OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS LATIN AMERICA PROGRAM:

**Human Rights Field Portfolio Review – Outcomes Summary**

Prepared by Heloisa Griggs, Senior Program Officer, Latin America Program

1. **Introduction and Summary**

At the first meeting of the Latin American Program’s Advisory Board on August 14, 2014 in Santiago, Chile, Chris Stone, Advisory Board members and program staff reviewed the human rights field portfolio. The Latin America Program’s major focus in the human rights field is supporting forward-looking organizations that are working closely with government actors to advance human rights, and that increasingly are focused on developing local constituencies and broadening public discussion of human rights issues. We have concentrated our support in the human rights field in a relatively small group of organizations to whom we provide substantial general support grants, often with co-funding from the Human Rights Initiative. Over the last three years, we have discontinued support for several organizations we felt are focused on more rigid, traditional and adversarial approaches to human rights work.

In this portfolio review, the discussion focused on the contrast between the type of human rights organizations the Latin America Program has chosen to support and the organizations the program has decided to stop or not start funding, new actors and constituencies in the human rights field in the region, and criteria for deciding funding levels for organizations receiving general support. The portfolio review process and discussion affirmed the decision of the Latin America Program to focus support on forward-looking organizations: those seeking to rethink human rights advocacy and mechanisms to respond to complex present-day challenges and opportunities, often requiring the construction of policy proposals and collaboration with government actors. The portfolio review also underscored the need to involve new actors and constituencies to advance human rights, and to foster experimentation with new approaches to advocacy and influencing public opinion on challenging human rights issues. A more detailed summary of the issues discussed, conclusions and next steps follows.

1. **Main Themes Discussed in Human Rights Field Portfolio Review**

***Human rights field portfolio focus on support for forward-looking organizations***

Advisory Board member Oscar Vilhena Vieira commended the program for focusing support on creative, dynamic human rights organizations that are experimenting with new approaches to human rights advocacy and are not the usual suspects in the field. He also wondered what this meant for the more traditional actors in the human rights field, and whether there was a role or need for these voices. I noted that concentrating our support in a small group of human rights organizations that work closely with governments, experiment with new approaches and alliances, and are self-critical was a deliberate decision about where we think limited resources can make the most impact in advancing human rights in Latin America. While we are confident this is the right focus for the program, I recognized this is not always an easy choice, as many traditional actors in the human rights field are passionate advocates, played an important role in the past during moments where an adversarial approach was effective, and can complement newer approaches effectively in some cases.

Chris Stone also commented on the emerging divide highlighted in the portfolio review document between the smaller group of forward-looking organizations the program has focused on, and a currently larger group of organizations still focused on more rigid, adversarial approaches and resistant to changes in strategy. In particular, Chris Stone wondered to what extent this divide was true across the field in Latin America or reflected differences between the human rights field in different countries in the region. I mentioned that this divide is present throughout the field across Latin America, as there are examples of more forward-looking and more traditional human rights organizations in most countries in the region. However, different political, social and economic contexts do mean there are significant variations in the nature of the challenges and the approaches of the human rights movement between countries in the region, affecting how forward-looking or traditional the field tends to be in particular countries.

***New actors and approaches***

Oscar Vilhena Vieira noted that in many ways the core grantees in the human rights field are sophisticated, elite organizations and wondered what mechanisms or avenues there might be to support newer actors or organizations that are not well-connected. I acknowledged this is an important question and challenge, noting that many of these core grantees are grappling with these questions about their role and status. This includes thinking about how these organizations might function more as hubs that serve as channels for democratic minority groups to advance their rights rather than acting on behalf of or representing such groups.

Advisory Board member Silvio Waisbord also asked about ways in which we are thinking about experimenting with new approaches and involving new actors. In response, I strongly agreed this should be a priority for the Latin America Program going forward. I mentioned we were particularly interested in identifying organizations that do not necessarily see themselves as human rights organizations, but that are interested in and well-positioned to experiment with new approaches for addressing complex human rights issues, and in backing creative efforts to influence public opinion on challenging human rights issues.

***Base country of human rights field grantees***

Advisory Board Chair Andrés Velasco asked about the reasons for supporting three U.S.-based organizations as part of the program’s human rights field, and whether support should be concentrated even further on organizations based in Latin America. I recognized this is an important issue that I continue to grapple with. Each of the three organizations plays a distinctive, relevant role in the field and they comprise a smaller portion of the overall portfolio, but it remains a question we should continue to evaluate regularly going forward. In addition, I have focused on adjusting the levels of funding to organizations in this portfolio over the last couple of years to bring them into line with my assessment of the role the organizations are playing in the human rights field and the relevance of their work to OSF priorities. This has included decreasing funding to one US-based organization and slightly increasing funding for three organizations based in the region (CELS, Conectas and Dejusticia) that are strategic partners for OSF in several areas.

***General support funding levels***

The eight main grantees in this portfolio (CEJIL, CELS, Conectas, DeJusticia, Due Process of Law Foundation - DPLF, Fundar, Instituto de Defensa Legal - IDL, and Washington Office on Latin America - WOLA) all receive general support. Chris Stone drew attention to the questions raised in the portfolio review document about the criteria for determining appropriate funding levels for organizations receiving general support (as opposed to project support, where project objectives and activities provide some parameters for funding levels), asking whether there were additional criteria beyond those outlined in the document. In particular, he asked whether the level of support provided by other donors to these core human rights field grantees influences our thinking about funding levels and whether for certain strong, innovative leaders in the field we might want to aspire for OSF funding to comprise a larger portion of their overall budget. I agreed that the level and shifts in funding by other donors are an important consideration in assessing OSF’s level of general support. I also acknowledged that we had not considered whether we should aim for OSF funding to comprise a higher portion of the overall budget of particularly strategic, innovative grantees to date, but that this is a relevant question to explore, particularly for three organizations in the portfolio (CELS, Conectas and Dejusticia).

1. **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Based on the significant innovation and accomplishments of the core grantees in this field, the Latin America Program will continue to focus its support on forward-looking organizations that are working closely with governments to advance human rights and seeking to influence public opinion on challenging human rights issues. In addition, the program will foster experimentation with new approaches to human rights advocacy and creative efforts to influence public opinion by a wider range of actors.

Since the portfolio review, we have taken some initial steps in this direction, such as making a grant to a dynamic, young organization focused on social mobilization that has not previously worked on human rights issues to increase accountability for and decrease incidents of police abuse (a longstanding human rights issue) through a collaborative, crowd-sourced platform for reporting police violence and social mobilization to generate support for reforms. With the defeat of the proposal to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Uruguay in an October 2014 referendum, following a campaign we backed by a diverse coalition led by Proderechos, we have also had an encouraging outcome in terms of new efforts to influence public opinion on challenging human rights issues that often have been seen as unlikely to win public backing.