



IREX Annual Highlights

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EDUCATION

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

INTERNET DEVELOPMENT

CIVIL SOCIETY

IREX Internet and Media Trainings Help Georgian Elections

Months prior to Georgia's parliamentary elections and the remarkable Rose Revolution that followed, IREX was working to promote electoral accountability and transparency across the nation.

Through its innovative media and Internet development programs, IREX and its local partners disseminated information about the candidates, the issues, and the vital role of the electoral process, encouraging increased citizen participation, promoting ethical and effective roles



Opposition supporters arrive in Tbilisi, November 23, 2003.

for the press and campaign personnel, and stimulating national and local debate.

With USAID funding and in conjunction with a team of local and international media professionals,

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Uzbek Islamic Leaders Encounter US Religious Diversity

Ten Islamic leaders from Uzbekistan who were selected by IREX to participate in the Community Connections program visited communities in Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut and shared experiences with Muslims, Christians, and Jews as they learned about religious diversity in the United States. The visitors spent several weeks in the United States through the program, which gave special focus this year to the topic of Islam in a religiously diverse United States.

Among the visitors' poignant interfaith experiences, as related in the *Boston Globe*, was an interfaith Jewish Sabbath celebration with traditional Hebrew blessings. Rabbi Miriam Spitzer of Sharon, a suburb of Boston, welcomed almost 50 Jewish, Muslim, and Christian guests to her home for a dinner and subsequent discussion of the town's adult and youth interfaith leadership pro-



Uzbek visitors Dilbarhon Yuldashova (left) and Sobirjon Normatov (right) share perspectives at an IREX roundtable in Washington, DC.

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grams. "Every personal contact can translate into a greater possibility for international openness," said Spitzer, expressing her enthusiasm for the event.

Many perspectives of the visitors and American Muslim leaders were presented at a dynamic public roundtable, sponsored by the Starr Foundation, at IREX's Washington headquarters at the conclusion of the visit. Susan L. Douglass, a scholar and

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Letter from the President

Breaking New Ground: IREX Extends Its Reach

Dear friends and colleagues,

Many of you know the IREX programs that helped raise the Iron Curtain and build democracy in formerly communist nations. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, IREX has expanded its programming base of educational and research exchanges to include civil society, media, and Internet development and its geographic reach to encompass China, Iran, and Turkey. In response to changing conditions, including successes in Eastern Europe, IREX continues to work in new regions.

IREX was established in 1968 with the original purpose of administering exchanges

with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But while the founding proposal cites an "immediate mandate" focusing on that region, it makes clear that "there is no disposition to limit [IREX's] jurisdiction geographically."

Today, new challenges in new regions face the United States. Local activists in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia are seeking democracy, modernization of their educational systems, an end to corruption, and better efforts to address health and social issues. These are the very issues that IREX has been addressing over the past decade.

As IREX continues to expand its geographic focus, we will seek both new partners and new engagements to complement our own expertise. Our staff, trainers, and consultants have expertise in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and we have been reaching out to individuals and organizations in these regions. In July in Amman, for example, I attended a working meeting

of Partners in Humanity, which assembled leaders of NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations that are active catalysts of Islamic-Western dialogue, to share IREX's extensive experience in programs that bridge sharply contrasting cultures and to learn from others who have worked in the Muslim world.

The present annual highlights demonstrate the dynamism and impressive functional capacities of IREX. We invite you to visit our website, www.irex.org, to view us and our activities in greater detail, and we look forward to new challenges, new opportunities, and new friends in the years ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Mark G. Pomar
President

Combating HIV/AIDS.

Throughout its programming, IREX concentrates on the most urgent needs confronting local populations in transitioning societies. Worldwide in 2003, UNAIDS estimates that 40 million people lived with HIV or AIDS, 5 million people were newly infected, and 3 million people died of the disease. IREX responded by focusing practical education and public service activities, often by partnering with local NGOs and the media, to engage maximum participation in combating HIV/AIDS.

Youth Activist Finds Her Stride Against AIDS

As one of more than 25 grantees in this year's Russian Young Leadership Fellows for Public Service Program (YLF), Olga Pestova has walked more than a few miles, metaphorically, in the shoes of others—and, by helping to organize AIDS Walk Atlanta, more than a few miles in her own.

Before coming to the United States through YLF, Pestova had an abiding interest in youth activism, having served in the government youth affairs departments of the city of Vladivostok and Primorskii Krai and as administrative director of a local youth NGO. But as she began conducting HIV/AIDS



Olga Pestova watches as fellow volunteers perform setup for AIDS Walk Atlanta.

training, she saw the issue firsthand: “In my work, I often faced the reality of epidemic. I saw young people dying because they did not have information in time, I saw HIV-positive people keeping in mind only one picture—the picture of their lonely death because they don’t have any support, understanding, and hope. I have been touched very deeply.” Russia has among the world’s fastest-growing rates of HIV infection, and rates in her own region are among the fastest growing in Russia.

Through her fellowship in the YLF program, which combines extensive public service with one year of graduate study at US colleges and universities, Pestova learned about the American experience in organizing nonprofit work against HIV/AIDS. At Georgia State University’s Andrew Young

School of Policy Studies, Pestova’s coursework covered fundamental principles of nonprofit management, while her volunteer work at AID Atlanta, a nonprofit, community-based AIDS service organization, put her energy to work staffing an AIDS/STD hotline, working with patients, and organizing such events as AIDS Walk Atlanta, through which she learned practical lessons on corporate sponsorship. She will bring formidable new skills—and broken-in walking shoes—when she returns to Vladivostok.

YLF is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State.

IREX and TPAA Establish Russian Legislative Group on AIDS

Responding to Russia’s exceptionally steep rise in HIV infections, IREX and Transatlantic Partners Against AIDS (TPAA) have teamed together to create a high-level coalition of members from the Russian State Duma and Federation Council to develop and strengthen HIV/AIDS policy formulation in Russia.

In less than eight years, new cases of HIV/AIDS infection have been reported in more than 30 cities and 86 of Russia’s 89 regions. The total number of reported HIV infections climbed to over 240,000 by mid-2003, a dramatic increase over the 10,993 reported less than five years earlier. Inaccurate official statistics leave broad latitude for speculation: while current estimates of the HIV-infected in Russia vary from 700,000 to 1.4 million, experts agree that Russia has one of the fastest rates of infection in the world.

With USAID funding, TPAA and IREX have established the Russian Parliamentary Working Group on AIDS to marshal political parties into a consensus position on politically sensitive issues related to HIV/AIDS, raise awareness and facilitate collaboration among fellow parliamentarians and other officials at the national and local levels, and serve as a bridge to other sectors, including business, civil society, academia, the scientific community, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information on HIV/AIDS in Russia, visit TPAA’s website at www.tpaa.net.

IREX Media Trainings and Grants Combat HIV/AIDS

The news media play a crucial role in addressing HIV/AIDS: citizens need to be informed about the disease, its implications for their communities, and the means of combating its spread. Ignorance poses the greatest danger.

In 2003, IREX worked in 10 countries by providing training on covering HIV/AIDS, supporting special television programming, and providing small grants to improve coverage. IREX activities in 2003 included the following projects, funded by USAID.

Albania: Television program on local heroes portrays AIDS specialist. *Heroes*, an IREX-supported television program, highlighted a doctor who returned from abroad and opened a clinic for AIDS victims. After receiving specialized training in Vienna several years ago, he returned to Tirana and set up a special clinic for the specific purpose of diagnosing and counseling AIDS victims. He began a program where he and his associates visit schools and inform students of the hazards HIV/AIDS and drug use.

Montenegro and Croatia: Television networks cover World AIDS Day. With IREX support, the MBC-TV program *Ksenija* in Montenegro and the CCN television network in Croatia broadcast special coverage on World AIDS Day.

Macedonia: Training caravan for journalists promotes balanced coverage. IREX and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia conducted a six-city training caravan whose goal was to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS among the media and improve and increase productive journalistic coverage of HIV/AIDS. The caravan presented three perspectives to trainees—those of the editor, the journalist, and HIV/AIDS advocates and NGOs. This provided journalists with a broad perspective that included practical journalism tips, information, and resources to better cover the issue and started a dialog between journalists, specialists, and advocacy NGOs so the coverage will continue and improve.

For more on IREX media programs and HIV/AIDS, visit www.irex.org/media.

Promoting free and fair elections. So fundamental is voting to democracy and political legitimacy that even authoritarian regimes embrace the trappings of elections. But ballots reflect the people's will only when cast after open debate, marked without intimidation, and tallied with public review. IREX programs engage citizens and civil society in election debate and discussions to ensure that elections are transparent, free, and fair.

IREX Media Programs Directly Reach 2003 National Electorates

Governments all too often control the information that citizens receive before elections, providing preferential treatment to favored candidates and restricting the opposition's ability to reach the people through the media.

In 2003, IREX provided election-related media support not only in Georgia amid the "Rose Revolution," but also in several other countries. IREX provided training in election reporting, the design and reporting of special elections supplements, and consultation with broadcast media on staging debates to ensure open dialog between candidates, citizen access and participation, and a focus on issues. Activities included the following projects, funded by USAID.

Albania: televised municipal election debates. For Albania's municipal elections, IREX organized televised political debates for over 100 local candidates in cities throughout the country. The broadcasts on local stations proved to be the only televised political debates featuring politicians from

all political parties.

Croatia: televised national election debates. IREX provided support and expertise on election coverage to the CCN television network, which provided the only televised debate between incumbent Prime Minister Ivica Racan of the SDP and Ivo Sanader of the HDZ, the two leading candidates in Croatia's national elections. The debate was neglected by state television. In all, CCN produced

nearly 30 hours of special campaign coverage, in addition to regular news. Nine panel discussions featured representatives from the most significant political parties, and CCN's elections coverage also included live call-in discussions (two hours each) with Prime Minister Racan and Croatian

president Stjepan Mesic.

Armenia: elections supplement. IREX published 75,000 copies of an informative elections supplement for Armenia's parliamentary elections. Topics covered included the issue of immunity for parliamentarians, the proposed constitutional amendments, the role of women in parliament, and promises made by parliamentarians. The supplement was distributed in most Yerevan and regional newspapers, and additional cop-



IREX media advisor Andrea Stefani moderates a televised debate for Albania's elections.

ies were distributed in towns and cities and with the support of the International Foundation for Election Systems. Editors and the public at large praised the project for providing objective and valuable voter information that could not be found in other publications.

Trainings Help Georgian Elections

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IREX produced an election supplement that presented candidate platforms and provided coverage of key issues, distributing over 320,000 copies in 35 national and regional newspapers. To complement print media efforts, IREX worked with Tbilisi-based and regional television and radio stations to produce a series of almost 200 political debates, informational programming, talk shows, and town hall meetings.

Direct training of journalists and editors was also vital. For example, in October IREX hosted "Behind the Scenes of Broadcast Media," a seminar by trainer Stan Matthews. Matthews, a campaign management expert, had just completed six weeks of on-the-ground



Opposition supporters arrive in Tbilisi, November 22, 2003.

training and advising to Georgian media journalists across the country. During the lecture, he outlined the differences between Georgian and US elections systems, media, approaches to the concepts of political expertise, and other factors that contribute to differences in election campaigns. Matthews analyzed the role and importance of mass media and public debates in promoting fairness of elections in Georgia. This kind of seminar training—coupled with intensive, on-site consultations with numerous Georgian broadcasters—enabled media outlets throughout the country to provide comprehensive information about candidates and issues facing the Georgian electorate.

The increased use of the Internet to bring issues to the forefront was also notable. IREX hosted sev-

eral online chats through the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP), a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State. In December citizens gathered at 12 IATP sites in nine cities throughout Georgia to grill candidates directly on the issues. Five of the six candidates participated in the chats—Zurab Kelekhsashvili, Zaza Sikharulidze, Kartlos Gharibashvili, Roin Liparteliani, and former opposition leader and frontrunner Mikheil Saakashvili.

Another event featured US Ambassador to Georgia Richard Miles, who chatted with more than 100 Georgian citizens in nine cities. "We have an interest in these elections to help Georgia to move to a fully democratic society, and maybe more important, we don't want to see it fall back towards a less democratic society," wrote Ambassador Miles.

Altogether, the Georgian people—along with the range of IREX activities related to Georgia's elections—demonstrated the valuable role that technical assistance can play in nurturing an active and informed civil society capable of making meaningful contributions to democratic processes.

Reforming schools: reaching teachers and students.

The development of a civil society relies upon the knowledge and skills of its citizens and the quality of its educational institutions. IREX education programs build a sustainable education infrastructure by helping schools restructure administrative practices, giving teachers methodologies and technologies for effective teaching, and developing curricula that engage students' curiosity and critical thinking.

No Turning Back: Teachers, Parents, and Students Alike Praise New Teaching Methods

Vania Kirakosyan, principal of School no. 181, gets right to the point. "You don't have to force the pupils to open the book. They have the desire to open it themselves, as they see the relevance of the instruction to their lives. That's what ELT brought to our school."

Kirakosyan's school is one of many that have benefited from the IREX-administered Elementary Level Curriculum Development and Teacher Training Project for Armenia (ELT), a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State. The program uses new teacher training curriculum materials to combine curriculum reform in elementary schools with teacher training activities.

Reactions gleaned at the May 2003 program conference have been overwhelmingly positive. Teacher Lusine Mirabyan of Vanadzor's School no. 5 spoke of the impact of

teacher training on the improvement of teaching methods in elementary schools. Mirabyan cited parents' involvement in the teaching process, a new concept in her school.



Three teachers share perspectives at the May 2003 ELT conference in Yerevan.

At first the parents were resistant towards the ELT methods, which include group projects for students, learning games, and exercises in critical thinking, but Mirabyan managed to overcome their resistance and even gain their support. She discussed the results that she received by involving the community of parents into her teaching practices. One parent wanted her second

child to be placed only in a class where the ELT methodology was used, explaining that her first child, after being educated by the ELT methods, became a more independent and free-thinking individual. Anahit Zohrabian, vice principal of School no. 181, noted that even the school's children in the elementary school "will not allow [the teachers] to move

back to the old things."

This remarkable unanimity stems from the program's innovative methodology, which is detailed in the program's educators' handbooks and is promulgated by local program hubs throughout Armenia. In the Gyumri hub, for example, trainers take turns conducting seminars for their peers on ELT methods. Lena Yeremyan, who also participates in the Middle School Curriculum Development and Teacher Training Program (MLT), carefully guided the teacher trainers to start incorporating the MLT program methodologies on backward planning and integrated curriculum units in their training activities. Teacher teams, under the guidance of teacher trainers, worked on creating their own integrative curriculum units.

The ELT curriculum has already paved the way for future reform. With a World Bank credit, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Center for Education Reform (CER) will integrate Armenia's school curriculum. "These [ELT] units," explained CER director Victor Martirosyan, "will become the basis for the MoES and CER to expand on."

School Connectivity for Uzbekistan: Technology Revitalizes the Classroom

Much like their American counterparts, a number of secondary school students in Uzbekistan honored Martin Luther King, Jr., Day by using the Internet to research his life, writing essays on the impact of his work, creating posters to illustrate his achievements, and chatting in online forums to share the knowledge gained through this process.

Unlike many of their peers in the United States, however, these Uzbek students only recently gained access to computers and the Internet, learning for the first time in the past several months how to search the Internet and participate in online forums. Their schools are among 30 in

Uzbekistan that were awarded computers and training in 2003 through School Connectivity for Uzbekistan, a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State.



Young students at School no. 110 practice their new computer skills.

Through this program, educators and students are being trained in basic computer and Internet skills to enhance their professional and academic lives. Teachers are learning to integrate technology into their classrooms to create active lessons in civic education and to cultivate a more democratic school.

Students are venturing online to explore the vast resources of information, and to share ideas with their peers—both locally and

abroad—in online forums. "With the appearance of computers connected to the Internet, lessons have become more interesting," commented Kudrat Dadajanov, a student at School no. 15 in Ferghana. "We can't even wait for the start of classes on literature, English, and math. [Our teachers] conduct their classes in the computer center."

School Connectivity will continue to expand in 2004 as it connects 30 more schools in Uzbekistan and links up with at least 20 schools in the US for joint online projects. Through this new initiative, IREX is revitalizing education by equipping teachers and students with new skills and teaching methods. Advanced technologies and wider access to resources around the world offer these schools a chance to discover innovative ways to approach, and appreciate, learning.

Fostering ethnic and religious tolerance. Among the deepest differences across humankind are nationality and religion, which are sources of cultural diversity and artistic inspiration as well as mistrust and strife. Working to build ties between the Western and non-Western world, including Central Asia, whose predominantly Muslim populations are experiencing the nascent beginnings of civil society, IREX brings diverse groups together to forge understanding and tolerance.

Documentary *Bride With No Gold* Presents the Traditions and Challenges of Sandjak Muslims

Young Muslim émigré Said had no bride, and the simple story of his dilemma, recounted in a documentary film financed with an IREX grant, brings together not only husband and wife, but also the diverse cultures of the former Yugoslavia and Western Europe.

All too often the media is used to stir up hatred, as in Rwanda, where radio broadcasts helped incite brutal massacres, or in Serbia, where the Milosevic regime used television to encourage and support wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. But the media can also foster tolerance and understanding, and IREX encourages this positive role by providing training and small grants to support media productions that do so.

In 2003, IREX provided a grant to Advance TV Production of Serbia to produce a documentary film, *Bride With No Gold*, on the minority Muslims of the Sandjak region in Serbia and Montenegro. Muslims comprise about 19% of the population in Serbia and Montenegro, where about 65% are Orthodox.

The documentary focuses on the Teferich, an annual fair that is frequently used for men and women to find spouses. A Sandjak Muslim emigrant to Austria faces the decision of whether to marry an Austrian and fully integrate into life there or whether to retain his cultural roots. He decides to journey back to the Teferich to find a bride in this traditional manner. Using this story line, the documentary explores the traditions of the Sandjak Muslims and the difficulties their society faces, including the emigration of the young to the West.

The film's producers aim to foster an understanding and appreciation of the cultural values of this population as well as "better understanding and tolerance between Muslim and Serb populations in Serbia and



Young brides at the Teferich festival.

Montenegro and a better understanding of the people who emigrated from transitional countries to Western Europe." The story, told directly by the film's subjects without voiceover, depicts the results of contact between traditional and modern cultures as well as results of exposure to cultural codes

of different nations.

A shorter version of the documentary will be presented for film festivals in Europe under the name *Said Finds a Bride*. Both versions will be aired on stations throughout the region.

This production was supported by the USAID-funded ProMedia Regional Project, administered by IREX, in cooperation with the Media Task Force of the Stability Pact of Southeastern Europe.

Uzbek Visitors Experience American Diversity

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writer for the Council on Islamic Education, noted that in the United States, the constitution does not allow the teaching of religion itself in public schools but permits teaching about religion as a means of learning about our deepest beliefs. "It is important to share this," said Douglass, who assists public schools in teaching about Islam, "because it teaches how a diverse country deals with its deepest differences in a public arena." Speaking on interfaith relations, Uzbek visitor Sobirjon Normatov, Imam-Hatib of the Umm al-Koro Mosque in Fergana City, recited verses from the Koran in support of the tolerance mandated in Islam. Normatov stated that approximately 10 to 12 percent of the Uzbek population is non-Muslim;



A man prays at a mosque in Uzbekistan.

of 2,047 religious organizations in the country, over 180 are non-Islamic, and the large cities in Uzbekistan have Jewish and Christian communities, among others.

Likewise, Imam Yahya Hendi of the Islamic Society of Frederick, Maryland, who also serves as Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University and the National Naval Medical Center, noted that the Koran calls for Muslims to show Christians and Jews *birr*, the highest form of kindness, and that the prophet Mohammed avowed that he who hurts a Jew or Christian hurts the prophet himself as well. Hendi highlighted practical works that Muslim organizations have used to bring people of different faiths together, including sending Jews and Muslims to serve together at soup kitchens and the construction of a house through Habitat for Humanity with one-third of the financing and volunteer labor coming

from each of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities. Imam Hendi closed the roundtable with the challenge, directed to all present, that when a church or mosque or temple of a minority religion is attacked in any nation, the religious community of the majority should be first to rise to its defense.

In addition to the roundtable, the Uzbek visitors also participated in a private discussion with local Muslim leaders, who spoke of the activities of Muslim organizations in the United States and observed that the leader of the largest US Islamic society is a woman, reflecting the active participation of women in Islam in the United States. Local leaders also described community outreach activities, such as an Islamic center's annual dinner for local firefighters and police and the establishment of regular Friday jum'ah prayers in the US Congress, and shared details of both the sporadic acts of vandalism and the far stronger interfaith support in the wake of September 11.

For more about IREX and Community Connections, please visit www.irex.org. Community Connections is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State.

Advancing social change. Societies transitioning to democracy and free markets are confronted with choices and challenges from which they have been separated or insulated in the past. Stable democracy requires civic discourse by the citizens and interest groups affected by these new issues. From women's empowerment to support for sustainable independent media, IREX fortifies the local voices that shape emerging democracies.

Job Skills for Women Combat Trafficking by Protecting the Environment

With Romania's 2007 entry into the European Union (EU) and its need to comply with EU environmental regulations, Business Opportunities for Women (BOW), IREX's partner in providing job skills training for women at risk of being trafficked, seized a unique opportunity. By providing women with job training in environmental monitoring, BOW has helped Romania's economic development while also protecting at-risk women.

The need for such training is great. For example, in November 2002 the International Organization for Migration reported providing assistance to over 600 Romanian women who had been trafficked after pursuing fraudulent jobs opportunities in the West. The training provided by BOW through the IREX-administered Regional Empowerment Initiative for Women (REIW), funded by the US Department of Labor, gives at-risk women an alternative to the low-paying and low-benefits positions traditionally offered to them.

BOW and the Environmental Protection Ministry of Romania estimate that thousands of environmental specialists will be needed

to conduct the necessary rigorous monitoring. Currently, there are only 300 specialists who are qualified to do this work.



A woman learns job skills. IREX is now teaching women to become environmental monitors.

Together with the Romanian ministries of education, labor, and environmental protection and the local business community, BOW developed a program to train women for careers in environmental protection. Certified by the ministries, the course combines 189 hours of course work with a three-month internship in Romanian companies. Participants are girls, ages 16 to 24 years, from low-income families who express

interest in working abroad and are considered at high risk for trafficking.

In November, BOW awarded certificates to 30 young women who had successfully completed the training to become environmental monitors. Since completing the course, two of the girls are working full-time as environmental monitors, and BOW expects that 10 additional alumni will be placed in jobs in early 2004. Participants credit the course with an increased sense of accomplishment and motivation—13 of the girls returned to finish their high school education. Others have

decided to enroll in university to specialize in environmental protection. Most importantly, the training participants are no longer looking for potentially risky employment overseas, as the vocational training has provided them with better opportunities at home.

New Television Programs Confront Corruption in Albania and Bulgaria

Two new IREX-supported television shows—*Hapur* in Albania and *Na Chisto* in Bulgaria—were launched in 2003 to tackle the issue of corruption. Both shows feature contributions from local stations, and both have made an immediate impact.

Corruption ranks as one of the most pervasive problems facing developing and transitioning countries. By publicly exposing corrupt practices, the media proves enormously beneficial to creating the changes necessary to prevent corruption. IREX supports the media's anticorruption efforts by providing training in investigative reporting, grants for in-depth anticorruption reporting by newspapers and by Internet and broadcast media, and specialized training in subjects such as trafficking in human beings, police reporting, and local government reporting.

Hapur's coverage resulted in efforts to address deficiencies in food inspection and packing, caused a vice minister's illegally built house to be torn down, and resulted in an investigation into the pricing of service contracts issued by Tirana's city government.

In Bulgaria, the series *Na Chisto* was launched in November and has featured stories on corruption in the educational and healthcare systems and on human trafficking. Prior to the launch of *Na Chisto*, IREX provided extensive training to the reporters involved, and the program's main broadcaster has seen its ratings triple for the timeslot in which the program airs.

The programs have demonstrated success not only in their ratings, but also in vividly highlighting the important role that the media can play in exposing corruption, since television is the main source of information for most people.

The IREX ProMedia regional program is funded by USAID.

Mile versus the Transition: Serbian TV Satire Addresses Social Change

In the past 15 years, the citizens of Serbia have seen the demise of Yugoslavia as a state; wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo; the collapse of the economy from among the strongest of Eastern Europe to among the poorest; international isolation for the nation's role in the wars; and political instability since the ouster of the Milosevic regime in October 2000.

While many bewildered citizens have turned to nationalism or disengaged from civic life, B92 Television, Serbia's leading independent television station, used an IREX grant from the USAID-funded ProMedia Serbia program to develop an innovative program to confront the nation's changes through

satire. With IREX consultations, B92 worked with writer Srdjan Andjelic and director Rasa Andric to develop *Mile* from a one-time show into a series.

The program centers on a nationalistic and irritated Serbian man, Mile, from Belgrade, who spends most of his time in front of the television disparaging the changes happening around him. The audience identifies with Mile's frustrations, the ridiculous arguments he makes to "protect" Serbian culture, and his begrudging attempts to come to terms with the changes needed for Serbia to modernize.

As the director, Ms. Andric, says, "It's terribly easy being Mile," *Continued on page 8*

Harnessing the power of volunteerism.

Government alone cannot solve the problems confronting society. Often the dedication of volunteers—individuals and representatives of nonprofit, nongovernmental, and community organizations—alleviates the most pressing problems. IREX promotes grassroots community activism and supports democracy, economic prosperity, and civil society by supporting public service and social responsibility.

Russian Young Leaders Walk for Washington's Homeless

On November 22, 2003, before the sun rose, 26 Russian graduate students gathered on Washington's National Mall to assist the 16th Annual Help the Homeless Walkathon by setting up and staffing food and water distribution tables throughout the day. Close to 30,000 participants passed the finish line after the three-mile walk.

Volunteerism is not a foreign concept to these young leaders. They are participants of the Russian Young Leadership Fellows for Public Service Program (YLF), a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State. YLF keeps public service at its core, and YLF fellows are selected for leadership potential and commitment to public service. At institutions throughout the United States, fellows pursue one year of public service-related graduate-level study and perform many



YLF participant Sardana Nikolaeva prepares to hand out granola bars.

hours of volunteering each month. Following the academic year, they conduct a summer professional internship to complement their academic and volunteer experience.

YLF fellows gathered in Washington, DC, in late November for their midprogram workshop to share their experiences to date, prepare for the next semester, and secure summer internships. The Walkathon allowed them to conduct volunteer activity together and discuss their experience.

The 16th Annual Help the Homeless Walkathon, sponsored by the Fannie Mae Foundation, raises awareness and funds for Washington metropolitan-area organizations that combat homelessness. Help the Homeless also fosters volunteerism in service to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. The event raised about \$6.5 million.

Television Program Inspires Civic Activism

Prior to the launch of *Heroes*, an Albanian television program developed and supported by IREX, Albanians had become accustomed to unrelenting negative stories about the state of their country, breeding a sense of hopelessness.

But IREX and local television producers realized that many citizens were



Title screen of Albania's *Heroes* television program, which receives production assistance and financial support through IREX's ProMedia program.

taking control of their own lives and volunteering to better their communities—and that these inspiring stories were waiting to be told. Thus *Heroes* was launched to bring such stories to light and inspire greater civic activism and volunteerism.

Heroes has witnessed unparalleled success in Albania. It is now broadcast on more than 30 local channels and has run for almost three years, inspiring Albanians to take responsibility for themselves and their communities. By emulating the heroes depicted on the show, common citizens have rebuilt schools, preserved cultural traditions, and kept local businesses in operation.

Episodes have focused on an émigré doctor who returned from abroad to open a clinic that includes HIV/AIDS counseling (see page 2) and a community that rebuilt a key bridge linking it to the main road. One episode, "The Babies," inspired a rush to adopt orphaned infants when the program showed the appalling conditions at a maternity hospital and a local group's efforts to improve them.

Local television stations submit stories to the *Heroes* production team, which in turn produces each episode from the best submissions and distributes it to the network of participating stations. This innovative production and distribution process has made its mark in Albania, as several local stations within the network have used *Heroes* as a model by highlighting community heroes in their own local newscasts.

IREX Grantee Rallies Community to Support Local Orphans

In autumn 2003, IREX grantee Nature House invited local children, parents, and social welfare specialists to a series of outdoor adventure activities to foster community and camaraderie between orphans and local residents in Russia's Tomsk Oblast. The program was a great success, attracting over 40 local children and their parents and around 20 orphans, children at risk of abandonment or neglect, and orphanage graduates aged 15 to 22. Nature House is financed in part by USAID's Assistance to Russian Orphans Program, which is administered by IREX and its partner, the Russian National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Nature House's programs, which included hikes and activities incorporating ecological studies and environmental awareness themes, helped the orphans and graduates to socialize with their peers and acquire an understanding of parent-child relationships,

self-sufficiency, personal organization, and interpersonal relations—all important social components of a well-rounded individual that are typically lacking in a Russian orphanage upbringing.

In addition to the cooperative outdoor activities, Nature House provided psychologists, sociologists, and child-welfare specialists to assist the children in their self-improvement.

The program results observed by the specialists exceeded Nature House's highest expectations. The project was designed to raise the confidence and self-esteem of orphans and refine their social interaction skills, and Nature House found the level of confidence and openness among the participating orphans to be remarkable. Once-shy and wary children became self-assured and made lasting friendships with children and families from the community.

Serbian TV Satire Addresses Social Change

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but not good. Every one of us could resist the changes which transition brings, but the question is whether this is useful or not. Mile in this series is not a character who should be admired, but someone who should make us snap out of it and make us laugh.”

The actor who plays Mile, Zoran Cvijanovic, says of his character, “...it was our intention to make him a comic character, and we wanted people to recognize themselves in him. Because, if it comes to that, then I hope people will realize, as I have, just how crazy we’ve become in the meantime. And to what extent we’ve never had the opportunity to see how normal people behave in everyday situations.”

Mile quickly became a highly rated show for B92 and one that drew in a new audience to the station, improving ratings in rural areas and Vojvodina, a province in the north of the country. More importantly, it demonstrates the oft-forgotten power of television to make a positive social impact through the vehicle of entertainment.

Financial Report Fiscal Year 2002

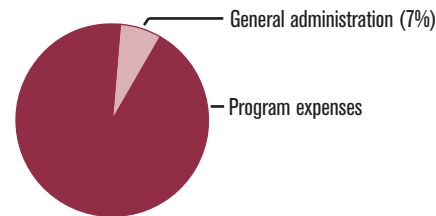
IREX increased total revenue and support from \$42 million in fiscal year 2001 to \$48 million during fiscal year 2002.

The information below represents unaudited financial statements.

Statement of Financial Position (thousands of dollars)

Assets	
Cash, cash equivalents	237
Other current assets	4,444
Fixed assets, net	647
Investments	4,991
Total assets	10,319
Liabilities and net assets	
Total liabilities	5,284
Total net assets	5,035
Total liabilities and net assets	10,319

Program and Administrative Costs



Statement of Activities (thousands of dollars)

Revenue and support	
Grants, contributions, and other	43,734
In-kind support	3,864
Total revenue and support	47,598
Expenses	
Program activities	39,462
General administration	3,263
In-kind expenses	3,864
Total expenses	46,589
Investment income	(245)
Change in net assets	764

About IREX

IREX (the International Research & Exchanges Board) is a leading US nonprofit organization specializing in education, independent media, Internet development, and civil society programs. For more about IREX, please visit our website at www.irex.org.

Education. The development of a civil society relies upon the knowledge and skills of its citizens and the quality of its educational institutions. IREX education programs give individuals in the United States and overseas the resources and opportunities they need to conduct innovative social science and humanities research, increase their professional knowledge and abilities, and advance their leadership skills. IREX also helps strengthen primary, secondary, and higher education institutions through the training of administrators, faculty, and teachers; the development of new curricula and teaching methodologies, academic programs, and disciplines; and the enrichment of campuses with visiting students and scholars.

Independent media. By providing balanced and unbiased information—and by serving as a forum for political expression—-independent media nurture an active and informed civil society capable of making meaningful contributions to democratic and economic processes. IREX focuses on developing local capacity, offering the technical and legal support necessary for building successful independent media systems.

Internet development. For over 10 years, IREX has been a leader in using the Internet as a tool for regional development. By providing computer training and Internet access, IREX strengthens democratization, creates new resources for the exchange of ideas, and opens a window to the West.

Civil society. IREX promotes open, democratic societies by strengthening the third sector—nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups. IREX civil society programs address a range of issues, including the prevention of trafficking in women and girls, local governance, economic development, rule of law, and social sector support. Since 1994, IREX has helped over 600 NGOs and nearly 750 civil society leaders to promote a collaborative and open approach to resolving community problems.

