



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

CANADA—MANITOBA GOVERNMENT URGED TO REFORM ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAWS

The [Manitoba Ombudsman](#) has joined groups and individuals calling on Premier Gary Doer's government to honor its pledge to overhaul its freedom of information legislation, according to a news article published by [CBC NEWS](#) on 24 May 2006. During a comprehensive public [review](#) of the province's [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#), conducted in 2004, the [Canadian Association of Journalists](#) had asked the Manitoba government to establish an arms-length clearinghouse to administer FIPPA requests fairly and consistently. It was also recommended that an appeal process for denied requests be provided, that service fees for access requests, if used at all, be kept to a minimum.

GLOBAL—CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS SIGN “MANCHESTER DECLARATION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION”

On the occasion of the [4th International Conference of Information Commissioners](#), held in Manchester, 28 Civil Society Organizations signed the “[Manchester Declaration on Access to Information](#).” Recalling the “Cancún Declaration,” affirming that access to information is a fundamental right and an essential condition for democratic governance, accountability and the development of participatory democracy and economic development, the statement calls on governments to respect the right of access to information in line with international law and best practice.

SIERRA LEONE—PARLIAMENT TO CONSIDER FOI LAW

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has decided that its Legislative Committee should give “consideration” to the Freedom of Information Bill, according to a news article published by [AWARENESS TIMES](#) on 15 June 2006. The Freedom of Information Coalition (FOIC) presented the draft Freedom of Information Bill to the members of the Parliament and is aggressively lobbying for its support around the country.

FISCAL MATTERS

BANGLADESH—BILL CONTROLLING NGO'S MICRO-CREDIT PROGRAMS INTRODUCED

A bill proposing formation of a Micro Credit Regulatory Authority (MCRA) to control non-government organizations' (NGOs) micro-credit programs was introduced in the Parliament on 7 June 2006, according to a news article published by [THE DAILY STAR](#). Under the new “Micro Credit Regulatory Authority Act, 2006,” micro-credit institutions: are required to take approval from the MCRA afresh, have a minimum reserve fund as specified by the law, and cannot spend money without approval. Furthermore, no micro-credit institution will be permitted to distribute profits without seeking approval from the authorities. The Governor of the Central Bank will head the MCRA board, which will consist of six members selected by the



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government. Currently, micro-credit institutions in Bangladesh are operating without a regulatory body.

SERBIA—LAW ON THE RESTITUTION OF PROPERTY TO CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES COMES INTO FORCE

The “Restitution law for property confiscated from religious communities,” came into force on 10 June, according to the news article published by [FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE](#). The National Assembly of Serbia had passed the law on 25 May 2006; the law will be applicable from 1 October 2006. For a detailed analysis of the controversial provisions of the law consult the [FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE](#) website.

SOUTH KOREA—BILL TO AMEND LAWS ON STATE SUPPORT OF CIVIC GROUPS INTRODUCED

An opposition lawmaker of the Grand National Party has submitted a bill to the National Assembly that would ban government funding to nongovernmental organizations found to be associated with violent protests. An article in [THE KOREA HERALD](#) on 26 June 2006, states that the bill “seeks to amend the existing law on state support of civic groups. An NGO found to have clashed violently with authorities in illegal protests would be banned from receiving government support for the next three years. The bill would also rescind any financial aid the group received that year.” The 2001 legislation and the mechanisms it created to support civil society organizations are discussed in the [April 2005 issue of IJCSL](#).

UNITED STATES—

- **ESTATE TAX BILL MAY BRING DOWN LEVEL OF DONATIONS FROM ESTATES**

The U.S. House of Representatives has approved the [Permanent Estate Tax Relief Act of 2006](#) (H.R. 5638). Under the new legislation charities may find it harder to get donations and some heirs may have to wait years or even decades longer to collect inheritances. The legislation seeks to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase the unified credit against the estate tax to an exclusion equivalent of \$5,000,000, to repeal the sunset provision for the estate and generation-skipping taxes, and to make other related changes in the law. According to a news article published by [THE NEW YORK TIMES](#), “charities now get billions of dollars in bequests from estates each year. How much of that money flows from generosity, and how much from a desire to reduce taxes, is impossible to know. But in 2004, 47 percent of estates of more than \$10 million that were required to pay taxes had at least some charitable contributions, in contrast to just 22 percent of such estates that escaped taxation. With higher exemptions, it seems likely that the level of donations from estates could fall sharply.” Before it can become law, [H.R. 5638](#) needs to be approved by the United States Senate. If passed by the Senate, the bill would be sent to the President for his signature.



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- **PANEL DISCUSSION HELD TO DISCUSS POLITICAL ABUSE OF CHARITIES**

A panel discussion, “How Some Politicians Exploit and Abuse Charity and Philanthropy—And What Ought to Be Done to Stop It,” was hosted by the Open Society Institute (OSI) at its New York office on 8 June 2006. According to an article published by [OSI](#), the panel discussed specific cases of abuse, the extent and potential of the damage to the philanthropic sector of such abuses, and sector and government regulatory steps that need to be taken to prevent future abuse. Participation by charities in political campaigns is forbidden by the US tax laws. The forum discussion in streaming audio format is [available on the OSI website](#).

- **SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE PASSES MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG DONORS AND NPOS**

[The Senate Finance Committee](#) gave unanimous, voice vote approval to several NPO reforms proposed by Committee Chair Senator Grassley, by appending them to a tax administration bill he put forth. The SFC Press Release of 28 June 2006 states that in addition to political activity provisions doubling fines for certain activities, the reforms include greater disclosure by non-profits to the public about their activities. These include requiring electronic filing of tax returns, for ease of IRS processing and review, and requiring organizations that do not have to file tax returns at all to provide the IRS with general information every three years. (For more detail, see JCX-28-06: Description Of The Chairman’s Modification To The Provisions Of S. 1321, The “Telephone Excise Tax Repeal Act Of 2005” And S. 832, The “Taxpayer Protection And Assistance Act Of 2005,” <http://www.house.gov/jct/x-28-06.pdf>.)

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

BAHRAIN—

- **AMENDMENTS TO DEMONSTRATIONS, RALLIES AND PUBLIC GATHERINGS LAW APPROVED**

Parliament and the Shura Council have approved the draft law governing public meetings and demonstrations (Amendments to Law 18/1973) (for previous coverage see [June 2006 issue of IJCSL-Newsletter](#)). The legislation is currently in the process of being ratified by the Royal Court. According to a news article published by the [GULF DAILY NEWS](#) on 11 June 2006, the draft is reportedly flawed. For instance: it bans “any speech or discussion infringing on public order or morals” but fails to explicitly define “public order,” “public morals,” and “legitimate grounds for banning an event.” Under the law, “special permission” is required for public gatherings held before 11:30 pm and after 7:00 am; the authorities have the discretion to decide if the meeting is public or private; non-citizens are prohibited from participating in demonstrations, processions, and political meetings. It is, however, expected that [further amendments](#) will be brought to the Shura Council, before the Royal Court ratifies the law.



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- **AMENDMENTS TO LABOR UNION LAW APPROVED**

Parliament has approved amendments to the labor union laws. The [GULF DAILY NEWS](#) reported on 18 June 2006 that the amendments give the government powers to decide which places are suitable for strikes and which are not. The general Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions and other stakeholders have strongly objected to the amendments.

EUROPE—INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE HELD ON FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY LEGISLATION

The second of four international roundtables in different OSCE sub-regions took place in the Serbian capital of Belgrade on 28 June 2006. The meetings are intended to finalize the OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines for Drafting Laws Pertaining to Freedom of Assembly. [NOTICIAS.INFO](#) reports that the final document of the roundtables is expected to provide lawmakers and law-enforcers of the OSCE-participating States with a practical toolkit on the legislative regulation of assemblies and public meetings, in the light of relevant international instruments and good practices throughout the OSCE.

THE GAMBIA—GOVERNMENT BARS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FROM HOLDING FORUM ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Coordinating Committee set up by the Government of The Gambia to oversee the African Union (AU) Summit barred civil society organizations on the continent from holding a forum on freedom of expression in the country, according to [Media Foundation for West Africa](#) press release on 23 June 2006. The forum was scheduled to take place in Banjul, the capital, on June 29 and 30, prior to the Summit. The CSOs have expressed deep concerns over this measure alleging barring the meeting is hostile to human rights and a violation of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

MALDIVES—GOVERNMENT AMENDS REGULATION ON FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Despite the Ministry of Home Affairs' [announcement of amendments](#), the Bill on Freedom of Assembly failed to pass through at the sixth sitting of the second session of People's Majlis, according to the news article published by [HAVEERU DAILY ONLINE](#) on 24 June 2006. Under the new amendments a demonstration could have been officially approved by Maldives Police Services in seven days. The regulation previously required that the approval form should be submitted no less than 14 days before the proposed date of any assembly. The regulation put in place on 15 May through a Presidential decree required three people or more to organize and hold a gathering or a march.

NIGERIA—ILO CLAIMS NEW LABOR INSTITUTIONS BILL VIOLATES FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

One of the [five draft labor bills approved by the Federal Executive Council](#) (FEC) in March violates Freedom of Association standards as envisaged in ILO Convention 87 which Nigeria ratified at independence, according to the news article published by



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[VANGUARD](#) on 29 June 2006. In one of its reports on Nigeria, the ILO committee of experts notes the broad powers of the Registrar to supervise the union accounts at any time is an “obstacle” to the full implementation of Convention 87.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AFGHANISTAN—STRICT MEDIA DIRECTIVES ISSUED

Afghanistan’s intelligence agency, the National Security Directorate (NSD), distributed a list of restrictions to Afghan journalists demanding that they curtail their reporting on the country’s deteriorating security situation. A news article published by [SCOOP INDEPENDENT NEWS](#) on 22 June 2006 states that the Directives require that the media ban or restrict broadcasting those materials which: “deteriorate the morale of the public, cause security problems, and are against the national interest.” The document also has told radio and television broadcasters that news of terrorist activities must not come as the lead story of the news. The government moves to restrict news media has caused unrest among journalists. Penalties for disobeying, however, are not indicated in the directives themselves and it is still unclear who authorized their distribution, reports [VOA](#).

CHINA—ANOTHER CRACKDOWN ON NEWS MEDIA

The Chinese legislature is considering a draft law that would give government officials a powerful new tool to restrict coverage of mass outbreaks of disease, riots, strikes, accidents, and other events that the authorities prefer to keep secret, according to a news article published by [INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE](#) on 26 June 2006. The draft law requires newspapers, magazines, news Web sites and television stations to seek prior approval from government officials each time they publish information about a sudden event. The violation may bring fines ranging from \$6,250 to \$12,500.

COSTA RICA—CONGRESS CONSIDERS BILL RESTRICTING PRESS FREEDOM

Costa Rica’s Congress is considering a bill restricting press freedom., according to a news alert published by [IFEX](#) on 12 June 2006. The bill introduced at the end of May, seeks to regulate journalism by establishing strict controls and regulatory bodies. It also limits the right to information by introducing the concept of “truthful information.”

JAPAN—COURT ALLOWS JOURNALISTS KEEP IDENTITIES OF THEIR SOURCES CONFIDENTIAL

In a reversal of a lower court decision, Tokyo’s High Court has decided that Japanese journalists may keep the identities of their sources confidential, even in criminal proceedings, in order to promote the public’s right to know under the [constitution of Japan](#). A news article published by [MONTEREY HERALD](#) on 15 June 2006 discusses the ruling, which stated the role of news organizations was to serve the people’s right to know the truth in democratic societies.



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KAZAKHSTAN—LEGISLATURE APPROVES DRAFT MEDIA LAW

The Upper House of the Kazakhstan Parliament has passed amendments to the media law further restricting the freedom of speech in the country, according to a news article published by [REUTERS](#) on 29 June 2006. The passage of the controversial legislation sparked an outcry among media advocacy groups. Among other repressive provisions of the law, the editors of periodicals which have been closed by a court order are barred to work in the same capacity for any other publication and each media outlet will have to maintain a fund for paying damages in case of defamation lawsuits. Advocacy groups claim that the proposed changes would make Kazakhstan's legislation one of the most restrictive in Central Asia.

MAURITANIA—NEW MEDIA LAW ADOPTED

The transitional junta in Mauritania has adopted a new media law, according to a news article published by [INDEPENDENT ONLINE](#) on 9 June 2006. Under the new law, newspapers are no longer required to obtain government permits before publishing. A media reform advisory commission has also been set up by the government that will make recommendations for a legal system suitable for the journalism profession.

PANAMA—DRAFT BILL SEEKING JAIL TIME FOR DEFAMATION INTRODUCED

The introduction of a draft bill to reform the Penal Code in Panama has raised grave concerns in the press and media industries and among journalists and other stakeholders. An article published by [NEWSWATCH INDIA](#) on 20 June 2006 says that "the proposed measure would make defamation committed in the news media an offense punishable with two to three years' imprisonment or the equivalent in fines, and libel or slander with one to two years' imprisonment or the equivalent in fines."

PARAGUAY—BILL RESTRICTING FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION INTRODUCED

The Paraguayan Senate has recently introduced a bill contrary to press freedom. A news article published by the [Inter American Press Association](#) (IAPA) on 7 June 2006, states that the bill seeks to set up a new administrative agency that would ban or fine the dissemination of images regarded as offensive. Media advocacy groups have expressed concerns, claiming the bill restricts the free flow of information.

SOUTH KOREA—GOVERNMENT PREPARES TO CONSIDER AMENDMENTS IN NEWSPAPER LAWS

Following a court decision on 30 June 2006 that some clauses of the newspaper laws and press arbitration laws are unconstitutional, the ruling and opposition party members of the government are in a deadlock. According to a news article published by [DONGA](#) on 1 July 2006, the ruling party is suggesting partial amendments in the existing laws, while opposition members are calling for replacing the entire existing legislation with new bills. The government is scheduled to hold a series of public hearings over the revision of the newspaper laws from a variety of experts including communications specialists to avoid unconstitutionality. The bills are expected to be debated during the regular session of the assembly in September.



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VIET NAM—STRICT PRESS REGULATIONS TAKE EFFECT

New strict press regulations took effect on 1 July 2006. According to a news article published by [Southeast Asian Press Alliance](#) on 16 June 2006, under the new “Decree on Cultural and Information Activities,” Vietnamese journalists can be fined up to 3 million Vietnam Dong (190 USD) for publishing stories with anonymous sources and 7 million Vietnam Dong (450 USD) for refusing to allow an interviewee to read the article before publication. Revealing “party secrets, state secrets, military secrets and economic secrets,” carries fines of up to 30 million Vietnam Dong (2,000 USD). Vietnamese journalists can also be fined for “defaming national heroes,” although the decree does not spell out who is a national hero.

UNITED STATES

• ACLU. PROPOSAL SAID TO LIMIT SPEECH OF BOARD MEMBERS

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) board members had proposed limits on their own speech, which would have limited board members’ ability to speak publicly about policies set by management when they opposed those policies. According to a news article published by [NEW YORK TIMES](#) on 19 June 2006, the New York State Attorney General’s office expressed deep concern over the ACLU’s proposed standards and the organization decided not to adopt them.

• GOVERNMENT OPPOSES JOURNALIST SHIELD LEGISLATION

The Justice Department has sent a letter to Congress opposing any federal “shield law” guaranteeing journalists the right to protect their sources. An IFEX [news alert](#) of 27 June 2006, states that the [Free Flow of Information Act](#) was introduced in the Senate in May 2006. The bill seeks to grant journalists a “qualified” rather than an “absolute” privilege as regards the confidentiality of their sources. Judges would be able to force journalists to reveal their sources only if several conditions were met. It would also have to be demonstrated that the reporter had information that was vital for a case and that there was a significant public interest in its disclosure.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

BOLIVIA—PRESIDENT ASSURES PUBLIC THAT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WILL REMAIN IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

After church leaders raised serious concern about the Education Minister’s proposals to drop religious education from the school curriculum, Bolivian President Evo Morales has assured the public that no such step will be taken by the government. The proposal also drew protests from parents and students. According to a news article posted by [WASHINGTON POST](#) on 25 June 2006, Bolivia’s constitution recognizes Catholicism as the official religion, but the Church has already said it would accept the change to a secular state. Its main concern is over any drive to make society less religious in general



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FINLAND—OMBUDSMEN’S RULING BANS GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF PARISH PUBLICATIONS

One of the Finnish Parliament’s two deputy ombudsmen has issued a decision banning the general distribution of parish publications, according to a news article published by [NEWSROOM FINLAND](#) on 15 June 2006. The decision says the distribution of parish publications to homes that had not subscribed to them was a violation against the freedom of worship. Scholars and constitutional experts have warned that the ruling is unconstitutional.

GLOBAL—NGOS ISSUE JOINT STATEMENT ON MANDATE AND WORK OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

A number of NGOs have submitted a joint statement on the Mandate and Work of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, according to a UNPO [press release](#) on 20 June 2006. Initiated by the [International Association for Religious Freedom](#), the statement underscores the urgency of paying close attention to the conclusions and recommendations in the latest report of the Special Rapporteur, Ms Asma Jahangir.

INDIA—RAJASTHAN GOVERNOR RETURNS ANTI-CONVERSION BILL TO THE GOVERNMENT

Following the refusal to sign Freedom of Religion bill that seeks to ban forced conversions, the Rajasthan governor, Pratibha Patil, has returned the bill back to the government, according to the news article published by [NDTV](#) on 12 June 2006. Noting the bill would affect people’s fundamental right to freedom of religion, the governor had asked the matter be referred to the President. The anti-conversion bill remained highly controversial (for previous coverage see [June 2006 issue of IJCSL-Newsletter](#)). The bill makes conversion a non-bailable offence subject to immediate arrest. It also provides for two to five years of imprisonment and a fine up to INR 50,000 (1,090 USD).

NEPAL—CONTROLLING MECHANISM TO CHECK IRREGULARITIES OF RELIGIOUS SECTOR URGED

Leaders of various religious groups have demanded to the formation of a separate Ministry or department to look after religious affairs in the country. They believe this is necessary to maintain religious harmony in the country, according to the news article published by [NEPAL NEWS](#) on 10 June 2006. The call follows the House of Representatives’ proclamation [declaring Nepal a secular state](#) — ending the 237-year old Shah Dynasty.

UZBEKISTAN—

• INTERNATIONAL NGO BANNED FOR PREACHING PROTESTANTISM

The Tashkent City Court of Civic Affairs has ordered the closure of an international non-governmental organization’s office in the country for activities including Protestant missionary work, according to the news article published by [RIA NOVOSTI](#) on 8 June 2006. The organization [Global Involvement Through](#)



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[Education](#) is alleged to have carried out activities that do not correspond to objectives declared in its charter, in particular missionary work among the local young people.

- **GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN ON DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS LITERATURE**

New penalties for the “illegal” production, storage, import and distribution of all forms of religious literature came into force on 23 June 2006. The [penalties](#) are introduced through the Criminal and Administrative Codes. According to a news article published by [FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE](#), “a new article of the Administrative Code, Article 184-2, punishes the “illegal production, storage, import or distribution of materials of religious content,” with punishment of a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals, while officials (presumably of religious organizations) guilty of the same offence can be punished with a fine of 50 to 150 times the minimum monthly wage, together with confiscation of the materials and the ‘corresponding means of producing and distributing them’.” A new article of the Criminal Code, Article 244-3, punishes same offence with punishment for those already convicted under the parallel article of the Administrative Code of a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage or “corrective labour” of up to three years. The production and distribution of religious literature is considered “illegal” if it is home produced materials.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

INDIA—DRAFT OF NEW GOVERNMENT POLICY ON NPOs DISCUSSED IN THE PRESS

The Government of India is shortly expected to announce a national policy for NPOs, according to a news article published by [HINDUSTAN TIMES](#) on 23 June 2006. The policy has been formulated by the Planning Commission in consultation with NGOs and the concerned Government agencies. A final draft of the policy is with the Prime Minister for approval. More about what the policy is expected to contain can be found on the [ICCSL website](#).

NEW ZEALAND—CHARITIES COMMISSION TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING CHARITY SECTOR REGULATIONS

Charities will soon begin registering with the Charities Commission. The registration of charities under the new Charities Act will begin in February 2007. The new register will provide members of the public with more information about the nature, activities, and purposes of charities in New Zealand; it will be available at [www.charities.govt.nz](#). According to a [CHARITIES COMMISSION](#) news update on 22 June 2006, charities registered under the Charities Act will receive a unique registration number, which will indicate to the public that the charity has met the requirements of registration. While registration with the Charities Commission is



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voluntary, existing charitable organizations need to register before 1 July 2008 in order to continue to qualify for income tax and gift duty exemptions.

SCOTLAND—OSCR RELEASES NEW PUBLICATIONS ON CHARITY REGULATIONS

The [Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator](#) (OSCR) has released two new publications: “[Charity Regulation in Scotland](#)” and “[Charities Accounts Regulations Interim Guidance](#).” The first publication reflects OSCR’s overview of The Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, while the second focuses on OSCR’s guidance on transition provisions including a brief overview of the Charities Accounts Regulations (Scotland) 2006.

UNITED KINGDOM—MPs, CHARITIES AND LAWYERS GEAR UP TO CHALLENGE CHARITABLE STATUS OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

“The charitable status of private schools and hospitals will be challenged by a powerful campaign led by MPs, charities, and lawyers, and backed by the Charity Commission, when the Charities Bill returns to Parliament,” according to a news article published by [TIMES ONLINE](#) on 24 June 2006. If the campaign is successful it may end the tax break that helps to keep many of the private schools in business. “The Bill replaces the 400-year-old common law definition of charity and removes the presumption of charitable status from independent schools. Instead, it requires all charities that charge high fees to demonstrate that they are of ‘public benefit’ if they are to retain tax breaks worth a total of £88 million a year.” As the Bill does not give details of what constitutes “public benefit,” critics believe that it is almost meaningless and want a stricter definition.

VIET NAM—DRAFT LAW ON LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO DEFINE ROLES OF NPOs IN PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES

According to a [Press Release found on the website of the National Assembly \(NA\) of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam](#), NA deputies stated on 19 June 2006 that the draft law on legal assistance should clarify the responsibility of socio-political organizations and associations to avoid overlapping in providing legal assistance services. Deputies Tran Thi Quoc Khanh from Hanoi and Nguyen Thi Loan from northern Vinh Phuc province shared the view that the clarification will help avoid issuance of another law on legal consultancy in the coming years

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

GLOBAL—INTERNATIONAL NGOs SIGN ACCOUNTABILITY CHARTER

Eleven leading international civil society organizations have demonstrated their commitment to transparency and accountability by publicly endorsing the first global accountability charter for the non-profit sector, according to the Transparency International [press release](#) on 6 June 2006. The “[International Non Governmental Organizations Accountability Charter](#)” sets out core values and operating principles for international NGOs. The Charter commits its signatories to comply with the



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principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensure good governance and transparency and non-discrimination, maintain high ethical standards in their fund-raising and advocacy activities.

KAZAKHSTAN—ROUND TABLE ON ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY HELD

A round table “The role of civil society institutions in development of democratic society” took place in Almaty on 29 May 2006. The round table participants worked out recommendations for the completion of the draft concept of the civil society development for 2006 - 2011, [KAZAKHSTAN TODAY](#) correspondent reports. The round table addressed concepts such as, clear definition of the notion of “civil society,” objectives and tasks of the draft concept, as well as definition of the problematic area existing today concerning the third sector development in general, and each institution in particular.

PAKISTAN—HUDOOD ORDINANCE CHALLENGED

Several sections of the Hudood Ordinance have been challenged in the Federal Shariat Court as “repugnant to Islamic injunctions and defaming Islam at the national and international level.” According to a news article published by [ASIANEWS.IT](#) on 19 June 2006, the petitioner seeks the amendment or repeal of nine provisions concerning the offence of Zina (pre- and extramarital sex), i.e. adultery, as being against the spirit of Islam. The ordinances stem from Islamic law stipulating severe punishments for Hudood (limitations or boundaries) offenses ranging from adultery and premarital sex to alcohol consumption. Not all Muslim countries have adopted Hudood penalties in their criminal justice codes, and Islamic scholars debate whether such laws are a correct interpretation of the Koran.

RUSSIA—GOVERNMENT DENIES LEGAL STATUS TO FORTY FOREIGN NGOS

A news article published by [BUZZLE](#) on 29 June 2006 declares that “Russian authorities have refused to grant legal status to 40 foreign NGOs which submitted paperwork to the justice ministry under stringent new legislation that requires them to re-register by October 18.” Foreign non-governmental organizations are experiencing problems re-registering in Russia after a new law on NGOs came into force early this year. NGO representatives claim the complaints are bureaucratic way of closing groups that interfere with the Kremlin’s political dominance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ARAB WORLD—AL JAZEERA TO GO GLOBAL IN ENGLISH TO COMPETE WITH BBC AND CNN

The Arab news channel Al Jazeera network has [announced the launch](#) of a sister English-language station, called Al Jazeera International (AJI), according to the news article published by [CBC](#) on 30 May 2006. Al Jazeera International will go on the air



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by fall 2006 focusing on developing-world issues using more indigenous reporters and freelancers than other channels.

GLOBAL—

- **UN-NGLS LAUNCHES REDESIGNED WEBSITE**

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) has launched its redesigned website (www.un-ngls.org). According to a [UN-NGLS](#) press release on 13 June 2006, the launch follows NGLS Survey conducted in April 2006, in which respondents called for a more efficient website. The new website is more user friendly, features simple navigation for complex searches, and loads quickly. It also provides easier access to reports and other types of information and includes a working site-level search engine. NGLS brings development-related issues and activities of the UN system to the attention of NGOs, supports NGOs active on issues and themes under discussion in the UN system, and facilitates NGO participation in, and activities around, UN conferences, events, and processes.

- **UN SECRETARY GENERAL INAUGURATES NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

On 19 June 2006, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, inaugurated the UN's new Human Rights Council at a ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland. Ministers and senior representatives from more than 100 countries attended the inaugural ceremony. Many media outlets reported that Annan urged the council not to become politicized, unlike its much-maligned predecessor – the UN Commission on Human Rights, which earned criticism for allowing some of the world's worst human rights abusers to influence its agenda as members. Human rights advocates urged countries to involve civil society and make use of the resources provided by independent watchdogs and NGOs in defending human rights.

- **SECOND WORLD FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

The [Second World Forum on Human Rights](#) will take place in Nantes (France) from 10 to 13 July 2006, according to the [UNESCO](#) news update. The forum will provide a platform for all interested in implementation, promotion and defense of human rights around the globe to conduct free dialogue, sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge. The forum further aims to strengthening the co-operation between the various actors involved on a local, national, regional and global scale.

NEW PUBLICATIONS—

- **CANADA--NEW REPORT ON “NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN ONTARIO” PUBLISHED**

The [Canadian Council on Social Development](#) has published a new report entitled “[The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Ontario](#).” The report, published in June 2006, is the first in series of regional reports on the third sector of Canadian society. The research is based on the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary



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Organizations, which was conducted by a consortium of organizations in partnership with Statistics Canada.

- **YEMEN**

The Yemeni Human Rights Observatory (YHRO), a non-governmental organization, has announced the release of first annual report on human rights and democracy in Yemen for 2005. According to the news article published by [YEMEN TIMES](#) on 18 June 2006, the report reveals that Yemeni legislation hinders human rights protection and requires a democratic transformation. The report argues that most laws have had a detrimental impact on certain constitutional clauses by restricting freedoms; this is particularly true of the Demonstration Law, which denies citizens the right to hold peaceful protests.

SCOTLAND—CHARITIES AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION LAUNCH THEIR MANIFESTO FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Charities and other voluntary organization launched their Manifesto for the Voluntary Sector on 19 June 2006. The document was drawn up in consultation with more than 30 key stakeholders and calls on the Scottish Executive, local authorities, and other supporters to improve the voluntary sector's capacity to develop and boost Scotland's public services. The document was launched at [The Gathering](#), the UK's largest voluntary sector event held at the Scottish Exhibition and Convention Centre in Glasgow on 19 June 2006.

RESOURCES

FIJI ISLANDS—

- [Fiji Human Rights Case Law Since 1970 Compendium](#) contains a very useful compendium of case law on the various civil liberties and freedoms. The [Bill of Rights - International Legal Analysis](#) is interesting, in part, because it includes the right to information as part of the right to freedom of expression.



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VOLUME 3 ISSUE 8

JULY 2006

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