



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 29, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The May 21 parliamentary elections marked another step in the development of Georgian democracy. We agree with the preliminary assessment of the International Election Observation Mission that these elections offered the Georgian people a real choice from among a wide array of candidates. The new parliament will have representatives from four parties and opposition blocs and offers the possibility for a new era in Georgian politics. Those elected to Parliament will need to find effective ways to work together in the spirit of compromise, keeping the long-term welfare of Georgia uppermost in their minds.

President Saakashvili publicly committed himself and his government early in the election process to holding free and fair elections. We watched the election process unfold, and on election day the United States had its own observers in place around the country, along with the representatives of other OSCE participating States. We agree with the International Election Observation Mission that the Government and other political stakeholders made efforts to conduct these elections in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and that there have been significant improvements to the electoral process since the recent presidential election.

However, in Georgia's young democracy, there is more work to be done. The International Election Observation Mission identified problems in the campaign, specifically, with voting and tabulation procedures, that need to be addressed in the future. We urge the Georgian authorities to investigate all allegations of irregularities and to work with all sides to address the shortcomings identified by international and domestic observers. Efforts also are needed so that the Government, opposition, and voters can develop the mutual trust that is a hallmark of established democracies. Our OSCE Mission can play an important role in this process.

Reflecting the continuing maturation of Georgian democracy, election day was generally calm overall. We deeply regret, however, that a violent attack on voters' busses in Abkhazia that resulted in civilian injuries and threatened an emerging and hopeful peace initiative. We call on all parties to participate in a thorough investigation that results in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.