



**USAID** | ARMENIA  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# ARMENIA LEGISLATIVE STRENGTHENING PROGRAM EVALUATION

APRIL 2007

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development by Democracy International, Inc.

Prepared under Task Order #DFD-I-10-04-00229-00 under the Democracy and Governance Analytical Services Indefinite Quantity Contract, #DFD-I-00-04-00229-00

**Submitted to:**  
USAID/Armenia

**Contractor:**  
Democracy International, Inc.  
4802 Montgomery Lane, Suite 200  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
Tel: 301-961-1660  
Email: [info@democracyinternational.us](mailto:info@democracyinternational.us)

# ARMENIA LEGISLATIVE STRENGTHENING PROGRAM EVALUATION

APRIL 2007

## **DISCLAIMER**

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Methodology.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Structure of the Report .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0 BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1 Parliamentary Elections.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.2 2005 Constitutional Changes .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.3 Media Problems for the NAA.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.4 Positioning for 2008 Presidential Election.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.0 ALSP I AND II.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1 Major Accomplishments .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.2 Shortcomings.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3.3 Staffing.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.4 Other Problems Encountered by ALSP I and II .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.5 Program Coordination .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.1 Continuing Work with the NAA .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.2 Program Structure and Staffing .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.3 Liaising with the NAA and Establishing a New MoU .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.4 Program Approach.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.5 Program Activities .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4.6 A Bridge Program .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5.0 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>SOURCES .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: TEAM BIOGRAPHIES .....</b>	<b>A1</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: MEETINGS.....</b>	<b>B1</b>



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracy International (DI) and USAID fielded a three-person team to evaluate the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Program Phases I and II (ALSP I and ALSP II) and the need for possible follow-on assistance to the National Assembly of Armenia (NAA). The team, consisting of Lincoln Mitchell and Jessie Pilgrim from DI and Eric Rudenshiold from USAID/Washington, reviewed relevant project documents and conducted extensive interviews of relevant stakeholders in Yerevan for three weeks in March 2007. The three primary goals of the evaluation were: to evaluate the ALSP program; to make specific recommendations as to whether USAID should continue to support efforts to strengthen the NAA and, if so, what types of program and projects should be part of that effort; and to draft an appropriate scope of work for follow-on programming, should it be warranted.

The team found that ALSP, particularly in its first phase, offered important assistance to the NAA under difficult conditions. Notable accomplishments were:

- Development of the NAA website – The NAA website is useful and described as the best website of any governmental institution in Armenia. Local staff members of NGOs, as well as many MPs and other observers, use the website regularly.
- Creation of templates and procedures for research – The research department of the NAA, barely functional in 2002, was assisted by ALSP in developing research tools and creating templates for research staff.
- Changes in the NAA Television Hour – ALSP worked with the NAA to open this program up to more MPs and political voices within the NAA.
- Improvements in the Citizen’s Information Department – ALSP assisted in making information about the NAA more broadly available and in developing templates and trainings to help MPs more easily plan and lead events allowing citizens to interact with the NAA, such as town hall meetings. It also assisted the department’s development of a computerized system for recording and tracking citizen complaints.
- Improved procedures for committee hearings – ALSP helped develop a structure for committee hearings and worked with NAA and committee leadership to facilitate several committee hearings around important issues.
- Budget assistance – The budget work conducted by ALSP was particularly effective because it was sustained and used a few different programmatic approaches, including a seminar on budgeting with the NAA’s budget committee, follow-up workshops in the NAA, a well executed study tour to the US, and work with the budget committee to summarize the proposed national budget into a brief, readable document.

The majority of successes occurred during ALSP I, as ALSP II encountered some difficulties, primarily due to political problems that arose when the NAA chose a new Speaker. These political problems resulted in the premature termination of ALSP II. However, ALSP II was able to sustain, deepen and even institutionalize some of the major accomplishments of ALSP I, such as the website, and focus some of its other work in important areas, most notably budget work.

USAID should continue to support and strengthen the NAA through a program not radically dissimilar to ALSP. While ALSP can point to some important accomplishments, the NAA is still

far from being a well-functioning, deliberative and accountable legislative body. Moreover, few other donors are seriously considering provision of assistance to the NAA. The programs that are being explored through multilaterals, such as the OSCE and UNDP, are modest and emphasize material support and staff training, rather than work on capacity building or training with MPs.

While it is recommended that USAID continue to work with the NAA in a way that seeks to build the capacity and increase the technical expertise of the institution, it is not recommended that “ASLP III” be implemented. A new program, with new staff and a new name, will provide a clear message to the NAA that it is time for a fresh start in this area and will make it easier to revisit the relationship between the NAA and the program. The new program will likely be somewhat similar in its goals and methods, but should be seen and presented to the NAA as something new.

The new program should deemphasize legislative drafting in favor of oversight and budget skills. Unlike its predecessors, this program should work directly with MPs as much as possible. MPs themselves should be the primary participants in workshops and seminars. Initial appeals to participants should cast a wide net, building awareness that the program exists, and then narrow as levels of interest are identified. The program should annually reach out to less-active MPs to try to recruit new possible program participants. This does not mean there should be no work with staff members, but the emphasis should be on working with MPs.

The program should create projects aimed at strengthening committees and enhancing their capacity to discuss and evaluate legislation as well as to engage in dialogue with interested external actors, such as policy experts and civil society organizations. This effort should be integrated with other USG technical assistance programs.

Due to the unfortunate premature conclusion of ALSP II, USAID will have no parliamentary support program in place when the new NAA is elected and seated after the May 2007 elections. Given the contracting and bidding process, it is unlikely that a program will be in place before 2008, which presents the danger of missing a key opportunity to work with the new NAA. USAID is encouraged to become engaged with the new NAA as soon as it is elected. Study tours to the US, Poland or the Baltics for new committee chairs in the NAA are one possibility for such engagement. This would be an effective way to engage with several key leaders of the new NAA, expose them to various aspects of a well-functioning legislature and send a message that the US will be engaged with the new NAA. A second project, if funds permit, would be a stand-alone orientation offered to new MPs. This program could take place any time in the summer or fall and would probably need to be implemented through an existing USAID contractor or partner in Armenia. The orientation would bring in experts and MPs from other post-Soviet parliaments to hold workshops with the new MPs on a range of issues including: constituency relations, media training, legislative review, public hearings and the like. Occasional workshops for MPs on specific topics before the new program is in place would be valuable in this regard as well.

ALSP I and II built a useful foundation for work with the NAA. USAID should continue to support the NAA through a legislative strengthening program that will have a new name, new leadership and a new MoU, but will not be dramatically different, programmatically, from ALSP. The new program must make a renewed effort to engage MPs directly and work with USAID and the USG in an ongoing way to develop and maintain a strategy that ensures cooperation and support from the NAA.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Democracy International (DI) and USAID fielded a three person team to perform an assessment of the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Program Phases I and II (ALSP I and ALSP II). The field work for this assessment was conducted in Armenia from March 1 to 19, 2007. The team consisted of Lincoln Mitchell and Jessie Pilgrim from DI and Eric Rudenshiold from USAID/Washington. Vahan Asatryan, an Armenian national, served as the local staff member for the team. Biographical information for team members can be found in Appendix A. Dr. Rudenshiold, Mr. Pilgrim and Dr. Mitchell worked on writing and revising this report through the end of March and early April 2007 after returning to the US. The report is a collaborative effort representing the views of all three team members.

The three goals for this assessment were: (1) to evaluate the ALSP program, which was recently brought to an early conclusion; (2) to make some specific recommendations about whether USAID should continue efforts to strengthen the National Assembly of Armenia (NAA), and about the types of program and projects that should be part of these efforts; and (3) to draft a relevant scope of work for follow-on programming, should it be warranted. The team found that ALSP, particularly in its first phase, offered important assistance to the NAA under difficult conditions, and it is strongly recommended that USAID continue to offer support to the NAA. More details concerning these two findings are provided below. This report identifies some of the particular challenges faced by ALSP and makes some concrete recommendations for confronting those challenges in the future.

### 1.1 Methodology

The conclusions and recommendations in this report are based on scores of interviews and discussions conducted by the assessment team with representatives of USAID, members of the NAA, NAA staff, ALSP staff, international and Armenian NGOs working in the field of democracy and governance, and other bilateral and multilateral funding organizations. Unfortunately, the team and USAID/Armenia, despite numerous requests by phone, email and letter, were unable to meet with the Speaker or Chief of Staff of the NAA. Further, it became apparent that the Chief of Staff would not permit any of his staff members to meet with the team. A full list of the assessment team's meetings can be found in Appendix B. In addition to these interviews, the assessment team reviewed numerous reports, proposals and other relevant documents from ALSP provided by USAID.

An important component of the team's methodology was its effort to assess ALSP and potential future support for the NAA by placing the Armenian case in a comparative context. All three members of the assessment team have a great deal of experience with parliaments in the region and globally. The team has drawn extensively on this experience in this assessment, particularly in the drafting of a series of recommendations for future programs. Moreover, the team frequently asked interviewees with similar experiences to consider the NAA in this comparative context.

### 1.2 Structure of the Report

The report is divided into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides background on the NAA and its history in post-independence Armenia. It also provides political

background, including discussion of the upcoming election and the constitutional changes of 2005. The third section is a discussion of the accomplishments, challenges and shortcomings of ALSP I and II. Section four is an extensive discussion of recommendations for future programs with the NAA, including actionable suggestions for facilitating an effective program. Section five, the conclusion, summarizes the most significant points regarding ALSP and recommendations for future work.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

Armenians voted for independence in a September 21, 1991, referendum. The referendum was followed by a presidential election on October 16, 1991, that gave 83% of the vote to Levon Ter-Petrosian, who had been elected head of government in 1990 when the Armenian National Movement defeated the Communist Party. On December 24th of the same year, Babken Ararktsyan was elected as the President of the RA Supreme Council (parliament).

Since that time, Armenia has adopted a presidential system for its national government. According to the country's constitution, the president is the head of government and of state. Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament. The constitution of 1995 greatly expanded the powers of the executive branch and gave it much more influence over the judiciary and municipal officials.

The elections for the first convocation of the NAA took place on July 5, 1995. This NAA consisted of 190 members, with 150 elected in single member constituencies and 40 elected from the political parties lists based on proportional representation. Five political parties crossed the five percent threshold for participation in the allocation of the 40 proportional representation seats. Babken Ararktsyan was elected as the President of the NAA. The 40 proportional representation seats were distributed in the following manner: The Union "Republic" (50%, 20 seats); "Shamiram" (20%, 8 seats); Armenian Communist Party (15%, 6 seats); National Democratic Union (7.5%, 3 seats); and Union of National Self-determination (7.5%, 3 seats).

President Ter-Petrosian was re-elected in 1996. In January-February 1998, Armenia faced a government crisis following public demonstrations against Ter-Petrosian's policies on Nagorno-Karabakh and the leadership of the NAA. As a result, Khosrov Haroutyunyan was elected as president of the NAA and the Prime Minister, Robert Kocharian, replaced Ter-Petrosian. In March 1998, Kocharian was elected President and reelected in March 2003.

The elections for the second convocation of the NAA were held on May 30, 1999. This NAA consisted of 131 members, 75 elected from single member constituencies and 56 elected from political party lists based on proportional representation. Six political parties and coalitions entered the NAA. Karen Demirchyan was elected Speaker.

Following the assassination of Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsian and six other officials during a session of the NAA on October 27, 1999, a period of political instability ensued. An opposition, headed by elements of the former Armenian National Movement government, tried unsuccessfully to force Kocharian to resign. Kocharian successfully survived the political unrest and was re-elected in 2003. Armen Khachatryan was elected Speaker of the NAA.

The elections for the third convocation of the NAA were held on May 25, 2003. This NAA consisted of 131 members, 56 elected in single member constituencies and 75 from political party lists based on proportional representation. Six political parties and coalitions entered the NAA. Factions in the new NAA included: Republican Party of Armenia (23.66%, 23 members); Orinats Yerkir (12.60%, 12 members); Armenian Revolutionary Federation or ARF Dashnaksutyun (11.45%, 11 members); Justice (13.71%, 14 members); National Unity (8.91%, 9 members); and Unified Labor Party (5.67%, 6 members). The deputy group "The People's Deputy" was also

formed (16 members). Fourteen members were not affiliated with any faction or deputy group. Opposition parties secured 26 seats during the 2003 election. The parliamentary opposition includes both the Justice Bloc, organized by the People's Party of Armenia Chairman Stepan Demirchian, and the rival National Unity Party, led by Artashes Geghamian.

The Republican Party, ARF Dashnaksutyun Party, and Orinats Yerkir formed a coalition government. However, Orinats Yerkir pulled out of the loose governing coalition in May 2006, leaving a coalition consisting of the Republican and the ARF Dashnaksutyun parties, plus several unaffiliated deputies who vote with the government bloc. The former Speaker of the NAA, Artur Baghdasaryan (Orinats Yerkir), resigned his position on May 22, 2006. On June 1, 2006, the National Assembly elected Tigran Torosian from the Republican Party to succeed Baghdasaryan.

## **2.1 Parliamentary Elections**

The election of new members of the NAA will be conducted on May 12, 2007, and the current term of the NAA will end within a few months. The May elections will be conducted under a new election system, which increases the number of members elected by proportional representation from 75 to 90 and decreases the number of members elected in single member constituencies from 56 to 41. The term of office for the NAA has been increased from four to five years. The legal threshold for the proportional representation seats remains at five percent for political parties, but has been increased for political party coalitions from five to seven percent.

There are 74 registered political parties in Armenia. However, parties are relatively weak and political affiliation is based in large part on, and centers around, individual personalities. Going into the elections, the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), led by Prime Minister Andranik Markarian, is the dominant political party with the most deputies in the current parliament. The party's electoral position has been strengthened with the addition of Defense Minister Serzh Sargisian, who was elected on the HHK list in the 2003 elections although he was not a member of the party. The Justice Bloc appears to be the strongest electoral force representing the opposition. A new face on the political scene is the Prosperous Armenia (BH) political party. This party was formed in the spring of 2006 and claims to have a well organized party structure in all regions of Armenia. It reports that it has more than 370,000 party members and 500 party offices throughout the country.

Few women are members of the NAA – only seven of the 131 members. Although the election legislation requires that women make up 15 percent of the names on a list and that every tenth name be a woman's, this is not an effective guarantee of the representation of women in the NAA. There is no reason to anticipate any significant increase in the number of women in the NAA after the 12 May elections.

Robert Kocharian is prevented from seeking a third term as president, making parliamentary elections especially important for candidates who are positioning themselves for the presidential contest in 2008. Although the parliamentary elections will raise a great deal of interest and activity, there is no reason to expect the election of a group of reform oriented deputies. All indications are that, with the exception of some younger candidates on party lists, a large number of deputies will be similar in political outlook to the incumbents. However, there is a good chance there will be a new Speaker after the elections. Planning for a new parliamentary assistance

program should consider the numerous potential election outcomes, each of which will require a politically deft approach even if the makeup of the new NAA is unlikely to be radically changed. Further, the installation of new deputies and the Speaker shortly after the elections impacts upon the timing of a new parliamentary assistance program.

## **2.2 2005 Constitutional Changes**

The Constitution of Armenia was amended in a referendum conducted in 2005. Some of the amendments could result in a stronger NAA and a better balance of power between the executive and legislative institutions. Under the amended Constitution, the NAA can play a greater role in the appointment and dismissal of the Prime Minister. The amended Constitution also requires that the Speaker concur before the President can convene an extraordinary parliamentary session. This could be significant as much of the legislation in Armenia is adopted in extraordinary sessions convened by the President. However, one of the more important changes, as perceived by members of the NAA interviewed by the team, is an amendment that allows the NAA to have up to twelve standing committees. This increase from six to twelve possible standing committees is seen by many deputies as a significant balancing of powers between the executive and legislative institutions.

The real impact of the 2005 amendments will be determined by the newly elected NAA. One of the initial legislative efforts of the new NAA will be passage of new legislation regulating the procedures of the NAA, including the number of committees to be established. This law will be crucial for determining the extent to which the Constitutional amendments may be applied by the NAA. The amendments will be of little import if the new NAA is unwilling to assert itself as a stronger legislative institution. If the NAA behaves as an extension of the executive branch, as previous NAAs have, then the 2005 amendments can hardly be considered as significantly increasing parliamentary power. Although some members have stated that the new NAA will provide a greater balance to the executive, other interlocutors expressed doubt that there would be any significant change in the way parliament conducts its relationship with the executive.

Although the NAA may not aggressively assert its new powers, it will change the way it conducts committee processes simply due to the certain increase in the number of standing committees from six to twelve. The doubling of the number of committee chairs and deputy chairs will change the manner in which legislation has been considered and change the balance of power internally within the NAA. The number of key players in the NAA, due to the additional committee structure, is expected to increase as well. With the new constitution in place, the NAA may change its own rules of procedure. If this occurs, it may be useful to support the NAA in its efforts to harmonize the new rules of procedure with the constitutional changes.

## **2.3 Media Problems for the NAA**

One of the problems faced by the NAA is the reluctance of the media to provide coverage of parliamentary activities. Although this is due in part to the general tendency of the media in most countries to focus its coverage on the activities of the executive, this situation has been exacerbated by the restrictive media environment in Armenia. The NAA had achieved some level of success in overcoming the lack of coverage through a weekly program that provided one hour of coverage of parliamentary activities on national television. This program aired every Sunday

during prime viewing hours, and was an effective mechanism for deputies to receive media coverage of their opinions on various public policy issues. Unfortunately, in a blow to the NAA, the legal provision requiring the public broadcaster to provide this one hour of coverage was successfully challenged in the Constitutional Court as an unconstitutional interference with the independence of the media. Although the court's decision found the provision unconstitutional, the public broadcaster did continue to provide some limited coverage of parliamentary activities. The extent to which any coverage will continue to be provided remains to be seen.

The media environment remains restrictive, even in the area of the upcoming election campaign. Interlocutors state that the published price for political advertising has been raised to twice the price of regular commercial advertising, which is already expensive. This means that some political parties and candidates may have difficulty purchasing the broadcast time needed to convey their messages to voters.

The Constitutional Court decision and the high price of political advertising are indicative of an increasingly restrictive media environment. The lack of media coverage of parliamentary activities is another reason for making the parliamentary hearing process more transparent and public. Committee chairmen and deputies, who no longer have the weekly one-hour program to make their views known to voters, may find that committee hearings are an effective means for communicating to constituents.

## **2.4 Positioning for 2008 Presidential Election**

Robert Kocharian, the incumbent President of Armenia, is completing his second term of office, and constitutional provisions prevent him from seeking a third term. The election to determine his successor will take place early in 2008. Some political leaders have started to position themselves for the presidential contest. Part of this positioning may include seeking parliamentary office in 2007 and a leadership position within the new NAA. Such positioning within the NAA creates the opportunity for a higher profile for the NAA as an institution.

Positioning for the 2008 election may also create some splits within the leadership of the political parties that dominate the executive branch. In a political environment already prone to fractures, aspirations for the 2008 election contest will certainly lend little stability to the current political alliances. Splits within these alliances might also present an opportunity for the NAA to gain a higher profile in the formulation and discussion of public policy issues. However, just as the NAA could benefit from such splits, it could also be the victim of internal political party disputes.

The upcoming 2008 Presidential election does present the opportunity for the NAA to assert itself and become more involved in the formulation of public policy. An executive nearing the end of his or her term is generally less powerful. Conversely, an executive beginning a term of office may also be less powerful because there has not been sufficient time to consolidate power and exercise effective control over the executive organs. There may be a window of opportunity, before the newly elected executive has mastered control of the government, for the NAA to assert itself as an institution and exercise the new powers granted by the 2005 Constitutional amendments.

## 3.0 ALSP I AND II

As discussed above, the combined period during which ALSP I and II were functioning was from April 2002 to October 2006. ALSP I covered the period from April 1, 2002 through March 30, 2004, with a no cost extension from April 1, 2004 through August 31, 2004. ALSP II was scheduled to last from September 1, 2004 until August 31, 2007, but activities were suspended in October of 2006. According to the workplans and other relevant USAID and ALSP documents, ALSP I sought to facilitate “a more responsive and effective parliament” through helping to develop “more effective internal management systems” and “increasing citizen access to the legislative process.” Efforts to achieve these goals were to be pursued through the following core tasks.

1. Strengthening the internal capacity to support the legislative process, focusing particularly on the financial and economic analytical aspects of that process;
2. Improving National Assembly systems for constituency relations and outreach; and
3. Increasing access to information about and from the National Assembly

According to similar documents, ALSP II sought to strengthen democratic governance in Armenia through two key results: 1) “the facilitation of a more responsive and effective parliament;” and 2) “the expansion of civic participation.” Efforts to achieve these goals were to be pursued through the following core tasks:

1. Facilitating and institutionalizing the involvement of Armenia’s legislative community to advocate, lobby and advise the National Assembly on policy and legislative issues;
2. Improving the functioning of key committees and departments of the National Assembly by having them work more closely with the legislative community in jointly analyzing, researching, commenting on and drafting legislation;
3. Improving the ability of select units and individuals within the National Assembly to be more transparent, representative and responsive to citizen priorities, interests and concerns; and
4. Developing the National Assembly’s ability to improve oversight of the executive branch through existing mechanisms and, to the extent possible, through assisting in the creation of new mechanisms via constitutional and legislative amendments.

### 3.1 Major Accomplishments

Overall, ALSP I contributed to the development of the NAA in several ways. The work of ALSP I clearly helped the NAA develop “systems for constituency relations and outreach” and “increased access to information about and from the NAA.” Among the major accomplishments of ALSP I were: developing and launching the NAA’s new website, creating templates and procedures for research, reworking and expanding access to the parliamentary hour television program, improving the functioning of the citizen’s information department at the NAA including implementing the Public Inquiry Tracking System (PITS) system so that MPs could log and trace citizen complaints more effectively, and improving the hearing processes for committees, which increased public input on some issues.

*The Website* – There was consensus among virtually all persons interviewed by the team that the website was ALSP’s most significant contribution. It was described as a useful and helpful site with a great deal of information and as the best website of any governmental institution in Armenia. Local staff members from several NGOs, as well as many MPs and other observers, said that they used the website regularly for information, ranging from background information for an MP to the text of a new law. There were several suggestions made about additional information that could be provided on the website. These included the attendance and voting records of individual MPs and the text of proposed legislation that has not yet been enacted into law. In addition to the website, several MPs and NAA staff said that they use the parliamentary intranet a great deal for internal parliamentary business. Other technical support provided in the first year of ALSP I included several new computers and rewiring in the NAA building to help make the intranet more accessible.

*Templates and Procedures for Research* – The research department of the NAA in 2002 was barely functional and unable to provide basic information to MPs and staff. Through helping the NAA develop modern research tools and working with the staff of the research department, ALSP was able to improve the NAA’s ability to do research. This accomplishment was cited specifically by only a few MPs, but alluded to by several others.

*Parliamentary Television Hour* – ALSP worked with the NAA to open this program up to more MPs and political voices within the NAA. Currently, the future of this television program is unclear due to a recent Constitutional Court decision that the NAA cannot compel a public television station to broadcast a particular program.

*Citizen’s Information Department* – ALSP worked with the staff of this department to help make more information about the NAA more broadly available. ALSP also developed templates and offered trainings to help MPs more easily plan and lead town hall meetings and other events allowing citizens to interact with the NAA. Importantly, ALSP helped the information department develop a computerized system for citizen’s complaints known as the PITS system. This system reduces the backlog of complaints at the citizen’s information department, sends the complaints to the appropriate MP and tracks any action that is taken to address the issue in question.

*Committee Hearings* – In addition to being cited by ALSP staff, a number of MPs and NAA staff members cited help with developing a process for committee hearings as an important contribution of ALSP. ALSP helped develop a structure for these hearings and worked with parliamentary and committee leadership to facilitate several committee hearings around important issues.

*Drafting Legislation* – ALSP conducted several workshops with the staff of the NAA to help them develop stronger legislative drafting skills. The results here seemed to be somewhat mixed as the parliamentary staff remains weak in the area of legislative drafting. However, it should be noted that the ministries of the executive branch also remain weak in the area of legislative drafting.

There are fewer concrete accomplishments that can be cited that are specific to ALSP II. One of the reasons for this is the difference in the nature of the activities of the two phases. Some of the activities of ALSP I, such as the work on the website and developing the PITS system, are more



easily achieved than activities directed at the transformation of the NAA into a stronger legislative institution. However, the primary reason for fewer successes in ALSP II is that the program encountered political problems when the NAA chose a new Speaker. This political difficulty is the primary cause of the program's early closure in October 2006. However, ALSP II was able to sustain, deepen and even institutionalize some of the major accomplishments of ALSP I, such as the website, and focus some of its other work as well in important areas, most notably in the area of the budget.

*Budget Assistance* – The budget work conducted by ALSP II was particularly effective because it was sustained and included several different programmatic approaches and tactics. These included a seminar on budgeting with the budget committee of the NAA, several follow-up workshops in the NAA, and a well-planned and well-executed study tour to the US that included opportunities to meet with legislators and staff members involved with budgeting at the national, state and local levels. Following the study tour, ALSP II worked with the budget committee to summarize the proposed national budget into a brief and readable document similar to the type performed by the budget committees in the US Congress. A number of MPs cited not only the value of these programs, but the extent to which this budget document was useful to them.

### **3.2 Shortcomings**

While ALSP I was, generally speaking, a successful program and ALSP II continued most of that good work, there were some things that could have been done better and that should be considered for further work in this area in Armenia. There are some issues regarding ALSP's relationship with the NAA, as well as staffing and other macro issues that will be discussed further, but several programmatic areas deserve attention as well.

ALSP I was very successful in working with the staff of the NAA, but was notably less successful when seeking to work with MPs. This was in part due to the timing of elections and in part to the late conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) negotiations. It also appears that there may have been an element of program implementation bias due to the role played by the former Speaker. The program would have benefited from a more developed political strategy for engaging MPs directly. Most of the workshops and projects conducted were focused on the staff. Other major accomplishments, such as the website or the PITS system, required minimal interaction with MPs. While work with staff members is very important, it is also necessary to work, in a variety of ways, with MPs as well. One striking example of the relative lack of participation by MPs was the ALSP I orientation for new NAA members conducted in 2003, which brought together experts from three foreign countries but was only attended by 10-15 MPs. While a core group of 10-15 MPs can be a key component of a program like ALSP, a project of that size and cost should have a larger reach.

A second concern about ALSP was that for some projects the program was performing tasks for the NAA rather than building the capacity of the NAA to perform such tasks. Producing templates for the research and information departments of the NAA, as well as for MPs seeking to hold public meetings, or designing a website or a system for handling citizen complaints are valuable contributions to Armenia's NAA. These activities, however, do not add to a cohesive and strategic program conducted by a partner organization seeking to strengthen the NAA and develop its skills and capacity, but rather function more as individual consultancies. For example,

the work to develop the website was important but emphasized creation and delivery of a product rather than capacity building.

Because of the relatively short period during which ALSP II was fully operational, it is more difficult to disaggregate programmatic shortcomings from the other larger issues that eventually led to ALSP II's early closure.

### **3.3 Staffing**

Neither ALSP I nor II appear to have been optimally staffed. It is questionable whether two senior expatriate staff positions were justified by a program of this size. A qualified Chief of Party (CoP), with relevant program, political and regional experience, should be sufficient for key foreign staffing. A local-hire deputy who is able to provide the necessary administrative and management skills should be attainable in the Armenian market. The program also seemed overly dependent on its CoP. The first CoP became the face of ALSP in a way that created challenges for the program following the CoP's departure after three and a half years. This occurred shortly after the abrupt departure of the program's Deputy CoP, which created a more difficult transition. Additionally, the skills of the CoP and the Deputy CoP of ALSP II did not complement each other as effectively as they might have. This issue raised more problems for the program when political problems were encountered with the new Speaker because the Deputy CoP was not able to provide the administrative support that would have made it easier for the CoP to navigate this difficult political situation.

### **3.4 Other Problems Encountered by ALSP I and II**

During the team's discussions with staff members of ALSP I and II, representatives of USAID's Armenia office, and staff members from other USAID democracy and governance programs in Armenia, a number of other problems that ALSP faced in Armenia were raised. While these problems had an impact on ALSP, ultimately they were not qualitatively different than those typically faced by similar programs.

A number of interviewees asserted that the NAA was dysfunctional with frequent leadership changes and populated by numerous MPs with little or no interest in legislation or the general work of the NAA. In this regard, however, it does not appear that the NAA is significantly worse than other former-Soviet parliaments. Many parliaments in the region have had multiple and changing Speakers. Azerbaijan, for example, has had seven Speakers in the last 10 years. Similarly, many former-Soviet parliaments feature significant numbers of MPs without professional experience who may have sought elected position to acquire immunity or to further their business interests, and are not interested in passing laws, representing constituents or legislating. Few parliaments in this region have majoritarian-elected MPs who have any real ties to constituents, often resulting in a generally lower number of engaged and professional MPs.

The departure of the CoP from ALSP I was a bigger setback for ALSP II than it needed to be. The problems associated with the CoP's departure were compounded because the leadership of the NAA also changed around the same time. However, ALSP's first CoP remained on the job for three and a half years, which provided substantial if not remarkable continuity to the program. Key personnel in programs like ALSP, all over the world, change relatively frequently.

Recognizing the inevitability of this type of turnover, programs should strive to be less dependent on the CoP and the CoP's relationships. Similarly, dependence on a relationship with one key individual will almost inevitably create problems for the program when that individual changes.

Additionally, the NAA's desire for material rather than technical assistance, in other words for computers, fax machines and other tools rather than seminars and capacity-building workshops is also not unusual. Managing expectations with regard to material support is a critical aspect of setting up and maintaining a successful parliamentary program, that should be supported by USAID and, if necessary, the US Embassy.

Another challenge ALSP faced, also not unique to Armenia, was to the attitude of MPs themselves. Elected officials often believe they are instinctively qualified for their position and tend to resist the idea of needing to be "trained" in how to do the job. They are less resistant to approaches that seek to "enhance their professional competence." The approach taken with the NAA may require even a greater degree of finesse, as there appears to be a high percentage of people in the NAA with little interest in the real work of passing laws and legislating.

ALSP II was particularly plagued by difficult relationships with the new leadership of the NAA. While USAID met with many people in designing the RFP for this program, the soon to be Speaker had expectations that were not included in the final and winning proposal. This proved unfortunate to the overall success of the program as Speaker Torosyan (1) had a different philosophy from his predecessor, (2) sought to distance himself from his predecessor, and (3) did not feel he was a stakeholder in the ALSP. It should be noted that ALSP II was not the only internationally funded program that found working with the new Speaker difficult, as he either stalled or cancelled the implementation of most other programs that were providing some form of assistance to the NAA.

ALSP also struggled to establish good relations with key staff of the NAA, having to rely on a Chief of Staff incumbent in that position for over a decade who acts as the gatekeeper for programs supporting the NAA staff. This, again, is not altogether unusual. Many chiefs of staff in former-Soviet republics remain in their position for a long time. There appears to have been some turnover in staff in the NAA after the recent Speaker change and a possibility that there will be more turnover if a new Speaker is chosen after the elections in May. This may provide a broader opportunity for working with the NAA than has previously existed.

Because the majority of draft laws are submitted by the Government, the NAA does not play the central role in the legislative process in Armenia, nor does it appear likely that this situation will change any time in the near future. The NAA has been increasingly convened into extraordinary session in order to pass laws rushed to the NAA by the executive branch. These extraordinary legislative sessions dilute the deliberative nature of the NAA and reduce any opportunity for input from MPs, staff or civil society. Governmental domination of the drafting and overall legislative process is a common phenomenon in the former Soviet Union, but parliaments in the region tend to play a greater role in legislation drafting and analysis than that of the NAA. Most political observers in Armenia agree that this is an important area for parliamentary technical assistance for MPs and staff members. With the constitutional amendments adding as many as six new standing committees to the NAA, increasing the capacity of all committees to provide non-

contradictory and deliberated legislation becomes an important aspect of increasing the importance of the NAA as a substantive governing organ.

### **3.5 Program Coordination**

Based on the team's interviews, particularly with other international organizations that work or have worked with the NAA, it became clear that the current Speaker was exceptionally difficult and largely unwilling to cooperate. This notion was reinforced by the Speaker's unwillingness to even meet with the evaluation team and the chief of staff's unwillingness to meet with the team or allow any of the parliamentary staff members to meet with the evaluation team. Speaker Torosian curtailed virtually all internationally supported parliamentary assistance activities, not just those of ALSP. Though UNDP has been negotiating to relaunch its parliamentary assistance program, it has only received postponements and reassurances that it can work with the new NAA, and this approval is far from certain and will likely depend on the new NAA selecting a different Speaker.

Speaker Torosian, when he was Deputy Speaker, had urged USAID to assist in the creation of a Parliamentary Research Center that was not realized in the final program. It does not appear that he (or anyone else) was subsequently thanked for his input, nor made aware of the difficult decisions that had to be made on what could and could not be included in the final program. In short, in a context where political work is essential, political backstopping appears to have received insufficient attention in the ALSP program. As already mentioned, Speaker relations are often difficult and need to be managed first and foremost by the USG in the form of high-level discussions and eventually MoUs. Parliamentary programs in neighboring countries have had extensive coordination between USAID, Embassies and the State Department, with Ambassadors lobbying and meeting extensively with Speakers.

A further issue raised by other implementing organizations in the democracy and governance field in Armenia is that there was some perception that Artur Baghdasaryan, the previous Speaker, was the primary beneficiary of the program. It was not clear to the team that this was in fact the case, but the perception here is important. No individual MP, including the Speaker, can become the focal point of a program, either in a positive or negative way. The program must be designed and implemented in a way that recognizes that turnover and changes in the politics of a particular parliament are unavoidable and that demonstrates that the program is designed to strengthen an institution, not an individual.

For these reasons, the program, and specifically the program's CoP, must have the political skills to be resilient, explore other approaches and build relationships across the parliament. The NAA appears to be more politically disciplined than many post-Soviet parliaments with a seemingly united majority bloc, making this task somewhat more difficult than in other countries.

ALSP I also suffered somewhat because of timing issues. The start-up time for ALSP 1 in April 2002 was unfortunately one year prior to parliamentary elections. At the program's inception, the NAA was not in session and MPs were beginning to focus most of their attention on the elections, making it very difficult for ALSP to build the necessary relations with MPs and to offer useful programs. This resulted in an initial engagement almost exclusively with staff members and divided the approach of the program from a potentially linked MP-staff effort into a more segmented activity with isolated components. Unfortunately, as will be discussed in the section

on program recommendations, it is extremely unlikely that any new parliamentary support program will be functioning by the time the new NAA begins its first session in the fall of 2007.

The MoU between ALSP and the NAA was a source of ongoing problems for ALSP. First, the program operated for much of its first year without a MoU. During the early months of the program, multiple and different sets of expectations were raised and misperceptions about the meaning of assistance became entrenched. Even though it is reasonably clearly written, the subsequent MoU's value as a guidance mechanism that clarifies the roles of both programmers and participants was seriously compromised by the time it was signed. The program had already started and the NAA had begun to receive assistance without the document. Thus, the incentives to sign a document were greatly reduced at that time, as was any potential effectiveness of the MoU.

Furthermore, MoUs can be a significant tool in leveraging a quid pro quo from program beneficiaries. This aspect appears to be largely missing from ALSP negotiations. Most parliamentary programs seek a measure of cost sharing during MoU negotiations as part of a high-level discussion before the program starts. This effort tends to result in the program being more highly valued during implementation and also enables regularly scheduled high-level meetings, generally involving the Speaker and the US Ambassador or USAID Mission Director to gauge the program over the period of implementation.

The MoU for ALSP also provided far greater detail than necessary mostly in the form of the annex. The MoU should lay out the basic guidelines for cooperation between the program and the NAA. It is not a contract that lays out specific tasks, contributions, etc. This degree of specificity not only weakens the future bargaining position for the implementing partner, but makes it virtually impossible for the program to maintain the degree of flexibility that is needed for an effective legislative strengthening program.

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Continuing Work with the NAA

USAID should continue to support and strengthen the NAA through a program not radically dissimilar to ALSP. It is clear that while ALSP can point to some important accomplishments, the NAA is still not even close to a well functioning, deliberative and accountable legislative body. In general, any new program should continue to have an emphasis on accountability, representation and strengthening links between constituents and majoritarian MPs. These are areas in which the NAA remains conspicuously weak. Additionally, the program must address the need for the NAA to develop and strengthen and empower itself as an institution, which will almost certainly involve engaging with individual factions within the NAA. The need for this type of assistance remains unambiguous, but there are concrete successes from ALSP I and II upon which the next program can build. Work with committees and factions are strong program entry points for both staff and MP training. Moreover, few other donors are seriously considering provision of assistance to the NAA. The programs that are being explored by the OSCE and UNDP are modest and emphasize material support and staff training, with little emphasis on working directly on capacity building or training of MPs.

While we recommend that USAID continue to work with the NAA in a way that seeks to build the capacity and increase the technical expertise of the institution, it is not recommended that “ASLP III” be implemented. A new program, with new staff and a new name, will provide a clear message to the NAA that this is a fresh start and make it easier to revisit the relationship between the NAA and the program. The new program will likely be similar in its goals and methods, but should be seen and presented to the NAA as a new initiative.

The period beginning with the parliamentary elections in May of 2007 and continuing through 2009 has the potential to be a pivotal moment in contemporary Armenian politics. While the NAA is still very weak, presidential elections in 2008 lead to a unique developmental opportunity. For the last seven years Armenia has been ruled by a virtually unchecked executive. But the last year of President Kocharian’s term in office will likely place him in a comparatively weaker position as a lame duck leader. Following that year, the newly elected president will need some time to consolidate his own power. Thus, the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007-2008 mean that the newly elected NAA may have a meaningful opportunity in 2008-2009 to expand its role in the power void created by a potentially weaker executive. This may well mean that a savvy and ambitious NAA leadership may be able to become a more viable and needed check to the traditionally strong executive.

There are additional political reasons why the next NAA will have an important role to play. The new constitutional amendments will change the NAA and its responsibilities. As many as six committees will be added to the NAA, creating more opportunities for political leadership in the NAA and for an expanded oversight role. Sorting out the overlap between these committees, determining how to work together on related issues, dividing jurisdiction and developing committee terms of reference, will be a necessary and difficult task. Additionally, laws will need to be checked and amended for compliance with new constitutional provisions. The NAA’s

governmental oversight function will need to be redefined in light of the Chamber of Control's changed role.

Although the 2007 elections will return a significant number of incumbents, most political analysts believe the elections will also result in a substantial number of new MPs and staff members who will be unfamiliar with their tasks and roles upon entering the NAA and will require training. There are some observers and MPs who also expect that a cadre of younger MPs and women may be included in the new NAA and that both of these groups would be approachable, appreciative and adaptable to ALSP-style lessons and training. Younger politicians in Armenia, the so-called "children of the elite," have different expectations and attitudes towards politics than the current ruling class. This generational evolution has produced a cadre of elected officials in other post-Soviet countries more receptive to the kinds of training suggested in this program.

## **4.2 Program Structure and Staffing**

It is the team's understanding that the budget for this program will be modest, but not dramatically different from that of ALSP I and II. Based on its interviews and discussions, the team recommends a two-year, \$2,000,000 program. Accordingly, it is essential that the program not be too ambitious and be more focused. A few top priorities, which are elaborated below, should be identified and pursued. Peripheral projects like youth days or teaching English should be eliminated. Based on this budget, after the fixed costs of overhead, the CoP salary, the cost of maintaining an office, hiring local staff and other necessities, there will only be money for a few study tours, a few retreats or conferences, a very small amount of equipment and a few publications. Expectations should be set accordingly from the beginning for USAID, the NAA and the program itself.

Structuring the staffing appropriately and finding the right people for the key positions will, as with most programs of this nature, be essential to the program's success. The staffing for ALSP was not structurally ideal. One foreigner, the CoP, is appropriate for a program of this size. The cost to the program of a foreign employee is quite high and having more than one foreign employee uses resources that are more effectively used elsewhere. The CoP, therefore, will be a very important hire. The best candidate for that position will have experience in other countries doing similar work. While direct experience with a well-functioning legislature, in the US or elsewhere, is useful, it is not necessarily a prerequisite and it is not a substitute for development field experience in democratization and governance. Clearly, this should not be the CoP's first overseas job, nor should the CoP be somebody whose only overseas experience is in an area other than governance. It is most critical that the CoP have political as well as technical skills.

The senior Armenian staff members will also play a critical role. The program should seek a strong Deputy CoP who will take on administrative and management responsibilities, freeing up the CoP for political and technical work. The Deputy CoP and other relevant local staff should also have experience working with legislatures.

For the reasons described above, the CoP candidate should be weighed heavily when considering the bid, as should senior Armenian staff. This is probably more important than proposed activities and projects, because many bidding organizations will propose a similar set of activities.

Moreover, there needs to be flexibility in activities anyway, which is one of the reasons why a CoP with good political skills is needed. However, once the program has begun, it will be important for the CoP to ensure that the programming is running sufficiently smoothly that it will not collapse should that CoP leave. This is a difficult balance to strike and will require cooperation and support from USAID.

### **4.3 Liaising with the NAA and Establishing a New MoU**

Effective and smooth work with the NAA cannot rely on an agreement made with just one individual. Although the Speaker's involvement is pivotal, committee chairs and analogous key staffers, such as department heads, are also important program constituents and a potentially powerful lobby group within the NAA that should be included, even if only minimally, in the program design and periodic assessment review. The program's success and, to some extent, ability to function depend on making several important MPs and senior staff as well as the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, feel they are stakeholders in the program. These people should be involved in helping to set up the program, but they should not dictate that process.

All of these stakeholders must understand the concept of technical assistance. Moreover, the US should not make the overall funding level of the program a key aspect of discussion. Since there is virtually no understanding in Armenia about USG hiring, procurement regulations and the concept of fixed costs, press releases and discussions that discuss budgets will result in raising expectations. Any technical assistance program of this type will have relatively few flexible budget lines. Nonetheless, overall areas of program concentration are legitimate areas of discussion among US and Armenian program partners.

This program will call for a new MoU. The process of agreeing on a MoU is as important as the document itself. Creating a new MoU allows the US to restate its hope to provide relevant technical assistance to the NAA through the creation of a general and very flexible document, with no annexes giving more specifics. This process is a political opportunity to engage high-level US and Armenian actors, ideally the Ambassador and the Speaker, to negotiate general expectations on both sides and to then delegate day-to-day administration of the program. Other legislative training programs in the region often include prominent participation of the US Ambassador in MoU negotiations with the Speaker of parliament, at least in the presentation of a document for the Speaker to review. A high-level signing ceremony between the Speaker and either the Ambassador, or a visiting USG dignitary from Washington, further emphasizes the political significance that is attached to this program.

During implementation, the contractor should represent the US side while the Speaker needs to officially appoint someone from the NAA side to be the program's key point of contact. Further, an MP liaison, or small advisory committee of MPs similar to the short-lived legislative strengthening advisory committee (LSAG) that was tried under ALSP, could help facilitate greater MP participation in program activities. If a committee approach is used, proper attention to managing the members is necessary, so that they stay focused and attentive to the program's needs. Assuming that MPs would independently have meetings and assigning too many responsibilities and expectations to such a group were key factors in why the approach did not work under ALSP. It will be up to the program, reinforced by the Embassy and USAID, to immediately set the tone and level of expectation from the Armenian side as to what the program



can and cannot do and to be clear that the program is not an entitlement for equipment or travel trips. Program budget discussions should be avoided as we have seen that Armenians will focus on the overall budget, not understanding that flexible program funds may well make up only 30 percent of an overall budget. In this regard it is important to note that, if programs or projects are to be cancelled, it should be on the initiative of USAID or the implementer, not the NAA.

After the MoU is agreed upon and the implementation phase of the program begins, USAID and the implementing contractor must continue to agree on the program and the political strategy for implementing the program throughout the project. The CoP must be committed to building and maintaining relationships with MPs and staff members who are central to the project. This also includes working closely with factions and faction leaders who are quite influential with individual MPs. It should be understood by USAID and the implementer that this is a key part of the CoP's job. It may be helpful to set up a formal or unofficial committee of MPs and staff to meet with program leadership regularly, but this may not be the best approach. Regardless of the approach, the CoP, must keep USAID abreast of these relationships so USAID can offer the necessary support to the CoP. The program can also provide the US Embassy, in many cases the Ambassador, with an ongoing subject of discussion with the Speaker, which, of course, has substantial indirect value.

#### **4.4 Program Approach**

Before making some specific recommendations for program activities, there are some general guidelines regarding these activities that should be considered. First, the program needs to be more cohesive. Individual projects need to be more clearly related to each other. They should build on each other and draw upon previous projects and activities. One successful example of this from ALSP II was the budget work. Similarly, sustained and ongoing projects are essential. Onetime trainings or workshops rarely have an impact. When possible, some underlying theme should tie several program activities together more clearly. One way to do this is to build a number of activities, such as workshops, public hearings and training on legislative review around an important issue that is being discussed in the NAA.

The program should also be better externally integrated as well. This means that it should interact more with other DG work in Armenia. Synergies, particularly though not exclusively with other DG programs, should be pursued. A program like this is valuable to all implementing DG partners because it provides insight and access to the NAA, making the program a potentially useful partner to numerous organizations.

The program should also draw on lessons from other programs that have had impacts in similar countries. The program will benefit from looking at its work in a comparative context. Too many people, including ALSP staff, MPs and other observers, attributed many perceived shortcomings of ALSP to the unique political situation in Armenia. However, there are similarities in the political and legislative environment between Armenia and many post-Soviet countries. It would be a more useful approach to draw on what has worked in similar countries, particularly in the region, though not exclusively. For example, programs for developing MP capacity to give press interviews are usually popular and successful elsewhere in the region. It seems reasonable to believe that public hearings and television interviews training would be popular and successful in

Armenia as well. One way to broaden the staff's comparative perspective would be through program staff exchanges of the type noted above.

The new program should also seek a better balance of projects that are seen as requiring hard work and those that are seen more as perks. For example, study tours, material support and the like should be deemphasized for MPs and be more contingent upon productive involvement in workshops, seminars and the like. In general, fewer material goods should be provided, while whatever is given should be given late in the program with specific guidelines for usage. For example, only staff members who have received database management training and scored well on an appropriate test would be eligible to receive new computers. The program should avoid providing material support early in the program as a means to garner goodwill from the NAA or its leadership. Transparency in all approaches of the program is essential, so that those who do receive "perks" or benefits of the program are not perceived as having received unfair advantages.

The approach needed to effectively provide technical assistance and capacity building to the NAA is one that combines doing and showing. Workshops and discussions, which focus on abstract or theoretical principles like constituency relations or legislative review, will be far more effective if they are built upon real legislation or constituency issues confronting the NAA. MP's will be much more likely to see themselves as stakeholders if they are able to see tangible results of the program.

Effective legislative strengthening programs should retain a reasonably high degree of flexibility. This makes it possible to offer support and structure projects around key initiatives in parliament and emergent public policy issues. If, for example, there is a major debate in parliament around a particular issue, the program should be able to establish meetings around this issue or use the debate as way to get the interest of MPs and build relevant capacity.

Determining which MPs will participate in various projects will be an important factor in the success of the program. Therefore, participant selection processes need to be transparent and broadly understood. When choosing staff members or MPs for workshops or seminars, opportunities need to be made available to all, or it should be understood that a select group is chosen for a reason such as membership on a particular committee. This is particularly important when selecting some staff members and not others. It is likely that MPs will self select, as there are likely to be a number of MPs who will be less active or interested participants. There are, of course, political issues here that cannot be avoided. It will be essential for the program to find some MPs from various pro- and anti-government factions with whom to work. The universe of MPs should also be fluid, so that different MPs participate in different programs.

## **4.5 Program Activities**

The following specific program activities are guidelines based on the team's work in March 2007. It is certainly possible that unforeseen opportunities to engage the NAA will arise or that the evolving political environment will require different kinds of projects. For this reason, the program leadership should be flexible. Moreover, it is unlikely that the program will be able to implement all these ideas, so setting priorities will be very important.

The new program should deemphasize legislative drafting in favor of oversight and budget skills. Though most agree that staff needs to continue to develop drafting skills, the NAA does not initiate a substantial amount of original legislation. At least in an initial phase, focusing on enhancing professional competence to review and analyze legislation supplied to the NAA would be more beneficial. Too many laws are passed other laws or with the constitution. Focusing on improving the overall quality of legislation alone will benefit the country and help to establish a strong and valued role for the NAA in relation to the country's already strong executive. Initially the NAA can play the role of technical filter to laws supplied externally, but as its competence and institutional self-confidence increase, the NAA may take on a greater role for initiating legislation.

Unlike its predecessors, this program should work directly with MPs as much as possible. The ability to do this will rely, not surprisingly, on the political skills and processes described earlier. MPs themselves should be the primary participants in workshops and seminars. Initial appeals to participants should cast a wide net, building awareness that the program exists, and then narrowing as levels of interest are identified. The program should annually reach out to less active MPs, to try to recruit possible new program participants. Program component approaches should be through both faction and committee leaderships, to reinforce technical and political support. This does not mean there should be no work with staff members, but the emphasis should be on working with MPs. Working with the staff is, generally speaking, a necessary but not sufficient component of these types of programs.

If there is a new Speaker that is more positively disposed to the program, it is worth considering a program element that works to develop the Speaker's capacity, particularly related to receiving and scheduling votes on laws sent to the NAA. The past governmental practice of scheduling extraordinary sessions for passing last-minute laws has often resulted in passing substandard and contradictory laws. More time for committee review and analysis, including civil society testimony and input, has resulted in better laws. One example of this is the labor code. Working with the Speaker in this way will not only help ameliorate this problem, but it will also strengthen the NAA as an institution and build goodwill with the Speaker.

The program should create projects aimed at strengthening committees and enhancing their capacity to discuss and evaluate legislation as well as to engage in dialogue with interested external actors such as policy experts and civil society organizations. This effort should be integrated with other USG technical assistance programs.

The website is a useful tool that is widely used and the program should continue develop it and make it sustainable. Providing some enhancements to the website, in addition to the ongoing maintenance of the website, would be helpful. If at all possible, attendance and voting records of MPs, in both committees and plenary sessions, should be included on the website as a transparency measure. Several neighboring parliaments currently provide this information. An interactive section should be created for outreach to committees, which could enhance opportunities to comment on draft legislation. Additionally, the PITS system should be placed online. A related project is to enhance the library and research function of the NAA through discrete enhancements for increasing full-text access to policy journals and other relevant documents.

## 4.6 A Bridge Program

Due to the unfortunate premature conclusion of ALSP II, USAID will have no parliamentary support program in place when the new NAA is elected and seated. Given the contracting and bidding process, the team recognizes that it is unlikely that a program of the kind described above will be in place before 2008. This means that the USG is in danger of missing a key opportunity to work with the new NAA. USAID is urged to become engaged with the new NAA as soon as it is elected. Possible means for such engagement are stated below.

First, study tours to the US for new committee chairs have been mentioned as a possibility by the US Embassy. This would be an effective way to engage with several key leaders of the new NAA, expose them to various aspects of a well-functioning legislature, and send a message that the US will be engaged with the new body.

A second project, if funds permit, would be a stand-alone orientation offered to new MPs. This program could take place any time in the summer or fall and would probably need to be implemented through an existing USAID contractor or partner in Armenia. The orientation would bring in experts and MPs from other post-Soviet parliaments to hold workshops with the new MPs on a range of issues, including constituency relations, media training, legislative review, the NAA's website and intranet, public hearings and the like. It is the team's understanding that ALSP is currently preparing material that could be used for this type of orientation, so the foundation for this may already be in place. Occasional workshops for MPs on specific topics before the new program is in place would be valuable in this regard as well. Possibilities might include media training through IREX, FOICA or another NGO, and constituency work through another partner.

In each of these cases, it would be helpful to present the project as part of the new program to help brand the program and build up some goodwill in Armenia even before it officially begins.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

ALSP I and II built a useful foundation for work with the NAA. There are some lasting impacts of those programs, such as the website and intranet, the PITS system, the improved ability of the NAA to solicit and use input from citizens, and individual staff members who have received training to do their jobs better.

There are concrete programmatic areas where ALSP could have been more successful. More clear priorities, particularly in ALSP II, more work with MPs rather than primarily staff in both ALSP I and II, and a greater emphasis on capacity building rather than providing services would have allowed ALSP to have a greater impact.

The more serious shortcomings of ALSP were political. The program relied too heavily on a relationship with one Speaker, Artur Baghdasaryan. When Speaker Baghdasaryan lost his position, the program was never able to build a relationship with the new Speaker. This is partially due to the Speaker himself, but also partially due to the political work of ALSP. However, ALSP's efforts to work effectively with the NAA after Speaker Baghdasaryan left office would also have benefited from an ability to coordinate political efforts with the USG in Armenia.

USAID should continue to support the NAA through a legislative strengthening program, which will have a new name, new leadership and a new MoU, but will not be dramatically different, programmatically, from ALSP. The new program must make a renewed effort to engage MPs directly and must work with USAID and the USG in an ongoing way to develop and maintain a strategy that ensures cooperation and support from the NAA.

## SOURCES

1. Official web site of the National Assembly of Armenia: <http://www.parliament.am>
2. Official web site of the President of Armenia: <http://www.president.amn>
3. Official web site of the Government of Armenia: <http://www.gov.am>
4. Official web site of the Central Electoral Commission of Armenia:  
<http://www.elections.am>
5. CIA-The World Fact Book-Armenia:  
<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/am.html>
6. U.S. Department of State Background Note on Armenia:  
<http://www.factmonster.com/country/profiles/armenia.html>
7. Official web site of the Embassy of the United States, Yerevan, Armenia:  
<http://www.usa.am>
8. Eurasianet Insight: <http://www.eurasianet.org>
9. Encyclopedia Britannica 2006 Deluxe Edition
10. OSCE/ODIHR – Elections: <http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14350.html>
11. Republic of Armenia Parties & Organizations:  
<http://www.politicalresources.net/armenia.htm>
12. Federal Research Division, Library of Congress – Armenia: Country Studies:  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/amtoc.html>
13. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty: <http://www.rferl.org>
14. Armenialiberty: <http://www.armenialiberty.org/>
15. ASBAREZ Armenian Daily Newspaper: <http://www.asbarez.com/>
16. washingtonpost.com: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/worldref/country/armenia.htm>

## APPENDIX A: TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

### **Lincoln Mitchell, Ph.D. - Team Leader and Senior Program Development Specialist**

Lincoln Mitchell, PhD, is an accomplished professor, political consultant, and international development professional. Dr. Mitchell has extensive experience working on legislative strengthening and other democracy and governance programs in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. He has worked in more than 14 countries, including Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia and Serbia.

From 2002 to 2004, Dr. Mitchell served as the CoP for the USAID-funded National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) program in Tbilisi, Georgia, which included a substantial legislative strengthening component. This program focused on establishing processes for the orientation and training of new Members of Parliament (MPs), establishing and updating parliamentary rules of procedure, developing skills of staff members and MPs in constituency services, training in budget processes and instituting a practice of public forums and hearings. In this role, he coordinated with other donors, secured funds and worked closely with the Speaker of the Georgian parliament.

Since 2004, Dr. Mitchell has worked as an International Political Development Specialist consultant on many projects. He wrote an assessment on political communities in Bahrain that included an extensive section on the legislature, consulted for NDI on the development and implementation of legislative programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and worked directly with MPs in Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan on constituency relations and legislative strategy.

Dr. Mitchell received a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an MA, M.Phil. and Ph.D in political science from Columbia University. His published works focus on democratic change, particularly in Georgia. He has taught at Columbia University, Brown University, and the Georgia Institute of Public Affairs in Tbilisi. Dr. Mitchell speaks intermediate Russian and French and is conversational in Mandarin Chinese.

### **Jessie Pilgrim, J.D. - Senior Program Development Specialist**

Jessie Pilgrim is a highly respected and accomplished lawyer, international development professional and former state legislator. He has worked on legislative issues in more than 25 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Mr. Pilgrim has worked for the American Bar Association Central and East European Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IFES, NDI, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (ODIHR) and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

From 1989 to 1993, Mr. Pilgrim served as an elected member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, where he was a member of committees dealing with the judiciary, taxation, international development, budget, and appropriations, among others. During his time in the Oklahoma legislature, Mr. Pilgrim authored or co-authored more than 300 legislative measures.

Since 1996, Mr. Pilgrim has served as a legal consultant, legal analyst and project manager on legislative strengthening and other democracy and governance programs in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere. He has observed parliamentary elections in Albania, Croatia and Montenegro, and served as Deputy Head of Mission for ODIHR in Albania in 2001. He has assisted legislatures and local governments in multiple countries in developing electoral law and systems to facilitate a more responsive legislative system.

Mr. Pilgrim received his J.D. from the University of Tulsa in 1984. He has been admitted to practice before the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia, as well as the United States Supreme Court.

### **Vahan Asatryan - Program Assistant**

Dr. Vahan Asatryan has, for the past 10 years, coordinated and advised several democratic governance and cross-cutting development projects carried out by the Government of Armenia and international donor agencies.

As a good governance team leader of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Armenia in 2003-2006, Dr. Asatryan led the teams of experts in designing and implementing the 2005-2009 United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Armenia. He designed and coordinated UNDP/Armenia projects in anti-corruption, citizenry participation in policy making, access to information and media independence. Mr. Asatryan led the UNDP/Armenia and Government teams, in designing and implementing an anti-corruption participatory monitoring methodology (APMM) in the healthcare and public education sectors. He also managed the team of experts drafting the legislation on lobbying in Armenia.

As a coordinator of the UNDP/Armenia electoral administration support project in 2002-2003, Dr. Asatryan led the team of experts in designing and implementing the nationwide training program for the members of electoral commissions.

As a national coordinator of the conflict resolution and peace building regional project of the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 2001-2002, he designed and implemented a number of cross border cooperation and second track diplomacy initiatives in the region.

As a national coordinator of several joint projects of the Government of Armenia and donors in 1997-2002, Dr. Asatryan led the teams of UNDP/Armenia and UNIFEM experts, in conducting gender review of the national legislation, designing and implementing gender mainstreaming in national strategies and programs such as the Poverty Reaction Strategy Paper (PRSP), as well as in various technical assistance projects. He considerably contributed to organizing and conducting research on gender and development and gender studies, promoting gender disaggregated statistics and gender analysis in Armenia. He also led preparation of the first ever national report on the status of women in Armenia.

Mr. Asatryan is a native Armenian speaker and is fully fluent in Russian and English.



## APPENDIX B: MEETINGS

### Members of Parliament

- Gagik Minasyan, Chair, Standing Committee on Finance, Loans, Budget and Economic Affairs
- Hranush Hakobyan, Chair, Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Youth Affairs
- Armen Rustamyan, Chair, Standing Committee on Foreign Relations
- Rafik Petrosyan, Chair, Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs
- Armen Ashotyan, MP
- Grigor Ghonjeyan, MP
- Areg Ghukasyan, MP

### Parliamentary Staff

- Karo Harutyunyan, Expert, Standing Committee on Stat and Legal Affairs
- Marine Hakobyan, Expert, Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Youth Affairs
- Hayk Grigoryan, Expert, United Labor Party Faction
- Tigran Mkrtchyan, Former Assistant to the Speaker
- Samvel Farmanyan, Former Assistant to the Speaker

### Local NGOs and Academia

- Tevan Poghosyan, Executive Director, ICHD
- Ashot Khurshudyan, Training Coordinator, ICHD
- Boris Navasardyan, Chair, Yerevan Press Club
- Nune Sarkissian, Executive Director, Internews
- David Sandukhchyan, Director, Internews
- Lucig Danielian, Vice Provost, American University of Armenia

### International NGOs

- Alex Sardar, Chief of Party, Counterpart Int. (CASP)
- Ara Nazinyan, Director, Eurasia
- Sonya Smith, Chief of Party, ABA CEELLI
- Robert Evans, Program Manager, IREX
- Chedomir Flego, Chief of Party, IFES
- Ms. Taline Sanassarian, Director, NDI
- Mr. Andrew Bennet, Director, NDI

### Donors

- Mr. Richard Hyde, DCM, British Embassy
- Ms. Alla Bakunts, Portfolio Manager, UNDP
- Mr. Marc Bojanic, Deputy Head of Office, OSCE
- Ms. Ruzanna Baghdasaryan, Program Officer, OSCE

- Mr. David Melikyan, Governance Officer, World Bank
- Ms. Bojana Urumova, Special Representative, Council of Europe Field Office
- Ms. Anna Ghukasyan, Assistant to SR, Council of Europe Field Office

### **State Institutions**

- Mr. Levon Mkrtchyan, Minister, Ministry of Education and Science
- Ms. Nvard Manasyan, Ministry of Education and Science
- Mr. Gevorg Kostanyan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Justice
- Mr. Gagik Voskanyan, Chariman Chamber of Control
- Ms. Ruzan Zazyan, Expert, Chamber of Control
- Mr. Armen Harutyunyan, Ombudsman, Office of the Public Defender
- Ms. Gayane Makaryan, Head, Department of International Relations, Office of the Public Defender

### **ALSP Staff**

- Ms. Jill Pender, Former Chief of Party, ALSP II
- Mr. John Armstrong, Acting Chief of Party
- Ms. Anna Hovhannisyan, Communications Specialist
- Ms. Anna Ter-Ghukasyan, Office Manager
- Mr. David Sukiasyan, Chief Accountant
- Ms. Ruzanna Harutyunyan, Administrative Assistant



**U.S. Agency for International Development**

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20523

Tel: (202) 712-0000

Fax: (202) 216-3524

[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)