

Mongolia Program Summary

Mongolia is the only country in Central Asia—and one of the few countries throughout Asia proper—that continues to boast dynamic institutions of democracy. Mongolia embarked on its democratic path in 1989 with widespread public support for democratic reforms and began its transition to a democracy in 1990. Throughout this 19-year period, Mongolia has created and strengthened democratic institutions including the national legislature, the judiciary, political parties and civil society. The International Republican Institute (IRI) has supported the development of democratic practices and good governance in Mongolia since 1992. IRI's long-standing presence in Mongolia has enabled IRI to establish a reputation as an expert organization willing to work with all political parties and civil society organizations, both in Ulaanbaatar and at the grassroots level in aimags (provinces) across Mongolia. In recent years IRI has focused on parliamentary strengthening, public opinion analysis, electoral reform, and civic engagement.

Parliament Strengthening

IRI's parliamentary strengthening program has assisted the State Great Hural (SGH) in conducting legislative oversight, parliamentary research capacity, professional development for parliament staff, and representative responsibilities more effectively. IRI was instrumental in helping SGH standing committees establish rules and procedures for the first official open committee hearing held in 2006, and has since worked with other standing committees to adopt formal rules of procedure. In cooperation with the SGH, IRI conducted five regional district trainings for approximately 150 parliamentary staff throughout the country on how to respond to concerns of the local constituents more effectively and encourage them to engage the public more often either through district tours or through more public forums. IRI facilitated the use of the SGH's new video teleconference equipment during these trainings, to allow district staff and constituents to talk directly with MPs and SGH staff who were in Ulaanbaatar.

The relatively small size of the SGH (76 members) has allowed IRI to work directly with a majority of Members of Parliament (MPs) and their offices, further cementing IRI's key role in advocating reforms and providing recommendations and advice. IRI worked with the Standing Committee on State Structure to draft an Ethics Rule for MPs. IRI arranged for experts in the U.S. to travel to Mongolia to train and consult with MPs and their staff to improve the quality of the draft, reinvigorating their commitment towards passing this legislation. In April 2009, a longstanding and fruitful cooperation between IRI and SGH culminated with the passage of the historic ethics legislation for Mongolian MPs.

Public Opinion Analysis

Public opinion analysis has also been a large component of IRI's activities in Mongolia. In advance of the June 2008 parliamentary elections, IRI conducted two nationwide public opinion polls. IRI utilized the poll results to consult with the major political parties in advance of the election to help them develop their nationwide campaign strategies, focused on messages that responded to the needs of the people. In the lead-up to the May 2009 Mongolian presidential election, IRI conducted six regional focus group discussions. The results of these focus group discussions were used throughout the 2009 pre-election period to inform the presidential candidates and political parties at national and local levels of issues of concern to the public. Additionally, IRI provided political parties and presidential candidate campaigns with data regarding the issues Mongolians were most concerned about: corruption, the economy, jobs and better living standards.

Electoral Reform

In helping to support fair and transparent elections, IRI worked with stakeholders to create standards for campaign finance reform legislation, provided nation-wide training for political party election observers, ensured security of ballot boxes, and conducted the first Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership (APDP) international election observation for the June 2008 Parliamentary Elections. Specifically, in advance of the 2004 and 2008 parliamentary elections, IRI prepared and distributed thousands of party agent manuals during trainings for political parties to prepare party agents to understand the election laws and observe and report on the election.

Civic Engagement

IRI's civic engagement work has centered on creating larger political space for youth and women. Beginning in 2006, IRI furthered its cooperation with the "Women's Partnership in Politics and Governance" by partnering with the women's auxiliaries of four political parties to increase women's representation at all levels of governance. IRI supported the partnership by helping to create a women's fellowship program, conducting regional women's empowerment trainings throughout Mongolia, and creating a quarterly women's bulletin which is distributed throughout the country. IRI has also continued to work with political party youth auxiliaries to strengthen their role in decision-making and leadership positions within their respective parties.

IRI's youth program currently focuses on developing the skills of college and secondary education level students by bridging the gap between youth and decision makers, thereby allowing youth to make an impact in their community and their country. IRI has created opportunities for the next generation of Mongolian leaders to develop their skills through debates, youth forums, and roundtables on active civic involvement.

