



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Elections in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 17, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has taken note of the recent election in Georgia, and has congratulated President-elect Saakashvili. We agree with the assessment of the OSCE's election observation mission that the election was, in essence, consistent with most of Georgia's OSCE commitments and standards for democratic elections, despite significant challenges. We congratulate the people of Georgia on the conduct of this election, which was the most competitive in Georgia's history. The electorate was offered a clear choice and the incumbent president faced numerous opposition candidates, including one candidate chosen as the combined standard-bearer of nine different opposition parties.

In this OSCE forum today, and as other important elections approach in the OSCE region, the United States commends especially Georgia's decision to turn to democracy when facing domestic tensions. We also welcome Georgia's close cooperation with the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly during the observation of this snap election, including prompt facilitation of the ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission, conducted well before election day.

We note with interest that criticism of the elections in Georgia has been strident in certain countries that have themselves not demonstrated a similar commitment to truly democratic elections, or to working with international or domestic observers. This election convincingly showed once again the value of ODIHR, and its election observation mission and domestic observers. ODIHR monitored and reported on the electoral process in accordance with our common commitments and shared conviction that pluralistic democracy is a prerequisite for a lasting order of peace, security, justice and cooperation.

Mr. Chairman, we also recognize, as did the OSCE's observation mission and others, that this election was far from perfect. Together with other international observers, United States representatives looked closely at the problems that were raised by the observers, whether they were our own, belonged to opposition parties, or worked for NGOs. In coming to our conclusions, we carefully reviewed the findings of our own observation mission and compared our results with those of colleagues from other international monitoring organizations, domestic NGOs, and members of the opposition.

We brought to the attention of the Central Election Commission and ODIHR any and all reports that we received alleging election irregularities or flawed vote counts. We pressed for quick, transparent investigations in all cases and we supported efforts by the opposition and NGOs to appeal questionable counts. It ultimately became clear that there were not enough disputed votes to have changed the official outcome.

We support ODIHR's ongoing effort to catalogue the complaints it has received, and we look forward to its next interim and final reports and recommendations on the election.

The United States urges all relevant authorities in Georgia to respond transparently, fully and quickly to all complaints of electoral process irregularities. We are ready here and in Tbilisi to work with all the parties in Georgia to address these problems, and resolve any outstanding issues before Parliamentary elections this spring.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.