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ACTIVITY BRIEF

NGO Legal Reform Initiative

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In November 2005, participants from Central Asia, Hungary, Ghana, Malawi, Ethiopia and the UK discuss ideas about next steps and lessons learned from the first-ever Global Forum on Civil Society Law, where ICNL brought together more than 150 participants from 60 countries.

International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law

Geographic Targets:

ECNL Headquarters in Hungary. Target countries of ICNL assistance: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, as well as regional activities with all SEE countries and best practices shared with all NIS, CEE and non-presence countries. ECNL also works actively in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

Project Duration:

05/01/2001-9/30/07

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U.S. Agency for International
Development

Activity Background

After the fall of communism in 1989, one of the key challenges to building civil society was the lack of a legislative environment to support non-governmental organizations. Independent NGOs scarcely existed and risked disbandment for subversiveness. Meaningful independent associational activity was nearly impossible. The fledging NGO sector not only struggled with a lack of funding, but also needed to establish credibility and legitimacy following a legacy of forced volunteerism under communism. USAID has supported ICNL throughout Europe and Eurasia to establish a legal framework where NGOs can operate freely, and private philanthropy can grow.

Core Interventions

- Provide technical assistance on laws affecting NGOs.
- Support the fair, consistent, apolitical implementation of the new legal framework.
- Conduct and share research on critical NGO legal issues.
- Empower local lawyers and practitioners to address NGO legal issues in each country.
- Create strong sustainable networks of individuals and institutions committed to NGO law reform.

Activity Results

- ICNL has contributed to the passage of over 45 laws supporting NGO activity and sustainability.
- ICNL has expanded an education network that integrates civil society law into the curricula of higher education institutions. Today, 20 universities in 10 countries in CEE and NIS teach NGO law to over 400 students annually.
- ICNL web-based regional civil society law library contains 2274 resources from 135 countries in 37 languages.
- ICNL's European affiliate, ECNL, has made key strides towards sustainability, with diversified funding from fee-based services, the C.S. Mott Foundation, UNDP, the British Council, and the European Commission.
- ICNL presented its research on the primary obstacles to democratic assistance and measures used to curtail civil society to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and, at the invitation of the White House, to 23 presidents and prime ministers at the 2006 UN General Assembly.