

International Issues News # 33 (October 2013): The 2013 International Council Meeting (ICM)¹

1. Introduction

The International Council Meeting (ICM) is AI's highest policy-making body. It meets every two years, bringing together between 300 and 400 volunteers and staff from around the world for an intense week of debate and decision-making. This year's meeting took place on 18th - 22nd August in Berlin, Germany.

The overall agenda for the ICM was based on AI's Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) for 2010 - 2016, which was agreed by the 2009 ICM, as well as the developments in organization and governance since 2009. These have arisen from the implementation of the Global Transition Programme (GTP), reducing the size of the International Secretariat in London to develop AI hubs in other countries, as well as the changes to AI's international governance triggered by the 2011 independent report (the "Owers Report"²) into the actions of the International Executive Committee - now renamed as the International Board³ - in relation to the departure of the former Secretary General and related matters.

2. Main strategic messages

Following the considerable organizational turbulence of the last two years, the main messages coming out of this ICM were that AI has learnt lessons from the Global Transition Programme and needs to do better in implementing change: there was frank discussion of the weaknesses in engagement and implementation of the GTP to date⁴. AI also needs to define more clearly the choices facing our movement, and improve the balance between making and implementing timely decisions and providing robust and wide-ranging consultation and debate on changes of direction. In terms of human rights strategy, our forthcoming campaigns on *My Body, My Rights* and *Stop governments torturing* will build on the successes of the *Arm Trade Treaty* campaign. Growing AI, bringing in more activists and supporters and raising more funds, will be critical to our future success particularly because many parts of AI are struggling to expand.

3. Human Rights strategy

There were seven decisions on human rights strategy. The most significant was to replace the six-year Integrated Strategic Plan (which has existed in varying forms since the 1995 *Ljubljana Action Plan*) by a set of more flexible and less detailed strategic goals (Decision 24); the board was instructed to develop these in an inclusive way. There were also decisions on specific aspects of human rights: Decision 22 puts renewed emphasis on AI's human rights relief function; Decisions 13 and 14 call for the Board to look at how AI can best act on the rights to water, food and sanitation, and on human rights violations arising from large-scale disasters; Decision 15 calls on AI to ensure that it monitors and acts to counter actions by

¹ This document is based on *2013 ICM Circular 29: decisions of the ICM* (ORG 53/006/2013)

² See *Final Independent Review Report* (ORG 10 026 2011)

³ The *International Executive Committee* has now been renamed the *International Board* ("the Board").

⁴ See *Global Transition Program - Reference Group Report on Building Trust and Confidence* (ORG 30 002 2013) *Global Transition Programme Roadmap* (ORG 30 001

governments which undermine or reduce their obligations under international human rights standards; Decision 16 re-emphasises the on-going value and importance of AI's work on human rights in the context of counter-terrorism actions by governments; Decision 17 instructs the board to develop a comprehensive policy on addressing sports organizations in relation to human rights issues.

4. Organization and structure

The main decision of the ICM on organization was the approval of a lengthy set of 29 *core standards* (in Decision 6) intended to provide a framework for the roles, responsibilities, formation, processes and behaviour of the management, boards and Annual General Meetings of AI entities. The standards cover three main areas: constitutions, roles and conduct, and policies and guidelines, and they were extensively consulted on during the months preceding the meeting. Their implementation should ensure that AI operates in a much more consistent way than previously, and that all who assume senior roles in AI are clear about their responsibilities. ICM Decision 21 calls on the Board to ensure that there is a common understanding throughout AI of our Core Values⁵ and their implications, especially in relation to independence, impartiality and international solidarity.

Three decisions relate to new ways in which AI is organising itself and spreading its workload amongst different parts of the movement. Decision 4 calls for clarity on the arrangements and funding of cases in which some of AI's international functions are carried out on behalf of the whole movement by individual sections. Decision 23 states that development of new forms of presence (i.e., any national AI entity which is not a traditional, self-governing section or structure) should continue with clear missions, a focus on effectiveness, and plans for transition to self-governing status where appropriate. Decision 20 asks the Board to ensure that the human rights work of those sections which contribute the most to the international budget is properly resourced and maintained; this arose from concerns that big AI sections might simply become fundraisers, losing sight of their activism.

In 2007, the ICM agreed a language strategy and policy for AI, moving away from four core languages (English, French, Spanish and Arabic) to a more flexible system of translating into different languages as appropriate. In Decision 19, this ICM called for a review of that policy.⁶

5. Finance

There were five decisions on finance: Decision 1 made some modest adjustments to the assessment system agreed in 2011 which regulates how national section contributions fund the international budget. It was agreed to study in more depth whether the system needs adjustment to avoid damaging the largest sections. Decision 2 encourages the movement to try pilot projects to raise "restricted funds" for particular projects, as these often appear to be more attractive to major donors than giving money to AI in

⁵ These are defined in AI Statute Article 2: "AI forms a global community of human rights defenders with the principles of international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect."

⁶ The strategy is contained in 2007 ICM Decision 12 (see *2007 ICM decisions*, ORG 52 001 2007) which also enacted the *Amnesty International Language Policy* (ORG

general.⁷ Decision 3 confirms that international financial reporting to AI and external stakeholders will be strengthened; and Decision 18 asks for a report by the end of 2014 – leading to a clearer policy – on good practice relating to accepting funds from foundations, corporate entities and states.⁸

6. Governance

Following on from the many governance reforms agreed by the 2011 ICM, there was a further round of follow-up decisions on governance this year. Decision 5 calls on the board to strengthen mechanisms for activist involvement in international discussions and decision-making; Decision 7 calls for another wide-ranging governance review to report in time for decisions to be made at the 2015 ICM, as well as a thorough review of the AI Statute (following on from the very large number of piecemeal changes that have been made over more than 20 years); Decision 8 increases the deadline for nominations of candidates for the board to 3 months before the ICM to ensure that all candidates can be adequately scrutinised by voting sections and structures; Decision 9 revises the procedures for suspending sections to remove confusions about the role of the IEC and appeal mechanisms that were introduced in 2011. Decision 10 renames the International Executive Committee as the International Board; Decision 12 amends the AI statute to include mention of the new core standards, and Decision 11 updates the AI statute to be consistent with all of this ICM's decisions.

⁷ Interestingly, this decision links back to the position agreed in 2003 ICM Decision 37 on creating standing funds to attract donors to contribute to particular areas of human rights. This was never fully implemented. See *2003 ICM Circular 50: decisions of the ICM* (ORG 52/003/2003).

⁸ This decision arose from the *Review of government funding at Amnesty International* (August 2012. ORG 70/015/2012) summarised in *International Issues*

International Issues News is put together to spread updates on AI's international focus to a wider audience worldwide, encouraging more members to become engaged with the issues. The articles are summaries of internal papers which we aim to condense without offering our opinions on the original documents.

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 mainly based on 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. We can normally supply English-language versions of all documents referenced in these articles.