

## ***PRESENTATION OF THE DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE DIALOGUE PROGRAM (2005 – 2006)***

### **Objective:**

In the framework of the “Forum for the Future” established to advance the universal values of human dignity, democracy, economic opportunities and social justice, the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) program is designed to foster productive dialogue between civil society and governments of the broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA), integrating participation of non-governmental actors, political leaders, media representatives and civil society experts and developing specific reform initiatives on issues relating to political reform, democracy and human rights.

To achieve this objective, the Governments of Italy, Turkey and Yemen, as Government Sponsors of the DAD, have undertaken a consultation process with their NGO counterparts, which led to the presentation of a DAD program at the Forum for the Future meeting held in Rabat in December 2004. The DAD partner NGOs are the Human Rights Information and Training Centre (“HRITC”, Yemen), No Peace Without Justice (“NPWJ”, Italy), and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (“TESEV”, Turkey).

The DAD program breaks-down the aim to provide response and support to the growing momentum for reform in the region into a number of component themes that can be tackled productively. The two themes identified as priorities in the first year are:

- (1) the participation of women in public life;
- (2) political pluralism and electoral processes.

On each of these themes, the DAD program foresees a consultation process within civil society and between civil society and governments.

The first of these themes is implemented in particular in close cooperation with TESEV and the Government of Turkey and the second by NPWJ with the Government of Italy; the Government of Yemen and HRITC are closely involved with the organisation of the Joint Meeting of Governments and civil society organisations, which would draw from all previous activities and launch analogous consultation initiatives on other themes.

### **The consultation process:**

The two themes addressed in the first year are:

- (1) Participation of women in public life, including political life, economic life and personal status;
- (2) Political pluralism, including electoral systems and processes, the role of political parties; and access to the media for political parties and civil society organisations.

In practice, on each theme, the specific activities and milestones include:

- ✓ *Regional civil society Workshops*, (one minimum on each theme), involving civil society representatives of the BMENA countries and other experts, with a view to the possibility of creating a platform for future dialogue also with Governments *leading to*:
- ✓ *Two Thematic Conferences*, one on each theme, where civil society and non governmental actors on one side and high level government representatives of the BMENA countries on the other side can interact on a peer-to-peer basis, to share priorities and expectations with a view to continued national and sub-regional dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society on the specific themes, and *culminating in*:

- ✓ *Joint Meeting of Governments and civil society* in early 2006, which should examine the progress made and commitments taken on the two first Democracy Assistance Dialogue themes, and attempt to establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms on them and identify and launch analogous consultation initiatives on other themes.

### **Results:**

As an overall result, the consultation process itself, on such politically sensitive issues, will represent an important achievement: constructive dialogue among governments, within civil society and especially between governments and civil society will contribute to foster a habit of consultation and cooperation on reform that can extend to other priorities.

The *civil society Workshops*, held in Istanbul on 20-21 June 2005, in Venice on 21-23 July 2005 and in Sana'a on 19-20 September 2005, assisted in creating a civil society agenda for dialogue with BMENA Governments in preparation for the Thematic Conferences and for the Joint Meeting and contributed to the strengthening of informal networks that can continue to create awareness of the issues raised within a wider civil society context on a national or sub-regional basis. Non-governmental actors, media representatives and politicians also discussed the possibility for research and writing programs as part of the DAD program, including for example a bulletin or newsletter to exchange information on initiatives in the region and assessments of the state of progress on political pluralism in each BMENA country, which could work as a baseline for continued monitoring in the future. Each civil society Workshop was attended by participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences, including civil society representatives, academics, intellectuals, politicians, media editors and other opinion leaders. Participants in each Workshop welcomed the workshops as an opportunity to engage others from the region on specific issues of concern; to share experiences, problems and approaches; and to prepare for the later initiatives envisaged within the DAD framework.

An additional civil society workshop on the participation of women in public life is foreseen for the beginning of 2006 in Turkey.

The *Thematic Conferences*, co-hosted by a Government, will involve high-level Government representatives. The most important result will be the full integration in a common dialogue, albeit on a very specific theme, of government representatives with civil society actors. Outcomes of the thematic conferences should include recommendations, commitment to work together in reform efforts, and increased local leadership and political commitment to reform on the specific theme of discussion.

The *Joint Government and Civil Society Conference*, as the major concluding event of the first year of the DAD process, is scheduled to be held in Yemen at the invitation of the Yemeni Government. The DAD plan as a whole should provide an opportunity for involvement and participation of activists and government representatives at various levels and in multiple settings, so that reform priorities and strategies will be, and will be perceived as, arising from these consultations. The Joint Meeting is designed to provide a more specific opportunity for participating Governments, civil society and other non-governmental actors to discuss concrete steps undertaken and discuss together challenges faced in implementing recommended reforms and launch the next themes identified for the second-year DAD program. Preparatory meetings of Yemeni and regional non-governmental actors have already begun to be hosted by HIRTC, the first being on 19-20 September 2005.