



TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

Celebrating 20 Years of Soros Foundation- Kazakhstan

Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan

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MISSION

Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan (SFK) is an Almaty-based non-governmental organization established by the Open Society Foundations in 1995 to promote civil-society initiatives in Kazakhstan. Our mission is promoting values of the open society in Kazakhstan. Since 1995, SFK has granted more than \$70 million to promote civil-society initiatives in Kazakhstan, which include a whole range of areas from HIV/AIDS prevention programs to a variety of educational programs aimed at enhancing critical-thinking and public-debating skills.

“All our social institutions are imperfect and ought to hold themselves open to improvement. This is the idea of the open society.”

GEORGE SOROS *Founder and Chairman, Open Society Foundations*

DEAR COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS:

We are pleased to present the anniversary report of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan. This report gives an overview of key programs and projects implemented by our foundation over its 20-year history of building open society in Kazakhstan.

We are pleased to think that a new generation of young people has grown up over this period in a new country, and that our foundation has had an influence on their outlook and set of values. Young people have been in the focus of our foundation from the very beginning, through scholarships, debates, and civic education initiatives.

Established in 1995 by the Open Society Foundations, the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan has undergone several strategic transformations. Our first programs pursued the goal of helping independent Kazakhstan overcome the difficulties of economic and political transition. In those challenging times, our grants were helping scholars and artists to produce creative work and to collaborate with their counterparts from across the world, while our scholarship programs opened up global education opportunities to hundreds of talented young people. Many of these people now hold senior positions in public service and business in Kazakhstan.

Advancing human rights has been core to our activities from the outset, and we have been striving to make the human rights movement strong and vibrant in Kazakhstan. We have always understood human rights in a broad sense, and we are especially proud of our programs that have promoted palliative care, inclusive education, and access to essential medicines, in addition to defending freedom of speech and access to justice.

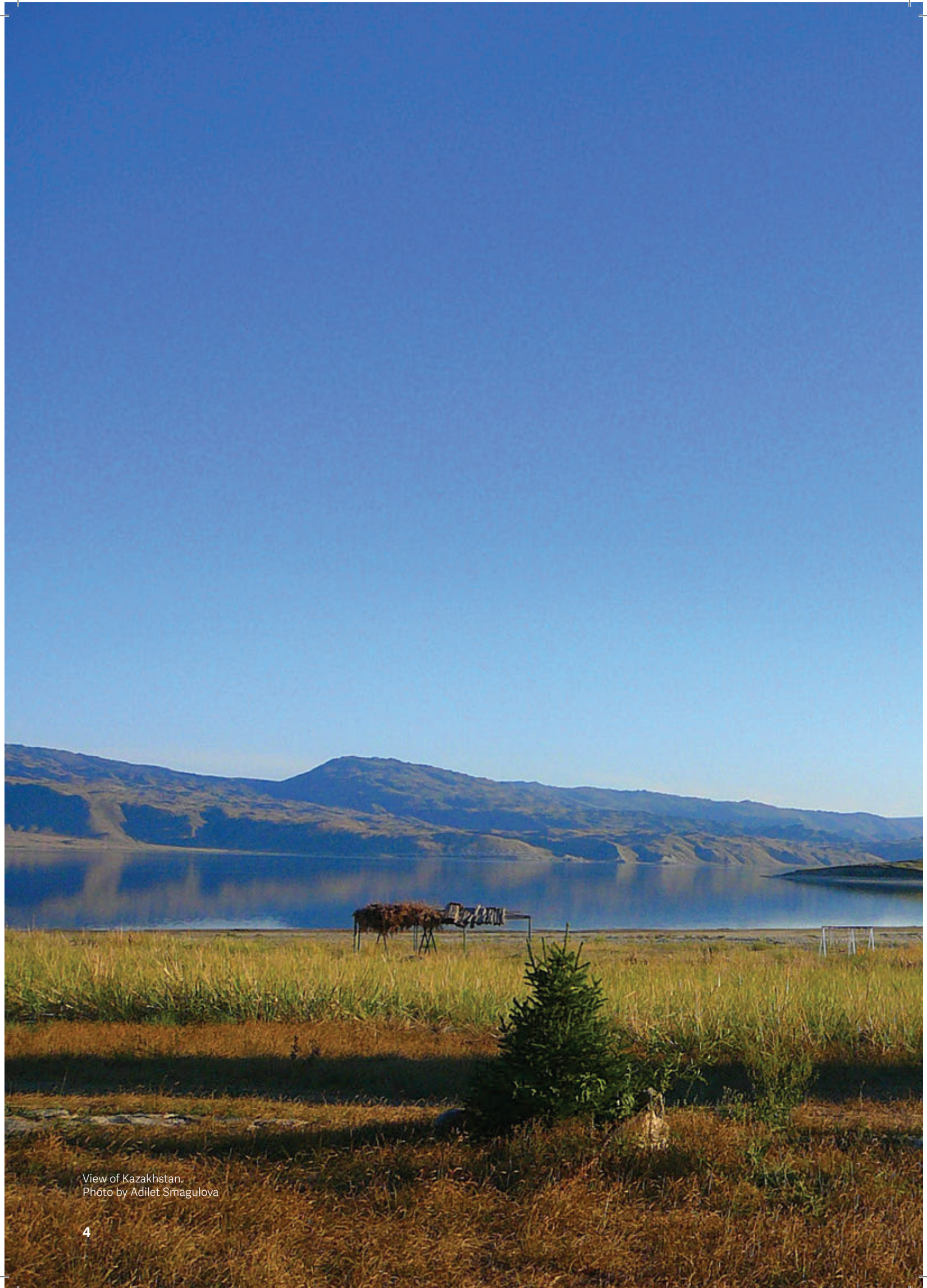
The beginning of the new century was marked by rising oil prices, which brought a petroleum bonanza to the country. New socio-economic realities made us redefine our program portfolio—shifting towards more good-governance projects. We have been assisting the government in implementing the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and improving budget accountability so that Kazakhstan can transform more of its oil wealth into human development.

These are difficult times for open society in the world. The rise of religious extremism, terrorism, and political and economic instability lead to violations of human rights and cause reverses in democratic positions even in countries which had been regarded as open societies. This makes the challenge even greater for transition countries like Kazakhstan, where liberal values and democratic traditions have not yet been rooted deeply. We see our role today in protecting and advancing open society values in Kazakhstan, making them known and shared by people in different walks of life. We believe that an open society is a stronger society, and we aim for a strong Kazakhstan.

Our legacy is the result of the hard work of our team and partners, and we are proud that so many wonderful people have served on our board and on the team, and that we have had such amazing partners in all areas of our work on our programs. Our report does not have the space to mention all of our many hard-working partners who have contributed so much to Kazakhstan, but we highly appreciate the work of all of our colleagues and partners and we dedicate this report to them.

Nargis Kassenova
*Chair of the
Board of Trustees*

Anton Artemyev
*Chair of the
Executive Council*



View of Kazakhstan.
Photo by Adilet Smagulova

TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

Protecting and advancing open society values in Kazakhstan.

TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

The Machine, a work of art by Assel Kadyrkhanova for the Territory of Memory: Mourning exhibition, 2013.
Photo by Nedelka Project

Arts and Culture

Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's support for culture and the arts over the last two decades has embraced innovative projects in art and literature, music and film-making, poetry and popular culture. We believe our contribution has left a durable cultural footprint, helping to create a vibrant space for the arts to flourish.

The grants offered by SFK to writers, artists, and filmmakers over the years have helped open up the arts to a new generation of accomplished and creative people, to the benefit of all arts lovers in Kazakhstan. "Thanks to these grant competitions, the culture of Kazakhstan was enriched," says artist Valeria Ibraeva. "I think this was of really great value."

As the late Gerold Belger, a prominent writer and a former chairman of the SFK board, put it poetically back in 1997: "In a period of deep economic crisis in our country, I would compare the practical and concrete assistance from SFK's unique programs to the swallow from the Kazakh legend which brings the suffering a life-saving drop of water in its beak."

Art

SFK's institutional support for the Center for Contemporary Art in Almaty from 1998 to 2010 allowed it to become a vehicle for artistic development, a place for artists to share ideas and a dynamic space where creativity thrived. This led to "new innovations, new ideas, new contacts with the professional artistic community," says Ms. Ibraeva, who was the center's director. "The mission was to support the artistic process in Kazakhstan," she says, and "the integration of the art of Kazakhstan into global artistic processes." The foundation's support helped Kazakhstani artists produce some trailblazing work, and exhibit it at home and abroad. As a result of SFK's assistance, "there was huge promotion of Kazakhstan's art," Ms. Ibraeva explains.

SFK encouraged artists to embrace cutting-edge forms and methods through projects such as a video art training initiative in 2003, which culminated with a video art festival at which the artists displayed their productions.

The foundation has also sponsored contemporary art exhibitions on meaningful subjects, such as Territory of Memory: Mourning in 2013, in which artists took a personalized look at the sufferings of the people of Kazakhstan during the Stalinist repressions and purges of the 1930s.

Innovative social art projects have also received the foundation's support. In 2012, SFK sponsored Mesqueunblog, a project which used cartoons as an art form for tackling prejudice against disabled people. The cartoons—which

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were published online then exhibited in cities around Kazakhstan—told the inspiring story of a real-life cerebral palsy sufferer, teenager Bakhytzhon Dzhumanov, and used humor to reveal the obstacles and prejudices he faces in his daily life. “People do not need to hide behind their disabilities, people have to live with them and perceive them naturally,” says Lyazzat Kaltayeva, the chairwoman of Shyrak (an NGO which works with women with disabilities), referring to Mesqueunblog. “Cartoons are a wonderful form of presenting information about disabled people, and you should not be afraid to laugh at it with us. We will always support this profile, the profile of equality.”

In another social art project supported by the foundation, photographer Ilya Martynov toured Kazakhstan and produced some astonishing urban images which he juxtaposed with archive shots to illustrate the architectural

changes of the past 50 years. “Through my works I wanted to create a dialogue with society about changes taking place with the architectural heritage of the country, to rethink the meaning today,” the photographer says. The photographs—which were displayed at the Interweaving Realities exhibition in Almaty in 2013—sparked an important debate on urban development in Kazakhstan.

Literature

Contemporary literature grants in 1996, 2000, and 2002 supported emerging writers who have gone on to forge successful careers in the literary arts such as Didar Amantay, Talasbek Asemkulov, Aygul Kemelbayeva, Ilya Odegov, Nikolay Verevchkin, and Yerbol Zhumagulov. The foundation considers it a priority to contribute to the development of Kazakh-language literature, and in 2002 three of the five winners of a contemporary novel grant—Mr. Amantay, Mr. Asemkulov, and Ms. Kemelbayeva—won funding to produce books in Kazakh. These grants have resulted in the publication of captivating literary works such

The foundation considers it a priority to contribute to the development of Kazakh-language literature.

as *Postscriptum* and *Flowers and Books*, two inspired short story collections by Mr. Amantay; *Midday*, a lyrical novel about music by Mr. Asemkulov; *The Tower*, an autobiographical novel about the strength of the human spirit by Ms. Kemelbayeva; and *Tooth of the Mammoth*, a memorable metaphorical tale about the last inhabitant of a dying town by Mr. Verevchkin.

SFK has also supported the performing arts, through grants for playwrights to produce drama that is engaging for local audiences and through financial assistance for theaters in the regions of Kazakhstan.

Works of art displayed at the Territory of Memory: Mourning exhibition, 2013.
Photo by Nedelka Project





In 2001, SFK sponsored the production of four CDs of traditional music: *Kazakh Musical Folklore*; *Kazakh Instrumental Music*; *Kazakh Musical Epics*; and *Kazakh Traditional Songs*.

Music

Securing Kazakhstan's musical heritage for posterity has been another important contribution to the arts from the foundation. In 2001, SFK sponsored the production of four CDs of traditional music that might otherwise have been lost to future generations: *Kazakh Musical Folklore*; *Kazakh Instrumental Music*; *Kazakh Musical Epics*; and *Kazakh Traditional Songs*.

The foundation has also supported the development of contemporary music, through innovative projects such as the country's first ever training in V-Jaying.

Film

SFK has sponsored social art on the screen through grants awarded for film and TV productions that tackled pressing challenges and problems. In the 1990s, the foundation sponsored *Perekrestok* (Crossroads), a soap opera with a conscience which aired topical questions and ethical dilemmas that helped viewers make sense of the rapid reforms unfolding in their country in real life at the time.

In 1998, we sponsored *With a Camera Around Kazakhstan*, a haunting documentary about living with HIV/AIDS

in the city of Temirtau which helped put a taboo topic on the agenda and tackle social stigma and discrimination. In 2013, SFK awarded grants to four talented young filmmakers to produce video shorts in Kazakh and Russian, resulting in some compelling productions which opened debates about socially-important issues. The film *Builders* imaginatively tackled the themes of homelessness and

social injustice, while *5,000 Tenge* looked at corruption, adeptly using animation to imagine how money feels when it is used as a bribe. The film *Ghost* related the problems of teenagers living in remote settlements in the environmentally-devastated Aral Sea area, and *Hold My Hand* was a life-affirming tale about a teenager living with leukemia and a man experiencing a mid-life crisis.



Cast of the *Perekrestok* (Crossroads) TV series, a soap opera with a conscience aired in the 1990s. Photo by Vox Populi



TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

A Kazakh language lesson at the Kulager school in Almaty. Photo by Irina Bogacheva

Education

SFK's educational legacy includes sustainable improvements in pre-school education; support for the government's curriculum reform efforts and transition to a 12-year education system; improving access to education for vulnerable children by promoting inclusive education; and boosting skill sets through a foreign scholarship program.

Pre-School Education

The foundation's support for a project to establish a child-centric, community-based approach to pre-school education has brought about sustainable improvements in this area. "The project's goal was to change approaches to education, to introduce democratic principles of education," says Dina Aidzhanova, director of Step by Step Kazakhstan, the organization which implemented the project. "This is about a child-centric approach to promote cognitive and physical development, with methods beneficial to the child, where parents are welcome in the classroom." Under the project, which ran from 1996 to 1998, pre-school education models were created in six pilot schools in different cities, through the provision of equipment and teacher training. The results have been far-reaching: nowadays, Step by Step Kazakhstan operates a large network covering 650 pre-school classes

and 38 elementary classes nationwide, and it also runs a home-learning program and family resource centers to help parents engage with their children's early education.

Step by Step Kazakhstan contributed to the drafting of the government's pre-school standards, promoting the principles of a child-centric environment; professional development of teachers; and inclusive education. Since 1996, over 50,000 children have been educated in pre-school and elementary classes

The teachers understand that the child is an individual who must be respected, and that the parents must be respected and involved.

supported by Step by Step Kazakhstan, and some 2,500 teachers have received training to foster child-centric learning. This has resulted in a change in mind-set, says Ms. Aidzhanova: "The teachers understand that the child is an individual who must be respected, and that the parents must be respected and involved. That is a change in mentality."

Curriculum Reform

A curriculum reform project sponsored by SFK has supported the government's ongoing transition to a 12-year education system. Launched in 2001 in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, the project has had a durable impact on the education reform process, and the conclusions reached by the Kazakhstani experts who participated were incorporated in the government's education strategy. Under the project, the specialists studied international experience of curriculum reform and considered the type of reforms required in Kazakhstan to deliver a high-quality education in support of a smart economy. In 2003, the experts presented the government with a reform plan, and their conclusions on the need for the education system to develop core competencies and functional literacy

EDUCATION

were incorporated in the state education program adopted in 2004.

The foundation also bolstered the development of critical-thinking skills (as one of the core competencies) through its support for the National Debate Center, opened in 1998 by Bakhytnur Otarbayeva to train schoolchildren and students in critical thinking through debate clubs set up in educational institutions. “The goal was to develop critical-thinking and leadership qualities, and I think this goal was achieved,” says Ms. Otarbayeva. “One of our program’s achievements is that it became sustainable.” Thanks to this initiative, debate clubs exist nowadays in many educational establishments nationwide, continuing to foster critical-thinking skills in young people.

Scholarship Programs

SFK’s foreign scholarship program—which ran from 1995 to 2013—has improved skill sets in Kazakhstan and helped create a pool of highly-qualified specialists who have made an enormous contribution to the country’s economy and social sector. Under the program, some 2,000 students from Kazakhstan gained access to a high-quality education in leading US and European universities, and brought their expertise back home to benefit their country. SFK sponsored the Center for Study Abroad, which administered the grants and offered free consultation services about educational opportunities abroad, and later supported the Bilim-Central Asia center after it assumed these functions. Grants were provided for studies in the humanities and social sciences, including economics, law, journalism, environmental science, social work, and public policy. “I believe our contribution has been to establish a pool of specialized experts in the humanities in Kazakhstan,” says Leila Yedygenova, Bilim-Central Asia’s director.

The foundation also provided Faculty Development Fellowships, which have allowed recipients to “have real, conscious input into the transformation of their educational and research institutes,” says recipient Nazym Shedenova, a sociology professor at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University.



Participants of the ZhasCamp youth forum, 2014.
Photo by the MISK youth organization

Inclusive Education

SFK has helped place inclusive education on the agenda in Kazakhstan, based on the belief that all children have the right to a quality education. Working in support of a government-set target to ensure that 70% of schools in Kazakhstan are inclusive by 2020, SFK has sponsored projects to improve

access to education for children from vulnerable groups, who often experience difficulties accessing quality educational services and are sometimes excluded altogether from mainstream education.

In 2009, SFK sponsored a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which reviewed education policies for students with special needs and disabilities and provided policy improvement recommendations for expanded access. This study produced the important finding that while Kazakhstan has a legal foundation enshrining the right of children with special needs to receive a quality education, the framework for the provision of specific services was lacking. In 2011 and 2014, SFK sponsored nationwide situational analyses to identify children with restricted access to education and define barriers to inclusive education, which included skills gaps; inflexible curricula; lack of appropriate teaching materials; and inaccessible study facilities. In 2011 and 2012, SFK sponsored a series of seminars nationwide to acquaint officials responsible for education policy at the sub-national level with successful inclusive education models, addressing practical



A student in Almaty. Photo by SFK

questions such as what needs to be done to make a school inclusive and how teacher training programs should be reformed. Between 2012 and 2014, SFK sponsored inclusive education projects at five pilot schools in Akmola Region, in which the teachers drafted development plans outlining practical steps to make their schools inclusive. SFK has provided grants for inclusive education initiatives at rural schools, and sponsored inclusive education training for trainee teachers.

The foundation has also supported the efforts of parents of children with disabilities to promote their offspring's right to a quality education. SFK has sponsored the Central Asian Regional Network of Parents with Autism, and provided a grant to set up the www.inclusion.kz website, a dynamic online platform for professionals and parents to share material on inclusive education.

Reducing social stigma as a means of overcoming barriers to inclusive education has been another priority, and the foundation has offered grants for journalists to produce awareness-raising reports on equal access to education for children from vulnerable groups. There is still a long way to go to secure equal access to education for all at-risk children, but we believe our efforts have helped place inclusive education on the agenda in Kazakhstan.

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Taxi service for people with disabilities in Karaganda, 2014. Photo by Vox Populi



Budget discussion at a village assembly
in South Kazakhstan Region, 2014.
Photo by Sholpan Aitenova

Governance

SFK's legacy in this area includes improved budget transparency and accountability, and greater public engagement in scrutinizing budgetary processes. We believe that our work aimed at embedding traditions of accountability and best practice has had a positive and long-lasting impact on Kazakhstan, and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

"SFK has carried out significant work over these years and made a substantial contribution to the country's democratic development," says Kirill Ossin, the director of the Eco Mangystau NGO, based in energy-rich western Kazakhstan. With the foundation's support, "a mechanism has been established for the development of dialogue between the authorities, business, and public organizations, on the path towards an active society and a transparent, responsible government."

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

SFK has been a trailblazer in advocating for transparency and public accountability in the oil and gas sector. In 2004, the foundation pioneered the field of revenue and budget transparency by launching the Kazakhstan Revenue Watch Program, and we also helped establish the revenue transparency movement by

supporting the Oil Revenues Under Public Oversight coalition and civil society groups such as Azamattik Kuryltai and Aikyndyk. With support from SFK and its partners, in 2005 Kazakhstan signed up to a flagship international reporting project, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Under EITI, extractive companies publicly report their tax and non-tax payments to the government, which in turn openly discloses revenue receipts, allowing a third party to reconcile the figures in the interests of openness and accountability. In 2013, Kazakhstan passed a milestone when it was awarded EITI-compliant status. "The foundation's support for EITI implementation in Kazakhstan allowed this initiative to be developed quite powerfully," says Pavel Lobachev, the director of the Almaty-based Echo NGO. SFK has also supported civil society participation in the National Stakeholders Council, which oversees EITI implementation.

"Civil society became a real participant with a full-fledged voice in a multi-lateral body created at the level of the state," says Mr. Lobachev. "Information in this sphere became a great deal more transparent."

The process has engaged public interest in the activities of extractive companies, especially in Kazakhstan's western energy-producing regions, and increased social responsibility in business as extractive companies engage with local communities. Through the National Stakeholders Council, civil society actors have become involved in monitoring the transparency of social infrastructure projects funded by energy companies, and in the decision-making process for new projects. The council's regular publication of revenue reports helps bring greater transparency to the management of extractive sector

EITI has been a game-changer for Kazakhstan in establishing public accountability over revenue flows within the energy sector.

GOVERNANCE

revenues; provides access to important public information for citizens; and increases the effectiveness of revenue management. Since investors value transparency, this work is also conducive to bringing about a long-term and sustainable improvement in the investment climate. EITI has been a game-changer for Kazakhstan in establishing public accountability over revenue flows within the energy sector.

Citizens' Budget

Another legacy of SFK's work to improve public scrutiny over financial flows has been the launch of the Citizens' Budget. This revolutionary project aims to improve accountability at the national and sub-national levels by setting out the government's taxation and spending plans in terms that are easily comprehensible to the layman. As well as improving transparency, this helps engage public participation in the budgetary process.

SFK partnered with the Ministry of Finance to support the introduction of Citizens' Budgets, working with the International Budget Partnership and members of the National Budget Network of Kazakhstan (NBNK), a coalition of NGOs. In 2011, the government passed legislation that paved the way for the launch of Citizens' Budgets, and nowadays public organizations—from ministries and local authorities to law-enforcement bodies—publish user-friendly Citizens' Budgets on their websites, permitting public scrutiny of government spending plans. The government also makes documents at most stages of the budgetary process publicly available—from pre-budget statements to audit reports. This project (carried out under SFK's Public Finance Transparency Program) has left a lasting legacy, engaging communities in scrutinizing public spending and helping make budgets more responsive to their needs.

Open Local Budget Index

The Open Local Budget Index (OLBI), jointly developed by SFK and the NBNK, aims at improving budget reporting accountability and public participation in the budget process at the sub-national level. This is done through studies evaluating the openness of budget reporting in the country's 14 regions, in the capital Astana, and in the financial capital Almaty, to rank them in terms of their openness. OLBI published its first ratings in 2011, and these rankings now serve as an instrument to make a comparative evaluation of local spending and demonstrate how open and publicly accountable each region is. The rankings also help identify differences in the budget process across the country, and determine which regions provide more opportunities for citizens to participate in the budget process, motivating local governments to improve access to information. "Budget development and execution of the budget have an impact on everyone, and especially on vulnerable groups," says Zhanibek Khassan, director of the Zertteu Research Institute, an NGO partner of the foundation. "From the economic point of view, public monitoring of budget execution allows local authorities to improve their intended use and the impact of government development programs."

This project has left a lasting legacy, engaging communities in scrutinizing public spending and helping make budgets more responsive to their needs.



The Kashagan oilfield in the Caspian Sea.
Photo by Joanna Lillis



An oil train in western Kazakhstan.
Photo by David Trilling

Local Self-Governance

SFK began supporting Kazakhstan's efforts to promote local self-governance in 1996, and as the government continues to roll out its decentralization initiative, our ongoing support continues to have an impact. The focus of our current efforts is promoting community engagement in the budget process at the local level, putting local communities at the heart of decision-making on budget priorities and creating a sense of shared responsibility with the local authorities for the use of budget funds. SFK is working with the Ministry of the National Economy on a financial decentralization initiative in which communities will be trained in budget evaluation and learn about their rights and responsibilities. As local authorities are given more revenue-generation and revenue-spending powers under local self-governance initiatives, the foundation will support civil society input into establishing mechanisms for managing these funds, ensuring that community engagement gives local people a voice in deciding spending priorities.

E-government

The foundation has supported the government's endeavors to promote e-government in Kazakhstan. Between 2002 and 2006, we sponsored the Transparent City project in East Kazakhstan Region, resulting in the creation of official websites for the city of Oskemen and the local legislature. This regional initiative, conducted by the Center for the Development of Local Self-Governance, established an effective system of online two-way communication between the local authorities and the public, and provided a model for e-government in other regions. It has had a long-lasting impact in Kazakhstan, where e-government is now a reality.

The focus of our current support is promoting community engagement in the budget process at the local level, putting local communities at the heart of decision-making on budget priorities and creating a sense of shared responsibility with the local authorities for the use of budget funds.

Конвенция Организации Объединенных Наций
о защите прав мигрантов

1 июля 2003

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TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

20 ЛЕТ
БОРЬБЫ
ЗА ВАШИ
ПРАВА
ВСЕМИРНАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ
ПО ПРАВАМ ЧЕЛОВЕКА 1993



Brochures on human rights produced
with the support of the foundation.
Photo by Assel Abdrahmanova

Human Rights

Open society values are based on upholding fundamental rights and liberties, and the promotion of efforts to defend human rights is therefore at the heart of our work.

As Yevgeniy Zhovtis, chairman of the board of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, puts it: "We share [with the foundation] common perceptions about the development of humanity," according to which "human rights are a fundamental principle, and respect for human dignity is key." Our achievements in this area include bolstering international advocacy efforts to improve Kazakhstan's human rights record; building capacity among campaigners; and raising awareness

The foundation is conducting ongoing efforts to breed a new generation of campaigners equipped with the necessary skills to undertake domestic and international human rights advocacy.

through human rights education. We have also contributed to improving the justice system by pioneering efforts that led to the establishment of a juvenile justice system that takes account of minors' special needs.

Capacity Building

The foundation is conducting ongoing efforts to breed a new generation of campaigners equipped with the necessary skills to undertake domestic and international human rights advocacy. We continue conducting a project to enhance the capacity of campaigners to carry out effective rights-based research and present it to the national government and international human rights mechanisms. In 2014, 10 trainees completed a course on which they received mentoring in producing high-quality analytical human rights reports, and five have already gone on to participate in international human rights mechanisms, including UN Human Rights Council hearings on Kazakhstan in 2014.

The course was "very useful," says participant Roman Reymer. "Primarily,

it helped structure my knowledge, and understand domestic and international mechanisms for the defense of human rights. During our study year we boosted our public-speaking and communications skills, and improved approaches to preparing analytical documents." Mr. Reymer studied the topic of access to justice for people with disabilities, and "now I face the important task of putting this project into practice and promoting an improvement in the situation in my region."

International Advocacy

The foundation has supported campaigners' efforts to conduct human rights advocacy at the international level, where civil society's contribution is invaluable in monitoring the government's adherence to its commitments and helping expose shortcomings in performance and target recommendations for improvement.

The foundation has supported the participation of NGOs and individual campaigners in international human rights mechanisms such as the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR); the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the UN Committee Against Torture; the

HUMAN RIGHTS

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The contribution of civil society at the international level has highlighted the need to target improvements in areas including the rule of law, civil and political freedoms, and socioeconomic rights.

We have offered institutional support to the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, which has been at the forefront of domestic and international human rights advocacy efforts. We have supported the Bureau's endeavors to involve civil society in advocacy through groups such as the Coalition of NGOs of Kazakhstan, whose reports to UPR hearings have highlighted shortcomings in areas such as political liberties; freedom of speech; freedom of conscience; freedom of association; and the rights of vulnerable groups (including migrants and victims of human trafficking). SFK has supported civil society involvement in CEDAW reporting, which has drawn attention to issues such as forced and early marriage and violence against women, and assisted the endeavors of the Coalition of Kazakhstan NGOs Against Torture, which achieved a landmark in its advocacy work with the government's adoption of a National Preventive Mechanism against torture in 2013.

A mock trial in Almaty, 2011.
Photo by SFK



Human rights campaigners hold a news conference in Almaty, 2014.
Photo by Joanna Lillis

Human Rights Education

In 1994, SFK pioneered an innovative training project in schools aimed at fostering awareness of human rights among the younger generation. The foundation supported the launch of the Street Law-Kazakhstan association, which trained law students to teach human rights seminars in schools using interactive methods, from brainstorming to mock trials. This engaged the students, stimulated debate, and made participants consider how fundamental rights relate to ordinary citizens. "People's eyes were opened," says Aizhan Mukhtarova, the director of Street Law-Kazakhstan.

"They started to value their own worth." The project achieved its aim of fostering civic awareness among the thousands of students who participated. Street Law-Kazakhstan also ran seminars for teachers, and published a set of textbooks on human rights which the government approved for use in schools. Street Law seminars were taught in juvenile detention centers and in facilities for children at risk, raising awareness about their rights and responsibilities among some of the most vulnerable members of society. "I do believe that this project contributed a lot for the purposes of creating a civil society in Kazakhstan," says lawyer Vassiliy Zenov, a former Street Law trainer.

In 1998, the foundation supported a project whereby law students provided free-of-charge legal consultations to members of the public at Legal Clinics established at Almaty's Kazakh State Law University. The program left a long-term legacy by putting the concept of legal aid on the agenda in Kazakhstan, where in 2013 a Law on Guaranteed Legal Aid was passed, ensuring that every citizen has the right to free-of-charge legal assistance in criminal, administrative, and civil cases. As Gulnar Baygazina of the Almaty City Collegium of Lawyers, points out, "people need this assistance, because not everyone can afford a lawyer."

Juvenile Justice

The launch of a specialized juvenile justice system in 2008 was a milestone for Kazakhstan's legal system, which came about with the support of SFK. In 2003, the foundation launched its Juvenile Justice Initiative, which has left an enduring legacy in the form of a functioning justice system for minors which ensures that their needs receive the specialized attention that they require. SFK-sponsored research conducted in Kazakhstan found that under a system tailored to

their needs, juveniles experience vastly improved treatment by police and judges, and improved access to alternatives to incarceration. After the SFK-sponsored pilot project ended in 2006, the government moved towards rolling out a nationwide juvenile justice system, which was launched in 2008.

The policy change in favor of juvenile justice was prompted and heavily influenced by the SFK's Juvenile Justice Initiative, which has created lasting social change and helped align Kazakhstan's international legal obligations and the government's declared commitments with domestic practice. "This system is the fruit of SFK's labor," says Ms. Baygazina. "SFK has made a direct and very significant contribution to the legal sphere in Kazakhstan."

The launch of a specialized juvenile justice system in 2008 was a milestone for Kazakhstan's legal system, which came about with the support of SFK.

Meeting with young people as part of Human Rights Day celebrations in Almaty, 2013.
Photo by Assel Abdrahmanova



TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

The Almaty telecommunications tower.
Photo by Pavel Miheev

Media Support

SFK's work to promote a free, responsible, and professional media has included supporting the transition from traditional to online formats; shaping expertise and professionalism; and bolstering civil society efforts to influence the legislative process. As Diana Okremova, the head of the Legal Media Center (an NGO partner), says: "Independent media in society are a guarantee of its development and progress."

Convergence Journalism

In the 1990s and 2000s, SFK provided important support to outlets spearheading the transition to online news, including Kazakhstan's first independent web-based news media sites, the Russian-language *Navigator* and *Zonakz.net* and the Kazakh-language *Qazaq.kz* and, most recently, *Arasha.kz*. SFK's support allowed these outlets to embrace online formats to deliver hard-hitting news.

Support for regional outlets and their transition online has been another priority. The foundation has sponsored their efforts to deliver local news through local voices, supporting 10 regional outlets in eight cities since 2012 alone, including *Nasha Gazeta* in Kostanay; *Podrobnosti* in Zhezkazgan; *Rika TV* in Aktobe; *Spektr* in Semey; and *Uralskaya Nedelya* and *Moi Gorod* in Oral. These regional outlets are breaking meaningful

news stories, holding the authorities to account on the local level, and managing to bring important topics into the national debate. "Our newspaper's new site, created with SFK support, will provide our readers with the opportunity to receive information about the life of the region quickly and at any time," says Yuliya Vysotskaya, *Podrobnosti* deputy editor.

The foundation has sponsored regional outlets' transition to digital formats through production grants to develop applications on Android and iOS. SFK supported the first launch of a digital app by a regional news outlet in Kazakhstan, by *Moi Gorod* in 2012. It now has more than 6,000 unique visitors a day, beating the online traffic of many long-standing regional news outlets. "We believe it is critical to see an objective world, not a black and white one, and the constant rise in visitors to the site and users of our mobile app indicates that ever greater numbers of people agree with this," says editor-in-chief Zhannat Nugmanova.

Shaping Expertise

SFK has sponsored the launch of industry organizations working to promote press freedom and professional journalistic standards. With our assistance, bodies such as the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech Adil Soz, the Legal Media Center, and the MediaNet International Center for Journalism have become dynamic and sustainable success stories. Adil Soz has monitored press freedom violations and attacks on journalists for more than a decade, as well as offering legal advice and representation to reporters; training journalists in their rights and responsibilities; and lobbying to reform media legislation on the national level.

Regional outlets supported by the foundation are breaking meaningful news stories, holding the authorities to account on the local level, and managing to bring important topics into the national debate.

MEDIA SUPPORT

“Enlightenment, progress, and support—that is how SFK’s 20 years of work can be characterized,” says Adil Soz’s president, Tamara Kaleyeva. The foundation also supports the Kazakhstan Press Club, an independent body which embraces the ethos of promoting professional, socially-responsible journalism.

We sponsor platforms for discussion of media trends and challenges such as the Media Kuryltai, organized by the Kazakhstan Press Club, and the Internet Central Asia forum, facilitated annually by MediaNet. Bringing an international perspective, we have funded the participation of international media experts in these events, and provided grants for Kazakhstani journalists to attend conferences abroad.

Media Professionalism

Raising the professional bar in journalism has been an important priority for SFK, and the foundation has cast its net wide to ensure that programs reach as many journalists as possible. With support from SFK, MediaNet’s journalism school has trained over 600 aspiring journalists since 2005, helping breed a new generation of professionals. “Thanks to the foundation’s grants, more than one generation of independent professional journalists has grown up, furnishing ordinary people with objective information,” Adil Jalilov, a co-founder of MediaNet, says.

In 2010, in partnership with other regional Open Society Foundations offices, SFK ran courses under the Regional School of Investigative Journalism in Public Finance, to boost capacity to report on financial transparency. In 2014, supported by the OSF-London Media Program and OSF’s Eurasia Program, SFK launched the iMedia training initiative with the Kazakhstan Press Club, to equip a future cohort of journalists and media entrepreneurs with the skill sets they need to create and sustain start-ups. “I believe that SFK carries out extremely important systemic projects to develop

the media market,” says Assel Karaulova, the Kazakhstan Press Club’s president. The iMedia School will boost the quality of multimedia journalism in Kazakhstan, she says, and “trigger the rise and growth of high-quality, independent media projects.”

Between 2010 and 2012, the foundation supported training in six regional centers for more than 200 Kazakh-language journalists in multimedia formats to develop citizen journalism, equipping participants with the skills to launch websites and blogs. “This way, with SFK, we have made a major contribution to the development of freedom of speech,” says Yessengul Kap, director of the Minber Support Center for Kazakh-language journalists.

SFK has also sponsored research to yield data that can be used to promote reforms aimed at establishing and sustaining a free media environment, including a project by the Legal Media Center studying the impact of government subsidies for the media. The center’s electronic database reveals the wide extent of government-funded material in many national and regional news outlets, resulting in improved public access to information and spark-

Raising the professional bar in journalism has been an important priority for SFK, and the foundation has cast its net wide to ensure that programs reach as many journalists as possible.

ing a national debate about media integrity and the press’s role as watchdog. SFK “has supported topics that have been taboo for other donors, which our society is hesitant to raise and discuss,” Ms. Okremova of the Legal Media Center says. Hence, “society has become more active on the civic level, bolder in discussing certain sensitive topics, ready and willing to defend its rights and freedoms.”



Bloggers meet with the governor of Mangistau Region in Zhanaozen, 2011.
Photo by Vox Populi



A master's journalism student from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University conducts an interview in Almaty, 2012. Photo by Dean Cox

Media Regulation

SFK has helped plug civil society into debates shaping the legislative process. In 2009, we supported civil society efforts to influence legislation governing the Internet, and between 2013 and 2014 we supported Adil Soz's efforts through the Article 20 coalition to push for amendments to the Criminal and Civil Codes that would strengthen press freedom in Kazakhstan. One important result of these endeavors was the introduction of criminal liability for restricting journalists' access to reporting.

In 2013, the foundation helped release the Mapping Digital Media report, a global OSF initiative to analyze digital switchover practices and their effect on plurality of information, media integrity, and journalistic capacity. This marked the result of SFK's four-year-long strategy to stimulate nationwide discussions

about Kazakhstan's progress towards going digital. The foundation backed civil society participation in parliamentary debates on revising broadcasting legislation, which led to the state's responsibility to support regional TV channels during the switchover being enshrined in law, providing them with de jure possibilities to open private multiplexes and not depend on the national operator.



A panel discussion on information security at the Media Kuryltai in Almaty, 2014. Photo by Kazakhstan Press Club



TOWARDS OPEN SOCIETY:

Healthcare staff in a
hospital in Almaty. Photo
by Vladimir Tretyakov

Public Health

SFK's work in the sphere of public health has resulted in improved education and training for medical staff through the foundation's support for the Kazakhstan School of Public Health and the provision of grants for healthcare professionals to study abroad.

SFK has been a pioneer in work to establish a palliative healthcare system in Kazakhstan, which has improved quality of life for the terminally ill, and in harm reduction programs to reduce the risks associated with drug use to users and the wider community.

Kazakhstan School of Public Health

SFK has provided institutional support to the Kazakhstan School of Public Health (KSPH), which is under the remit of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development, since the school's foundation in 1997, including technical grants for the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment and educational grants for short-term and long-term courses in leading foreign medical training establishments. This support for the school has also encompassed projects to improve its educational programs in partnership with leading universities in western countries, covering areas ranging from preventive medicine to medical law and healthcare

management and economics. "The influence of the foundation's projects has had a practical result in the form of improved educational programs and an increase in the professional level of the school's faculty," says Dr. Maksut Kulzhanov, KSPH's founder and a professor at the school.

The foundation has supported the school's work to set up distance-learning courses in public health in Kazakhstan, which has vastly increased the reach of its study programs, allowing greater numbers of healthcare staff to improve their qualifications. SFK provided grants to set up distance-learning infrastructure, including the design of electronic study material and training for tutors and supervisors. Specialists from the school use their expertise to make a broader contribution on the national level through collaboration with officials in the sphere of policy-making to draw up healthcare legislation and health programs, and they work with local authorities on healthcare programs and healthcare management. SFK's

support has contributed to improving Kazakhstan's public health system, to the benefit of the citizens who rely on it. "The influence on the life of Kazakhstanis has been indirect rather than direct—through an improvement in the system of management and organization of medical care provision in medical organizations; improved access to healthcare; and the introduction of new principles of care provision," says Dr. Kulzhanov.

The foundation's support has contributed to improving Kazakhstan's public health system, to the benefit of the citizens who rely on it.



Women with their children at a hospital in Kazakhstan. Photo by Ulrich Baumgarten via Getty Images

The Salzburg seminars have had a sustainable impact on Kazakhstan's healthcare system, as professionals return armed with new knowledge and skills that afford improvements in patient care.

Salzburg Seminars

The foundation's financial support for a grant program for practicing doctors and other healthcare staff to undergo training at medical clinics in Austria to improve their skills and gain international expertise has brought significant improvements to Kazakhstan's healthcare system. The foundation funded 66 grants in specialist fields including pediatrics, cardiology, neonatology, gynecology, otolaryngology, anesthesiology, urology, and infectious diseases from 1998 to 2003, after which the program became self-sustaining. Healthcare professionals continue to attend Austrian clinics under the program today, and this has had a sustainable impact on Kazakhstan's healthcare system, as they return armed with new knowledge and skills that afford improvements in patient care.

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction programs sponsored by SFK have helped reduce the negative consequences associated with drug use, following the principle that such initiatives do not downplay the associated dangers but provide a practical means of minimizing risks to users and

the wider community. Collaborating with the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development and the Republican AIDS Center, SFK-sponsored programs have targeted risk groups such as intravenous drug users (IDUs), to prevent the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

"SFK was a pioneer in this sphere," says Tatyana Rodina, director of the Association of Organizations Working with HIV/AIDS and Drug Users. In 2003, the foundation sponsored a pilot needle exchange program which helped place harm reduction on the public health agenda, and nowadays Kazakhstan has needle exchange points in all regions, helping to minimize public health risks. "We are trying to reduce harm from drug use, especially the spread of HIV," says Ms. Rodina, whose association was set up in 2004 with SFK support and is now self-sustaining. "This is about reducing risk. At the end of the day, a lot of people didn't get infected, and this was of social value."

Palliative Care

The introduction of a specialized palliative care system for those facing life-threatening illnesses has been a lasting legacy of SFK's work in public health. Palliative care improves quality of life for patients and their relatives, emphasizing their rights to dignity, justice, and equality. The system provides symptom control and pain relief to patients, as well as psychological support to them and their families, helping relatives cope with illness and bereavement. In 2008, the foundation sponsored a situational analysis on palliative care in Kazakhstan, which identified significant gaps in practices and demonstrated the need for the introduction of modern standards, through advocacy, education, and awareness raising. In 2009, the notion of palliative care was incorporated in Kazakhstan's Healthcare Code, and in 2010 SFK worked with the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development, the Kazakhstan School of Public Health, and public health experts to form a working group to draw up written national standards. The result was a milestone in public healthcare in 2013, when the National Palliative Care Standards came into force.

Although there is a long way to go for the system to be fully incorporated in healthcare practice nationwide, this sets a benchmark obliging the state to offer the terminally ill a variety of different services catering for differing needs: from hospices to outpatient care. There are also mobile multi-disciplinary teams providing home visits (which are so far dependent on SFK's support). "The introduction of a system of palliative care and rehabilitation has made it possible to reach thousands of patients in terminal stages with the necessary medical care, which has significantly increased their quality of life," says Dr. Kulzhanov.

SFK "provided the forward impulse for the development of this most important branch of medical and social care for the public," says Gulnara Kunirova, president of the Palliative Care Association of Kazakhstan, which was set up in 2013 with SFK support. "Thanks to projects initiated by the foundation itself or implemented with its participation, the philosophy of palliative care has started to penetrate into all structures of Kazakhstani society—from the non-governmental sector to the level of government and parliament."

Palliative care applies the principle of allowing patients to live as well as possible for as long as possible, and this is really making a difference to quality of life for patients and their families in Kazakhstan. "Huge thanks to the team for the kindness, attentiveness, and sensitivity they have shown," says Raviya Kurepanova, a beneficiary of palliative care services. "Thanks to these people I feel better. And now I am not alone."

The introduction of a system of palliative care and rehabilitation has made it possible to reach thousands of patients in terminal stages with the necessary medical care, which has significantly increased their quality of life.

A hospice in Karaganda.
Photo by Vox Populi



FUTURE STRATEGY

Our priority is to promote the open society values for which we stand. We are proud to be advancing universal principles, which are enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights endorsed by the government of Kazakhstan. Going forward, we will continue to nurture and bolster these values as a vehicle for positive social, economic, and political development in Kazakhstan.

IN THE YEARS AHEAD, WE WILL:

- continue to support, strengthen, and protect civil society campaigners, groups and initiatives that safeguard fundamental human rights and advocate for liberal policy reforms;
- capitalize on our success in promoting revenue and budget transparency, aiming to translate transparency into accountability;
- empower young people to become active, responsible citizens, equipping them with the tools they need to transform communities;
- boost media capacity by supporting innovation and professionalism, and help preserve the space for freedom of expression;
- promote social inclusion with a focus on one of society's most vulnerable groups, championing the rights of people with mental health disorders;
- build public policy capacity, supporting a new generation of experts able to articulate open society values forcefully;
- consolidate our existing strong and productive alliances and reach out to new actors, offering a clear vision, measurable objectives, and deliverable goals.



Photos on pages 31 and 32 by Assel Abdrahmanova, Yuriy Bekker, Dean Cox, Joanna Lillis, Aidana Muhametgalieva, and the SFK archive

Human Rights Program

The field of human rights remains a major priority for the foundation, and we see our role in supporting the outstanding and courageous work of our partners, helping them become stronger and more effective defenders of fundamental human rights. SFK will facilitate donor coordination on human rights and assist our civil society partners in raising additional funds.

In addition to established NGOs, we will look for ways to support grassroots social movements as a form of civil activism to protect human rights and interests. Focusing on concrete problems and relying on non-traditional approaches, social movements mobilize broad public support. We will help them build capacity by connecting them to professional human rights organizations to forge mutually-enriching collaboration.

Transparency and Accountability Program

SFK has been a driver in establishing the revenue transparency movement in Kazakhstan, leading to the government's endorsement of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. At this stage, our priority is to ensure the data available through revenue-focused initiatives are meaningful for citizens, and generate broader debate about public finances and budget management.

We will capitalize upon our successful experience in revenue transparency to promote open governance in the electricity sector, through the Electricity Governance Initiative, a global network of civil society organizations working to further transparent, inclusive, accountable decision-making in this sector.

Local Budget Initiative

The outstanding work of budget monitoring NGOs supported by SFK has brought about significant improvements in transparency and accountability of the budget system at the national level, and we now aim to match these improvements at the sub-national level.

Citizens still experience difficulty in accessing budget information and influencing budget decisions which have a direct impact on their rights or interests at the local level, where more than 60% of government expenditure occurs. We will use our accumulated capacity to set a benchmark for local budget transparency, accountability, and public participation. We will use the Open Local Budget Index as an effective motivator for local authorities to create a more open environment, providing better access to budget information and more active public consultations on major budget decisions.

Youth Program

SFK will remain committed to youth empowerment, helping young people become active and responsible citizens, community leaders, and opinion-formers. We will encourage young people to reject political apathy and negative ideologies such as religious and other forms of extremism, and embrace liberal values as a force for positive change.

We see our role as not to guide young people but to respond to their proposals, equipping them with the tools and funds they need to implement grassroots initiatives to transform their communities. We will encourage young people to rely on themselves (rather than on the state or other actors) in addressing the social problems they face. Our support will be founded on the belief that it is the responsibility of young people to identify problems and find solutions.

We will focus on extending our support beyond big cities to smaller communities, and tailoring our programs towards the Kazakh-speaking population (particularly in the provinces) and rural inhabitants.



Media Program

SFK's efforts will be directed at boosting media professionalism and building capacity at outlets which have a strong commitment to responsible and professional journalism. The foundation will support cutting-edge workshops in news reporting across digital platforms, and training in areas such as computer-assisted reporting and data-driven journalism. Our focus on capacity building for regional media will help promote and improve the quality of local news coverage, with an emphasis on reporting issues such as transparency, accountability, and social justice.

SFK will set a strong commitment to supporting Kazakh-language new media in their pursuit of generating and delivering quality journalism to broader audiences.

We will support international training and collaboration to provide opportunities for new and existing media to increase their sustainability, both journalistic and financial. By bringing in talent and innovative knowledge, SFK will help raise professional quality standards for Kazakhstan's media industry.

Public Policy Initiative

We will build capacity in the under-developed field of public policy in Kazakhstan, by supporting the creation of a cadre of young scholars able to articulate open society values and democratic principles forcefully. This will be achieved through a tailor-made fellowship program using hands-on methods to train participants in skills such as policy analysis, data visualization, and communications. Topics for study have been chosen to reflect the challenges facing Kazakhstan and contribute to finding solutions. They include migration; education; criminal law; social policy; nation-building; regional development; religious affairs;

and economic diversification. We will support initiatives to build networks and platforms through which liberal scholars can present their ideas to decision-makers and the general public, including the Ekvilibro online TV discussion program, hosted by *Vlast.kz*; and the Club of the Institute of Political Solutions, an offline dialogue forum.

Social Inclusion Initiative

Efforts to promote social inclusion will focus on championing the rights of people with mental health disorders, who face severe discrimination and are among the most vulnerable, socially-excluded groups in Kazakhstan. The overwhelming majority of adults suffering from psychiatric disorders receive treatment in closed institutions, and children are generally excluded from mainstream education.

We will support emerging community-based mental health services, to establish best practice and lay the foundation for future advocacy for de-institutionalization. We will mobilize a coalition to lobby to achieve meaningful changes in policies and their implementation, and in public perceptions of mental health disabilities, aiming to provide opportunities for people with mental disorders to live, study, and work without isolation from society.



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