

Annual Report of the Executive Director  
of the Geneva Social Observatory  
May 2007 to May 2008

**Overview**

During its fourth year, the activities of the Geneva Social Observatory (GSO) have focused on the implementation of multistakeholder dialogue on diabetes and social responsibility. Phase One of this project was completed with a major publication of the roundtable series and presentations of the report in connection with the World Health Assembly in May 2007 and the International Labour Conference in June 2007. Phase Two of the project required careful preparation of a workshop on developing a workplace strategy on wellness and diabetes, which was convened in March 2008. It was also determined that the publication of the monthly *GSO News* should be replaced with a quarterly GSO Activity Report. Further refinements were also made to the GSO website. Some highlights relating to these activities are described in this report. The report concludes with some comments on the successful application for Swiss status as a not-for-profit organization and provisional acceptance of the GSO as an NGO observer with consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council.

**The GSO Roundtable Series on *Diabetes and Social Responsibility***

In October 2006, the GSO initiated a multi-stakeholder dialogue on “Diabetes and Social Responsibility” through a series of roundtables (1) to highlight the importance of addressing the global epidemic of diabetes (and related chronic diseases) within the workforce, (2) to identify the changing roles and responsibilities of human resources managers, occupational safety and health experts, health care professionals, labor relations specialists and other stakeholders in the workplace, and (3) to develop policy recommendations for global and national action as well as public/private partnerships.

With active support from the Diabetes and Social Responsibility Planning Committee, the reports of the roundtables were consolidated into a major publication that featured the GSO Action Plan for Diabetes and Social Responsibility. Please see the GSO website for an electronic version of the report. This publication was also presented at briefing sessions in connection with the World Health Assembly in May 2007 and the International Labour Conference in June 2007. Many helpful suggestions came out of these briefings, and summaries of the discussions are available on the GSO website. Phase One of the project was concluded in June 2007.

Faced with a dramatic increase in diabetes around the world, especially among people in the prime of their working lives, roundtable participants acknowledged

the gravity of the pandemic and developed an action plan and global policy recommendations. Most urgently, the group had proposed the establishment of a skeleton protocol for individual companies to adopt. The protocol was envisioned to include company strategies for prevention of diabetes, especially through the promotion of physical activity and healthier diets, and policies on screening for diabetes. Other parts of the protocol should address non-discrimination and the accommodation of people living with diabetes, as well as the basic ingredients for an early intervention-and-treatment programme. The group also recognized that the development of such a protocol required a preliminary compilation of evidence on the economic impact of diabetes in the workplace.

Starting in September 2007, the Geneva Social Observatory set about the implementation of Phase Two of the project on Diabetes and Social Responsibility. The GSO convened the Diabetes and Social Responsibility Planning Committee in a series of planning meetings, and the Committee decided to devote extensive preparations for a two-day workshop and decided to rename the desired work product as a “strategy” instead of a “protocol”. Also, noting the prevalence of the epidemic in developing countries, where clinical treatment options are limited, the Planning Committee also looked for ways to create global/local partnerships to empower community-based approaches to prevention and treatment.

GSO convened the multisectoral Workshop on 18 and 19 March 2008 to develop a Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness. The group of participants and contributors included representatives from the Mauritius Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, U.N. organizations such as the International Labor Organization and the World Health Organization, health-related groups such as IC-Health (New Delhi, India), the International Centre for Migration and Health, World Heart Federation, World Medical Association, and the International Council of Nurses, and private sector entities including DuPont, Eli Lilly, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble and sanofi aventis.

The purpose of the Workshop was to prepare a first draft of a working strategy document that provides a compelling rationale for concerted action to use the workplace as an outlet to educate and inform employers and workers about diabetes and thereby save lives and improve productivity. The Meeting Report on the GSO Workshop to Develop a Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness is available on the GSO Website. An extensive background document, agenda and participants list as well as the Draft Strategy itself are also available on the GSO Website.

Subsequent to the Workshop, the Planning Committee of the GSO Diabetes Project met on 10 April 2008 and again on 15 May 2008 to take forward the ideas resulting from the Workshop and to provide additional input on further vetting and

validation of the strategy. GSO is planning to move forward with the Draft Strategy by soliciting comments from experts in the prevention and treatment of diabetes, human resources and personnel management and occupational safety and health. A special validation forum will be convened, tentatively scheduled for early September 2008.

The Third Phase of the Project will deal with issues of pilot testing and implementation. Following the validation forum, the GSO Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness will be published for distribution to interested parties. Where feasible, the GSO will promote the strategy with specific groups, including employers and their associations, trade unions, NGOs and community groups. Discussions are underway to develop proposals for pilot testing of the workplace strategy in specific settings. Country-specific surveillance and benchmarking, as well as integration of a diabetes component in targeted wellness programmes are the areas for proposal development. Also, the GSO has gathered together a rich menu of materials on diabetes in the workplace and will seek to edit them to facilitate further publication for broader dissemination.

#### **Exploratory dialogue on *Promoting fair trade and labour standards in the post-MFA environment***

The GSO hosted an exploratory dialogue on “Promoting fair trade and labour standards in the post-MFA environment” in February 2007, as reported in last year’s annual report. The participants in the dialogue came from diplomatic missions with both labour and trade interests, international organizations, trade unions, NGOs and the private sector. The participants urged action on trade options, rules of origin, aid for trade, adjustment assistance, delivering technical and adjustment assistance and core labour standards. With active support from Committee member Brewster Grace, several foundations were approached to consider moving forward with a series of dialogues on these topics. However, funding has been difficult to find, and the immediate environment in Geneva has changed, especially in terms of the momentum and focus of Doha Round negotiations. The GSO has continued to look for opportunities to build on the exploratory dialogue. Limited human resources, however, have required the GSO in Geneva to concentrate on the diabetes project through the second half of 2007 and the first quarter of 2008.

In the immediate future, the GSO will explore variations of activities it could sponsor to contribute to the understanding of the trade and labour standards relationship. These may include carrying out a series of case studies or building collaborative working partnerships with stakeholders

## **Shifting to Quarterly Activity Reports**

The GSO is a neutral forum for information-sharing, dialogue and action on global social issues. Hence the GSO is dedicated to balanced reporting and research on targeted social issues and provided a monthly news service in the form of a newsletter entitled **GSO News**, a subscription service that was supplemented with an abbreviated **GSO News Digest**.

In September, the GSO Committee decided to shift away from monthly news reporting to a quarterly report on GSO activities. The last issue of **GSO News** was September 2007. Subscribers and supporters were invited to become Friends of the GSO. The quarterly GSO Activities Report was launched in January 2008, and provides a more focused format on GSO activities.

## **Ongoing programmes: GSO Website**

As reported in last year's annual report, the GSO website was launched on 15 March 2006. The website has made it possible to place all of the reports of GSO projects and events and related project materials. It is also where all issues of **GSO News** are catalogued and made available to the public. The GSO website may be found at [www.gsogeneva.ch](http://www.gsogeneva.ch).

The overall aim of developing the GSO website is to promote the work and mission of the GSO. As the GSO and our projects have grown, so has the need to develop the content and capabilities of the GSO website.

## **Human Resource Changes at GSO**

The Geneva Social Observatory has been fortunate to have a wide array of supporters who have contributed their time to GSO programmes. The most substantial contribution of time has come from HRI, and efforts have been made to cover the costs incurred by HRI, at least in terms of specific project outputs.

In addition, members of the GSO Committee have been actively involved in specific endeavours for the GSO – mobilizing funding for specific projects and contributing their substantive expertise to specific events. Others have offered their expertise on budgeting, auditing, or preparing articles for *GSO News*.

Changes in the Committee have included the transfer of its President Martin Watson from QUNO to ICTSD, and the departure of Susan Crowley from Geneva and her subsequent resignation. The Committee has approved the addition of three new members to the Committee: David Atwood from QUNO, Linda Carrier-Walker from the International Council of Nurses and Manuel Carballo from the International Centre for Migration and Health.

### **Other Changes of Note**

We are pleased to report that the GSO had been cleared for tax-exempt status as an NGO in Switzerland. The GSO is grateful to John Iglehart, attorney at law in Geneva, for continuing so ably to guide the organization through these necessary steps for establishing its legal status as a not-for-profit organization.

The GSO has also been recommended for consultative status as an observer for the UN Economic and Social Council. This is subject to approval by ECOSOC in July 2008. Approval will mean that the GSO will have access to UN meetings in Geneva and elsewhere. The GSO has also received approval for NGO badges to access the WTO.