

13 June 2013

Independent Review Panel - Meeting 20 May 2013 in London

Letter to the Members in this review round

Dear Arelys Moreno,

In May we as the Charter's *Independent Review Panel* met to discuss the reports that had been submitted since our last meeting in October 2012. We would like to thank you for going through this exercise of reporting against the Charter and recognise the commitment to accountability that this demonstrates. We are now writing to provide feedback on your report.

Since we first started assessing the reports we have noticed a marked **improvement in quality** and an improved commitment to accountability. In the last meetings we reviewed some reports of very good quality. However there is still room for improvement in all reports. Enclosed you will find a collection of what we believe to be **Good Practice** in responding to some of the indicators in the GRI reporting framework, including examples from the reports you have submitted in this round. As we feel that part of our role is to encourage organisational improvement we encourage you to look at this document and see the potential in Members learning from each other.

In addition to responding to the indicators in the GRI reporting framework focused on transparency, we would like to encourage Members to include a qualitative assessment of **whether you are satisfied** with the information you are providing and if not, how you intend to improve. We would like you to consider the questions: *What are the challenges each indicator holds for my organisation and how do we deal with these? Do the systems in place work well? How do they contribute to improving your work?* In the cases where you present hard data (for example on diversity or training hours), please consider the following: *Are we pleased with these numbers? How do we want these to change and what actions can we take to facilitate that?* These kinds of explanations are especially welcome where you present weak results or poor data. We hope that this would also encourage use of the reports to facilitate internal discussion of areas for improvement.

With regard to the **complaints handling mechanism** (indicator NGO2), we would like to remind you that it is now mandatory for Charter Members to have such a mechanism in place. This is at the core of good accountability. Such a mechanism should be open for external and internal complaints, outline a clear process, including a timeframe for resolution, and be easily accessible to the intended users. We saw several good examples in the latest set of reports. The reports would however be enriched by examples of the nature of cases dealt with in any reporting period. We would also encourage members to highlight their Charter membership and the commitments that it represents on their website by uploading the Charter logo and linking to the Charter alongside their complaint handling mechanism.

We understand that it is a challenge for global organisations to report on the operations of national entities, but we strongly encourage you to provide an explanation on the structures and processes you have in place to ensure that **global accountability standards** are upheld at a national level and, if they are not, how you tackle this issue. Many reports are relatively strong on policy but much weaker on evidence and selected examples of how this works in practice. How do you use **lessons learned** to improve your programmes?

We welcome cases where organisations make commitments for the future and identify areas for improvement. The newly introduced **Gap Analysis** table is a useful tool to easily track

commitments and achievements made in your organisation. We have included the commitments we could identify when going through your report and would like to encourage you to keep working with this document and submit it again along with your next report.

Finally we would like to inform you that we have decided to focus our attention to some specific areas in the 2014 review rounds. This will be communicated to the entire membership shortly but we would like to provide you with this information at this point already:

➤ **Policy – practice – assurance**

We can see that the reports are improving with regard to accountability measures you take, but are also interested in getting a better understanding of the extent to which this leads to improvements in performance. In our view many reports are good in providing an overview of policies in place. They are however less strong in showing that these are implemented systematically in practice and often relatively weak when it comes to evidence of assurance. Although we acknowledge that of the three - policy, practice and assurance - that latter is most difficult it is also a very important one and we encourage you to work further on this area.

➤ **Advocacy**

Being adequately accountable for our advocacy work is of crucial importance for the legitimacy of NGOs. Nevertheless many reports are relatively weak in this area. It is not totally clear which processes are in place to arrive at advocacy positions, how partners and other stakeholders are involved, how the correctness of the claim is ensured, if there are clear plans for how to exit a campaign and how lessons learned are feed in to the improvement of further work. We see potential for mutual learning through discussions around these questions and encourage all Members to participate in the Charter's workshop on this topic by the end of this year.

➤ **Communication**

We believe the reports should be written for and actively discussed with your trustees, your staff, partners, beneficiaries and other key stakeholders. Only when people know about your commitments and performance against them will they react and help you to improve even further. Often the reports are addressed to the Panel and any other audience is not immediately evident. Against this backdrop we would also welcome more information on how you handle the results of the reporting process, how they are discussed within the organisation, whether they facilitate discussion of areas for improvement, if they lead to an agreed action plan and how they are brought to the attention of the Board.

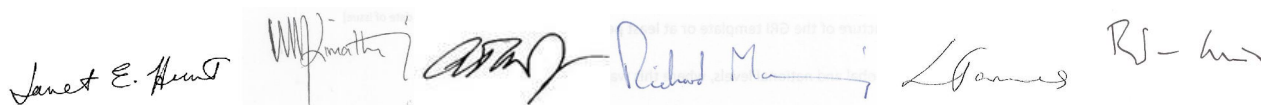
Organisation-specific feedback to Panos Network

We acknowledge that your organisation has gone through a tough year having to close down one of your institutes. However we would have liked to see some progress in the areas of concern raised in our last review. We understand that you were not able to progress on all areas mentioned in earlier reports and would suggest a prioritisation of the issues that you intend to focus on given the constraints the organisation is facing. For example, we would have recommended concentrating efforts on improving your MEL procedures and waiting with the environmental pieces, however, this is a decision that you need to make as an organisation. Finally, we would like to emphasise that we appreciate your ongoing effort to report on behalf of your entire organisation, as we see this as a way of driving organisational development.

Our intention is that this letter, and any response you may wish to provide, is made publicly available on the Charter website, along with your report. You can find the reports that were previously reviewed on the Charter website. However, should there be errors of fact in the feedback above or in the note below, we would of course wish to correct these before publication.

Should you have any comments we would appreciate a response by 12 July 2013.

Yours sincerely,

A row of six handwritten signatures in blue ink. From left to right: Janet E. Hunt, Wambui Kimathi, Tony Tujan, Richard Manning, Louise James, and Brendan Gormley.

Janet Hunt Wambui Kimathi Tony Tujan Richard Manning Louise James Brendan Gormley