



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As prepared for delivery by Tova Wang
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The United States welcomes this opportunity to discuss election related issues, including election observation, at this meeting and we thank the Irish Chairmanship and ODIHR for organizing it.

Twenty-two years ago in Copenhagen, all of the OSCE participating States recognized that a pluralistic democracy and the rule of law are essential for ensuring respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. They committed to the ideals of democracy and political pluralism and expressed their common determination to build democratic societies based on free elections and the rule of law. This concept of security rooted in democracy went well beyond international commitments to human rights found in such documents as the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights.

In Copenhagen in 1990, we committed to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot under conditions which ensure the free expression of the opinion of the electors. We also committed to a clear separation between the State and political parties. In defining what constitutes a free election, we committed to, among other things, universal and equal suffrage; procedures that ensure that votes are counted and reported honestly; the right of citizens to seek public office without discrimination; the right to establish, in full freedom, political parties and other political organizations; political campaigning in a free and fair atmosphere; unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings; and for domestic and international observation of our electoral processes.

We tasked ODIHR with organizing election observation missions and to establish the procedures for such observation – a task it has performed admirably. ODIHR adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, which we have agreed elaborate guidelines for international electoral observation.

But what is to be observed? Our Copenhagen commitments laid out the criteria for free elections. Observation is to gauge how these commitments are being met at all stages of the electoral process – from the run up to the elections, to voting day and the vote count, including voter registration, the registration of political parties, the fairness of the playing field and access to media, establishment of independent election commissions, nomination of candidates, and treatment of domestic and international election observers.

There is no question that elections in every country have some technical irregularities, and all countries must work to minimize and eliminate them. That said, elections that are mechanically perfect on Election Day can be fraudulent, if elections processes leading up

to the voting are fundamentally unfair. It is sobering to see that voter confidence in the electoral process is extremely low in some countries that boast of having excellent election procedures.

The 2006 ODIHR Report on Common Responsibilities highlighted the challenge facing us all. The real problem in the OSCE region today is that the commitment to hold democratic elections is still not fully implemented in all participating States.

We hope that in this meeting we can discuss and perhaps agree on how election observation can better assure that our election commitments are being met. We must also discuss what we can collectively do to promote the improvements that ODIHR has recommended in its election observation reports.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.