

**COMMEMORATION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE
DECLARATION OF GLOBAL PRINCIPLES FOR NONPARTISAN
ELECTION OBSERVATION AND MONITORING
BY CITIZEN ORGANIZATIONS**

UNITED NATIONS
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Remarks by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič,
Director of the
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Check against delivery!

Excellencies,
Honourable Colleagues,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to be here today in this outstanding company. Although it seems like only a short time ago, it has now been seven years since OSCE/ODIHR participated in a similar setting at the launch of the *Declaration of Principles for International Observers*. I am very glad to see that non-partisan domestic election observation organizations have taken it upon themselves to espouse the same values of professionalism and impartiality, which are key to professional election observation activities.

One way of commemorating the launch of these global principles is to highlight the obvious: elections essentially belong to the voters, to the citizens of a country. They are the main stakeholders in the process of ensuring genuine and democratic elections.

Second, elections are principally about political rights and those can only be realised through a process marked by integrity. The more eyes are focused on the process, the more the citizenry will

trust its results. This, in turn, means that the involvement of an active citizenry is crucial to the honesty of any electoral process.

It is therefore heartening that so many domestic observer organizations have come together today to support and promote the principles behind democratic elections - principles such as equality, universality, fairness, freedom and competitiveness.

I had a chance to see civic observers in action exactly a month ago, in a very large country in which civic observers are required to work as either party representatives or journalists. We were all impressed by their dedication and professionalism. Civic observers did not interfere with the process; they sought first of all dialogue, and second they documented - through a mighty array of new technologies - all steps of the process, throughout the entire country. This has a real potential to enhance not only the transparency but also the integrity of the process.

All states should be keen to embrace such citizen oversight. Within OSCE, its 56 states have acknowledged *“that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They*

therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law.” Clearly, these “private institutions and organizations” include domestic non-party observer groups.

We, OSCE/ODIHR, therefore wholeheartedly welcome the launch of global principles by this community of domestic observation organizations. With this, you have set up a common platform around which you can showcase your professionalism and impartiality in election observation.

In addition to its observation work, ODIHR has for two decades now engaged with domestic observers in our region. We published a Handbook for Domestic Election Observers back in 2003 which, in many cases, helped such organizations to establish a professional and transparent working methods. ODIHR has also supported specific training activities and advised domestic observers how to develop their methodology. Civic observers also actively participate in various OSCE events and regularly offer insights into

the role and work of civil society in democracy and the democratization processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I once again congratulate the participants of this historic event for the progress you have made in raising the profile and professionalism of election observation by domestic organizations. I trust that for those more than 100 groups that have endorsed the global principles and for all those are represented here today, it will form an important vehicle for their mutual co-operation and development in the coming years, and also for the co-operation with international organizations such as ours.

Your work is important. As Yogi Berra once wisely remarked: "You can actually observe a lot just by watching".

I wish you every success in your future work and look forward to meeting you in those countries where ODIHR may be observing elections in the future.

Thank you.