



United States Mission to the OSCE

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Democratic Elections and Election Observation Session II

As prepared for delivery by Tova Wang
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The Copenhagen Document of 1990 was a blueprint for a democratic Europe governed by the rule of law and committed to the protection of human rights. All participating States, including those that joined the Helsinki process subsequently, have agreed that “The will of the people, freely and fairly expressed through periodic and genuine elections, is the basis of the authority and legitimacy of all government.”

Unfortunately, some participating States continue to hold elections that do not rise to their commitments. Procedural flaws during the voter registration process and on election day, as well as uneven playing fields in the run-up to elections, including regarding access to the media, campaign finance regulations; use of administrative resources, and censorship; violence, and harassment of opposition politicians and civil society activists; tarnish elections in some parts of the OSCE space. The United States urges meaningful improvement in these areas.

The Copenhagen Document also solidified the role of foreign and domestic election observers acting at the invitation of the participating States to enhance transparency in the electoral process. OSCE guidelines for election monitoring have been enshrined in the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers. This document has been endorsed at the United Nations by more than 30 international organizations active in the field of elections. The UN General Assembly expressed its appreciation for the document, most recently in its Resolution 66/163, adopted by consensus last December.

But it is useful always to consider what we in the OSCE can do better. To deepen implementation of the commitments of the Copenhagen 1990 Document, the United States suggests that the OSCE consider ways that new technologies could be utilized to improve electoral participation, enhance the integrity of electoral processes, and increase public confidence in elections through greater transparency and accountability. OSCE could also explore ways to ensure better electoral participation for marginalized populations, especially ethnic minorities. During international observation missions, we encourage the movement toward greater coordination among the various international observation groups and the recognition of the importance of, increased support for and consultation with domestic observation organizations.. We also support increased focus on how to improve the drafting of recommendations and follow up on their effective implementation.

The United States will not agree to any proposals that would call into question ODIHR’s election observation methodology or autonomy, or otherwise weaken existing commitments. We believe that ODIHR’s current methodology is transparent and objective, and that is why it enjoys credibility among the vast majority of OSCE participating States, other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and domestic observer groups

throughout the world. That credibility also rests on ODIHR's autonomy and on the ability of ODIHR election experts to do their job without political interference. I would also note the significant contribution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in our election observations.

The Copenhagen Document confirmed our collective commitment to a democratic political framework based on the rule of law. It recognized that such a framework guarantees full respect for the free expression of the legitimate interests and aspirations of our citizenry, including the right to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. When governments erect unjust laws to control what its people can and cannot read or hear—in print, on the internet, over television or radio—it is a step in the wrong direction and away from these cherished principles.

In some OSCE participating States, authorities still present opposition parties and civil society—exercising essential freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, both online and offline—as a threat to stability. As agreed by participating States 22 years ago in Copenhagen, the U.S. would like to reconfirm our commitment to the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association, for all, including members of NGOs and opposition political parties. Respect for such fundamental freedoms contributes to a healthy system of checks on government power, which is critical to democratic governance.

We urge all participating States to honor their commitments to consolidate pluralistic democracy, to respect the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, offline and online, and foster the rule of law.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.