



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Elections in Armenia

As delivered by Political Counselor Sam Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 28, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has taken note of the February 19th presidential election in Armenia. We note the February 20th statement of the OSCE Election Observation Mission that assessed the election to have been “mostly in line” with international commitments. We thank that Mission for its good work. We remain concerned about problems specified in the Mission’s report and by certain steps taken by the authorities in the post-election period.

In this OSCE forum today, and as other important elections approach in the OSCE region, the United States commends the decision of Armenia to make genuine efforts to address shortcomings noted in previous elections, including in the legal framework. We also welcome the commitment of Armenia to cooperate closely with the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly during the observation of this election, including prompt facilitation of the needs assessment mission of the ODIHR conducted well before Election Day.

We applaud both the government and the opposition in Armenia for avoiding successfully any incidents of violence in the context of large public political rallies on behalf of each of the two top candidates. This peaceful exercise of the freedom of assembly, coupled with effective, non-violent, crowd management, is a notable achievement and a sign of democratic progress. We call on all sides to ensure that this peaceful situation continues.

Mr. Chairman, we need also to recognize that this election was far from perfect. Although the administration of the election procedure was mostly in line with OSCE standards, key OSCE commitments, regarding the planning and execution of democratic elections, remain unmet in Armenia as noted in the OSCE preliminary findings. We call on the Government and people of Armenia to commit themselves to address these concerns.

After Election Day, together with other international observers, United States representatives carefully reviewed the findings of observers that included our own, those from opposition parties, and from NGOs. Concerns fell broadly into the following areas:

--favorable treatment before Election Day of the government’s candidate, including the employment of public officials for private campaign duties;

--instances of ballot stuffing;
--vote-buying, multiple voting and voter intimidation; and
--an unusually high turnout in some regions that in some cases might have been an indicator of irregularities.

Most recently, there were disturbing irregularities with the recount of votes in a number of polling stations as well as OSCE reports of limitations on freedom of speech.

We also are very concerned about the post-election arrests of opposition politicians, as well as reports that authorities have forcibly closed opposition offices. These kinds of actions are not consistent with democratic principles, and we urge the Government of Armenia to uphold the rule of law and international democratic standards in proceeding on these cases.

Because of such real and perceived irregularities, we remain concerned that the level of trust among the Armenian electorate in their election process remains dangerously low. We encourage the authorities in Armenia to conduct transparent, rapid investigations of all complaints as part of the process of ongoing election reform and to rebuild public trust.

We support the ongoing effort of ODIHR to catalogue the complaints it has received, and we look forward both to their next interim report on the elections and to the final report and recommendations.

The United States remains ready here and in Yerevan to work with all the parties in Armenia to address these problems.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.