



BRIEF NEWS FROM IBCR

We'd like to introduce you to our new informal newsletter, which will be published on an occasional basis to inform you on the happenings and developments at the IBCR. With these newsletters, we will aim to bring you up to date on our successes, projects, introduce you to some of our collaborators and summarize our more important meetings. We hope that you will appreciate this new form of communication, more relaxed, informal but with the intention of giving you a more open window into the everyday world of the IBCR.

Of Armenian origin and the young father of two, Dr Vrej Atabekian is in charge of the program which develops country profiles: a collection of national portraits illustrating the status of implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Where did this project of such a scale come from, how is it carried out, and what concrete impacts does it have?

The Bureau is the first and only organization to draw together such a detailed and targeted inventory of the rights of the child at the country level. How did this idea come to be?

We simply realized that, in reality, such country profiles devoted to the rights of children simply did not exist. Annual reports such as those produced by Amnesty International deal with human rights in general and little attention is devoted to children. As for the reports of the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child, their frequency (every five years) seemed insufficient to us, as the deterioration of children's rights can be immense within a five-year period. It's enough time for a genocide to take place... So we felt the need to fill this void and draw together country by country assessments of the situation of children's rights, in as systematic a manner as possible, and yearly if the financial means can be found. With the necessary financial resources, I believe the Bureau could claim the role of an international monitor.

At the moment, we have received funding for five Asian country profiles, and I have conducted fact finding missions on the field to validate our information, as well as gather more.

Tell us about the highlights of the trip.

The act of going directly to the scene to confirm the validity of our information and complete it was very important for me, because despite my motivations for this project, a few doubts remained concerning the impact of country profiles, and I wanted to be sure that our work was neither repetitive nor superficial, and that it had a real use.

Meeting with experts in the field, members of local NGOs, surpassed my expectations. Experts were fascinated by our project, and reaffirmed the need and thus the usefulness of our work. In addition, I came to realize that at times I was bringing new information to those I met, a testament to the quality of our research! Upon returning to the Bureau I was absolutely and firmly convinced of the necessity of our work.

At the moment, we have drawn up five country profiles whose information has been validated on the field, and thirty-eight others, which are equal in quality but have not yet been validated. They are all available on the website (www.ibcr.org) as well as in hard copy upon request at the Bureau. I must emphasize that it is truly a team effort. A number of people participated in the conceptualization of the project, and I worked with two experts, Chris SIDOTI and Mark HECHT, and above all, many interns without which a project of such a scale could never be realized. They all are proof of an investment and devotion which allowed this mission to be well carried out and in excellent conditions.

You will now concentrate on North Africa ... How are the countries selected for country profiles, and how do you approach the task?

We are now continuing our study with countries of North Africa thanks to financial assistance provided by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We have chosen North Africa because we want to attract the interest of the international community towards these countries. There is much discussion about Africa, but little action. Countries such as Sudan require more attention, which is why it was selected along with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Libya. As for our working method, we make a list of potential contacts in each country, recruit experts who could be of assistance, and then go on the field to gather more information and validate existing data.

How do you see the future?

I am optimistic. I am sometimes outraged by the operations of certain organizations in defense of human rights, which lack honesty and thus business takes precedent over the protection of children. For me, it is essential to believe in one's work and one's interest. In my case, here, I am convinced of the validity of our actions. The work we do here at the Bureau will not make us rich and we know that! We are small, independent, and above all devoted, and, I hope, efficient.

Océane PLOCKYN.

Editor's note: After more than five years with IBCR, Dr Vrej Atabekian has recently joined the OSCE's office in Warsaw, Poland, where he will be responsible for democratization and non-discrimination. This opportunity will allow Vrej and his young family to get closer to their loved ones. We wish him success and thank him for his many years of loyal service! The IBCR also wishes to use this opportunity to welcome Mr Guillaume Landry, who will be taking over as Program Manager responsible for the Country Profiles. Before joining IBCR, Mr Landry was Project Manager, West Africa, for the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.