



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement for the Closing Session of the SHDM on Electoral Standards and Commitments

As delivered by Chairman DeForest Blake Soaries, Election Assistance Commission,
to the Supplemental Human Dimension Meeting on Elections, Vienna
July 16, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you again to ODIHR for organizing this important Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Electoral Standards and Commitments and to all of the governmental and non-governmental participants who have helped to make this event a success.

Mr. Chairman, the United States appreciates the opportunity that we have had over the past day and a half to hear many points of view about OSCE election standards and commitments. Today, the United States remains as committed as ever to the OSCE commitments laid out in the 1990 Copenhagen document and in subsequent OSCE documents.

The very nature of democracy is that it is constantly developing and evolving to meet the needs of citizens. This is true in every OSCE participating State, including in the United States. That is why we are open to ideas on how the OSCE election commitments, and especially their implementation, can be improved.

However, the United States sees no need to re-open the Copenhagen commitments. The Copenhagen document provides the guidelines and benchmarks that we need to achieve democratic, free, and fair elections.

Of course, there may be a few areas in which gaps in the existing commitments could be filled. For example, the OSCE does not yet have specific commitments related to the participation of internally displaced persons in electoral processes or concerning accountable, balanced, and impartial election administration. We therefore look forward to considering proposals to fill these and other gaps as necessary.

We must remember, however, that the primary responsibility lies with participating States for fulfilling their election-related commitments. This is important for two reasons. First, making and reinforcing commitments on paper is an empty exercise unless participating States truly desire and intend to hold free, fair, and democratic elections. Secondly, public confidence in elections cannot be expected unless governments demonstrate this desire and intent to their citizens.

There are many different electoral systems in place in the OSCE region, and there are many legitimate technical ways to carry out elections. There is little to be gained from comparing these

systems. Different systems can all be equally valid, as long as they provide the framework for a free, fair, and truly democratic electoral process.

Elections are not simply events that happen. Rather, elections are processes that involve much more than voting. As many speakers have made clear during this meeting, democratic elections depend on the presence of democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, a free media, and the rule of law. The OSCE and ODIHR are available to offer assistance and guidance in all of these areas of concern. Moreover, it is important that ODIHR continue to fulfill this role.

It is extremely important that States follow up on election monitoring assessments and recommendations. This follow-up should include long-term, constructive engagement to foster an overall democratic institutional framework that will allow for free, fair, and fully democratic elections.

We also believe that a more systematic mechanism should be considered for such follow-up. We are very interested in the idea Mr. Vaananen put forward on establishing, as a matter of practice, a concrete political dialogue with relevant authorities following each observation.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the OSCE for welcoming me to this conference. I would also like to thank Ambassador Strohal and ODIHR for organizing it. Finally, thank you to all the governmental and non-governmental participants in this meeting for making these discussions useful and constructive.

Thank you.