



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Observation of U.S. Elections**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 4, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thanks also to the distinguished representative of the European Union for their congratulations as well on the elections held recently in the United States.

The United States did indeed hold an historic election on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, which was closely scrutinized around the world. I understand that voter turnout was high and that 10 million more Americans voted in this election than in the 2000 election.

The U.S. invited the OSCE to observe the election, as it has done for every presidential and midterm election in the U.S. since 1996. The U.S. invitation was issued in accordance with the commitment the United States undertook with 54 other OSCE participating States in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

This year's OSCE election observer mission represented the Organization's first attempt to plan and coordinate a nationwide observation of a U.S. general election. As was the case in the OSCE's more limited U.S. missions in 2002 and 2003, observers can only observe elections to the extent permitted by state and local laws and regulations as provided for in the Copenhagen Document. As we have previously noted, the U.S. election system is highly decentralized.

In light of the constitutional authority of U.S. states and counties over elections, the U.S. Federal Government has no system of accreditation for foreign observers. This means that election observers, again following past practice, are responsible for directly contacting individual state and local officials to arrange activities in the respective voting districts.

We understand that many state and local election officials warmly welcomed the OSCE election mission and made time during an extremely hectic period to meet with OSCE observers and answer questions about election procedures.

Some U.S. states and counties, in accordance with their individual laws and procedures, permitted broad access to polling sites to observers. Others did so with limitations consistent with state and local laws and regulations. Some states have laws that ban observers from polling sites, and so informed observers who contacted them.

The U.S. Government has been working diligently at multiple levels to facilitate cooperation between international observers and appropriate state and local election officials.

The U.S. Federal Government has and will continue to support OSCE observation of U.S. elections.

We are committed to continuing to explore ways to work with U.S. states and counties to facilitate appropriate access by observers in a timely fashion. We will also work more closely with international observers to ensure a better understanding of the decentralized nature of the U.S. electoral system and encourage direct contact between observer missions and local officials.

We look forward to reading the OSCE Election Observation Team's assessment of the U.S. election, including any recommendations it may make.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.