

Building Bridges: Engaging Civil Society from Muslim Communities and Countries with the Multilateral Sphere

Project Overview July 2007

The assessment within FIM leading to this project was that civil society from the Muslim world is all too often absent from, or poorly represented within, dialogues with multilateral bodies. The FIM Board felt that this was a priority area of action if we were to be consistent with our mandate. Within the FIM network there exists an important body of experiential knowledge in dealing with a wide diversity of multilateral organizations. At the same time FIM has developed relations with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) within OIC countries and other Muslim communities that are seeking ways to increase their influence on multilateralism.

During 2006 and in early 2007, FIM convened three meetings that enabled CSO participants from OIC member countries to achieve a consensus on the need for influencing multilateral bodies and also to identify priority areas for action. The first, Phase I meeting, was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, January 16-18, 2006; Phase II comprised two meetings: in Doha, Qatar, October 29 to November 1, 2006 and Amman, Jordan, January 11-12, 2007. A fourth, OIC Phase III implementation meeting, is being planned for October 2007 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Following is a brief summary of Phase I and II meetings and their outcomes followed by a more detailed description of the operational objectives identified for the implementation period June 2007 to June 2008 along with a risk assessment and budget for this period.

Building Bridges I and II: Kuala Lumpur, Doha, and Amman Meetings

The objectives of the Kuala Lumpur meeting were to: (a) Identify up to 50 CSOs, including 30 from civil society within OIC countries, who are in agreement with the project objective and willing and capable of finding joint solutions; and (b) Identify one or two priority areas of joint action over the following two-three years; and develop two case studies that examine efforts by civil society from within the Muslim world to influence multilateralism. These objectives were successfully met. FIM convened over 30 civil society practitioners. Two case studies *The Darfur Consortium, the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC): Taking First Steps Towards Justice in Darfur* and *CEDAW, Our Unrealized Dream* were developed and presented. Importantly, two priority areas for joint action were identified: to lobby for NGO accreditation within the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC); and to increase the influence of civil society from OIC countries in the UN. (It was decided to use the opportunity provided by the New or Restored Democracies (NRD) process to advance this objective.)

This decision led to convening of the second meeting in Doha, Qatar as a side event to the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD). FIM organized and chaired a workshop: *Building Bridges II: Engaging Civil Society from OIC Countries and Other Muslim Communities with the Multilateral Sphere*, as part of the NGO Forum on New and Restored Democracies. The objective of this meeting was to solicit ideas on how to attain NGO accreditation within the OIC in the next five years. This workshop generated additional helpful ideas and identified risks, to be discussed below. Importantly, it became clear that the first priority would be the OIC and that FIM would focus its convening powers on this first objective and turn to the UN objective once the OIC Phase was underway.

Following the Doha workshop, the FIM president met with two project donors who had attended. There was an agreement that, with their support, FIM would convene a small, follow-up to the Doha workshop in Jordan in early January. The objectives of this meeting, held in Amman on January 11 and 12, 2007, were to: (a) finalize an operational strategy which would enable NGOs or CSOs to obtain accreditation with the OIC and (b) allot specific responsibilities and tasks to committed organizations and individuals. Given the need to begin to address the knowledge gap on the OIC, an analysis of the OIC was prepared and circulated to participants in advance of this meeting. The Amman group decided on several strategic objectives including the importance of a follow-up strategic meeting in 2007. To that end, a three-day gathering is being planned for October 2007 in Dhaka Bangladesh. Importantly, at the end of 2006, over 50 countries and/or civil society leaders, the majority from OIC countries, were committed to this project.

Building Bridges III: From Amman to Dhaka

It was confirmed in Jordan that, given its increasing relevance and influence, the OIC is the priority for now and that strategies to influence the UN would be discussed once the OIC accreditation phase was implemented in Dhaka. It is currently estimated that achieving accreditation is a five-year project. Following is a brief explanation of the strategies underlying project objectives for 2007 and 2008.

There is considerable diversity amongst the CSOs involved in this project and this diversity affects all elements of the project's strategy. The CSOs involved come from different regions of the world, they reflect varied cultures, and range from highly secular organizations to those who encase all development work within Islamic principals. A similar diversity exists amongst the state members of the OIC. While some important OIC member states have extensive experience with civil society, others have a cautious, if not outright suspicious attitude to CSOs.

This underlying diversity brings a complexity that requires longer planning times and prohibits full inclusiveness at this stage. Core membership will expand as the project develops its inclusive capacity and ability to deal with more sensitive or divisive issues. FIM's role is that of a neutral convener and facilitator and will remain so in order to help establish the trust necessary for such a project. While FIM brings considerable experience with CSOs and multilateral bodies, the strategic decisions taken in Amman were the result of discussions amongst core member organizations.

An important aspect of these strategies is the need for information on the OIC. It was recognized that CSOs, even within the OIC countries, know relatively little about the OIC. Therefore the accumulation of the most basic knowledge of the OIC is a fundamental requirement before the alliance can implement strategies for achieving OIC accreditation.

The following objectives for 2007 and 2008 reflect an appraisal as to how to develop the confidence of all, or most OIC members. They build on the assessment that constructive collaboration between the OIC and their CSOs is possible and that such collaboration will help them, as governments, to achieve their social and governance objectives. There are many social issues to be dealt with later and they will require important discussions.

In Jordan, the discussion on OIC strategy identified three broad entry points for influencing the OIC: the first entry point was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs address issues where the interests of the OIC and member state CSOs converge. The OIC is officially committed to the MDGs and the CSO community is actively working toward their attainment. The second entry point is the various OIC Committees; and third, the Office of the Secretary General and/or the OIC President.

The priority issues and objectives toward implementation decided in Amman focus on these entry points. The consensus is that these objectives can be constructively and collaboratively pursued with the OIC now. They will strengthen a resource base of critical information and build project and administrative support. At the same time, we will keep the second, UN-focused, outcome within the project's overall scope. It is expected that lessons learned as we pursue the first outcome will contribute to achieving the second. Below is a description of the operational objectives for 2007 and 2008 followed by a risk analysis.

Objectives: 2007 and 2008

a) Establish a nine-member, OIC Phase Steering Committee.

In Jordan it was agreed that, at this stage, a new Steering Committee is essential for this operational phase. A nine-member committee will be set up with gender and regional balance, two from Sub Saharan Africa, two from the Mid East, three from Asia, and two from non-OIC member states.

b) Facilitate the growing alliance of civil society organizations.

In Jordan it was agreed that there would be two categories of members or participants in this project, the core alliance and associate members. This second category can play an important advisory or expert role but will not have a voting or decision-making role.

- Strengthen a core alliance of CSOs who are legally registered within an OIC member state.
- Strengthen the group of associate member CSOs who are based outside OIC states and who support the objectives of the core OIC alliance.

c) Strengthen the OIC information base to facilitate the process of achieving CSO accreditation with the OIC.

This has begun with the preparation of an OIC overview and analysis for the Jordan meeting (see Annex 1). The following additional objectives toward strengthening the information base were identified:

- Prepare analysis of relevant accreditation models;
- Analyze the OIC ten-year plan;
- Identify a contact person or organization within Saudi Arabia who can monitor the OIC and inform OIC Alliance members;
- Establish a contractual agreement with a CSO within Saudi Arabia to provide long-term secretariat support for OIC Group.

d) Seek collaboration with the OIC through identified entry points.

Alliance partners have identified the following entry points and actions:

- Millennium development Goals (MDGs): Encourage the Global Campaign Against Poverty (GCAP) to identify the next OIC Summit as a specific GCAP target event.
- Address one of the OIC Standing Committees or the OIC Committee on UN Reform.
- Request a meeting with the OIC Secretary General.

e) October 2007: Convene the next meeting of OIC alliance partners (see next section).

Building Bridges III Agenda: Dhaka, October 2007

At this meeting, selected members of the alliance, the majority OIC civil society practitioners, will address the above objectives and follow up on project strategic activities set in Amman.

Participants will:

- Analyze the OIC ten-year plan;
- Analyze models of accreditation;
- Reach agreement as to principles for an OIC accreditation model;
- Reach agreement on two to three priority MDG goals with the potential for joint OIC/CSO collaboration;
- Decide on specific OIC Committee(s) as entry points over the following 12 months;
- Expand the alliance;
- Discuss follow-up and/or planning for meeting with the OIC Secretary General;
- Create a short list of UN organizations and/or events of primary importance for CSOs within OIC member states.
- Appoint a nine-member Steering Committee.

Meetings Following Dhaka

The following meetings are anticipated after Dhaka:

- Alliance partners will meet to apply the principles identified in Dhaka to create a preferred OIC model of accreditation.
- We have determined that the next OIC Summit meeting is presently scheduled to be held in Senegal in March of 2008. This is a critical entry point and a meeting of selected alliance partners and a meeting with OIC leaders (possibly the Secretary General) will coincide with this Summit.
- Meetings with selected OIC Committee representatives.
- An implementation meeting will be organized to create strategies for moving forward on UN entry points for civil society from OIC countries.

Achieving Outcomes and Assessing Risks

Thus far all project objectives have been achieved. FIM succeeded in securing funding for the Kuala Lumpur meeting and successfully convened over 30 senior decision makers. In Doha and Jordan the OIC and the United Nations were successfully and collaboratively identified as priority multilateral organizations for Muslim civil society engagement. Importantly, the OIC was chosen as the starting point. We have a large group of CSOs and civil society leaders committed to the objectives of this project, and strategies for implementation have been created.

At this writing the project has proceeded successfully and we are moving forward toward a fourth meeting in Dhaka.

Activities in Phases I and II have helped to establish this project's stability. Risks have been reduced because we have moved from beginning with like-minded partners and establishing clear project objectives and principles, to opening up to a larger membership who share these objectives. Our experience to date has shown that, in order to reduce risks due to the many facets of diversity that alliance partners bring, and to continue to successfully achieve our objectives, flexibility and longer planning and implementation times are required. Core membership will expand as the project develops its inclusive capacity and ability to deal with more sensitive or divisive issues.

As we enter this new implementation phase we build on the successes of Phases I and II while taking note of what we have learned. The chief risks associated with this next Phase are related to achieving the objectives of the first OIC Phase III meeting in October 2007. These risks are considered low to medium. It has thus far proven difficult to establish and maintain a Steering Committee and this remains a medium risk. Members live in unstable and sometimes war torn areas and have been diverted from this project by more pressing issues. This risk will be addressed in Dhaka where a slate of Steering Committee members will be presented.

Timely preparation of the study on models of accreditation and the successful preparation of a presentation on the OIC ten-year plan are also considered to be a medium risk. Energy and time are limited particularly during times of strife and war in members' countries. Recent violence in Lebanon for example has affected FIM's ability to identify authors to prepare the needed documents for our next meeting. The OIC study must be prepared with sufficient time for participants to review it and arrive at the meeting prepared to contribute to discussion on principles to adopt for an appropriate OIC accreditation model. FIM is striving to commission authors for these studies in a timely fashion.

Diversity poses a possible risk for the Dhaka meeting in reaching agreement on two to three priority MDG goals with potential for joint OIC/CSO collaboration. Thus far the project has succeeded in managing risks associated with diversity. We can reduce risk of divisiveness as we move into implementation by taking a long view and avoiding undue haste, by trying to keep the project objectives at the forefront of decision making, and by ensuring excellent communications and meeting facilitation. FIM's established role of a neutral convener and facilitator helps to reduce these risks. FIM is aware of the importance of building and carefully maintaining the necessary trust and respect to minimize the risks associated with such a project. While FIM brings considerable experience with CSOs and multilateral bodies, the strategic decisions taken in Amman were the result of discussions amongst core member organizations. This participatory process, always led by civil society from Muslim communities and countries, is critical to the success of this project and will continue.