



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Director of ODIHR

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you also, Ambassador Strohal, for your mid-year presentation of ODIHR activities and leadership of the Office over the last six months.

In the area of elections, the United States agrees with you that this year is indeed a challenging one, even for an institution with as much experience and capability as ODIHR.

ODIHR did an excellent job in the election observation missions it has so far conducted this year in Georgia, the Russian Federation, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro.

In particular, ODIHR should be commended for organizing very professional observation missions on short notice for two major national elections in Georgia.

These ODIHR missions and subsequent reports demonstrated once again why ODIHR's election observation methodology enjoys world respect. In a nutshell, that methodology is based on sound, standard criteria that the Office applies in an objective fashion.

We encourage all participating States to embrace ODIHR election observation missions and assessment teams as a means to improve their own election systems. We note the importance of the upcoming elections in Kazakhstan and Ukraine and hope for democratic elections. The ODIHR monitoring missions will play an important role in determining their fairness.

For ODIHR to be effective, participating States must issue not only invitations to observe elections, but also, where necessary, visas for the observers in a timely fashion. We encourage Belarus, for example, to issue an invitation soon to ODIHR so that it may effectively monitor the upcoming parliamentary elections there.

As you mentioned Ambassador Strohal, the United States has already invited ODIHR to observe our presidential and congressional elections on November 2nd. We stand ready to facilitate an ODIHR election observation mission.

The United States commends other participating States organizing elections this fall that have also already issued invitations to ODIHR.

The United States strongly supports the OSCE having a role in the upcoming Afghan elections, as requested by the Afghan authorities and the UN. In this regard, we would like to commend and to thank ODIHR for getting an assessment team off to Kabul so quickly to evaluate what role the OSCE could usefully play. We look forward to seeing the assessment team's report.

Afghanistan is an important country which is at a pivotal point in its history. It is imperative that the world community do all that it can to help Afghanistan build a stable, democratic future. Elections are an important component of this transformation.

OSCE participating States have a direct interest in seeing democracy, peace and stability take root in Afghanistan, and the OSCE has a corresponding responsibility to help Afghanistan, an OSCE partner for cooperation, achieve these goals.

In contrast to its election programs, ODIHR's activities in the area of intolerance are new. The United States appreciates ODIHR's proactive effort to build a tolerance program since the Maastricht Ministerial Council adopted its Decision on Tolerance and Non-discrimination and the Permanent Council adopted its Decision on Combating Anti-Semitism in April.

ODIHR's efforts in the coming years to promote tolerance are central to keeping the OSCE as a whole relevant in a globalizing world.

Participating States must support ODIHR financially and morally, including by responding, whenever they can, to ODIHR requests for information regarding, for example, best practices. We can all do more in this regard.

The United States recalls that in the April PC Decision on Combating Anti-Semitism, participating States made a commitment to "collect and maintain reliable information and statistics about anti-Semitic crimes, and other hate crimes, committed within their territory" and to report such information to ODIHR. We hope participating States are already acting on this commitment, especially since concrete data and statistics form the essential basis for governments and ODIHR to devise intelligent programs and strategies for combating hate crimes.

Just as participating States cannot "pass the buck" to ODIHR, so too must ODIHR not wait on participating States to act.

We fully support ODIHR's efforts to collaborate with NGOs in the collection of information and to coordinate with other international organizations so that it identifies gaps and opportunities for joint action and avoids duplication.

Mr. Chairman, the United States applauds the hard work of Ambassador Strohal and all ODIHR staff since the Director spoke to the Permanent Council in January. Simply put, ODIHR deserves the support of all our Governments as it works with us to achieve our aspirations for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.