Somaliland Program Summary

Somaliland, a break-away territory in the northern region of Somalia, uniquely blends democratic principles, traditional clan structures and Islamic faith. Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1992, and since 2002, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has been a collaborating partner with civil society groups, political parties and the national parliament. Through funding from the United States Agency for International Development, IRI’s program provides support to marginalized groups; campaign and internal party strengthening assistance to Somaliland’s three political parties; and parliamentary staff development training for both houses of the national legislature.

Marginalized Groups

The signature element of the IRI-Somaliland program is the Institute’s work with historically marginalized populations. In 2008, IRI helped representatives of 52 Somaliland civil society organizations establish the Somaliland Marginalized Advocacy Group (SOMAG), a coalition comprised of women, youth, persons with disabilities and members of minority clans. The mission of SOMAG is to increase political space for historically marginalized groups in Somaliland by encouraging greater participation in the political process and advocating for changes in public policy. IRI’s work with SOMAG seeks to strengthen the leadership and management of the coalition and to support comprehensive advocacy campaigns.

In 2008, SOMAG co-hosted a series of public debates and forums focusing on the role of marginalized groups in the voter registration process. As a follow-up to these public dialogues, IRI trained 127 domestic observers to monitor Somaliland’s first-ever voter registration process. IRI worked closely with SOMAG in the process of identifying and training domestic observers from the marginalized groups. The activities helped to contribute to the transparency of the voter registration process, encouraged increased participation of marginalized groups and promoted greater involvement by these groups in the electoral process.

Somaliland National Youth Organization (SONYO), one of Somaliland’s largest youth civil society organizations and a key member of SOMAG, hopes to effect political change by encouraging the Somaliland legislature to lower the required age to run for elected office. IRI is supporting the efforts of SONYO by facilitating planning meetings, training their members on lobbying strategies and advocacy communications and sponsoring forums for Somaliland youth and members of parliament to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the draft legislation.

Political Party Assistance

IRI has partnered with the three official political parties by assisting the parties’ efforts to effectively participate in the first-ever voter registration initiative and the upcoming presidential and local elections.

In 2008, as part of a comprehensive voter registration initiative, IRI trained more than 1,000 political party agents to monitor the voter registration process throughout the 982 registration centers in the six regions of Somaliland. IRI’s successful training of party agents helped the parties participate directly in the process, resulting in broad-based support and buy-in among party leadership and members. The agenda for IRI’s training focused on the technical requirements of registration, as well as education on general themes of promoting democratic governance in Somaliland.

Starting in late February 2009, IRI conducted a series of training sessions for representatives of Somaliland’s three political parties. The trainings focused on door-to-door campaign skills, internal party communication, organizing a successful electoral campaign and the importance of message discipline. The trainings continued in late May 2009.
when IRI facilitated a training for the women’s leagues of the political parties that focused on developing female political leaders’ ability to craft a message and platform, lobby decision-makers, effectively communicate to constituents and draft an electoral agenda for their respective women’s leagues.

Parliamentary Support
The lower House of Representatives, controlled by opposition parties, saw an influx of new Members following the 2005 parliamentary elections, thus requiring basic training in the legislative process. IRI, in partnership with the parliament, conducted an assessment in 2008 which identified a need for greater overall capacity of parliamentarians and staff. In a recent training, parliamentarians learned the basic concepts, principles, and tools of constituency outreach, as well as the foundation for serving constituents, planning for action, working with media and media relations, and enhancing communication.