minister Nazarov assured the OSCE's Chairman-in-Office that the controversial law on non-governmental organizations would not be passed before the presidential election due this November. The OSCE chairman-in-Office reminded the Tajik government that "the fight against terrorism should not be used as a pretext to control civil society." He encouraged his Tajik counterpart to refrain from using the legislation to hinder the development of civil society. During his visit to central Asia, the Chairman met with the representatives of civil society, political parties and the mass media.

UZBEKISTAN—COURT ORDERS CLOSURE OF FREEDOM HOUSE OFFICE

The Uzbek Court in Tashkent ordered the closure of the Freedom House branch office for violations of Uzbek legislation, according to a news article published by [PRESA LATINA](#) on 6 March 2006. The court ruled the foundation overlooked obligatory requirements for foreign NGOs, which include the handing over of information on internal financial flows and programs and activities.

ZIMBABWE—NGO BILL EXPECTED TO BECOME LAW LATER THIS YEAR

The government is finalizing changes in its controversial Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) Bill before it is brought back to Parliament for enactment, according to the news article published by [ZIMONLINE](#) on 7 March 2006. Last year President Mugabe refused to sign the Bill passed by the Parliament in December 2004. In its original form, the NGO Bill remained highly controversial. Among other things, it proposed to ban all civic bodies from carrying out voter education while those focusing on governance or human rights-related work were to be prohibited from receiving foreign funding. The Bill also provided for the appointment by the government of an NGO council that would register NGOs and monitor their activities. The council would have powers to deregister and ban NGOs it deemed were not toeing the line. Tamuka Muzondo, an [ICCSL](#) and [ACCSL](#) Associate and Director, Policy and Planning for the [National Association of NGOs \(NANGO\)](#) will be speaking about the legal framework for NGOs in Zimbabwe at Catholic University's Columbus School of Law on 4 April 2006, and his remarks will be featured on the ICCSL and ACCSL websites later in the month.



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

GHANA—DEMOCRACY TRAINING INSTITUTE TO BE ESTABLISHED SOON

A training institute on democracy will soon be set up in Ghana. According to the news article published by [GRAPHIC GHANA](#) on 10 March 2006, the “African Institute for Democracy and Rule of Law” which is being set up with the assistance of Freedom House will provide training for government officials and others seeking theoretical and practical education in the specialized field of democracy and the rule of law. The Institute will be established in June 2006.

GLOBAL—WORLD BANK’S ADVISORY GROUP TO THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY UNIT MEETS

The Advisory Group to the Civic Engagement and Social Accountability Unit of the World Bank met on 26-27 March 2006. The meeting was attended by Dr. Leon Irish, one of ICCSL’s founders and a member of the Advisory Group. Information on the meeting will soon be available on the [ICCSL website](#).

NORTH AMERICA—MEETING HELD TO DISCUSS HARMONIZATION OF NOT-FOR-PROFIT ASSOCIATION LAWS

From 17 through 20 March 2006, Dr. Leon Irish, one of ICCSL’s Co-founders, participated in a Project to Harmonize the Legal Framework for Unincorporated Nonprofit Associations in North America. There were 17 participants, two Mexican participants, four Canadian participants, and eleven Americans. This Reform Project is historic. It represents the first time that the National Conference of Commissioners for Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) has sought to work with other nations to reform a body of law. The other sponsoring organizations are the Business Law and International Law Sections of the American Bar Association, the Uniform Laws Commission of Canada, the British Columbia Law Institute, and the Mexican Bar Association. More information on the meeting is available on the [ICCSL website](#).

PAKISTAN—WORLD SOCIAL FORUM CONCLUDED

With the determination to continue the struggle for global peace and people’s progress, the Polycentric [World Social Forum 2006](#) concluded in Karachi on 29 March 2006. The [Pakistan chapter of the WSF](#) was attended by more than 40,000 enthusiastic delegates and civil society representatives from 58 countries around the world from 24 – 29 March 2006 in Karachi. More than 500 parallel events were organized besides several hundred cultural events and rallies on the road. Various plenary sessions, seminars and discussions were held on topics ranging from the Kashmir conflict to the political and socio-economic situation in the region. The forum also deliberated on major conflicts in Asia, in particular Kashmir, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and promoted people to people dialogue, exchanges, interaction, networking and alliances. Heated debates were held on key issues like political and economic rights, gender discrimination and bonded labor. Main themes were challenging the advances of new liberalism, capitalism and US-lead imperialism.



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

ZIMBABWE—CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISH ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION EXPECTED

The Justice Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, is reported to have said that Zimbabwe will establish its own Human Rights Commission and may make constitutional amendments in this regard. According to a news article published by [MAIL & GUARDIAN ONLINE](#) on 26 March 2006, the Commission will be entrusted with the responsibility to promote and protect human rights and receive, investigate and redress any complaints relating to human rights.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GLOBAL—

- **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CELEBRATED**

The 40th International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was celebrated on 21 March 2006. This year's theme was "Empowering Youth to Fight Racism." Marking the Day, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, [urged](#) every one to fight everyday discrimination and "unteach" common-place intolerance that underpin humanity's "most horrific crimes," according to the [UN NEWS SERVICE](#).

- **UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY CREATES NEW HUMAN RIGHTS BODY**

On 15 March 2006, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on a [resolution](#) setting up the new Human Rights Council, according to [UN News Center](#). The 47-nation UN Human Rights Council will replace the current 53-country UN Human Rights Commission. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 170 in favor with 4 against – the United States, Israel, the Marshall Islands and Palau – with Venezuela, Iran and Belarus abstaining. Every UN member state is eligible to join; the members will be elected by secret ballot; an election needs an absolute General Assembly majority; each member serves for three-year term; all UN members will eventually have rights record reviewed; systematic violators of human rights could be suspended. The Human Rights Council is scheduled to hold its first meeting on 19 June 2006 in Geneva after the U.N. General Assembly votes on its members in May.

- **WORLD BANK CIVIL SOCIETY WEB SITE NOW IN THREE LANGUAGES**

The World Bank has launched a [multi-lingual civil society web site](#). The site contains data, reports, and information on policy dialogues, consultation processes and events involving civil society organizations in English, Arabic, Spanish and French.



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

- **WORLD SOCIAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE HELD IN JUNE**

Marked by the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the second World Forum on Human Rights will be held in the Nantes Métropole Convention Centre from 10 – 13 July 2006. According to [WORLD SOCIAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS](#) web site, the 2006 Forum is aimed to provide a platform for unrestricted dialogue so that all actors from the field of Human Rights participate equally and create and reinforce international solidarity networks for promoting, defending and implementing Human Rights all over the world.

- **APRIL FOOL'S ISSUE**

Although this issue is published on the first working day of April, the 3rd, it is the April Fool's Day Issue for 2006. Thus, it contains one, but only one, joke story. Special thanks this year go to Rob Kushen and his father-in-law for providing the link to the story.

NEW PUBLICATIONS—

- **ANNUAL SOUTH EAST EUROPE MEDIA HANDBOOK 2005/2006 PUBLISHED**

The Vienna-based South East Europe Media Organization (SEEMO) has announced the publication of its new edition of the annual South East Europe Media Handbook 2005/2006. According to a SEEMO [press release](#) on 3 March 2006, the handbook provides important information on the media situation in countries in South East Europe, media laws and regulations, press freedom violations in 2005 and a list of selected media in the region. The reports in this year's Media Handbook cover: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia (Republic of Macedonia - FYROM), Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro / Kosovo, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

- **IPI WORLD PRESS FREEDOM REVIEW 2005 RELEASED**

The International Press Institute (IPI) has released its "[2005 World Press Freedom Review](#)," according to an IPI [press release](#) on 30 March 2006. The annual IPI World Press Freedom Review examines the state of the media in over 180 countries, territories and administered areas, documenting press freedom violations and major media developments all over the world. Divided into specific regions, each report provides a comprehensive overview of the year's events and may be contrasted with the events of previous years.

- **US RELEASES YEARLY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD**

On 8 March 2006, the [U.S. Department of State released](#) "[Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005](#)." The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices are submitted annually by the U.S. Department of State to the U.S. Congress. The reports cover internationally recognized individual, civil, political, and worker



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 5

APRIL 2006

rights, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and describe the performance of 196 countries in putting into practice their international commitments on human rights. According to [VOA](#), American officials use these yearly reports to develop policies, carry out diplomacy and decide about aid and other assistance.

UNITED KINGDOM—COMMISSION ON FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING ESTABLISHED

[The Commission on the Future of Volunteering](#) was [launched](#) on 29 March 2006.

The main objective of the Commission is to develop a long-term vision for volunteering in England. It will review the current thinking and state of volunteering, publish its initial thinking, invite people to comment on its initial thinking, request individuals and organizations to prepare written submissions on a range of topics, host hearings on significant topics. Based on its research, submissions, evidence, discussions and consultations, the Commission will published a final report in June 2007. The Commission is the initiative of the [England Volunteering Development Council](#), and sponsored by the [Volunteering Hub](#).

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