

**Check against delivery!**

*Second International Meeting on the  
Implementation of the Declaration of Principles for  
International Election Observers*

Organization of American States, Hall of the Americas

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Opening Remarks by  
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Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights (ODIHR)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to address you today at the Second International Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. When we met in New York two years ago, in October 2005, to commemorate these documents at the United Nations, all those present recognised that this was a historic moment. The Declaration of Principles and the Code of Conduct represent the first universal effort to outline a code of practice for safeguarding the integrity of objective and impartial election observation as a shared global activity, and as a shared global contribution to foster democracy.

I would like to recognize each of your organisations who have contributed to this effort, and in particular the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, the National Democratic Institute, and the Carter Center for spearheading it. These documents are unique as they are living documents as they underscore best practice for the credible delivery of international election observation. They are relevant to us in our work in which we advance the principles and practices for democratic elections. Let

me express special thanks to our hosts for bringing us together to take a look at how these documents are working in practice.

I would want to give you our OSCE perspective. As you know, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is a transatlantic security organization of 56 participating States from Central Asia to North America. Over the past 15 years, the OSCE has placed great emphasis on promoting democratic elections as a key pillar of sustainable security and stability. My Office – the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights - has been entrusted with the mandate for election observation as conducted among OSCE States. Each year, the ODIHR deploys thousands of observers to monitor elections throughout the OSCE region in order to assess participating States' compliance with OSCE election-related commitments. I know full well the responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of any organization that undertakes serious election observation efforts, and the subsequent opportunities to assist States to meet their full potential in delivering a democratic election exercise for the benefit of their citizenry.

Since its establishment in the 1990, the ODIHR has become one of the leading international organizations involved in election observation, in terms of both the scope of our activities, and the systematic approach to election observation. The reports of our election observation missions often serve as a point of reference for discussing progress achieved by the States in their democratic reforms.

We feel privileged in the OSCE with the 1990 Copenhagen Document. It not only serves as a basis for election observation activities in the region, but also provides a unique set of principles for conducting democratic elections. The Copenhagen Document is probably the most advanced intergovernmental agreement on elections in existence today.

Having said that, I would like to underline that we see room for further improvement. My Office launched a discussion on the possibility of adopting additional commitments, with a focus on principles that are implicit, but not expressly stated in the Copenhagen Document, such as transparency, accountability and public confidence. Particularly in view of the new challenges

associated with the emergence of new voting technologies, this is a timely initiative on which we engage OSCE States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The methodology we have developed over the past decade is based on the premise that an election is much more than a one-day event. Our reports provide a comprehensive insight into all elements of an electoral process: before, during, and after polling day. Thus far my Office has observed over 150 electoral events in some 30 countries, having deployed over 30,000 observers. All this has only become possible because of the support of OSCE States, a body of professional experts and talented observers seconded by States and willing to give up many a weekend in the cause of promoting democratic principles. We also appreciate the contribution and specific experience parliamentarians bring to our work.

As you all well know, the “free and fair” label that was first associated with our activity at its outset has long been held too imprecise to characterise the complexities of an election process. We do not judge elections, and we are not the election police

either. We assess election processes in all their dimensions – the legal and administrative frameworks and their implementation, the political campaign culminating in election day, the media, the complaints and appeals process, and related civil and political rights. This is why the ODIHR is focusing on assessing whether the elections were conducted in line with the multiple OSCE commitments and other international standards.

Election observation is not an end objective unto itself; as the Declaration makes clear, it is embedded in wider democratization efforts undertaken by a range of actors. International election observation is one important segment of international norm-building which may have an impact on democratization. Once advice and assistance is embraced by domestic authorities, it is empowering of the ones who stand to benefit from advances in accountability and transparency: the electorate, and their participation in democratic process is beyond election day.

However, a few OSCE States have started to question our work as a result of our solid methodological approach and informed assessments of the electoral process, including its deficiencies. They have done so not by challenging the core of our findings but

by seeking to shift the debate away from unfulfilled commitments to the modalities of election observation. Perhaps ironically, this criticism comes at a time as the true value of election observation as a means to support universal civil and political rights is being fully recognized.

The ODIHR has dedicated a lot of efforts to address the issues raised by those States. We have further developed our methodology and published a number of guidebooks to help OSCE States address remaining challenges. We have further ensured balanced geographical coverage of elections, moving beyond the priority focus on developing democracies, but also deploying more targeted and focused election assessment missions to longer-standing democracies and post-transition countries.

Despite obvious improvements in the operational modalities and a broader geographical participation in our missions, we currently face a rather unprecedented situation: the attempt to narrow the freedom of election observation through proposing limits on scale and duration of observation missions by a host State. While we stand ready to engage in discussions how to further enhance operational modalities, the OSCE could not allow itself to

compromise the integrity of its election observation through simply accepting such restrictions. This would not only undermine our achievements of the last decade, it could also have consequences for the global community present here.

Dear Colleagues,

Unfortunately, some of the key challenges we have observed in our election observation missions persist. They will, alas, sound familiar to you:

- the refusal of registration and/or de-registration of candidates in unclear proceedings with the potential to impose disproportional sanctions for minor violations;
- the misuse of state administrative resources by the incumbents;
- pressure on groups of the electorate to vote in a specific manner;
- media bias, particularly with regard to state-controlled media, in favour of the incumbents;
- election administrations whose composition is not sufficiently inclusive;



- lack of sufficient voter registration guidelines and safeguards to prevent abuse;
- complaints and appeals procedures that do not always permit a timely and effective redress; and,
- overall, lack of sufficient will to rectify identified shortcomings.

As a consequence, such trends to limit competition result in damaged voter confidence, especially due to insufficient transparency and accountability, including during the vote count, the tabulation of the vote and the announcement of results. Of course, no country is immune to electoral problems. However, many states are able to address the challenges through their own independent and credible democratic institutions. This is possible because the authorities in those states demonstrate good will and interest in improving their electoral standards. We would like to see this to be the only trend there is. The conduct of democratic elections can only be established and maintained through a genuine political commitment. The shared global activity of election observation needs to see, as the other side of the coin, a shared global responsibility of governments to ensure the implementation of democratic principles.

Let me briefly turn to new challenges in the field of voting technologies. We have realised that the existing observation methodology is not sufficient for the informative assessment of electronic voting, and that new innovative approaches need to be put in place to assess voting procedures that are no longer observable by the eyes of observers. Together we have shared experience and information in order to jointly respond to such new developments in our common field of activity.

The ODIHR has been building its experience in this area, and has now observed several elections where these new technologies were used. We have stressed that the introduction of such technologies must be held to the same rigorous standards as traditional voting methods if they are to be consistent with international standards, but we also recognise that new technologies can have an impact on the overall confidence of the electorate in the integrity of elections.

My Office is now preparing *Guidelines for Observation of Electronic Voting*. Some of you have participated in this process, which we greatly appreciate, and some of your organisations have embarked on similar initiatives. In this context, we look forward with great interest to the deliberation of Panel 2 devoted to

observation of electronic technologies this afternoon. This is certainly an area where the community of election observers will benefit from further sharing experience.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I want to express once more my gratitude to the organizers of this meeting for their initiative. The importance of establishing a global network of election observation organizations cannot be overestimated. I therefore strongly support the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and believe that three key principles should continue to guide international election observation overall:

- we must get the facts right and relate them clearly to international standards and commitments;
- we must maintain a coherent message from the international community, and finally,
- we must, all together, ensure appropriate follow-up to our recommendations.

All of us here are privileged to promote the principles of democracy, democratic elections and human rights. We help countries to improve their election processes and standards and to address outstanding challenges in this context. It is most encouraging to be part of this growing global network of people and organizations who share an understanding of election observation as an important activity in defending and promoting genuine democratic elections that truly reflect the will of the people. We will continue to deliver our mandated election observation activities to the highest standards possible in our corner of the world, in partnership with many of you present here today.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you productive working sessions and hope to see you at the next such occasion.