Accountability discussion summary

* **Location**: The majority of the current grantees in this portfolio are located in the US, and yet the abuses that they take up are primarily located in the global south. While this approach might have made sense when many of these organizations began working a decade or more ago, there is now a growing community of groups based outside the US bringing expertise to these issues. It was agreed that “zip code” matters and that more priority should be given to stronger support for local and regional voices, even if additional investment is required to develop the capacity of these groups outside the US. Changing the portfolio in this way will mean, however, that funding to some of the existing grantees may need to change or even disappear in order to make space for new partners.
* **Diversity**: While many of the groups in the portfolio have played a foundational role in building the movement, the advisory board agreed that it would be important to begin to support some diversity in the portfolio. That diversity should necessarily include an effort to look at grave abuses perpetrated by governments in the fight against terrorism. Moreover, the right to truth is not just about the crimes but the complicity of other actors, and that this area could be of particular interest for our work going forward as other donors, particularly bilateral agencies, will not support work that would bring their own actions under scrutiny. Given the work of other parts of Open Society, the Human Rights Initiative would need to consider carefully how to engage here so as to complement existing work.
* **Not just prosecution**: Over the last year, the portfolio has focused on documentation with clear capacity to support accountability through prosecutions, and the recommendation from the team is to continue this focus moving forward. The discussion, however, offered arguments in support of a more holistic view of accountability efforts. Aryeh Neier noted that truth and justice are different forms of addressing the experiences of grave human rights abuses, and recognition of abuses continues to be vitally important. Thus, non-judicial forms of accountability, such as truth commissions, can be particularly important when they help activists to penetrate a façade of rule of law. It was agreed that the portfolio should not dismiss the important role documentation can play in shifting attitudes by offering an alternative understanding of events, and should seek ways to support better links between groups working on documentation across geographies and focus areas.
* **Victims’ voice**: There is a need to move from the rhetoric of victim participation to experimenting with actual mechanisms that actually make it happen. There was an interesting debate about whether the experience of efforts to pursue accountability in Latin America would be relevant to activists and lawyers working on these issues in Africa, where many of the institutions are comparably weak, and this is something the portfolio should explore.