

Remarks by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

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Presentation of OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the 2012 US General Elections

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Mr. President,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address this distinguished gathering today and to present the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission final report on the 6 November 2012 general elections. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to President Carter and the staff at the Carter Center for their generous hosting of this event.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank President Carter for his unwavering support of international election observation, not only in the United States, but across the world. OSCE/ODIHR and the Carter Center – as well as several other like-minded US organizations such as the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute – are founding endorsers of the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This is what unites us and emphasizes the importance of professional, independent, and impartial international election observation.

International election observation is important. It is an expression of the interest of the international community in democratic elections and its relevance as part of democratic development, including respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law. It is also a tool to assess electoral processes against international obligations and commitments for democratic elections, while recognizing that it is the people of a country who ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of an electoral process.

As a community of states committed to the respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the OSCE has emphasized democratic elections as a key pillar of long-term security and stability. All 57 OSCE participating States have committed to upholding several important principles when it comes to democratic elections: universality, equality, transparency, secrecy of vote, accountability, fairness, and freedom. These principles are enshrined in the Copenhagen Document which was agreed to by all participating States in 1990. One of these commitments is to invite international observers from other OSCE participating States. In doing so, States acknowledge that election observation is a useful and important undertaking. It can promote transparency and accountability and enhance public confidence in an electoral process.

OSCE commitments for democratic elections apply equally to all across the OSCE region. This was underscored in the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration at the OSCE Summit in Kazakhstan, where OSCE participating States reiterated that “all OSCE principles and commitments, without exception, apply equally to each participating State, and we emphasize that we are accountable to our citizens and responsible to each other for their full implementation.” Our Office has been mandated to follow electoral developments across the OSCE region. I am pleased to report that in over two decades of its work OSCE/ODIHR has until now observed elections in 56 of the 57 OSCE participating States. This also includes six observation activities deployed to the United States (starting in 2002), always upon the invitation of the respective US government.

It has been said many times that election observation is not an end in itself, but is intended to assist States to improve compliance with their election-related

obligations and OSCE commitments. That is why any observation activity should identify areas for improvement and formulate clear, constructive and implementable recommendations. In the 1999 Charter for European Security, OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow-up promptly ODIHR’s election assessments and recommendations”. To promote effective follow-up, our Office regularly presents its final reports with findings and recommendations ‘in country’ following each electoral process. Such follow-up visits serve to discuss the OSCE/ODIHR’s election-related recommendations as well as possible areas of future co-operation and assistance. In May of this year, I presented the final report on last year’s general elections to a wide range of interlocutors in Washington DC. With the invitation to our Office to present conclusions and recommendations United States is demonstrating its willingness to abide by its OSCE commitments. This is important not only in the context of US elections, but also as a powerful example throughout the OSCE region.

Let me underline that there is no perfect democracy and no perfect elections; electoral processes in all countries can always be improved. The external assessment and recommendations offered by the OSCE/ODIHR are designed to contribute to this. The United States is no exception. Our final report concluded that the 2012 general elections took place in a competitive environment and were administered professionally, but that further steps should be taken to bring the electoral process closer in line with the United States’ OSCE commitments.

Let me conclude by thanking again to President Carter for his support of international election observation. Events as this, organized by the Carter Center, present a valuable forum for discussing how elections in this country can be further improved.