

Integrated Strategic Plan 2010 to 2016: Consultation Pack Two: Feedback from AIANZ Governance Team

Introductory comments

The Governance Team (GT) is concerned that – for such a critical consultation process and the development of such a vital planning document for Amnesty International – Sections have not been provided with a summary of the feedback received by the IS on ISP Consultation Pack One. The path that leads from the views of the Movement expressed in response to Pack One, to the changes the IS is proposing in ISP Consultation Pack Two, are far from clear. Indeed footnote 2 on page 9 of the ISP Consultation Pack Two (POL 50/011/2008) cites numerous sources for the development of the analysis therein, none of which are feedback from the Movement on Pack One. We urge the IS to provide this summary feedback information to Sections as soon as practicable, so it can inform this process going forward.

The GT is also concerned about whether changing the Vision, Mission, Values and Competencies statements is necessary for the Movement, and seemingly so soon after these statements had changes agreed to reflect the expanded human rights mandate of Amnesty. The specific drivers for these proposed changes are not apparent.

In particular there seems to be a move backwards to using general and potentially vague descriptors in these statements. Such language is open to a wide range of subjective interpretations and therefore has the potential to divide rather than unite the Movement. It has the potential to be equally unclear externally. Perhaps more importantly, the proposed changes to these core Amnesty statements do not promote Amnesty as a Movement distinguishable from a variety of other human rights organisations and related agencies.

Comments on the proposed Vision Statement

The GT has the following views on the proposed changes to the Vision Statement:

A shift from referring to the 'legal' basis, to referring to the 'individual' in the new Vision Statement, is positive;
However the new Vision Statement must incorporate a reference to 'rights'
The new Vision Statement is too general and has clear potential to make Amnesty's Vision indistinct from the vision of a myriad of other human rights focused bodies;

The language of 'equality' can potentially be interpreted to promote one human right (i.e. non-discrimination) over other human rights (which runs counter to accepted human rights wisdom);

Often the law appropriately treats different people differently in order to achieve equity, rather than blanket demands for equality and our Vision Statement should be alert to this;

Any new Vision Statement should make references to 'groups', as well as to 'individuals';

The AI Vision Statement must make reference to the UDHR, given its resounding relevance 60 years on;

The new Vision Statement does not immediately appear to treat all human rights as universal and indivisible. AI should be aware that while 'dignity' is a term AI is using for its campaign on poverty and economic social and cultural rights, for most people in the human rights community 'dignity' is what is gained from observance of all human rights. Therefore some will interpret the proposed new Vision Statement as – on top of that general reference to dignity – only specifically mentioning civil and political rights (as it specifies only non-discrimination and justice). This would prioritise a Vision of civil and political rights over ESCR;

Hope, while aspirational, is not a quality reliant on the presence of human rights for its realisation.

The GT suggests that if the Movement is convinced that a change to the Vision Statement is necessary, AI considers adopting the following version of the Statement:

AI's Vision is of:

A world where all people, through working in partnership, live with all the human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the other international human rights instruments.

Comments on the proposed Mission Statement

The GT's comments on the suggested new Mission Statement are as follows:

The inclusion of "working with those whose human rights are threatened" sets a positive direction for the Mission Statement;

The burying of the reference to 'grave abuses' in the proposed Statement is of serious concern, given we understand that the ICM in 2007 reaffirmed this as Amnesty's defining Mission;

It is far from certain that – as the proposed Mission Statement suggests - 'inequality' and 'injustice' are always going to be a grave abuse of human rights. We suggest it is preferable to avoid raising such questions on the face of AI's Mission Statement;

The loss of reference to 'research' in an AI Mission Statement would be a major concern. Does it mean that AI is considering a move away from being a research based organisation, with its own research facility?;

The new proposed Mission Statement gives an immediate impression of being inaccessible through being too wordy;

The language employed in the new Mission Statement – when compared to the current Mission Statement – suggests a strongly politically focused organisation. Given the practical difficulty this political focus can cause for Sections when they seek registration as charitable entities, we strongly suggest the IS reconsider the proposed change.

As a result the GT supports retention of the current Mission Statement.

Comments on the proposed Core Values Statement

The GT's views on the proposed Core Values Statement are as follows:

The Values Statement is too long and wordy and therefore immediately appears inaccessible;

The loss of the terms 'democracy' and impartiality' from an AI Values Statement is of serious concern and must be remedied;

Alongside reference to individuals, reference should also be made to groups/collectives;

While the universality and indivisibility of human rights are mentioned, the inalienability and interdependence of rights are missing – this is an unfortunate oversight;

In the part of the Value Statement that says we are 'courageous and persistent in our fight to end human rights abuses' the AI-agreed focus on grave abuses is missing in action. As one of AI's points of difference from many other human rights organisations, it should be included in any such Statement.

The GT suggests the existing Values Statement be retained, perhaps with the addition of reference to groups under the 'effective action' value.

Comments on the proposed AI Competencies Statement

The GT is concerned that the proposal is to move the Statement on AI's Core Competencies away from clear statements of AI's competent actions, to generic competencies. To be frank, it has an element of management jargon about it. Using descriptors such as AI being 'fast and flexible' tells the reader very little, especially when compared to the current Statement of Core Competencies.

What are the resources are that will allow these broad and generic competencies to be achieved, and how they will be monitored? The AIANZ GT would appreciate the IS's advice on this point, should this proposal proceed.

The proposed Statement makes no mention of a networked One Amnesty, with individual Sections and Regional Fora empowered by the whole. As there is a clear link between the structure of AI and its ability to deliver, this is an oversight that must be addressed in any Statement of Core Competencies. In the proposed form, the new Statement talks 'process' but is not reflective of the current situation. In particular, the strength of AI being a membership based organisation is not apparent.

We strongly suggest the current Competencies Statement be retained.

Comments on the proposed Strategic Perspectives

The list of Strategic Perspectives seems to require further consideration. For example, 'capabilities and process' do not sit easily as 'strategic perspectives, and nor do 'learning and growth'.

In addition the strategic perspective of AI's members, who are the bedrock of the Movement, is missing.

Comments on the four areas of AI's human rights work identified for 2010 to 2016

From the consultation AIANZ carried out on ISP Pack One with AIANZ members, other New Zealand and regional stakeholders, the GT can confidently support the first two listed areas of work for AI to 2016. These are 'the rights of people living in poverty' and 'the rights of people living under conflict and lawlessness'. Importantly, it is clear for Sections which AI Campaigns will embody these areas.

However 'the equality of all people' as an area of work for AI suffers from the same problems as the references to equality in the proposed Vision Statement (see comments above). It is therefore unsuccessful as a highlighted 'area', as is the area of 'the rights of people on the move'. The latter is too broad and vague.

From our consultations we have an acute appreciation of the pressing need to address the human rights issues surrounding for example environmental refugees. However, the proposed descriptor for this area of work does not succeed. The rights of 'displaced people' is one example of a preferable description.

More concerning for the GT is that the suggested four areas – as currently described - are those that other human rights organisation currently focus on,

and in some instances more successfully than AI. Our points of difference – our focus on grave abuses of human rights, and the power of our global membership writing as one voice for change on, say, a specific and grave breach of the right to adequate housing by one State – must both be retained and put at the front of AI's central Statements.

There is also support within the Children's Rights Network of the Section for the adoption of children's rights as a priority target in the ISP for the period 2010 to 2016 and a separate paper addressing this issue is attached.

The GT looks forward to receiving a summary of all Sections' feedback on ISP Consultation Pack Two in due course.

SUBMISSION BY THE CHILDREN'S RIGHT NETWORK

INTRODUCTION. The network's delegate to the recent Annual Meeting, Jan Marsh, raised this issue in discussion and as a question to the GT. However there was inadequate time for dealing with the issue and we therefore raise it again.

PURPOSE – To seek to persuade the NZ Section and delegates to the 2009 ICM to campaign for, and support, the adoption of children's rights as a priority target in the ISP for the period 2010 to 2016.

The rights of children have received increased world attention since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. During this period, Amnesty's attention to children's issues, although it has shown some increase, has been spasmodic and often overshadowed by attention to other themes.

There have been some significant success stories such as the abolition of the execution of juvenile offenders in the USA and the international prohibition (with partial success) of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In achieving these and other actions, Amnesty has often combined with other concerned NGOs in groupings such as the Coalition on Child Soldiers.

There has been a widening of Amnesty's human rights concerns during the last decade to include community, social and economic issues which are again often addressed in conjunction with other players. This change was very apparent during the campaign to End Violence against Women as part of the current ISP.

There is no doubt that community awareness of women's rights, and actions to combat violations of them, were enhanced by this extended campaign. It was an aspect of human rights that had received inadequate attention in previous years. Similarly, during the last twenty-years (from memory), children's rights have only been a central issue of concern for Amnesty during a very short campaign in 1999.

We acknowledge that there has been, in recent years, an increase in the number of Urgent Actions concerning imprisonment, torture and execution of children or occasionally the plight of child refugees. However, children round the world, both boys and girls, in their homes and in public and private institutions, continue to be subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Other huge areas of concern include child labour, trafficking of children, street children, rights to education and child health; all largely untouched by Amnesty action. The demobilisation and rehabilitation of child soldiers; the continued execution of juvenile offenders by Iran, Sudan and occasionally other countries; and the wrongful imprisonment of children are other ongoing issues which require greater input by Amnesty.

Fortunately there has been a major development of concern about children within Amnesty especially during the last ten years. There are now thirty seven Sections with groups or individuals committed to working for children's rights and connected by Amnesty's ChildNet. The creation of an IS position dedicated to children, within the Health and Human Rights group, has resulted in improved information and communication.

The Children's Rights Network in NZ was created in June 2002 and has functioned since through email newsletters. Most of the actions have been based on Urgent Action cases. However, the network has also participated fully in international actions including recently educational discrimination in Slovakia, seeking the release of a wrongfully imprisoned juvenile in Nigeria and seeking the repatriation to Canada of a child soldier held in Guantanamo Bay.

Within New Zealand, the network also participated in the successful campaign to abolish Section 59 of the Crimes Act through letter writing and a submission to the parliamentary select committee. A further submission was made to the select committee considering amendments to the Youth Justice system. Both submissions were based on the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The network maintains contact with the Office of the Commissioner for Children, UNICEF, Save the Children and other NGOs to work collectively for children.

We strongly believe that respect for the human rights of children is absolutely vital to the development of a more just and less violent international environment. Children are the most vulnerable members of the community, the least able to protect themselves and the most valuable resource for the future of society. The proper conditions for their upbringing are set out in the Convention. Children who are mistreated are more likely to grow up into violent, selfish adults who will not respect the rights of others.

We therefore urge our colleagues in AIANZ to seek the highest priority for children's rights in the next ISP. We also urge that Freedom Week in 2009 be devoted to children's rights to indicate the Section's absolute commitment to protecting children.

For Children's Rights Network