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Robert H. Salamon
Principal Director
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Asian Development Bank

November 11, 2003

Re: Selection of Locations for ADB Disclosure Policy Review Consultations

Dear Mr. Salamon,

We hope you are well. We've heard that the ADB is close to announcing the venues and dates for the consultations around the disclosure policy review. Our information suggests that the consultations will be (i) country-specific and not regional in scope, (ii) that they will start in early January and end in late February, and (iii) that this information will be posted on the ADB website next week.

We are writing to suggest that the ADB not post any information which announces locations for consultations until it has discussed these details with key external stakeholders, including civil society. Also, the criteria for the selection of a particular venue should be discussed prior to the final determination of a venue in order to foster complete transparency in the selection of countries where consultations will take place.

We outline below what we have learned and our concerns as they pertain to each point. Please correct us if what we have heard is inaccurate:-

1. Consultations will be country-specific and not regional, and only national civil society will participate: We believe this will not be an inclusive way to proceed since regional civil society actors will not be able to participate. It will limit participation and will not be conducive to receiving broad feedback from a variety of regional groups. We would suggest that consultations be made regional (e.g. Mekong, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Pacific Islands, etc) rather than country-specific.
2. Choice of countries (even if consultations are regional) should be reconsidered: For instance, if a regional consultation is held in India (we have heard New Delhi is a country choice), it will be extremely difficult for any of the Pakistani groups to participate. As you know, Pakistani civil society has been actively engaged in giving feedback to the ADB over the last several years and it would be critical, in our view, to provide an opportunity for Pakistani groups (and others from South Asia) to participate in a South Asian consultation and interact with the ADB Disclosure Policy via a consultation. The example of country exclusion obviously applies to all of the other venue choices if consultations are not regionally organized.
3. Consultations will start in January 2004: In your Sept 2nd letter to BIC and NGO Forum, you had assured us that the comment period on the First Draft will be no less than 60 days. Your letter informed us that you envision two periods for comment "15 August-14 November on the current policy and December-February 2004 (exact dates to be determined) on the First Draft". It would appear, however, that a posting of the First Draft in December with consultations slated to start in early January will be less than 60 days. This is insufficient time for preparing useful comments. We would like to urge the ADB to start consultations after 60 days of the

posting of the First Draft (as originally communicated) so as to give civil society activists time to prepare for consultations. Only adequate preparation time will ensure that the exchanges at the consultations are meaningful and not a waste of anyone's time/effort.

4. Criteria for selection of consultation venues: Finally, it would be most useful if you could elaborate on the criteria the ADB is using to select consultations venues. We would think that the ADB would like to arrange consultations in countries where civil society and citizens have been most engaged with the ADB through projects and policies. In fact, your letter of Sept. 2nd acknowledges that "one factor in determining the location of these consultations will be the level of interest expressed in the Review (and in transparency/accountability issues) by civil society organizations". However, it appears from the list of venues under consideration that these cannot be reasonably characterized as such countries.

I would also like to acknowledge that you had asked us to send you specific suggestions on consultations in your letter of Sept. 2nd. We were unable to send you suggestions sooner but hope that the suggestions we express via this letter will be taken into consideration.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this and we hope we can have more dialogue on the choice of consultation venues prior to the ADB finalizing them. As you know, we'll be in Manila next week and we can certainly discuss this then.

We appreciate the ADB's commitment to the important issue of transparency and information disclosure and look forward to working with you and the Steering Committee in the months to come.

Best wishes,



Mishka Zaman
Manager, Asia Program



Graham Saul
Manager, Transparency Program

Cc:
ADB Disclosure Steering Committee Members (via Mr. Robert Salamon)
Sameer Dossani, Executive Director, NGO Forum on ADB