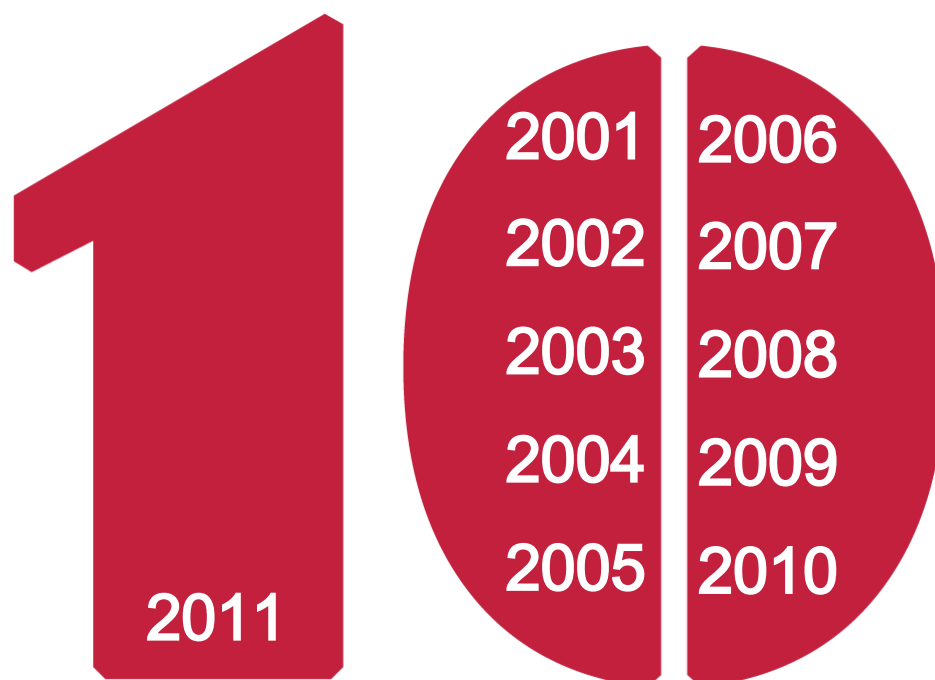


# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER OF ARMENIA 2001-2011



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YEREVAN-2011



## ” We are proud of our 10 years’ achievements”

In 2001 when the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia (FOICA) was founded, the idea of freedom of information was yet unknown to our society, whereas its necessity was enormous. At the same time, the founders of the FOICA were confident that many issues in our country could be overcome, if the openness and transparency of the government system were ensured. The FOICA was founded on 01 July 2001.

Our 10 years’ history is marked with significant achievements:

1. The elaboration of an advanced Law on Freedom of Information and its adoption in 2003, which was our first major and important step on the path of ensuring freedom of information.
2. Founding a non-formal freedom of information educational center and training 2500 civil and public servants on the implementation of the FOI legislation and training 3750 representatives of the civil society on the usage of the access to information right.
3. Organization of country-wide public campaigns via television, radio, press and Internet, as well as FOI “Golden Key and Rusty Lock” annual award ceremonies.
4. Thousands of consultations for citizens, journalists and officials about the appropriate implementation of freedom of information.
5. Publication of dozens of books, two collections of court cases and educational brochures for all targeted groups.
6. Production of the TV program “You’re Informed” devoted to the tight link between the right of access to information and other human rights.
7. Tens of court cases against state bodies, which had violated the access to information right.
8. Modernization of official websites, development of electronic governance mechanisms.
9. Active international cooperation and foundation of the international network of FOI advocates.
10. And finally, the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia succeeded in creating an environment of openness and publicity and in making the FOI idea popular in Armenia.

*Shushan Doydoyan*  
FOICA President

# Freedom of Information Center of Armenia 2001-2011

The Freedom of Information Center (FOICA) was founded by journalists and lawyers on 01 July 2001 in Yerevan, Armenia. The mission of FOICA is:

1. to promote application of the RA Freedom of Information Law,
2. to contribute to the transparency and openness of the Armenian government system and to stimulate civil society's involvement in the governance system.

**The main activities of the FOICA are:**

## Training

By organizing country-wide training for citizens and representatives of NGOs, mass media, political parties as well as state officials, the Center helps to improve their knowledge in the sphere of freedom of information. During 2003-2011 over 6250 people including 2500 officials received knowledge and skills on how to implement FOI legislation.

## Legal Counseling and Advocacy

In 2001-2011 the Center provided 6300 persons (citizens, media, NGOs, journalists and legal persons) with legal consultations and assistance on FOI issues.

The FOICA helps civil society groups to appeal unjustified information refusals in courts, hence making positive court precedents in the FOI field in Armenia. In 2006-2011 the FOICA brought 28 court cases with 75% positive outcome against state and self-governing bodies for illegal refusals of information requests and has successfully restored the violated rights of people.

## Public Educational Campaign

The FOICA actively advertises the public's right to know and the Armenian FOI Law. It exposes cases of violation of access to information right through broadcast and print media, as well as Internet. Dozens of TV talk shows and programs, investigative articles, conferences, FOI Annual Award Ceremonies have been prepared and organized. Since 2001 the Center has been publishing the "You have a right to know" Bulletin which is the only Armenian periodical specialized in freedom of information. Each issue of the Bulletin contains a "black-list" of those officials who have violated the access to information right of citizens, journalists, NGOs and juridical persons.



*FOI Annual Award Ceremony-2009. Positive Award for the most transparent institution was given to Azatan village administration.*

” The main mission of FOICA is to defend the people's constitutional right to have access to information.





The FOICA's website [www.foi.am](http://www.foi.am) is a professional resource for everyone to get knowledge and news on freedom of information, including local and international practice.

As a substantial part of public campaign, since the adoption of the Armenian FOI law in 2003, each year on September 28 – the International Right to Know Day, the FOICA organizes the Golden Key FOI Annual Award Ceremony to assess the openness and transparency of the government and to criticize closed and secret work style.

### Legislation Reforms

The FOICA has played an active role in the elaboration and adoption of the Armenian law on “Freedom of information”. The FOICA has initiated the drafting and adoption process of the second generation of the freedom of information legislation reforms. The reform package was developed together with the Armenian Ministry of Justice; Member of the National Assembly Viktor Dallakyan and the civil society. At present the package is included in the agenda of the National Assembly's session.

### E-Government Reforms

The FOICA implements a number of activities aimed at establishing new electronic government mechanisms in the government system. In 2011 the Freedom of Information Center has fully modernized the official websites of the Armenian Ministry of Territorial Administration and the 10 regional administrations. The FOICA is also supporting the Government to effectively use “Mulberry” electronic documentation sharing system in the governance system. For this purpose a series of training sessions and working discussions were organized in 2009-2010. In addition to this, computers were provided to municipalities and regional administrations.

### Monitoring of the FOI Legislation Implementation and the Transparency of the Government System

The FOICA carries out a constant monitoring of the implementation practice of FOI legislation in the state agencies and local self-government bodies. Every year the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia sends over 1000 information requests to state agencies and local self-government bodies, which makes the Centre one of the organizations that most actively use the Armenian Law on Freedom of Information. During past 10 years the FOICA carried out a number of monitoring projects to find out the state of freedom of information in Armenia.



FOI Annual Award Ceremony-2011.

Sh. Doydoyan gives the Certificate of Appraisal to Mr. Stephen Brager, the head of USAID Democracy and Governance Office.

Dr. Jatinder Cheema, USAID/Armenia Mission Director awards the Golden key to the mayor of Goris.



**Dr. Jatinder Cheema**  
**USAID|Armenia Mission Director**



The U.S. Agency for International Development is proud to support the dedicated work of the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia since 2005. In recent years, Armenia has made significant progress in ensuring the freedom of access to information for its citizens. The passage of the comprehensive Freedom of Information law in 2003, due to the initiative and efforts of the Freedom of Information Center, has provided an opportunity for the civil society and citizens of Armenia to hold government bodies accountable and responsive to citizens' and organizations' requests for information.

Throughout a decade of active work, FOICA has been instrumental in supporting public and civic involvement and participation in governance as well as promoting transparent and accountable government through facilitating access to information. The Center has consistently raised public awareness about citizens' rights stipulated by the FOI law, counseled government officials on their responsibilities related to the law and provided legal consultation that has been critical in the advancement of government accountability.

Access to public information by citizens has long been a cornerstone of American democracy, and the United States is proud to be a leader in ensuring this right. A century and a half ago, President Abraham Lincoln underscored the importance of what would today be called freedom of information when he avowed "I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts." As urgent today, President Obama's first executive order upon taking office addressed issues related to access to public information, specifically to presidential records. He averred that "the Government should not keep information confidential merely because public officials might be embarrassed by disclosure, because errors and failures might be revealed, or because of speculative or abstract fears." Improving access to government information is a never ending job whereby countries around the world can further refine and strengthen the freedom of information practices.

Armenia is a young democracy, and while it has made important progress towards openness, transparency and accountability, much remains to be done. Throughout the last ten years, FOICA has been a key player in this process, and on behalf of the U.S. Government, I congratulate them for the successes they have made to date. We hope that FOICA can continue to demonstrate the perseverance and hard work for new and sustainable advances, and we wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.





**Manvel Badalyan**

**President of the RA Civil Service Council**

The adoption of the RA Law on Freedom of Information had a breakthrough importance in terms of clarifying the collective mechanisms and principles for ensuring information accessibility by state government and local self-government bodies. However, the importance of the law significantly increased especially because the struggle for its implementation started from bottom - by the representatives of the civil society. Here the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, during the ten years of its existence and activities, created its unique place and signature, which is based on creating a legal implementation practice of the law, and especially on strengthening the understanding within state bodies, state and public officials and servants towards the importance of ensuring freedom and accessibility of information.

The cooperation between the Civil Service Council and the Center was also aimed at the above-mentioned. It is a classic example of purposeful and effective cooperation between a state body and an NGO, as a result of which we have conducted a number of training programs, have improved and enriched the questionnaires for attesting civil servants and for the competitions for civil servants' positions responsible for freedom of information in the staffs of state bodies, and have made changes in the job descriptions of relevant positions. The aim of it all has been making the knowledge of the FOI Law mandatory in the civil service sphere.

We are sure that a responsible, accountable, and transparent state and community government may be achieved also by creating all the conditions necessary for the implementation of citizens' access to information right. This is the most effective way for ensuring public control over the state government. In this respect there is still much to be done. We believe that the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, now based on the results and cumulative experience of its ten-year work, will continue its work with doubled enthusiasm and confidence. And in this mission we wish our colleagues new achievements.

# 1. Training

” In 2003-2011 over 6250 persons including 2500 officials received knowledge and skills on how to implement freedom of information legislation”.



*FOICA lawyer G. Hayrapetyan trains civil servants.*

In 2003-2011 the FOICA organized dozens of training workshops throughout Armenia on the implementation of local and international standards of freedom of information. The training events were conducted for the representatives of state agencies and local self-government bodies, and of the civil society.

In November 2010 the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia established the FOI non-formal Educational Center for providing continuous training for public officials and civil servants. The educational center became a sustainable source for providing regular training for officials in the FOI field.

In order to increase the efficiency of the FOI trainings, in 2010 the FOICA produced two educational video films with the titles “Your Duty to Provide Information” and “Your Right to be Informed”.

## Training of Civil Servants

Since 2008 the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, together with the Armenian Civil Service Council, has started the training of civil servants. The training was first launched within the framework of the “Freedom of Information Training for Civil Servants Responsible for Public Affairs” Project, which was supported by the OSCE Office in Yerevan. During two-day training workshops 84 employees of information departments of governmental bodies and 10 regional administrations acquired necessary practical knowledge and skills for the implementation of the Law on Freedom of Information.

Another outcome of this cooperation was the revision of the job descriptions of civil servants responsible for public affairs in the Armenian civil service system. Their job descriptions have been revised to include their specific functions and duties in the FOI sphere.

The FOICA-Civil Service Council cooperation was continued in November 2010 when the training of civil servants restarted in the “Non-Formal Freedom of Information Educational Center”. Those were three-day training sessions devoted to the freedom of information. Following the training the participants received state-approved certificates. In November-December 2010 and March-June 2011, 301 civil servants took part in the trainings of the Educational Center.

The training sessions are held in accordance with the program on “Ensuring the Principles of Integrity Freedom of Information and Public Affairs in the Governance System”, approved on 28 October 2010, by the Decision N847 of the RA Civil Service Council.

The Civil Service Council with its decision N302-U, dated 17 April, 2008, included the “Freedom of Information and Public Relations in the Governance System” training program into the permanent training curriculum of civil servant information officers.

Afterwards, with the decision No. 129-U issued by the Minister of Territorial Administration on 20 October 2011, the training program “Interpersonal relations, freedom of information and public relations in the local self-government system” intended for community servants was approved.





**Vache Terteryan,**  
First Deputy Minister of  
Territorial Administration  
of the Republic of Armenia

Throughout its ten years of activity, the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia has made a significant contribution to state management, publicity and transparency of local government activities and, moreover, through its annual awards, the center has also supported these causes. We welcome the consistency of the FOICA's efforts in the implementation of the law on Freedom of Information and in the protection of the citizen's right to receive information, which is an important step in the strengthening of democracy.

The Ministry of Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia values its cooperation with the Center. We appreciate the work of the FOICA with the territorial administration and local self-government bodies. Within the FOICA's "Access to information as a mean for community participation" program, the information sites of the regional governments are currently being updated and citizens can obtain information not only about the work of the regions and regional governments, but they can also learn about the Freedom of Information law and follow online application process.

The Ministry of Territorial Administration congratulates the Freedom of Information Center and wishes success and further productive activity.

A worthwhile part of the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia NGO's ten-year activities are such events of core importance, based on which desirable acts of democracy and tendencies for their constant development became obvious. It can be truly underlined that with its outstanding mission the organization promoted the installation of one of the most important preconditions of democracy - the freedom of information tradition and had an active participation in preserving and spreading this tradition.

Cordially congratulating the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia NGO for the 10th anniversary of its foundation, I find it worth highlighting the enormous work of the President of the organization Shushan Doydoyan and the effectiveness and uniqueness of her activities.

I am sure that the professionalism and the reputation achieved during these 10 years, in the future too, will give positive developments to the realization of the organization's functions, bringing new successes to all the programs and initiatives.



**Kavalenko Shahgaldyan**  
Head of Kotayk Regional  
Administration



## 2. Improvement of Mechanisms of Proactive Publication

### Information Billboards

The most important part of the freedom of information is proactive publication of public oriented information. For this purpose the FOICA provides communities with information billboards as a tool for proactive publication of information. The information billboards are flexible, cheap and efficient source for the communities, fostering active disclosure of obligatory information by local institutions.

In the framework of this process, a memorandum was signed between the FOICA President and the heads of 8 communities. By this memorandum the community leaders took an obligation to periodically (at least once a month) update the information on the billboards, as well as ensure community awareness of the billboards. The billboards must be used exclusively for public purposes, it is to say, advertisements are strictly excluded from the billboards.



“ Since 2007 the FOICA placed 230 billboards in 49 communities throughout Armenia.

### Improving E-Government Mechanisms

During 2010 the FOICA took up the complex improvement process of the informational portals of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and the 10 regional administrations of Armenia. The Center initiated the development of Internet portals, which will provide the public with compound and complete information about the activities of regional administrations and the Ministry of Territorial Administration. It now ensures the accessibility and transparency of important and necessary information (community budgets and budget implementation reports, financial donations, regional governors' decisions, as well as the 13 information categories defined by the Law on Freedom of Information).

The FOICA is also supporting the Armenian Government to effectively use “Mulberry” electronic documentation sharing system in

the governance system. For this reason, training sessions and workshops were held for chiefs of staffs and employees of public affairs departments of the regional administrations.

[www.mta.gov.am](http://www.mta.gov.am)

**Aghvan Hovsepyan,**  
Prosecutor General of the  
Republic of Armenia,  
State Counselor of Justice



I congratulate Shushan Doydoyan and the team of the “Freedom of Information Center” non-governmental organization on the tenth anniversary of their establishment. The formation of civil society is one of the biggest achievements and represents the values of our state and society and you have made a significant contribution in that field.

The FOICA stands out with its close cooperation with law enforcement agencies as well.

We deeply appreciate your sincere interest in the law enforcement system and especially your organization’s contribution to the creation of information relationships between the prosecutor’s office and the public and the formation and development of mechanisms for easy access to information.

I wish good health, strong will and energy to you and your staff, for doing the citizens’ and the civil society representatives’ difficult and responsible work that demands determination, enthusiasm and loyalty toward state and society. Without a free, strong, well-organized civil society, our society will not be complete.

Good luck to you!!!



### 3. Strategic Litigation

Strategic litigation is one of the FOICA's main tools as a most important guarantee for protecting the access to information right. FOI court cases positively affect the state of freedom of information, preventing violations. The FOICA initiates court cases against those officials, who violate citizens' right to know, do not respond the information requests or provide incomplete information. Due to this process a positive court precedent practice on freedom of information is gradually formed.

Some of the court cases initiated by the FOICA were of precedential importance. Such was the case FOICA vs. the village municipality of Elpin, which ended in 2009. This was the first time when the official who violated the right to know - the mayor of Elpin - was imposed to an administrative sanction in the amount of AMD 50.000.

Of precedential importance was also the FOICA's claim to the RA Constitutional Court. On September 9, 2009, the FOICA applied to the Constitutional Court with the claim to consider Articles 151 and 152 of the RA Code of Administrative Procedures as contradictory with Articles 18 and 19 of the Constitution and to announce them invalid. On 05 February 2010 the Constitutional Court decided that articles 151 and 152 of the Code of Administrative Procedures do not contradict the Constitution. At the same time the constitutional court stated that the problem is in the legislative gap and gave a direct recommendation to the National Assembly to take appropriate actions to reform the Code of Administrative Offence and fill the gap of imposing administrative sanctions. The Chairman of the Constitutional Court Mr. Gagik Harutyunyan thanked the FOICA for touching upon such an important issue.

Since 2003 the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia has been carrying a mission of judicial protection of the access to information right. Until today 28 court cases have been initiated by the FOICA out of which 26 are fully completed and only 2 are still in process – the FOICA vs. village municipality of Zartonk, and the FOICA vs. “Yerevan Urban Development & Investment Programs Department” SNCO.

This initiative of the FOICA was not left without consequence. On 31 January 2011 the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia adopted a reform package which also anticipates removing the requirement of a report about administrative violations from the Code of Administrative Procedures.

According to amendments made on January 31 in Armenia's Administrative Procedure Code, the requirement to write a statement on the fact of FOI administrative offenses was removed. Thus, according to the last paragraph of Article 254 of the Administrative Procedure Code, no statement is needed when the access to information right is violated.



*The hearing of the FOICA's claim in the RA Constitutional Court, February, 2010.*





**Ruzan Minasyan**  
Responsible for the Legal  
Section of “Aravot” Daily

I congratulate my colleagues in the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Center’s foundation.

The FOICA is one of the visible NGOs. It is one of the few, whose activities one encounters every second and whose practical proposals are made use of without a “translator’s” help.

The FOICA is an organization which never became a protector of office journalism. It is with everyone, it does real, working journalism.

The FOICA is a tradition-maker having initiated the FOI Law, thanks to which the barriers hindering freedom of speech were overcome and information became accessible.

The previous law on media outlets anticipated that everyone had a right to receive information from officials, however the order was not regulated. Thus, officials, because of this legislative gap, were close in terms of information accessibility. This issue was solved with the Law on Freedom of Information. The FOICA even turned to courts: the Organization did not leave journalists alone in courts. It is hard to be visible and not become a target for criticism. It is hard to make traditions and not be vulnerable in vacant legal relations.

But one thing is obvious: the FOICA has taken up only one sphere – the sphere of information accessibility, for which it has done enormous work. Congratulations.

## 4. The RA Law on Freedom of Information: 2003-2011

On 23 September 2003 the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia adopted the Law on Freedom of Information, which was recognized by the international community and experts in this sphere as one of the best in the world. This was an exceptional case when the civil society was able to actively and effectively cooperate with the Government and the National Assembly, elaborating an advanced legislative act. Gathering a group of journalists, representatives from NGOs and Parliament Members Victor Dallakyan and Vardan Bostanjyan, the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia set up a working group, which developed and introduced to the National Assembly the current Law on Freedom of Information. Today too, all are confident that freedom of information is the only key for establishing democracy and promoting transparency and accountability of the state institutions.

In 2009, with the support of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, and in close cooperation with the civil society and international organizations, the FOICA, the National Assembly and the Ministry of Justice developed a package of draft amendments to the Law on Freedom of Information and relevant legislation.



Before the elaboration of abovementioned draft, the FOICA organized a number of round-table discussions in order to hear the suggestions and conclusions of interested groups, including representatives from the civil society, media outlets and state institutions. These suggestions and conclusions are also included in the draft package.

” Since December 2009 the package of draft amendments has been introduced to the National Assembly’s four-day session, but it has not yet been discussed”.



**Karen Andreasyan,**  
Human Rights Defender of  
Armenia

**T**he Freedom of Information Center of Armenia and its founder and President Shushan Doydoyan are recognized as prominent representatives of Armenian civil society and as defenders of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The Armenian law on the Freedom of Information, which was initiated together with Shushan Doydoyan and other colleagues, became an important basis on which the FOICA is operating and developing. The Center also holds fundamental importance in transparent governance and access to information, thereby contributing to the establishment of strong democracy.

There are a large number of people that the FOICA has helped and there are also a large number of state and local government bodies that came under the legitimate concern of the Center.

With its undisputed ability of helping people and opening the doors of information of state bodies, the Center will certainly continue its great mission for many decades to come.



## 5. Public Education Campaign

### Freedom of Information Week September 21-28, 2011

From 21-28 September 2011, for the first time the Freedom of Information Center organized Freedom of Information week in Armenia on the occasion of its 10th anniversary. The main aim of the Freedom of Information Week (FOI week) was to broadly present to the public the right to freedom of information, the mechanisms of its implementation and the enforcement process of the Law on Freedom of Information.



**W**ithin the frames of the FOI week the following events have been organized by the FOICA in 2011:

- **21 September 2011**- Public campaign dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Republic of Armenia and the 10th anniversary of the FOICA's foundation: this day, the FOICA's staff and the students of the Yerevan State University (YSU) distributed flyers and booklets about the right to know.
- **22 September 2011**- Presentation of the new web project concerning the complete statistical picture of the FOI field ([www.givemeinfo.am](http://www.givemeinfo.am)) took place. Presentation of the outcomes of the "Freedom of Information in Armenia" country-wide monitoring.
- **26 September 2011**- Public launch of the modernized websites of 10 regional administrations of Armenia was organized in Hrazdan, Kotayq region.
- **28 September 2011**- The FOI Week was completed by the FOI annual "Golden key and rusty lock" FOI award ceremony. This year, in addition to traditional nominations, on the occasion of the FOICA's 10th anniversary, ten special prizes were awarded to the organizations and authors of the best initiatives for their efforts to establish and develop freedom of information in Armenia.  
See details: <http://www.foi.am/en/about-award/>.

” In more than 100 countries where FOI laws have been adopted and applied, every year the last week of September is devoted to the Right to Know. During this week the civil society groups organize various events aimed at encouraging openness and transparency of the government .





**Armen Ashotyan,**  
RA Minister of Education and  
Science

I congratulate the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia on the 10th anniversary of its foundation and I wish that in the future too, the organization's activities will be marked with achievements.

The Freedom of Information Center of Armenia NGO has been pursuing several very important tasks and these tasks have always been based on approaches and principles that are in accordance with democratic standards.

In addition to the jubilee congratulations, I should also mention the President of the organization Shushan Doydoyan's exceptional devotion towards her work, and would like to wish that all her undertakings be successful.

Being a period of information technologies, the 20th century prompts the need for creating an informed society. This also accounts for the degree of democratization in every state and society. The assurance of the access to information right in today's world has become not only the guarantee for individuals' socialization, but also is an important part of basic human rights.

Loyal to the principles adopted by our country towards establishing democratic values, with its 10 years' history, the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia has promoted the increase of transparency and accountability of the activities of state governance, local self-government bodies and organizations of public importance. Besides, it has also promoted the formation of public opinion about those bodies and organizations. The FOICA's "Golden Key" award ceremony has become unique means for public assessment of freedom of information.

Once again congratulating the staff of Freedom of Information Center of Armenia NGO on their 10th anniversary, I wish them new successes and achievements.



## FOI Annual Award Ceremony

Since 2002 in more than 100 countries September 28 is celebrated as the International Right to Know Day. In Armenia since 2003 after the adoption of the Armenian FOI law the FOICA jointly with its partner NGOs, has initiated the FOI Annual Award Ceremony which become an important awareness raising campaign tool and a stimulus for developing good access to information practices by public bodies.



FOI Annual Award Ceremony-2009

**T**he Golden Keys awards are awarded as a symbol of openness and transparency, and the Rusty lock awards are awarded as a symbol of secrecy.

### The positive awards are:

- Positive Award for the institution/agency that has the best applied the Armenian FOI Law;
- Positive award for the best official website in terms of access to information;
- Positive award for the best official initiative ensuring freedom of information;
- Positive Award for the NGO that best utilized the right of access to information;
- Positive Award for the journalist/author of the best FOI related article;
- Positive Award for a citizen who has actively exercised his/her right of access to information under FOI Law.

### The negative awards are:

- Negative award for a state institution, which does not fulfill its obligations in FOI field.
- Negative award for a state institution, which is the author of the most ridiculous official answer.

The nominees are selected by an Independent Jury represented by local and international organizations' members, journalists, and scientists in the field. The Jury sums up the results of the monitoring conducted by the FOICA and their own experience. Another source for unbiased decision-making is the monthly Black list. The selection criteria are available on: <http://www.foi.am/en/award-standards/>:



FOI Annual Award Ceremony-2007



## Black list

” The FOICA quarterly publishes a “Black List” of those officials who head agencies that have violated the access to information right in that time period. Utilizing these quarterly reports, FOICA publishes an annual “Black List.”



The Black List includes heads of national, local self-government, and other institutions, or heads of organizations of public importance that:

- Do not respond to information requests.
- Respond to information requests after the deadlines defined by the “Law on Freedom of Information.” (While the “Law on Freedom of Information” defines a timeframe of five business days to respond to written inquiries, FOICA allows additional four working days to allow time for postal delivery. Thus, a response is considered in violation of deadline if it is not received within nine working days after sending the information request.)
- Do not provide legal reasons for denying a request.
- Provide incomplete or false information,
- Define and/or charge illegal fees for giving information.
- Cite improper information sources.
- Do not properly publish information subject to mandatory publication in due times, in accordance with the “Law on Freedom of Information”, articles 3 and 7.

Before including an official and the corresponding institution on the Black List, the FOICA takes the following steps:

**STEP 1:** After the deadline of nine working days defined above is exceeded, the FOICA representative calls and checks whether the inquiry was received and who is responsible for it.

**STEP 2:** After receiving an incomplete answer, a groundless denial, or no answer, the Center sends a second inquiry. (In this case the deadline is also nine working days).

**STEP 3:** After leaving the second request unanswered the relevant body and its head appear in the Black List.

The FOICA Black List is continuously updated. All those institutions that review their activities after being included in the quarterly Black List, and carry on reforms that improve information accessibility will not be included in the Black List for subsequent quarters or on the Annual Black List of officials who have violated the access to information right. Indeed, FOICA will note on its Black List page the progress made by such institutions. At the end of the year, the annual Black List is developed based on the quarterly data. The Annual Black List will also note the positive changes made by the relevant institutions.



## Photo-Exhibition Devoted to the World Press Freedom Day

In 2010 the UNESCO devoted World Press Freedom Day, May 3, to freedom of information. For that reason the FOICA, together with the USAID, OSCE Office in Yerevan and UN Department of Public Information, organized a photo-exhibition under the heading "Freedom of the Press, the Right to Know". About 300 works were presented, and the jury selected 30 unique photos out of them.

The aim of the exhibition was to illustrate the challenges and opportunities of freedom of speech and information, and to remind governments, representatives of mass media outlets, and the public of their role in implementing this right.

The opening of the exhibition was held on 03 May, 2010, where the US Ambassador to Armenia Mary Yovanovich, Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan Ambassador Sergey Kapinos, UN Resident Coordinator in Armenia Dafina Gercheva, the RA Prosecutor General, the Minister of Education and Science, representatives of other state structures, journalists and the civil society were present.

The exhibition lasted for one week, and after it was over the photos were published in the special catalogue devoted to the World Press Freedom Day.



"AFACTUM"  
by Ashot Ashot



"No title"  
by Sargis Virabyan



"Honored artist of the RA Sos Sargsyan"  
by Jirayr Sukiasyan







**Ambassador Sergey Kapinos**  
Head of the OSCE Office in  
Yerevan

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Freedom of Information Centre of Armenia (FOICA) on its 10th anniversary. A dedicated advocate of freedom of information values in Armenia, the FOICA has had a pioneering role in defending the public right to know, so instrumental for the enjoyment of other democratic rights and freedoms.

The OSCE Office in Yerevan appreciates the many-years successful cooperation with the FOICA within the framework of several initiatives aimed at increasing the transparency and accountability of the Armenian governmental institutions and strengthening the know-how among civil society in exercising the right of access to information - a cornerstone to democracy.

I wish the FOICA a continuing success in all its endeavors.

**Mr. Francois Vezina,**  
Former Chief of Party-Mobilizing  
Action against Corruption (MAAC)  
Activity



As one of the most vibrant civil society organizations in Armenia, Freedom of Information Center of Armenia (FOICA) has played a lead role in the prevention and detection of corruption by holding big and small government agencies alike accountable to the principles of access to information.

It is well known that access to information is pre-condition to transparent and accountable governance. It is therefore difficult to overestimate the role that FOICA plays in this area of Armenian public life. The fact that it provides capacity building for concerned agencies and public servants, relentlessly tests the access to information practices by monitoring the performance of government, recognizes good and blacklists the poor performers, challenges officials in court, and advocates for policy changes makes FOICA an indispensable partner for the advancement of democracy and integrity in Armenia.

On the occasion of its 10th Anniversary, on behalf of the USAID Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity team, I wish FOICA unbroken resolve and determination in the pursuit of its goals.

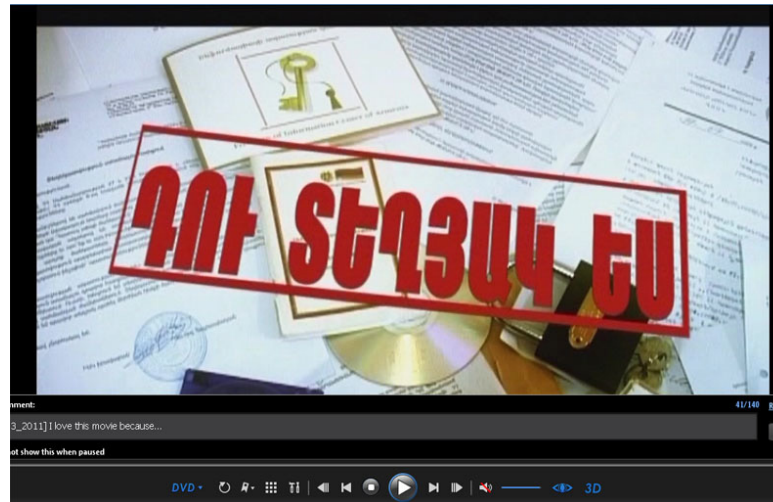


## “You’re Informed” TV program

Since 2009 the FOICA produces “You’re Informed” TV program which is devoted to the people’s right to know. The program talks about how people can receive necessary information according to the Armenian legislation, where and how to apply, what to do when their request is denied, etc. And most importantly, it tells about how people can implement their other rights (consumer rights, labor rights, right to education, social protection rights, health-care rights, etc.) through the right to know.

The duration of each program is 30 minutes. The TV Program is aired on “Yerkir Media” TV channel. All TV programs can be viewed on-line:

<http://www.foi.am/en/tv-program/>



## Publications

” In the last 10 years the FOICA has published numerous articles, research, analyses and books about freedom of information. The majority of these publications are also posted on the Center’s website in Armenian and English languages: <http://www.foi.am/en/books/>

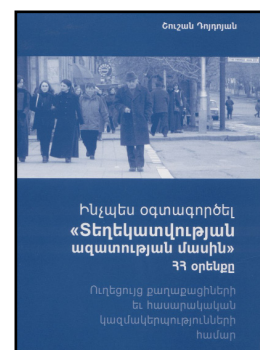
### “YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW” bulletin

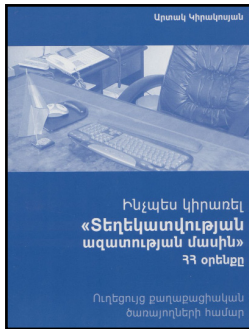
Since 2001 the Center has been publishing “You have a Right to be Know” bulletin, which is the only professional periodical in Armenia about the freedom of information sphere. In each issue of the periodical the “Black List” of officials violating the access to information right is published.



### How to Apply the RA “Law on Freedom of Information”: Guidebook for Citizens and Non-Governmental Organizations, 2005

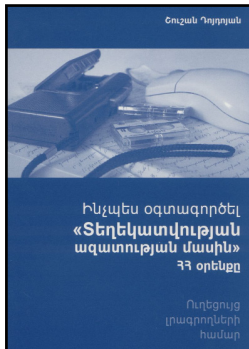
The main purpose of this guidebook is to introduce to the citizens and representatives of the civil society the concept and importance of freedom of information. It also presents the specifics of the FOI legislation’s national and international legal regulations, the order and conditions for receiving information, the mechanisms for appealing against violations of the access to information right, as well as to the legal responsibilities.





### How to Apply the RA “Law on Freedom of Information”: Guidebook for Civil Servants, 2005

This guidebook is first of all meant for state and local self-government bodies, and for private organizations of public importance. Its aim is to help them harmonize their activities with the FOI standards. The guidebook will help them work more professionally, which will increase the public trust towards their organizations.



### How to Use the RA “Law on Freedom of Information”: Guidebook for Journalists, 2005

The guidebook teaches the representatives of mass media, journalists on the concept of freedom of information and its importance, as well as the specifics of national and international legal regulations of the FOI legislation, the order and conditions for receiving information, the mechanisms for appealing against violations of the access to information right and the legal responsibilities.



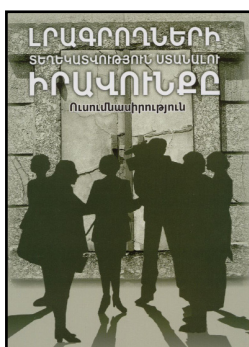
### How to Apply the RA “Law on Freedom of Information”: Guidebook for Representatives of the Law Enforcement, 2005

The main purpose of this guidebook is to show the representatives of the law enforcement the concept of freedom of information and its importance, as well as the specifics of freedom of information in the law enforcement system. The guidebook will help them work more professionally, which will increase the public trust towards their structures.



### Transparent Elections: How to Receive Information in Electoral Processes: Guidebook for Journalists, 2007

The purpose of the guidebook is to show the representatives of media outlets, journalists the concept of freedom of information and its importance during elections, how they can use the FOI legislation during elections for accessing information.



### Access to Information Right of Journalists: Research, 2007

The purpose of this research is to promote the Armenian media's access to information by summing up journalists' experience in FOI law observing how effectively the journalists are able to exercise their constitutional right of access to information in their daily work, how open and transparent state agencies are for the media, identifying the current obstacles and challenges affecting the journalists' right to information.



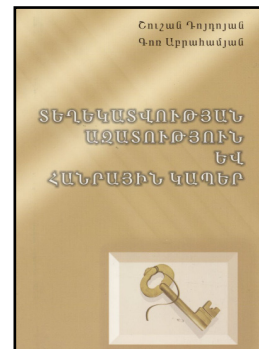
### The Key for Democracy: Freedom of Information, 2008

The monograph talks about the role and importance of freedom of information in forming a democratic society. The author, Shushan Doydoyan, touches upon the legal guarantees and the specifics of national and international legal regulations of freedom of information, the basic issues that occur in Armenia during the implementation of the access to information right, as well as the punishment mechanisms for violating this right.



### Freedom of Information and Public Relations, 2008

This guidebook was produced for the employees of Information and Public Relations Departments of state agencies. It was developed by the Civil Service Council of the RA and the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, with the assistance of the OSCE Office in Yerevan.



### How to Receive Information on the Way to Social Integration, 2008

This manual presents guidelines on how to access to information right of disabled people, to promote accessibility awareness, and through it to overcome the two-way social integration process. With the help of the guidebook people with disabilities will be able to learn about one of the most important components of human rights – access to information and related rights.



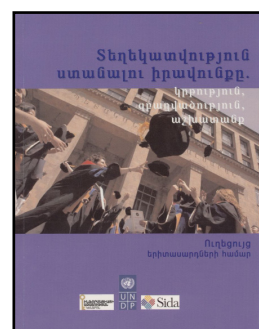
### Future Mothers' Access to Information Right, 2008

The aim of this guidebook is to increase women's awareness level of their rights and opportunities in the family planning, pregnancy, delivery and post-delivery periods. The guideline was prepared in order to promote the use of the access to information right, mother's awareness and protection during pregnancy, and to alleviate the barriers related to social issues.



### Access to Information Right: Education, Employment, Work, 2008

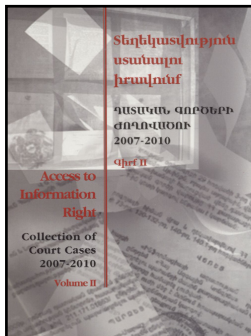
The book informs the youth about the mechanisms on how to use the FOI law to protect young people's rights to education, employment and work. It covers issues on how the youth representatives may submit information requests and receive the necessary information, in what form, within what time frames and how they may appeal the unlawful denials.





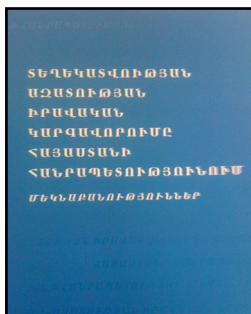
### Collection of Court Cases, Volume 1, 2001-2006

The collection includes all the documents of the court cases that took place in 2001-2006 for the protection of access to information right – information request, claim, verdict. In the introduction of the book the issues of court protection of the access to information right in Armenia are also presented.



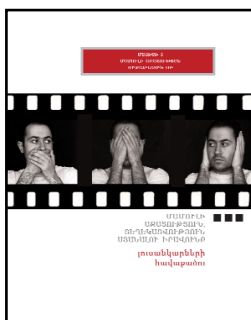
### Collection of Court Cases, Volume 2, 2007-2010

This collection comprises the court cases that took place in 2007-2010 in the FOI sphere in the Republic of Armenia. A concise description of each case is presented, together with all relevant documents – claim, court verdict, etc. The collection also includes an analysis of the FOI forensic practice.



### Legal Regulation of Freedom of Information in the Republic of Armenia: Commentary Book, 2011

The book consists of two major parts. The first part includes the concept of the access to information right, its principles, the implementation specifics of the FOI Law, the FOI forensic practice, as well as cases of the access to information right violation and practical examples. As for the second part, it is a detailed analysis of the FOI Law: how to understand and interpret each article of the FOI Law, hence, also how to implement the FOI Law.



### Freedom of the Press, the Right to Know: Photo Catalogue, 2010

On 03 May 2010 the FOICA organized a photo exhibition “Freedom of the Press, the Right to Know”. 30 unique photos were presented during the exhibition. It lasted one week, after which the photos were published in the special catalogue devoted to the International Press Freedom Day.



## The First FOI Song

Freedom of information already has its own song, the author of which is the leader of the "VOX" Group Aram Ryan. For the first time the song was performed live by Aram Ryan on September 28, 2011 at the Freedom of Information Award Ceremony.



### "Give Me Info" song, lyrics

I don't want you to ever lie to me.  
Let me hear the truth, no matter how bitter it is.  
There are problems that we need to solve together,  
Because if you keep hiding them, we will all fail.

So I fight and I demand:  
Give me info...  
Undisguised and first-hand.

I have been dreaming to live in a just society.  
But justice and lies can't co-exist.  
I'm an intelligent being and I long for freedom.  
But I need some info on how to be free.

So I fight and I demand:  
Give me info...  
Undisguised and first-hand.

Let's save the truth from the chains of deception.  
Information is the light that will reign again.  
Information is our strength and our might.  
Together, we can change the life in our society.

So I fight and I demand:  
Give me info...  
Undisguised and first-hand.

## 6. Legal Consultations

In 2001-2011 the FOICA provided 6300 persons (citizens, media, NGOs, journalists and legal persons) with legal consultations and assistance on FOI issues.

**T**his activity of the Organization comprises three directions:

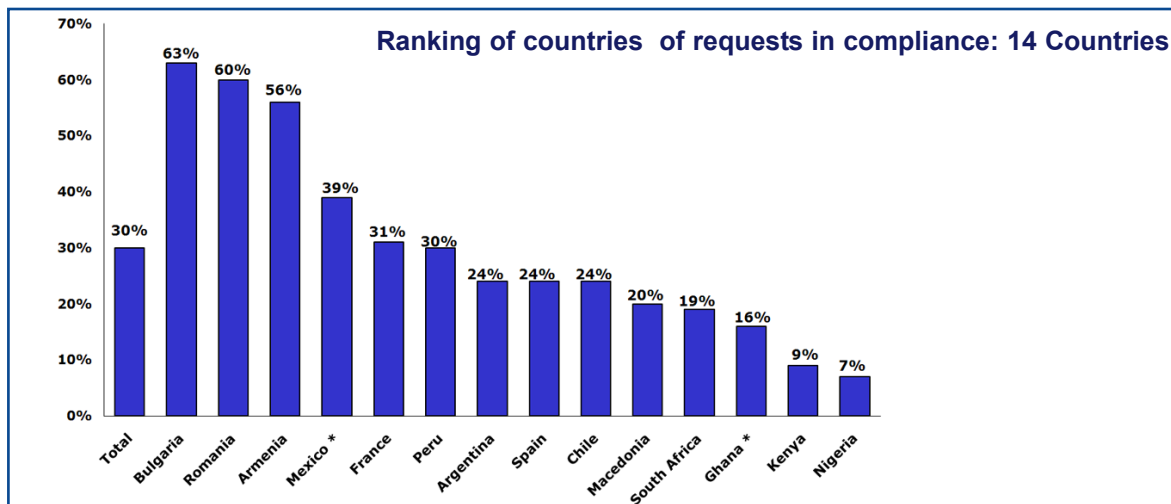
1. Consultations about the opportunities and the order of receiving information from state governance and local self-government bodies.
2. Practical assistance to citizens in preparing their information requests. In cases when citizens' requests were left unanswered or the answer was incomplete, the FOICA, on its behalf, sends a request with the same content to that specific information holder and acquires the needed information for the citizens.
3. Preparing court claims and court representation. In cases, when the FOICA does not succeed in receiving information in this way, the FOICA files a court claim in order to receive the requested information, as well as to impose administrative sanctions on the official violating the right to know.

Consultations were done through the Internet, by phone, and through citizens' visits to FOICA office.

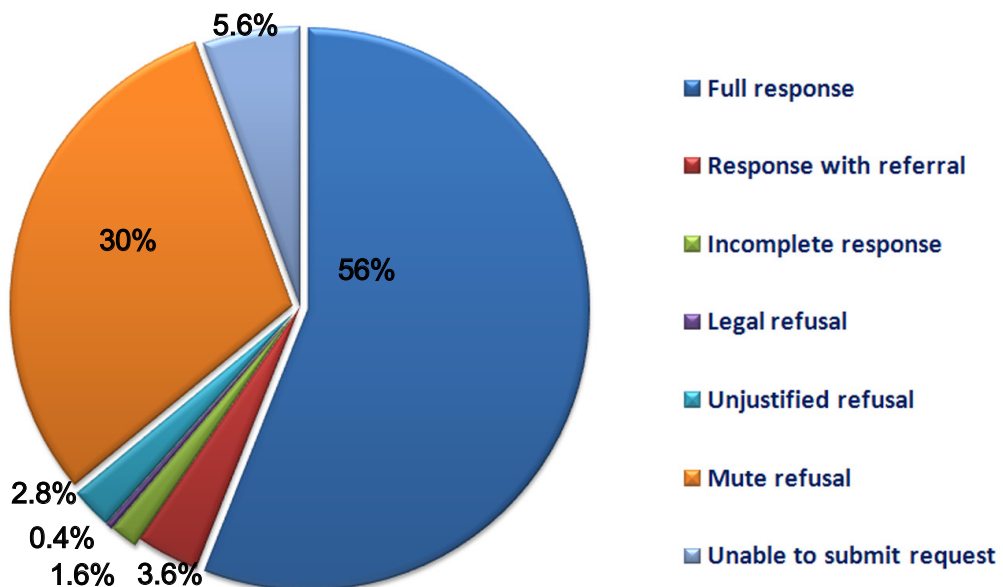
## 7. Monitoring of the Implementation of FOI Legislation and the Transparency of the Government

Since 2003 in order to assess the state of freedom of information in state governance and local self-government bodies the FOICA conducted monitoring of the implementation of FOI legislation. In order to assess the state of freedom of information in state governance and local self-government bodies and in order to make state bodies work openly and transparently, as well as to receive necessary information for citizens, the FOICA sends over 1000 requests per year to state governance and local self-government bodies, becoming one of the organizations most actively using the FOI law.

The first monitoring of FOI situation in Armenia was conducted in 2003 after the adoption of the FOI Law. Other countries, including Bulgaria, Macedonia, Peru and South African Republic also participated in the monitoring project. The next comprehensive monitoring was carried out in 2004 together with other 14 countries. These are the main monitoring outcomes of Armenia in comparison to other participating countries.



In 2011 the FOICA conducted the next complete monitoring of the implementation of Freedom of Information legislation. The monitoring report is available at: <http://www.foi.am/en/research/>.





## 8. Givmeinfo.am web project

In 2011 [www.givmeinfo.am](http://www.givmeinfo.am) website was developed by the FOICA as an on-line mechanism to promote the transparent work of state and local self-government bodies.

We do not criticize or analyze. We demonstrate the statistical picture of the freedom of information sector in Armenia, according to you requests.

This site presents statistic picture of how the information holders (state bodies, local self-government bodies, state offices, state budget sponsored organizations, organizations of public importance) enforce the right to freedom of information.



The web project also gives an opportunity to everyone who has applied to any information holder by a FOI request to input into the site his/her information request and all related documents. As a result, citizens' FOI requests are also included in the statistics, presenting the full picture of the freedom of information in Armenia.

Here, you can:

- See the entire statistical picture of activities in the freedom of information sector, as well as both positive and negative results per annum - all related to state and local self-government bodies, state budget sponsored organizations, as well as the organizations with public functions.
- Create your information request case. Complete the appropriate application form, insert copies of required documents, and your case will become part of the freedom of information database.
- Familiarize yourself with separate pages related to activities of each unit in the freedom of information sector. Your case will be displayed on the page of the specific supervision unit you searched for: a statistical picture will be produced based on given answers related to your request addressed to that unit.
- Discuss and Comment on the results, as seen on the website.
- Share Cases and statistical data with the public through social networks.

The project was conducted with the support of the OSCE Office in Yerevan and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

## 9. The FOICA's Partners

In 10 years the FOICA has conducted 24 projects.

### **Our partners and supporters are:**

1. United States Agency for International Development
2. OSCE Office in Yerevan
3. Eurasia Partnership Foundation Office in Armenia
4. Justice Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest
5. World Bank Yerevan Office
6. Article 19
7. UN Development Program
8. Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)
9. Embassy of the United States of America
10. British Embassy in Yerevan
11. American Bar Association, CEELI
12. "Casals & Associates" Inc.

### **Ongoing Project**

Since 2008 the FOICA implements “Access to Information for Community Involvement” five-year project supported by USAID Armenia. The project is designed to promote transparency and openness of the government, as well as support the people’s involvement and participation in addressing public issues through promoting effective and efficient access to information.

The proposed primary strands under the project are:

1. Establishment of non-formal educational Center.
2. Training of various actors (central and local government representatives, in particular PR officers, as well as civil society groups).
3. Establishment of mechanisms for logging-in, tracking and addressing FOI requests in 3 regional central government bodies and 2 municipalities.
4. Strategic litigation on access to information.
5. Improving mechanisms for proactive publication of information.
6. Improvement of public outreach efforts.
7. Public education campaign.