

Gulf Program Summary

The International Republican Institute (IRI) began working in Oman in 1999 with the bicameral Council of Oman following the introduction of the research and information department of the *Majlis A'Dawla* chamber. Since that time, IRI has expanded its institutional assistance to include the popularly elected *Majlis A'Shura* and civil society organizations. Recently IRI expanded its civil society focus from Oman to the greater Gulf region and in 2009 IRI supported civil society development training in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Legislative Strengthening

IRI's current program centers on a multi-year training schedule with the bicameral Council of Oman which offers seminars on skill sets needed in a parliamentary setting. Examples include legislative drafting, policy research, budget analysis and committee management.

The goal of IRI's partnership with the Oman Council is to provide technical support to members and staff on best practices used by parliaments throughout the world but primarily in the Middle East. It is an opportunity for the members and staff to learn how their colleagues from throughout the region are achieving success and allows IRI to tailor those practices to the unique legislative and cultural environment in Oman.

In January 2008, IRI held a seminar for committee chairmen on committee management. Other highlights include a legislative drafting workshop and a workshop on budget analysis. Upon the conclusion of the legislative drafting workshop, a manual specifically designed for the Omani *Majlis* was created and distributed to participants. Building on previous trainings, in 2009 IRI also hosted workshops on public opinion research, specifically polling methodologies and questionnaire development, and on the impact of social, economic and environmental policies. In addition, workshops on media communication were held and included discussion on how to communicate with the media, how to understand the needs of the media, the needs of the audience and the general rules for mass communication in Oman.

Civil Society

In an effort to support the growth of a more vibrant civil society in the Gulf Region, IRI supports emerging local civil society organizations through capacity building and organizational management. Working through local partner *Tawasul*, IRI supported seminars to help effectively use advocacy and education campaigns to contribute to a more democratic Gulf Region. Participating groups range from professional associations such as the Oman Radiographers Association to organizations concerned with working with the disadvantaged, like *Dar al Atta* and groups with broader concerns such as the Oman Environmental Society.

In 2009, IRI was able to incorporate a women's training component and in April organized its first-ever workshops with the Oman Women's Associations and the General Women's Union based in the UAE. More than 100 women learned various techniques on how to manage a civil society organization, develop their leadership skills and invest in opportunities for professional development. In addition, the participants were able to practice their public speaking abilities by completing exercises requiring them to make presentations of varying lengths.

IRI continues to engage partners and supports the role of women in civil society. As representative institutions in Oman take on greater responsibilities, IRI will continue to play a supporting role in strengthening the governance capability and institutional capacity of the Council of Oman.

IRI's Gulf Program is funded by the Middle East Partnership Initiative.