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New forms of presence¹

Introduction

Amnesty International's growth strategy for the coming years is ambitious: by the end of 2015, AI should have five million members and supporters, and a quarter of these should be in the global south. This represents an overall growth of 60% from the end of 2010, and a doubling of the proportion of AI's members in the south.² This growth will not happen unless AI successfully finds new ways to establish and organise itself in different countries. The traditional model of highly autonomous self-governing sections and structures emerging from the basis of individual volunteer activism has proved very durable and successful in Western Europe and North America, but has repeatedly failed to generate successful AI entities in most countries in most other parts of the world, with a few notable exceptions: between 1988 and 2010, there was a net increase of only two AI sections in the global south and east, and today AI is virtually absent in China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and other large countries with major human rights concerns. Hence, the AI movement has over recent years drawn the conclusion that it needs to be more strategic and flexible in finding new ways to organise. The 2011 International Council Meeting (ICM) endorsed this view and agreed a framework for developing these *new forms of presence*.³

The existing forms of presence

During the period 2004-2010 several new forms of presence were piloted, sometimes as a result of strategic considerations (e.g. in response to the "Arab Spring"), and at other times due to the impossibility of maintaining traditional sections (e.g., in Colombia). As a result, AI now has five main forms of presence:

- (a) **Sections and structures:** there are 63 AI sections, structures and pre-structures.⁴ These are national membership organizations that are self-governing, led by a volunteer board, and employ a director and staff. A structure is very similar to a section, but has fewer obligations. When the system of separate sections and structures was formalised in the AI statute in 2003, "structure" was considered a stepping-stone to becoming a fully-fledged section. A pre-structure is an AI entity that is on the way to becoming a structure.
- (b) **International membership:** there are around 45,000 individual international members of AI in about 120 countries. They have joined AI directly (most commonly via amnesty.org) in a country which has no national AI section or structure. In 2011, for the first time, they were able to elect representatives through an online election to represent them at the International Council Meeting (ICM).
- (c) **Partnerships for presence:** These are formal partnership agreements with other human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs): they describe how AI and the NGO will collaborate, without giving the NGO membership of AI. There are currently about six such partnerships, and two others ran during between 2007 and 2012 (in Botswana and Liberia). The partnerships typically engage in joint campaigning and human rights training, and function in countries where it is difficult for individuals to join AI. The AI side of the partnership is led by the International Secretariat (IS).

¹ This article is mainly based on *New forms of presence - consultation paper* (ORG 80/001/2012).

² These targets come from *Amnesty International growth strategy 2011-2015* (ORG 30/001/2011). A detailed analysis of AI in 2011 is contained in *State of the movement report - ICM Circular 27* (ORG 10/010/2011).

³ The background to the ICM discussion is contained in *Growing AI for impact through new forms of presence ICM Circular 17* (ORG30/009/2011).

- (d) **Affiliation:** There is currently a pilot project underway managed by the IS with Mozaika in Latvia. The intention is that if Mozaika and AI's international members in Latvia can work together in a productive way, then Mozaika could become an AI affiliate. A second pilot is scheduled to start next year. At present, there is no provision in the AI statute for affiliation.
- (e) **Deferred self-governance:** AI Brazil, India and Kenya are the three cases of deferred self-governance that exist at the moment. In each case, there is an IS-managed entity (established in 2011 or 2012), which it is intended to grow into a sustainable, autonomous AI section in due course (probably over about five years). Although managed by the IS, they are ultimately overseen by the elected International Executive Committee (IEC) which delegates its authority to the Secretary General. The reason for creating these entities is that in each country there is a pressing need for an AI presence but there is a lack of AI members who are able to organise and run a national section. (In addition, in there is a history of very expensive failures to establish AI Sections in Brazil and a number of other countries in similar positions).
- (f) **Virtual Section:** AI Colombia, launched in April 2012, is the only example of a virtual section: because of the security situation in Colombia, it is not possible for AI to have an office or a board that meets regularly, etc. Hence, AI Colombia operates through internet platforms that enable action, discussion and e-learning.

In addition to these forms of presence, AI has offices run by the Secretary General in several countries. These provide project support for "sections and structures experiencing complex and chronic organizational problems which are situated in countries where AI's presence is considered to be of strategic importance and/or having substantial potential for growth ... local governance is suspended and the section or structure is actively managed under the authority of the Secretary General."⁵

Observations on success, governance, and diverse realities

AI's overall aim is to have vibrant activist memberships in as many countries as possible. The five forms of presence described above reflect the movement's attempt to realise this aim in many different circumstances. Ideally, the success of these AI entities would be measured by looking at their contribution to AI's impact, their growth of activism and participation, and their growth of membership. This would also give AI some clues about which forms of presence should be prioritised. In practice, however, measuring anything other than basic numbers on members is highly problematic and the results are usually difficult to evaluate. Hence, AI is investing more effort in developing success indicators that are both feasible and useful, but it is always likely to be the case that considerable judgment needs to be exercised in assessing the success (or otherwise) of AI presences.

AI is also strongly committed to building democratically led, self-governing entities. In practice, however, this is often a considerable challenge. For instance, in 2011 international members of AI for the first time elected their own representatives to the ICM. This process was not judged a success, however, and the next set of elections has been deferred until 2014, with the representatives to the 2013 ICM being appointed.⁶ Furthermore, the relationship between international members and deferred-governance entities or partnerships for presence has not yet been fully articulated. And the path from deferred to actual governance is only a road-map: nobody knows for sure whether it will be possible to build a core of activists interested in governing a section in countries such as Brazil, or whether such cores will be sufficiently representative of the wider AI membership in their country to make democratic self-governance a reality. A lot of work remains to be done on this topic, including clarifying how

⁵ See the *State of the movement report 2011* (ORG 10/010/2011). Footnote 7 lists: Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Russia, South Africa, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

⁶ See *System for selecting international members to attend the 2013 ICM and*

activists can become members, and how members can ultimately take control of AI in their own country.

On the other hand, it is clear that such entities need to be tried because the traditional route of building sections “from the ground up” has simply failed to generate an AI presence in much of the world, and all the experience we have shows that the most plausible route to success in a country such as Brazil or India is nowadays through an investment (in people and infrastructure) that is big enough to make a noticeable impact nationally in the media, with other parts of the human rights movement, and with the government. The cost of doing this, and the level of expertise needed to make it a success, mean that it has to be funded by the whole AI movement through the International Secretariat.

Criteria and guidelines for new forms of presence

Because the new forms of presence raise many questions, the IEC is now consulting on proposed criteria for establishing new forms of presence, as well as processes for establishing them and guidelines for their development. In addition, some re-wording of the AI statute may be needed. The criteria focus on where new forms of presence should be developed and which form of presence is most appropriate, taking into account factors such as AI’s priorities, the local political situation, the wider geo-political context, and AI’s experience and existing form(s) of presence in the country. The IEC asked for responses on its draft criteria and guidelines by early November in time for it to analyse them and publish draft ICM resolutions by January 2013.

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*We welcome any comments, questions or suggestions on our choice of documents, the accuracy of the summaries and how the newsletter could be more usefully developed. **Please write to iinews@aivol.org***

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Note on original documents

These articles are taken from internal AI documents from the Weekly Mailings sent out by the International Secretariat. AI sections vary in their practice with respect to making these available to members. If you are interested in finding the original document please investigate within your own Section but feel free to let us know if you are having problems.