

6th annual meeting of the signatories of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation

*The statement that follows was agreed by the High-Level Panel co-chaired by EU Parliament President **Jerzy Buzek** and EU High Representative **Catherine Ashton**, with Former President of the United States **Jimmy Carter** (The Carter Center), Former Canadian Prime Minister the Right Honourable **Joe Clark** (National Democratic Institute), United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador **Zachary Muburi-Muita** (Head of the UN Office to the African Union), and Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Ambassador **Janez Lenarčič** (OSCE-ODIHR). This event was the start of a three-day meeting of the signatories of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, held in Brussels from 4-6 October 2011.*

4 October 2011, Brussels

- **Election observation is a key instrument in promoting democracy and human rights.** The participants in this panel reaffirm their commitment to supporting democracy in all its forms, and consider election observation as one of the key instruments to achieve this goal. The deployment of international observers promotes and consolidates shared universal values, such as respect for human rights and open government.
- **Countries inviting observers get an invaluable service – a truthful evaluation of their electoral process.** Election observation provides a mechanism to reinforce democracy. We believe that genuine accountability requires transparency. Countries which invite election observers demonstrate that they are open to constructive criticism.
- **Observers should resist pressure to dilute their findings.** Credible election observation missions provide independent assessments of the electoral process. Election observers assess elections in line with obligations, principles and commitments that countries have endorsed. It is the responsibility of election observers to provide accurate, unbiased and honest assessments. Therefore they should exercise careful judgement and resist pressure to dilute their findings.
- **Electoral assistance and democracy support initiatives should take more account of election observer recommendations.** International donors and national governments should embrace observer recommendations as part of their dialogue. For their part, election observers should improve how they frame and target recommendations to ensure that they are a good starting point for future work and can make a lasting contribution to supporting democracy.

- **Efforts should be made to strengthen election observation methodology to take account of new issues as they arise.** In this context, we commit ourselves to include a greater focus on the participation of women and national minorities, as well as persons with disabilities. We will also aim to pay closer attention to voter registration and campaign finance. In addition, we intend to look at effective ways in which international observation can help prevent and respond to election-related violence.
- **Domestic observer groups should be supported.** International election observation is not an end in itself. We are all committed to ensuring that election observation should increasingly be conducted by domestic bodies. These organisations play a fundamental role in providing the safeguards to future elections.
- **Citizens ultimately determine the degree of confidence they should place in elections and their government, and we therefore urge respect for the role of citizens as election observers.** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the authority of government derives from the people's will expressed in genuine elections. We therefore embrace the right of citizens to participate in elections, including to assess whether the process is credible, and we encourage full access for representatives of political parties, candidates, the media and nonpartisan citizen observers.
- **Electoral assistance should prioritise ensuring public and stakeholder confidence in elections.** Most importantly, we should encourage the establishment of election management bodies that possess broad trust and work in an inclusive and consultative manner. We should also encourage transparency in all phases of the election process, as well as establishment of fair, expeditious and accessible dispute resolution systems.
- **Elections should be placed at the heart of our conflict prevention work.** Such efforts should involve a coordinated strategy among international and national bodies that brings together good offices, conflict prevention, mediation and election expertise.
- **Sustainability and cost-effectiveness should increasingly be central considerations in the design and provision of electoral assistance.** All assistance should have long-term sustainability and national ownership as its goals and should aim at clearly defined end states.
- **More time and resources should be invested in governance.** Investments in elections will not yield sustainable peace and development without good and effective governance at all levels, including independent and professional judiciaries, full respect for human rights, open and pluralistic media, a robust civil society and a credible and responsive government.