

Let Freedom Ring—in China, Ghana, and the Crimea

This summer saw Cato's Global Freedom Initiative bring the ideas of individual liberty, rule of law, and freedom of trade and travel to areas that have so far had little experience of them. Spanning Asia, Africa, and post-Soviet regions, the seminars brought together local scholars and eager students to discuss the timeless ideas of liberty and prospects for its local application.



In the heart of Ghana's historic capital of Accra lies Ashesi University, which this August played host to the seminar "Inspiring African Transformation," cosponsored by Cato's Center for Promotion of Human Rights and the Imani Center for Policy and Education. Sixty-three students learned from local voices of liberty including Kenyan documentary filmmaker June Arunga, producer of "Africa's Ultimate Resource" (2005), who spoke on how her medium can be used to spotlight government corruption. The students were also treated to lectures of regional importance, such as "The Mystery of Property: How Property Rights

Conquered Poverty in Rich Countries" and "Why Africa Should Forget Foreign Aid."

The China leg of the Global Freedom Initiative, "Summer School on Property Rights, Public Policy, and Constitutionalism," held in Beijing August 14 to 16, was appropriately titled. Hayek scholar Liu Junning gave a wide-ranging lecture stressing the importance of property rights, the rule of law, and constitutionalism. Junning further stressed that if China's ascent is to continue, these drivers of economic growth must continue to be fostered. Other speakers included Beijing University's resi-

dent expert on institutional economics, Xia Yeliang, as well as Mao Shoulong, a professor of public policy at Renmin University. More than 50 students from all across China took part in the seminar.

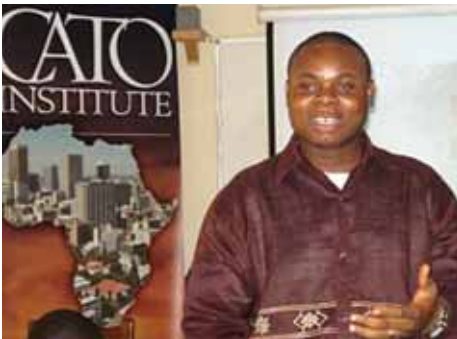
Cato's Global Freedom Initiative summer tour ended by taking the ideas of freedom to the former Soviet city of Alushta, Crimea. From September 2–8, a sparkling cast of libertarian luminaries spoke to students drawn from throughout the Russian-speaking world. Speakers included Andrei Illarionov, former economic adviser to Vladimir Putin and now a senior fellow at the Cato Institute; Johan Norberg, Swedish author of the Cato-published *In Defense of Global Capitalism*, recently issued in Russian by Cato.ru; Tom Palmer, director of Cato's Center for Promotion of Human Rights; and Georgian state minis-

ter Kakha Bendukidze. The seminar included breakout sessions on styles of leadership, how to influence mainstream media, how to build a blog presence, and the use of new media strategies generally. Mikhail Dubov, author of the popular Russian economics blog Ruconomics, said he was floored by the presence of Andrei Illarionov and similarly impressed by the caliber of his fellow participants: "All of my classmates demonstrated the ability to think for themselves—to make their own conclusions. This is rare in present-day Russia."

Thinking clearly on policy issues will be promoted in 2008 as a result of the work of Cato's Center for Promotion of Human Rights, as a part of Cato's Global Freedom Initiative. The Center's fruitful partnership with the Imani center will continue with additional African seminars for English-speakers to be held in 2008. A seminar for French-speakers is planned for North Africa. In partnership with the Institute for Economic Studies-Europe, Cato will sponsor several seminars across Europe. A Winter School is being held in Shanghai and more programs are being planned for China. Lastly, Cato's first book has been published in Brazil, under the Ordemlivre.org brand, and many more programs for Portuguese speakers are planned for 2008. Stay tuned!

Says Tom Palmer, "We're laying the plans for a very, very busy 2008."





(Previous page and upper left) Chinese students gather for the “Summer School on Property Rights, Public Policy, and Constitutionalism.” (Upper right) At the Crimean conference, Cato senior fellow Andrei Illarionov holds aloft a 100% cotton, 100% better alternative to communism. (Lower right) Russian-speaking students of liberty raise their hands in response to Johan Norberg’s question: “Who here has enjoyed a foreign-made product?” (Lower left) Franklin Cudjoe, executive director of the Imani Center for Policy and Education, explains that while international aid will not lift Africa out of poverty, removing barriers to entrepreneurship will. (Lower middle) Kenyan documentary filmmaker June Arunga strategizes with African students at the Ghana seminar to discuss how to use narrative to propagate political messages.

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that I do know, I see their value in making my life better, such as the time I landed at an unfamiliar airport and rendezvoused with a friend who was picking me up.

Interestingly, for someone who gets credit for thinking broadly about socioeconomic issues, Frank actually thinks quite narrowly about them. First, he tends to think that everyone is like him in having a strong comparative impulse. But this is false. (Abraham Buunk et al., the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, found this in some people but not others.) And although Frank sometimes admits that one’s concern with relative social standing will rear its ugly head in matters not just of relative consumption—how about the following: “I spent my leisure time better than you did”—he always

jumps back to assuming, without much evidence, that the dominant form of status-seeking is narrowly economic.

And beyond all that, what if Frank were completely correct in his assertion that many or most people care about relative income and position? I don’t doubt that some people are that way. My own solution is not to have such people as friends. But how would that justify forcibly taking their money? Wouldn’t the proper thing be to persuade people not to care about others’ income and even to work on one’s own psyche rather than to force one’s views on others? Frank’s advocacy of higher taxes reminds me of a scene from the TV show *Scrubs*. Carla, a nurse on the show, suggests to the janitor that they collect money from other employees to do a good deed.

JANITOR: I’ll check their lockers.

CARLA: I meant *ask* them.

JANITOR (with a quizzical look on his face): That seems kind of roundabout, but OK.

At one time, critics of economic freedom justified high taxes on high-income people on the grounds of ability to pay. They at least admitted that those taxes hurt those people. But the growing availability to even the poor of goods that were only recently thought of as luxury goods has weakened that argument. Now, Robert Frank argues for higher taxes on high-income people on the grounds that it is good for them. If that is the best the proponents of higher taxes come up with, maybe we should see this as intellectual progress.