



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Tajik election law

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 15, 2004

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

On July 8, the Majlisi Milli passed further amendments to the law, "On Elections of the Majlisi Oli in the Republic of Tajikistan." This process showed a new level of achievement in parliamentary democracy and was in many ways a step forward for Tajik democracy. We applaud Tajikistan's progress.

With that said, we are concerned that the recently amended election law does not fully meet OSCE standards. Further improvements are needed in order for Tajikistan to achieve the international standards stipulated in the Helsinki Final Act. Since the law can still be further modified, allow me to mention a few specifics.

There is still no clear provision for truly independent election commissions at all levels, un beholden to any single political party or to any government that may be in power. Independent election commissions, with equal representation by all parties, help to guarantee that election results accurately represent the will of the voters and, thus, increase the trust of the citizens of Tajikistan in their elected government.

We appreciate that parliament has greatly reduced, from earlier draft legislation, the amount of money that candidates must deposit to stand for election. However, the amount required is still excessive - more than twice the annual per capita income. Such a high fee is exclusionary and may prevent highly qualified and honest but poor people from competing for a seat in the parliament.

The law should also provide more explicit provision for independent domestic election observers at polling places. The recent amendments are to be commended in providing for domestic political party and international observers, however non-partisan observers may also play a valuable role and the recent draft has been ambiguous on this point.

We recommend that Tajikistan make these important additional improvements, either before President Rahmonov signs the bill into law, or through subsequent amendments.

Tajikistan deserves congratulations for the demonstrable steps toward democracy it has already made. And we hope that Tajikistan, as an OSCE member, will take the necessary steps to ensure that its laws and practices conform with OSCE principles and standards. We reiterate our offer to be of assistance.

Thank you.