



## **AACR Annual Roundtable Conference - April 20, 2004**

### **Civic Responsibility: New Challenges in Institutional Governance**

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The Association of Americans for Civic Responsibility (AACR) organized a very successful roundtable conference, “Civic Responsibility: New Challenges in Institutional Governance,” on April 20, 2004, at the Capital Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC. The conference held four general sessions beginning at 9:30 a.m. and ending around 5:00 p.m. with a reception. By discussing and debating various aspects of a new concept, institutional civic responsibility (ICR), the participants agreed AACR should move forward with its plan to be a catalyst in the area of the performance of civic responsibility among all US legal entities.

#### **Session I: Promoting Individual and Institutional Civic Responsibility**

The first session, “Promoting Individual and Institutional Civic Responsibility,” was moderated by Dr. George Thomas, MD, President and CEO of the Bradenton Cardiology Center in Florida and former chairman of the International Medical Graduates (IMG) section of the American Medical Association (AMA). Dr. Joy Cherian, President of AACR and a former commissioner of the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), led the discussion by pointing out the need for all institutions, including business entities, professional and trade associations, educational institutions, ethnic groups, and government agencies in the United States, to jointly or separately promote civic responsibility at the individual level while also leading social responsibility programs at collective or group levels. Individuals are the part and parcel of civil society in which institutions are prospering.

Many corporations often play a supportive role in this process by informing employees of volunteer opportunities within the local community, giving employees a certain number of paid days off each year to volunteer with community organizations of their own choosing, rewarding employees and the organizations in which they serve for giving back to the community, and encouraging retired employees to give back their services to the community. Several discussants pointed out that some corporations also make community service a requirement for their top executives. Despite this, there is a sense that civic responsibility is not a top priority of many businesses.

Mr. Linas Kojelis, President of Kojelis & Co. and a former White House public liaison official, pointed out that one area of civic responsibility in which more work needs to be done is fostering in youth the concept and practice of civic responsibility through participation in social and civic organizations. There is an important role in this for parents, educational institutions, and religious groups, as well as popular cultural media. There is debate as to whether the Internet is a tool in promoting civic responsibility among youth—while it acts as a resource in providing connections and information, it may also lead to disengagement as it does not require personal interaction. It was suggested that AACR might consider playing a role in fostering civic responsibility among youth, possibly by: 1) examining the role of the Internet as an opportunity or challenge in promoting civic responsibility; 2) conducting a study to determine, on average, how many hours per week young persons contribute to society; or 3) engage in a joint session with a youth or educational association to discuss how to get youth more involved.

## **Session II: The 2003 UN Convention against Corruption and Global Civic Responsibility**

The second session, "The 2003 UN Convention against Corruption and Global Civic Responsibility," was moderated by Marcia Wiss, Esq., a partner of the Washington, DC law firm, Hogan & Hartson. The discussion topic was presented by Susan Kinsley, Esq., Media/NGO Liaison Officer at the United Nations Information Center. Ms. Kinsley described the salient features of the newly adopted UN Convention against Corruption and presented in detail the potential impact of this Convention on international law enforcement around the globe. Her presentation was followed by a detailed analysis of the Convention and its future influence in the global business arena by Ms. Diane M. Kohn, Program Director of Transparency International-USA, a well known non-governmental organization (NGO) working in advocacy against corruption in the world market.

Their remarks were very informative and educational. The World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public power for private gain. So far, Kenya is the only country to have ratified the Convention, and it will probably take two-three years to get the required 30 signatories for the Convention to come into force. It is expected that the United States will ratify the Convention and play a part in the monitoring process, though it could take up to five years to get monitoring mechanisms in place. The Convention may be beneficial for US multinational corporations because it could provide for compatible rules on corruption throughout the world, leading to better investment opportunities and level playing fields. While the Convention has not received much media attention in the United States, coverage is more extensive in countries where corruption more directly affects people. It is expected that once the US Senate considers the Convention, it will receive more media attention and there will be a need for public education on the Convention. Both the UN Information Center and Transparency International provide informational tool kits to compliment the Convention.

AACR will look into the possibility of educating US-based business entities and the general public about the Convention. Article 12 of the Convention calls on all signatory countries to take appropriate steps to educate private sectors in their own countries to create an awareness of the negative effects of corruption. Article 13 urges signatory countries to promote the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil societies, NGOs, and community-based organizations about the need to fight against corruption. AACR may take an active role in this regard since the prevention of corruption relates to global civic responsibility activities.

### **Luncheon: Keynote Speech by Dr. Michael Schneider**

Professor Michael Schneider, Director of the Maxwell-Washington School of International Relations, Syracuse University, and Chairman of AACR's Advisory Committee, delivered the luncheon keynote address. He pointed out that while the United States has had a long tradition of global civic responsibility, because of the involvement of US businesses and workers in globalization, Americans are at a special juncture when it comes to civic responsibility. This presents to AACR a special opportunity to encourage the integration of new Americans with native-born citizens, businesses, and other US institutions to advance the concept of civic responsibility through openness and reform initiatives.

### **Session III: Enhancing the Civic Involvement of US Immigrant Community Leaders— What Role can US Business Entities Play?**

The third session, “Enhancing the Civic Involvement of US Immigrant Community Leaders—What Role can US Business Entities Play?,” was moderated by Dr. Piyush Agrawal, the immediate past President of the Association of Indians in America (AIA) and a former superintendent of the school board of Piscataway, New Jersey. In his opening remarks, Dr. Agrawal stressed the need to highlight the importance of cooperation among all institutions and individuals in addressing the issue of civic responsibility as an investment in the future of America. Dr. Agrawal and Mr. Kojelis described their own observations and experiences with respect to relations between US corporations as corporate citizens and ethnic immigrants as new Americans. US companies should look at the diverse ethnic immigrant communities within the United States as both marketing and philanthropic opportunities. However, it is important to note that the corporate/immigrant relationship is a two-way street—that is, immigrant leaders must assume the responsibility to educate corporations about their own immigrant communities, and corporations must take the responsibility to educate the immigrant groups on how to assimilate with mainstream America. It should be remembered, however, that most immigrant groups are not simply looking for hand-outs, but rather cooperation with dignity for appropriate business and employment opportunities. Becoming more engaged with immigrant communities may include developing a loyal customer base within a certain ethnic group. This may also be a good way to tap into various foreign markets. In addition, Mr. Mahadeva (Matt) Mani, Strategic Markets Director of AT&T, noted that a company may want to consider hiring qualified ethnic immigrant workers so that the company workforce is reflective of its diverse customer base, though this may require shifting the company’s internal culture to be more supportive of these new Americans. Also, one way to give back to immigrant communities, as well as attract future loyal customers from these communities, is through financial support such as scholarships and sponsorships for the younger generations of ethnic immigrant groups. Mr. Mani also cited several examples of how strategic alliance between AACR and corporations can move the country forward through engagement with issues related to “civic responsibility.”

### **Session IV: Developing Interinstitutional Civic Commitment Activities**

The fourth and final session, “Developing Interinstitutional Civic Commitment Activities,” was led by Mr. Chad Tragakis of Hill and Knowlton. The task of promoting civic responsibility is not easy and requires the cooperation of everyone. Some of the challenges to interinstitutional civic responsibility include competing demands for time, money, and resources, as well as leadership and developing a willingness to work toward one common goal. One of the first steps to take is to raise the level of awareness of civic responsibility in all Americans. This may be done by training youth leaders through leadership seminars, cooperating with national organizations, or urging adults to be better role models for younger generations. Ms. Carol Clark, Executive Director of World Vision, noted that it may also involve developing a large campaign with a clear message linked to high impact issues, tapping community leaders, educating the media, or providing a platform for people in various walks of life to be heard. Some participants indicated that while it is important to first conduct an audit to see what other groups are doing in order to avoid duplication, some ideas of reaching out to Americans include challenging them to take a “modern citizenship test” or tap into corporations’ board of directors to educate them on the role of corporate citizenship and mobilizing resources for long-term support. One of the attendees suggested that it may also be helpful for AACR to start its initiatives with a narrow focus, and as success is achieved, branch out to other focus areas.

Dr. Cherian, President of AACR, thanked the participants for their cooperation and contributions to making the AACR roundtable conference productive by laying a foundation for the concept of institutional civic responsibility (ICR). He expressed hope that AACR can promote ICR domestically and globally by bringing together the experience and knowledge of all institutions, including corporations, professional and trade associations, all other for-profit and nonprofit groups, and government agencies (federal, state, and local) for the benefit of every institution committed to the performance of civic responsibility. This effort will build a better society within the United States.

People in the business sector often ask the AACR leadership why AACR prefers the term “civic responsibility” over the term “social responsibility.” The answer is that while “social responsibility” programs are admirable and beneficial, there is a growing feeling among the general public that these programs originate from an attitude of “nice things to have” on the part of business entities as public relations tools. AACR believes that every institution, whether a profit-making or a nonprofit entity, should perform its moral or ethical obligations for the benefit of its internal stakeholders as well as its external stakeholders. These obligations are derived from institutions’ existence as legal citizens (e.g., corporations are considered corporate citizens which are incorporated or established under the laws of the land). These laws are enacted by the elected representatives of all the people and protect the interests of all of those corporations. In short, “civic responsibility” includes a “must do” commitment while “social responsibility” is considered as something “nice to have.” That is the reason why AACR emphasizes “civic responsibility” over “social responsibility.” However, it is true that a number of current “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) programs can be termed as “corporate civic responsibility” (CCR) programs because of their sponsors’ “must do” approach over a “nice to have” attitude. In addition, the term “civic responsibility” includes the term “social responsibility.”

The following individuals attended AACR’s roundtable conference and helped to make it a grand success:

1. Dr. Piyush C. Agrawal, Association of Indians in America (AIA)
2. Ms. Lucia Antalova, Transparency International-USA
3. Dr. Joy Cherian, President, AACR
4. Ms. Carol Clark, World Vision
5. Mr. Kevin Fisher, Legislative Assistant, American Airlines
6. Mr. Dan Garry, Manager, Public Issues, 3M, Minneapolis, MN
7. Mr. Varghese Robert George, Chairman and CEO, Westex Group, Rockville, MD
8. Ms. Melody Holmberg, Halliburton (KBR)
9. Susan Kinsley, Esq., The United Nations Information Center
10. Ms. Diane Kohn, Program Director, Transparency International-USA
11. Mr. Linas Kojelis, Kojelis & Co., Washington, DC
12. Mr. Paul Lima, Vice President, Northwestern Mutual, Milwaukee, WI
13. Ms. Marie Long, Vice President, Constituency Relations, AT&T
14. Mr. John Magnuson, President, The Magnuson Group, Alexandria, VA
15. Mr. Mahadeva Mani, Strategic Markets Director, AT&T
16. Mr. Sam Malhotra, CEO, Subsystem Technologies, Inc., Rosslyn, Virginia
17. Ms. Emily Manning, The United Nations Information Center
18. Dr. Michael Schneider, Director, Maxwell-Washington School of International Relations, Syracuse University
19. Mr. George Sigalos, Director, Government Relations, Halliburton (KBR)
20. Mr. Frank Skrobiszewski, Sr. Vice President, Hungarian-American Enterprise Fund
21. Byron Spears, Esq., American Council for Trade in Services (ACTS)
22. Dr. George Thomas, M.D., President & CEO, Bradenton Cardiology, Florida

23. Mr. Chad Tragakis, Hill & Knowlton, Washington, DC
24. Ms. Monika Wargo, Executive Director, AACR
25. Marcia Wiss, Esq., Partner, Hogan and Hartson (law firm), Washington office