

## The International Program – Armenia



The World Learning Exchange Program, under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State, organized a three-week study tour for a delegation from Armenia. The visitors hold positions of leadership in non-governmental organizations in Armenia and are engaged in the development of programs that strengthen civil society engagement.

Judicial Watch attorney Jim Peterson hosted the delegation at its headquarters in Washington, DC, on May 14, 2009. The program's objectives were, in part, to:

- Examine best practices and current trends in NGO management, including strategic planning, fundraising, youth leadership training and volunteer management;
- Observe the legislative and executive processes in the U.S., concentrating on mechanisms for soliciting citizen input and support;
- Discuss community organizing principals with individuals and organizations actively engaged in civic activism and community organizing through site visits to "grass roots" nonprofit organizations.

Judicial Watch was asked to "discuss the role of watchdog organizations and the role of the public in ensuring government ethics and accountability." As set forth in its [Mission Statement](#), "through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in our nation's public life and seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach." [The International Program](#) is an integral part of its educational program.

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Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, celebrated its 2750<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1968. And for most of its history, Armenia has suffered under the domination of various empires and remained under Soviet control from the early 1800's up to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. The U.S. Department of State's [country profile](#) for Armenia states that it "continues to work closely with international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to help Armenia in its transition to a free-market economy."

The visiting Armenian delegates serve as directors, managers, and fundraisers in various programs encompassing youth and community action, peacemaking, and development for civil society NGOs. In order to further democratic, social, and economic prospects in Armenia, they must work actively to promote volunteerism. Civil society groups in Armenia depend largely upon volunteerism and in-kind contributions—such as venues offered without charge for organized events and meetings—in order to meet their objectives.

Attorney Jim Peterson provided a general overview of Judicial Watch's mission to promote ethics and accountability in government. He informed the visitors that [open records laws](#), which vary at local, state, and federal levels, are the primary tools used by Judicial Watch to fight against government secrecy.