

**The Future of
International
Electoral
Observation**

*Lessons Learned and
Recommendations*

CONFERENCE REPORT



Conference organized by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Copenhagen, Denmark, 26-27 OCTOBER 1998

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Foreword

“Elections, while easily manipulated, are the only system that offers any hope of holding leaders accountable. It is progress, moreover, that the manipulators can find themselves outcasts. But international election observers are still too narrowly focused on election day itself.... Well-meaning international observers need independent reports on campaign fraud before they can make judgments about events they do not even witness. That is why the rise of local independent monitoring groups needs to be encouraged. In the last few years, millions of people have voted for the first time, peacefully and joyfully. In too many cases, they have not been freely choosing their leaders. They are doubly victimized when the world persists in calling these rigged events democracy.”

This quote is from an editorial in the New York Times in June 1999. It encapsulates some of the major questions asked and lessons learned about electoral observation. These same issues were highlighted at the International IDEA conference on “The Future of International Electoral Observation” and you will find reflections and recommendations on these and many other issues in this conference report.

The global wave of democratization during this decade has given rise to a growing international co-operation in the field of elections, initially dominated by election observation. We know that elections are crucial events but what is ultimately at stake is democracy. What have we learned and what can we think of improving? How should policies, rules and guidelines be shaped in the different organizations involved and how can we enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness for those who finance these operations?

International IDEA was founded with the specific objective of promoting sustainable democracy. Since the Institute was established in 1995 it has declined to undertake electoral observation. This function is one that many other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are already engaged in and in which they have developed considerable skills. This has enabled International IDEA to provide a different service: facilitating constructive criticism of this activity with a degree of detachment and objectivity.

Towards this objective, the Institute convened a “Roundtable on International Election Observation” in October 1995, with participants from all the major actors involved in the international election observation process. At this session a number of activities to strengthen the election observation process were identified. In September 1996, International IDEA convened another meeting on “The International Observation of the 1996 Russian Presidential Elections: Lessons Learned to Facilitate Field Co-operation”. This meeting identified the need to improve co-operation and recommended steps to enhance these operations. Participants at these early conferences also suggested that further analysis of this practice should be conducted, in



Bengt Sæve-Söderbergh
Secretary-General
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particular on the value of establishing minimum standards by which to analyse and judge elections, and on identifying likely future trends in international election observation.

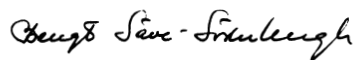
Accordingly, on 26-27 October 1998 International IDEA, with the support of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, convened a conference in Copenhagen, Denmark on "The Future of International Electoral Observation". The objective of the conference was to bring together the major international players involved in the field to reflect, in light of current experience and scholarship, on the future of international election observation. It was also aimed at identifying possible changes required to improve both the cost-effectiveness of observation and its potential for improving the electoral aspects of democratization. Participants were a representative cross-section of major election observation organizations, parliamentarians, policy-makers and experts on the subject, as the attached list indicates (see Annex 2 page 28).

On behalf of International IDEA I want to thank the participants for their constructive comments and the suggestions which you will see reflected in this report. Special thanks go to the government of Denmark for their assistance, particularly to Mr Poul Nielson who at the time of the conference was the Cabinet Minister in charge and who took a strong personal interest in these issues.

At the conference a number of suggestions were made for International IDEA to get involved with a variety of issues and initiatives. Several of these suggestions have become integrated into the Institute's ongoing projects, and others may be taken up in its future work programme.

It is our hope that the recommendations and reflections made at this conference and reflected in this report will be of practical use to those who, in different capacities, are obliged to plan for the next phase of international co-operation for democracy, where elections are but one of the necessary components.

With best regards



Bengt Säre-Söderbergh
Secretary-General
International IDEA

Executive Summary

In the 1990s, election observation has become a huge industry. From Cambodia to South Africa and from Nicaragua to Mozambique, hundreds of organizations have sent observers to monitor the election process. In the last two years, International IDEA has held meetings with various observation organizations in an attempt to improve co-ordination and to share information on lessons learned.

A recent conference on “The Future of International Electoral Observation” in Copenhagen provided an opportunity for the major players in the field to come together in a neutral environment to discuss common issues and concerns. Among the issues discussed were the following:

- *the factors involved in deciding whether or not to send observers to monitor an election;*
- *co-ordination of international observation missions to achieve cost-effectiveness;*
- *clarifying the various election observation models and approaches, based primarily on the timing, duration, context and objectives of the mission;*
- *the co-operative relationship between international and domestic observers;*
- *monitoring the domestic media to ensure a “level playing field”;*
- *developing workable common standards for evaluating the election process;*
- *the consequences of elections that are deemed not free and fair.*

Participants recognized that there now exists an international right to democratic elections and thus the aim of international election observation should be to assist the democratization process within a country. They also recognized the need for

greater co-operation and co-ordination between short- and long-term observers, as well as between domestic and international observers. Furthermore, they stressed the need for international observers to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of domestic electoral observers.

They also felt that international election observers should give serious considerations to the initial decision regarding whether or not to get involved in observation, since this is the point at which they can exert maximum pressure on the host authorities. Finally, when discussing the future of international election observation, there was a consensus among conference participants that the ultimate objective is to help a country consolidate its own democratic processes and capacities so that international election observation becomes redundant.

Conference participants proposed a number of recommendations for follow-up activities including:

- 1. Organizing a conference of leading domestic electoral observation organizations and a selected number of international observation organizations to discuss ways of improving co-operation between international and domestic electoral observers.*
- 2. Providing a regular forum to analyse lessons learned from observer missions, starting with the 1998 election in Cambodia.*
- 3. Examining the role of the media in electoral observation.*
- 4. Developing guidelines on the issue of “free and fair” elections by bringing together various experts in the field.*
- 5. Organizing a meeting of various credit rating organizations to learn ways in which different components of a free and fair election could be evaluated.*

I. Introduction

The international community has used elections for a variety of purposes. In some cases, in association with cease-fire agreements, elections have served as an exit strategy, i.e., “peace-keeping elections”. “Peace-building elections”, on the other hand, have been used to bring warring factions together. Now in the post-cold war era, the interest of the international community is to use elections instrumentally in promoting democracy. However, international experience is replete with examples of undue emphasis being placed on elections while neglecting the development of a democratic culture and institutions. As a result, electoral gains remained short-lived. It must be remembered that a credible election is a *single* important and repeated step on the long road to democracy.

The processes involved in the conduct of democratic elections, including international election observation, are intended to lead to the development of a democratic culture and to transparency in public life. Support for elections has tended to be equated with support for democratization and for a country’s peaceful development. At the conference on “The Future of International Electoral Observation”, participants emphasized the importance of not losing sight of this objective. The conference, held in Copenhagen in October 1998, brought together the majors players in the field of electoral observation to explore how observation could be made more efficient and cost-effective, and how it could better contribute to a country’s democratization process.

Attending the conference were, among others, representatives from the United Nations, the International Foundation for Election Systems, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the National Democratic Institute, the Organization of American States, the United States Agency for International Development, the European Commission and parliamentarians and government officials from several of International IDEA’s member states.

The ultimate objective of international election observation, conference participants agreed, is to render itself superfluous. In other words, it is a transitional activity employed to assist a country on the road to democratic development but, once democratic capacity has taken root in a country, international election observation should no longer be required. International election observers must keep this objective in mind when planning and conducting their work.

Current major issues, which participants thought were particularly important for the electoral observation process in emerging democracies, were discussed extensively, including the following:

- the timing for mounting election observation missions;
- establishing objectives for the observation mission;
- the co-ordination of international observation missions;
- working for maximum cost-effectiveness in election observation;

- the need to develop workable common standards of evaluation;
- the co-operative relationship between international and domestic observers;
- clarifying the various election observation models and approaches, based primarily on the timing, context and objectives of the mission;
- the issue of domestic media monitoring;
- the consequences of elections being deemed *not* free and fair.



II. The Future of International Electoral Observation: Trends and Objectives

Participants unanimously agreed that an international right to democratic elections has emerged under various human rights instruments and through state practice under international law. Participants also agreed on the definition of election observation used by International IDEA in its *Code of Conduct for the Ethical and Professional Observation of Elections*. Election observation is defined as “the purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process and the making of informed judgements on the conduct of such a process on the basis of the information collected by persons who are not inherently authorized to intervene in the process, and whose involvement in mediation or technical assistance activities should not be such as to jeopardize their main observation responsibilities”.

With the emergence of new democracies over the past 15 years, the field of international electoral assistance and observation has become more complex. Today, observing elections in a country is more than sending short-term polling-day observers. Increasingly, international organizations and donor countries are looking at the finer points of electoral observation and aiming to refine their techniques. This means that crucial decisions need to be made by international organizations and governments *before* engaging in observing a country’s elections. Early decisions and carefully defined objectives often will determine the success of the mission. A major element in this is recognizing current trends, which will assist international organizations in understanding the situation in which they are going to engage. Conference participants identified several trends in international electoral observation that are impacting on their work and are shaping their objectives. They include the following:

1. Better co-ordination for cost-effectiveness.
2. Greater exchange of information and sharing of experience for mutual benefit.
3. The need to know the “democratic context” or the level of democratization of a country in order to make an analysis of its electoral performance.
4. The continued need for a mix of both short-term and long-term international election observers, as well as better co-ordination with domestic electoral observers and other civil society structures.
5. The need for observers to clarify and state their own objectives in undertaking electoral observation.
6. The desirability of having multiple assessments by various international election observation missions.
7. The need to develop and prepare common training programmes and briefing materials.
8. The need to develop a common reporting format.
9. The need to assess the long-term human rights situation of a country.
10. The desirability of having adequate lead time for preparation of a mission.

A. TRENDS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Country Awareness and Preparation

Considerable time has lapsed since election observation began in Latin America at the end of the 1980s. A decade has passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Former communist countries, to varying degrees, are still striving to establish democratic political processes in place of their former totalitarian systems. The international community has been working extensively to assist these countries, as well as those in Latin America, Asia and Africa, in their transition to democracy. Today, as before, countries in these regions have differing electoral assistance needs during their transition. Participants felt that it is important to identify a country's current context, its needs and potential, as well as its reasons for holding elections before attempting to observe them. Elections can serve a variety of purposes, and it is important that those planning observation missions should consider this in order to make an accurate assessment. An election may be:

- the first transitional election in a country emerging from an authoritarian regime;
- the first post-independence election after gaining freedom;
- a peace-making election held to resolve conflict in a country;
- a peace-keeping election held to maintain a precarious peace;
- part of a continuing transitional process to stabilize a country;
- held in a possibly backsliding situation to disguise a deteriorating democratic process.

It is important that both long-term and short-term electoral observers are briefed thoroughly on a country's situation and on the objectives of election observation. The criteria for analysing each election will vary, in accordance with the particular goal of the election and the observing government or organization's objective in engaging in observation. In countries in the early stage of establishing a democratic system, international electoral observers may need to examine human rights and the overall

political situation more closely than in countries that have nearly completed such a transition. In the former case, international election observation can play a crucial role in instilling public confidence in the transparency of the electoral process.

International election observers also must know the background to the elections. They must obtain information before they arrive in a country, and once on the ground they must be briefed on important aspects of the current situation. They should also have the opportunity



to assess whether or not there have been any changes in the country's electoral arrangements compared to previous elections, and should seek to determine the progress that has been made towards democratization.

2. Co-ordination

There was unanimous consensus that co-ordination among international organizations sending electoral observers is an important focus for the future, particularly given the diminishing resources now available for international democratization efforts. Although different groups will have divergent strategic interests in observing the same election, this should not hinder a minimum degree of co-ordination. The goal of international observer groups should not be to co-ordinate every single detail of their missions, but to focus upon certain priority areas. These could include:

1. defining a common framework or overall understanding of planned activities in a country;
2. defining common objectives for election observation;
3. developing complementary, not overlapping, activities in a country;
4. sharing information;
5. co-ordinating geographical coverage among long-term and short-term observers as well as with domestic electoral observers;
6. pre- and post-electoral co-ordination;
7. making full use of available local assistance.

Two particular ways in which co-ordination could be better developed were suggested:

1. *Meeting before the beginning of the election observation process:* It was suggested that a "pre-mortem" meeting could be held before the beginning of a country's election cycle to co-ordinate these efforts. This would give various groups an opportunity to plan in-country activities more effectively, based on agreements for a division of labour and geographical areas.
2. *On the ground:* A mechanism could be developed to integrate various international groups as they arrive to conduct observation. In this way, disparate groups would still have an opportunity to join in the co-ordination effort and benefit from it. Co-ordination on the ground also allows for any last minute changes that often take place, such as changes in the number of electoral observers, or in the focus of the observation.

Co-ordination of Observation Tasks

It was agreed that different types of groups, such as intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national parliamentary groups can plan to observe different aspects of an election. It was recognized that co-ordination among different types of observer groups may be more difficult than among

similar groups. All participants agreed however that some basic co-ordination should be attempted, such as a reasonable division of geographic coverage.

Co-ordination of Reports

Participants agreed that the co-ordination of a single final report was not an overarching objective. In the interest of plurality, it is important that all observers have an opportunity to independently assess the situation in a country. When an election is well co-ordinated, different aspects of the process could be highlighted more effectively in multiple reports due to organizational specialization and the coverage of different aspects of the elections. Multiple reports also provide the host country with different perspectives and sources of information by which to judge the electoral activities as well as their own democratic development.

3. Domestic Media

Conference participants emphasized that the international community must focus on the role of the media during an election period. Monitoring the domestic media has become an important aspect of international election observation as, increasingly, media coverage of an election and of the campaigning by various political parties has become a central concern in establishing a “level playing field”. Problematic issues identified include: equal access to the media for all contesting political parties in order to communicate their platform, and the use of the enormous potential of the media for voter and civic education. Creating a level playing field should be the main goal of national media, both state-controlled and private alike.

Long-term election observers could make a better judgment of the media coverage, but this could also be achieved through the short-term use of specialized media observers. Co-ordination again was seen as desirable, as was advance knowledge of pre-election domestic media activity.

4. Consequences

There was a marked concern about the fact that governments, whose elections are deemed to be *not* free and fair or *not* meeting internationally accepted standards, do not face any consequences. If the international community fails to attach positive or negative consequences to the conduct of the elections it observes, then the entire exercise might be regarded as cosmetic. Governments should face some consequences when abuse of the electoral process is apparent.

When considering consequences, the objectives of post-election reporting become particularly important. Host governments should be provided with an in-depth analysis of the election process including an exhaustive enumeration of the problems. In the post-election phase, electoral observers should not only observe the activity in the country after the election, but could also seek to assist the host government in understanding all points made in the observation reports.

The international community needs to focus on the issue of consequences. It was noted that for this to be effective, a general consensus among the international community would be required on the types of consequences to implement.

B. INTERNATIONAL IDEA'S *GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION*

Participants felt that there is a need for clear guidelines on the issue of whether or not to get involved in election observation. The mere fact that a reputable international organization agrees to observe an election may lend unintended support to an exercise that may not be democratic, free and fair, or internationally acceptable. It was emphasized that maximum moral pressure often can be exerted by the international community at the point of deciding whether or not to get involved in election observation, rather than at the later stage of declaring whether or not the election was free and fair. Therefore it was recommended that international election observation, as an instrument aimed at promoting democratization in a country, must be used more judiciously by the international community. In this context, the draft guidelines, published and circulated by International IDEA after extensive consultation and after consideration of the United Nations guidelines on this issue, were appreciated by the participants.

Participants agreed that International IDEA's *Guidelines for Determining Involvement in International Election Observation* provide a starting point for determining objectives and facilitating co-ordination in an international election observation exercise. There should be a basic agreement with the host country before undertaking election observation and this should be preceded by a formal official invitation to observe the elections. There should be general support from the principal political parties and groups to such international election observation. An initial assessment of the likely character of the elections should also be made. Unless certain basic civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms exist in a host country, and unless there is a minimum acceptable credibility of the electoral authority, international election observation should not be undertaken.



It was suggested that International IDEA should incorporate the following two points in its guidelines:

- 1.** Guiding principles and an illustrative list of situations where international election observation could or should be refused by a state or an international/intergovernmental organization.
- 2.** More detailed provisions relating to the access to and control of media during democratic elections.

III. Models Of International Observation and Policy Implications

The *manner* in which an organization chooses to observe an election significantly impacts on the work it does in a host country, as does its final evaluation of the overall country situation. The choice of an election observation model should be based on a detailed analysis of the situation in a country. Additionally, the choice of a model depends on the objectives the election is expected to achieve. Despite the realization that there are different types and methods of observation, it was considered important for organizations to focus on finding a common approach or strategy while in the host country. This was seen as important to avoid the host government receiving confusing signals regarding the conduct of the elections.

A. APPROACH

The freedom and fairness of elections is not determined simply on election day; events leading up to and following an election are equally important. Thus, organizations need to determine the circumstances under which they are willing to observe an election, and make this clear to the host government.

International organizations also need to determine what they consider to be the most important aspects of the election and what are their long-term objectives. While long-term objectives may vary, they should not deviate from focusing on sustaining long-term democracy in a country. With clear objectives in mind, election observation organizations can better influence the “levelness” of the playing field for all political parties in a country, and thereby assist in promoting a legitimate government.

B. TIMING

When and under what circumstances to become involved in election observation is equally important. By getting involved in election observation, international organizations may appear, implicitly, to be accepting the legitimacy of an election, although such acceptance may not be the final conclusion of their observation exercise. It is important to examine whether the political environment in a country meets internationally accepted basic minimum standards and to ask questions such as: what will be the role of this election observation mission in promoting democracy in the host country?; and how can the mission be structured to help promote democracy in the country?

As noted earlier, the period before taking the final decision to send election observers to a country is the time when an organization enjoys the greatest flexibility and “bargaining power” over the potential host. During this time, an organization can point out any deficiencies within a country’s electoral process, and can help the government recognize these deficiencies and rectify them before committing a group of observers. This is the ideal time to put pressure on a government to adopt the internationally accepted rules of a democratic election. At the outset, an observation organization conveys to the host government not only its objectives, but also its requirements for the

upcoming elections. In fact, observing an ill-timed or ill-prepared election can hinder the process of democratization in a country. Therefore, international organizations must make a serious preliminary judgement about the political context and the electoral process before deciding to undertake election observation.

C. ELECTION PERIOD

Conference participants agreed that there are essentially three time periods during which election observation is crucial: pre-election activity, election day activity, and post-election activity. Before the actual polling day there are many events that can influence the outcome of an election. Important amongst these are electoral boundary delimitation, media coverage, general framework of election laws, registration of voters, voter education efforts, ballot design, and the number and location of polling places. The period after the election, it was agreed, should be given more attention in the future. Currently, once the ballots are counted, most international election observers leave the country. Yet in many cases this is the most crucial period of the electoral process. Other events, seen as crucial but currently neglected, include the following:

- counting of votes and aggregation of national counting results;
- the reporting of the results in the media;
- determination of the number of seats in proportional representation electoral systems and their allocation to political parties based on the number of valid votes obtained;
- installation of the new government and members of parliament;
- availability and functioning of and respect for electoral dispute settlement mechanisms;
- post-poll violence.

Currently, there is still a tendency to focus excessive attention on election day, which may result in a distorted and uneven assessment of an election. Refined models for future electoral observation should focus more closely on pre- and post-election periods, where weaknesses in the system often are more clearly revealed.

D. LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM MODELS

Discussion at the conference focused on the advantages and disadvantages of long-term and short-term models of observation. Long-term observation is defined as the process in which observers evaluate the *entire* electoral cycle and provide support for the democratization process. This includes pre-election, election day, and post-election periods. Short-term observation is the process in which electoral observers stay in a country for a relatively shorter time period, typically no more than a week and usually during the final campaigning period or a few days before the polling. They may evaluate the final campaigning, polling and the counting process. There was a

consensus that both long-term and short-term observers were important, but that there are areas of long-term and short-term observation that must be better co-ordinated by international organizations.

Both models of international election observation – short-term and long-term – were discussed, especially in relation to their perceived cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Participants felt that short-term international election observer teams should be comprised of experienced members of parliament, political party representatives, and serving and retired statesmen. In some cases, parliamentarian observers are the most appropriate choice because they are familiar with campaigning environments and political issues surrounding registration of voters and political parties, as well as post-election activities such as installing newly elected officials into office. Long-term international election observers should be professional electoral administrators and officials, media monitoring groups, human rights activists and so on. It was agreed that the number of short-term international election observers should be kept to a minimum, since for example, there is no need for short-term observers to cover each voting station on election day, as long-term international election observers should be present.

The final vote count period was seen as crucial and requiring more attention by short-term observers. It was suggested that short-term observer missions, where there are no long-term electoral observers from the same organization, might assemble a small task force to follow-up the vote counting procedure and the installation of the new parliament/president – a process that could take several days.

Though the optimal combination of short-term and long-term observers depends on the situation in the country holding elections and on the international organization, it is important that both types of electoral observers co-operate with each other, within and across organizations. Long-term electoral observers acquire considerable experience and a more intimate knowledge of the country, which short-term electoral observers cannot gain in the few days that they are present in a country. Therefore, it is important that long-term electoral observers are given an opportunity to share their insights and concerns with short-term observers. The preferred forum for doing this would be the in-country briefing.

Discussions of the 1998 Cambodian elections and its extensive observation by a number of international organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union, produced a lively debate over the quality and international acceptability of these elections. There was a predominant view that the pronouncement of the Cambodian elections as “substantially free and fair” and as “generally reflecting the views of its electorate” by a number of international organizations was myopic, and based too narrowly on the polling period and the period immediately preceding it. Evaluation of the more comprehensive human rights reports in Cambodia and the events of the year

preceding the elections, revealed that an atmosphere that would have enabled voters to exercise their votes fearlessly did not exist.

It was suggested by participants that wherever there has been a controversial international observation of elections, International IDEA should be prepared to convene a meeting of the various international election observation organizations involved to explore the lessons learned and to disseminate these lessons to the widest possible audience. Since International IDEA does not itself undertake election observation, it was seen as being well placed to promote an independent, detached and objective view, and thus eminently suited to undertake this responsibility.

E. OBSERVATION CHECKLISTS

The form that short-term observers must fill out during their electoral observation was also discussed. This form usually includes a checklist and a set of short questions. It was pointed out that despite best efforts in preparing these electoral observation forms, these forms can not reflect the actual situation in different countries. In fact, they seem to confuse the evaluation of an election. It was recommended that checklist forms be tailored to the specific situation of the country holding elections.

F. THE OBSERVERS' STATEMENT

Whether the mission is long-term or short-term, invariably post-election statements are issued. These statements provide information and analysis of the electoral process and an evaluation of the overall electoral situation. When these statements are made, they have a direct impact on other electoral observation groups, political parties, candidates, as well as on the government of the host country. They also have an indirect impact when the media reports on these statements; often, opinions are formed based on these media commentaries. Media coverage may be based on many factors including the quality of the electoral observation statement/report, the timing of the statement, the reputation of the issuing organization, or often the most influential individual making the statement. Though it is important to issue a preliminary statement soon after the election, it is also prudent not to issue a final report until observers can confirm the information in the report. Conflicting statements made by different election observation groups can serve to confuse important issues and obscure mission goals. Some conference participants asserted that short-term observers should not react publicly at all.

It was felt that the final election observation reports should address the following audiences:

- leadership of the opposition political parties;
- government/leaders of the ruling parties;
- elements of civil society and other NGOs.

G. REPORTING

Whether international electoral observers are long- or short-term, it is essential that they provide a comprehensive report to their deploying authorities. On their return to their home country, international electoral observers should report on their mission so that the home government can take proper and informed action regarding the elections and the democratization process in the host country.

H. INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC MODELS

Domestic and international electoral observers are both important actors in an election process. Both groups are observing the process and working to ensure electoral credibility, a legitimate elected government, and the creation of a democratic environment in a country. However, the roles of domestic and international observers are not inter-changeable in an emerging democracy as the groups play different roles.

Through their work, domestic observers help to build confidence for the electoral process within the grass roots community. Domestic electoral observation groups are often recognized within their community as the “watchdogs” of the election process. Domestic observers also can serve as an important asset to international observers, by sharing with them a greater understanding of the social, political, and cultural environment of the country. They could brief international observers on the particularities of a country and the specific elements of concern in the election process. Finally, greater numbers and wider distribution of domestic observers can provide more geographic coverage, complementing the necessarily more limited numbers of international electoral observers. They also have the advantage of being intimately familiar with the political environment, knowing the local languages, understanding the local concerns and fears, and often being available to work on longer-term assignments. International observers, on the other hand, may be seen as being more objective and bringing an independent perspective to the process. They have at times played the role of “ultimate arbiter” in serious confrontations. In countries that are particularly polarized, domestic electoral observers may face serious difficulties in gaining access to certain areas and their impartiality is frequently questioned, while international observers do not normally encounter such difficulties. The complementary relationship between the two groups allows for effective co-operation and mutual benefits.

I. DOMESTIC OBSERVERS

The role of political party workers in the observation of elections was discussed and it was agreed that their observation is the single most important check on the possible fraudulent practices that may be perpetrated on the electoral process. However, there was also a clear consensus that in the interest of cost-effectiveness and long-term capacity-building, international election observers should draw more on the resources

and expertise of domestic election observers. Strengthening the internal capacity of a country could eventually eliminate the need for further international election observation. It was unanimously suggested that International IDEA should convene an international conference of leading national election observation organizations, together with international/inter-governmental election observation organizations, to explore improved ways of co-operation and support between them. It was hoped that from such a meeting there would emerge recommendations on areas of co-operation and co-ordination, the mechanism and modalities of such co-operation, and formal and/or informal structures for improved mutual consultations.

Since the final goal of international election observation is seen as to render itself ultimately superfluous, one excellent way to achieve this is to promote observation by domestic groups. There are however many important issues which must still be resolved before international observation can be eliminated. One issue concerns the composition of domestic observers: should they consist of representatives from all political parties, a few representatives from parties, or none at all; or should they be from independent civil society organizations.

J. TRAINING

One important form of co-operation between international and domestic electoral observers is in training. The domestic electoral observers require more in-depth training on various aspects of conducting the electoral process, especially with regard to the importance of their playing a non-partisan role. International observers often bring with them broad experience in elections and technical skills that domestic observers frequently lack. Providing domestic observers with knowledge on standard democratic election processes will help them gain the credibility they need to function effectively throughout the election process. By working to familiarize domestic observers with international standards and norms, international observers can provide an invaluable resource, which will strengthen the long-term democratic capacity of the host country.

K. EXCHANGES

Another form of capacity-building for domestic monitors is through exchanges. It was suggested that there should be an increased emphasis on sending the domestic observers of one country to observe and learn from the elections of other well-established and successful transitional democracies. This could prove to be beneficial to domestic observer groups who often feel overwhelmed by what they see as their own country's unique election problems. Experiencing concrete examples of different electoral practices can enrich their understanding of elections and generate ideas on how to develop their own processes. It can also provide access to an invaluable network that can assist them in their future work.

IV. Evaluation of the Cost-Effectiveness of International Electoral Observation

The effective utilization of resources to support elections and democratization is a major concern of international donors as well as of national organizations conducting electoral observation. Increasingly, donor organizations are examining the cost-effectiveness of election observation, as funding continues to dwindle. But before cost-effectiveness can be measured, it needs to be clearly defined.

The direct expenses involved in an electoral observation mission can be calculated relatively easily. Effectiveness, however, is more difficult to measure. It involves a degree of subjectivity and includes both an “inspection” function as well as an “efficiency” function. Inspection involves measuring the performance of the election observation mission, by considering both the flaws and the achievements of the mission. Cost-efficiency suggests that examining the achievements of the mission against the amount of time and money spent may help in determining whether it was done in the best possible manner. Clearly, greater and more accurate information about an observation mission will assist in formulating a more convincing assessment of its efficiency.

A. DONOR PERSPECTIVE

International donors support democratization in three main ways:

- support for positive action;
- support for legal frameworks enabling positive action;
- support for the development of observation standards and methodology.

Recently, the trend has been to increase funds for domestic observation and other actions specifically designed to develop self-sustaining capacities within a given country, and to support international observers only as a complement to domestic observers. This is seen to be a less expensive and more cost-effective option as well as likely to encourage domestic democratic processes. This trend is due also partly to the fact that funds for international election observation missions are being scrutinized more closely. Donors are having to decide between funding election observation missions or funding other longer-term projects in a given country. Election observation missions have always been and are becoming more expensive because of the tendency to focus not only on election day, but on the entire process. Although this is a positive development, the limited available resources impact on its effectiveness. Donors are forced, therefore, to make decisions based increasingly on their estimation of the cost-effectiveness of a proposed democracy support project.

Participants suggested that one way in which efficiency and cost-effectiveness could be enhanced is by using the final reports of observer missions as a tool to encourage host government efficiency and credibility in its electoral processes. It was noted that there is increasing attention being paid to these published reports. Even international financial institutions now are taking interest in these reports and referring to them as possible indicators of a country’s stability, and thus relevant in their decisions on

funding development projects in countries. In order to make these reports as effective as possible, observation organizations need to keep in mind the diversity of the election situation in a country, the report's audience, and the need for accurate and convincing analyses. This could add an entirely new constituency to those concerned with electoral democracy, helping not only with future enforcement but also possibly with future funding. The international community is beginning to realize the importance of democratic development and its effect on a host of other inter-related sectors. In the future, could international election observation organizations use this awareness as a means of encouraging more consistent and credible electoral processes?

In addition, it was suggested that there should be more focus on the actual design of election observation missions. Design should take into account the key weak points in the electoral process as well as a mission's capability to cover the entire election process. Thorough examination before entering the country is vital in identifying the systemic flaws in the process. In this way, mission resources could be deployed more effectively based on specific needs and target areas. Donors, increasingly concerned with possible wasteful duplication by international electoral organization missions, emphasized the need to avoid duplication and increase co-operation and co-ordination.

B. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION PERSPECTIVE

Like donors, international organizations find it difficult to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of an election observation mission. They agree that the assessment of a mission's cost-effectiveness is often inaccurate because it is evaluated against ideal objectives and standards. To meet the objectives set out for it, a long-term mission should be comprehensive, integrated, large-scale, and prepared for a long-term presence (at least four months) in a country. On the other hand, short-term election observation missions should observe the electoral process in a country during the pre-election period, on election day, and briefly after elections. Co-ordination among observer groups should take place throughout the process, and joint group operations, shared information, and dispersed operations throughout the country should be increased. These standards are seen as ideal; in reality, missions do not fulfil these expectations due to time constraints and resource limitations.

Issues affecting election observation missions include the following: long-term observation missions generally do not arrive in a country until about two months before the election, due to lack of funding or logistical reasons. Short-term observers co-ordinate only perfunctorily with other groups. This tendency is often coupled with pressure to tailor the findings of their missions to the demands of external influences.

There is often pressure from other organizations to issue a joint statement after the elections. Just as different local groups have different goals for observing the election, so international election observation missions often have differing goals. These might include:

- legitimization of the political process adopted and of the electoral processes involved;
- confidence-building measures;
- deterrence of manipulation and intimidation;
- improvement and change of the political system;
- democracy and human rights observance;
- training of observers or parliamentarians as resource persons for other election observation missions.

These varied goals and pressures will often lead to the adoption of different methods of election observation. For example, in order to build confidence in the electoral process, international observers often simply need to be present. Instead of focusing intensively upon information gathering, they may simply be interested in “showing the flag” as a deterrent to intimidation, fraud and as a confidence-building measure. For confidence-building, geographic coverage and long-term observation is essential; short-term observers have a limited impact on confidence-building since they usually arrive too late on the electoral scene.

The critical period for achieving some of the above goals differs, depending on the goal and the country situation. Efforts to improve and reform the system, for example, will need to be done by the international election observation organizations either before or latest at the point of entry. However, focus upon democracy and human rights building is something that is longer term than the election process. This will change the mission’s strategy and make comparative cost-effectiveness even more difficult to evaluate.

Suggestions were made by some international organizations that to achieve the desired goals, there should be more focus by organizations, and by donors in general, on the entire democratization *process* and not only on the *event* – the election. The focus of the evaluation exercise ought to be on “*democracy assessments*” rather than on “*election assessments*”. Elections provide an excellent opportunity to examine simultaneously a number of elements, but a thorough understanding of the democratization process requires a deeper assessment. As more organizations turn in this direction, costs rise and effectiveness becomes even more difficult to measure.

According to some conference participants, in order to examine cost-effectiveness of elections it is essential to deconstruct the electoral process and to concentrate on each element individually. This process involves specifying the goals of the mission and the actions to be taken. Election observation missions will be either expensive or inefficient if the goals of the mission are not clearly defined and if a cost analysis is not done before the process begins. For example, if the goal is to develop a legal framework, then one or two legal experts should be sent to a country to analyse the electoral and

other relevant laws and to follow their implementation. If the goal is strictly to examine the voting procedure then the most cost-effective method to achieve this must be sought. It was suggested that it is generally more efficient to encourage static observation by national observers than mobile observation by international observers. The presence of a small number of international observers can complement the domestic electoral observers by reinforcing the domestic observer's messages. For the period of the vote count it is also more cost-effective to use domestic observers primarily because they understand the local language and can generally stay longer in the country.

C. INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

International non-governmental organizations had a slightly different perspective on cost-effectiveness than treaty-based intergovernmental organizations. International NGOs can undertake two areas of work: the first is to organize observation missions and the second is to assist in the election process itself. When performing the latter, NGOs cannot simultaneously take part in election observation.

When international NGOs examine the cost-effectiveness of a project, they tend to separate cost-effectiveness from efficiency. When examining effectiveness, international NGOs examine whether and to what extent the observation missions were served by the services provided. There are high costs associated with transparency related issues, which are critical for confidence in the electoral process and acceptance of its results. Missions by international NGOs often are considered cost-efficient because of the value that the NGO perspective brings to the process, but the missions may not be considered "effective".

V. *Evaluation of Free and Fair Elections and the Need for Basic Minimum Standards*

Focusing on an article entitled “What Makes Elections Free and Fair?” by Professors Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svensson, participants discussed the need to formulate basic minimum standards for observing elections. Participants agreed that the current method of analysing elections, which focuses on the terms “free” and “fair”, does not take into account the context within which an election takes place, and thus does not offer a complete and clear evaluation of an election.

The controversy surrounding the use of the term “free and fair” or the term “basic minimum standard” was discussed. It was agreed that a blanket use of these terms is neither realistic nor advisable in today’s electoral environment. If all countries were at the same level of democratic development then perhaps these terms could be applied. But as the political situation in each country varies and countries are at different stages of democratic evolution, no objective criteria can be applied. Each country needs to be assessed with regard to its own specific situation and level of democratization. A country emerging from a prolonged civil war or from authoritarian/military rule might have had acceptable elections, which may be considered faulty due to inexperienced election administration officials or logistical failure, but this may not be acceptable in a country with a relatively mature democracy in place.

There was no final agreement on how minimum basic standards (or internationally accepted standards) for free and fair elections could be formulated or to what extent they should apply in different contexts. But participants agreed that certain minimum criteria must be applied.

During the conference, four working groups were constituted to discuss and formulate recommendations regarding possible criteria for assessing various electoral components that could be used in pre-election, during-election, and post-election periods. The checklist that Professors Elklit and Svensson created for assessing an election was discussed (see Annex 1). The checklist includes periods before, during, and after the elections and divides various components of the electoral process into the categories “free” and “fair”.

Various elements under the “free” aspect include rights such as freedom of speech, movement and assembly, and under “fair” are issues such as due process. The former covers *substantive rights* whereas the later specifies the *even-handed application* of those rights. Both are important for a democratic election but if one has to choose between the “free” and “fair” aspects then the free aspects were regarded as being relatively more important. A “free” election presumes the very existence of the political rights, whereas a “fair” election merely requires a fair application of these rights. Though most participants found this list to be a satisfactory starting point for analysis, participants suggested several specific additions, including:

1. citizens must be afforded access to a reasonable complaint resolution mechanism;
2. a legal framework for elections should exist and be accepted;



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3. voters should have reasonable access to polling stations and polling stations should be located in accessible locations;
4. political parties should be afforded equal access to public as well as *private* media.

Not all of these additional factors were seen as applicable to every election. Participants agreed that it would be useful to have a comprehensive list from which to determine what issues were relevant, and to review and update this list for future guidance.

A. STANDARDS

Participants made several suggestions on general ways to improve the standards for the evaluation of elections:

1. It is important to specify the purpose of an election before attempting to observe it. International IDEA's *Code of Conduct for the Ethical and Professional Observation of Elections* also states that the objectives of the election should be made clear before the elections: "It is essential that the public know what the observers were trying to achieve in order to evaluate the results of the observation process on its merits, and to determine whether the process was effective."
2. It would be useful to develop both absolute and relative standards. Certain standards are quantifiable and are regarded as *absolute*, such as access to the media, accuracy of registration lists, and so on. On the other hand, relative standards are less quantifiable and are more political in nature. It is helpful to keep in mind which standards are measurable and which are not.
3. There should be a way to assess the magnitude of the deficiencies or flaws in an election. One must ask whether the deficiencies strike at the essence of a legitimate electoral process, such as the denial of a multi-party election, or whether they nevertheless allow the general will of the electorate to be reflected.
4. Recognizing the changes that have occurred in recent years, some participants felt that account should be taken of other types of violations, such as human rights, when analyzing an election. The human rights monitors have different training and offer different perspectives on the process, which could help election monitors make a more informed judgement.
5. Some participants called for more work to be done on the assessment of elections. Many participants were not satisfied with the current practice of evaluating an election, finding it too limited for the tasks it should serve. There was no agreement however on either a new method of grading nor on whether one need exist at all. International IDEA was asked to explore with relevant organizations ways to grade various components of democratic election for the possibility of rating elections.

B. ELECTION PERIODS

The following are issues specifically dealing with the three periods in the election process. (although there was agreement that various aspects of an election observation cannot be divided simply into three parts). Depending upon the context of the elections, these time periods were seen as having differing “weight” in the evaluation.

1. Pre-Election Period

In the pre-election period, participants agreed that a checklist or certain pre-set criteria was useful. Many participants pointed out that it was not necessary to use formal terms to describe the period. With the changing nature of elections around the world, transferring the terms “*free and fair elections*” to different countries at varying levels of democratization confuses the exact meaning which the term intended to convey. Each country’s specific situation and the level of democratization must be kept in mind.

2. Polling Day

The judgement of elections may be seen from two perspectives. First is the judgement of actual election day events. The second is a judgement of the overall progress of the election based on the general context of democratization in a country. Conference participants agreed that keeping in mind a country’s political context was extremely important when evaluating an election. They pointed out that distinguishing these two types of judgements helped clarify the meaning of the events.

3. Post-Election Period

After election day, there are several important dimensions to be observed with respect to the fair implementation of the election results, such as participation in the newly elected assemblies. Also, it is important that there be a viable and functioning complaint resolution mechanism which can work toward the timely resolution of complaints. Analysis of these elements should be included in the final electoral observation report.

The process of election observation was de-constructed into its component parts and it was agreed that, in the future, each task should be entrusted to more professional bodies (see table below). But even before this professionalization of election observation takes place it was emphasized that current short-term and long-term observers should be given extensive professional training on various aspects of the electoral process.

Task	Professional Body to Perform Task
Boundary Delimitation	<i>Team of experts including jurists, census experts and geographers</i>
Election Commissions	<i>Electoral administrators</i>
Electoral Law	<i>Lawyers and academicians</i>
Electoral Campaign human rights activists	<i>Media commissioners or specialists and</i>
Campaign Finance	<i>Campaign finance experts</i>
Polling	<i>Electoral administrators, politicians</i>
Counting	<i>Electoral administrators, statisticians</i>
Election Disputes	<i>Electoral judges and lawyers</i>

VI. Challenges and Prospects for the Future

Since International IDEA held its initial “Roundtable on International Electoral Observation” in 1995, many new and increasingly complex issues have surfaced in the field of election observation. Some of these issues include whether or not to develop a common framework on which to conduct electoral observation, and what type of co-ordination, division of labour and funding allocation arrangements to implement in the future. These questions help to highlight the challenges that the international community needs to address and the scope of its work in this field.

For example, globalization and a rapidly changing world in which information is readily, but selectively, available has resulted in increased disenfranchisement of some segments of society. Appropriate international assistance could help to create an environment in which these groups can be reintegrated into political, and especially electoral, processes.

In addition, with the increased fragmentation of societies into different ethnic groups there is a comparable increase in the risk that nationalism now poses – another area in which the international community must respond appropriately. Today, there is a greater chance that an election, although technically perfect, may lead to more problems within the political process of a country. Resolving such problems is difficult, in part, because old tools are being used to resolve new problems. However, the international community must focus on finding satisfactory means by which to resolve such issues.

The international community must also deal with the phenomenon of declining funds. This necessitates more integrated planning among and between groups, and the formulation of common standards of practice and judgement. Moving towards a more comprehensive assessment of the democratization process would prove useful.

Helping to increase the capacity of domestic election observation capacity is one of the most important current needs. Observing elections is a skill that needs to be developed and refined. The capacity to do this comprehensively will necessarily be a slow process. By providing continuity in the process, through training of workers and professionalization of the workforce, the international community can assist countries in consolidating their democratic processes. The ultimate goal is that each country should run and monitor its own elections and co-operate with other countries to learn ways of refining their own elections.

Considerable amounts of money and resources are invested in the conduct and observation of elections; in quite a few cases, this comes from the international donor community. This investment goes into a number of different operations such as electoral administration, election observation, training, voter education, recruitment of polling officials and so on. At present no authoritative assessment seems to have been made regarding comparative expenditure on various aspects of the conduct and observation of elections. It was suggested that an audit should be undertaken to find

comparative costs of each major element of an election. This would indicate to international donors and the governments in which areas to invest resources more effectively, if more resources are needed for certain operations, or whether costs could be curtailed in certain areas, for example, by more effectively co-ordinating with the domestic election observers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the objective of the conference was not to prescribe specific follow-up activities, the following general recommendations were identified, based on a consensus emerging from the discussions:

1. International election observers should give serious consideration to the initial decision of whether or not to get involved in observation, since this is the point at which they can exert the maximum pressure on the inviting authorities.
2. International IDEA's draft *Guidelines for Determining Involvement in International Election Observation* should be strengthened by including the following:
 - examples of situations in which invitation to observe should be declined; and
 - additional provisions relating the possibility of observation to the role of the media in the election.
3. International IDEA should be prepared to convene meetings of interested international organizations or states to explore and disseminate lessons learned, especially from electoral observations that have been controversial.
4. Ideally, short-term observation missions should consist of experienced parliamentarians and statesmen, while long-term missions should consist primarily of professional electoral administrators, media specialists, and experienced human rights monitors.
5. Whenever possible, preference should be given to long-term electoral observers.
6. Observer mission reports should address political party leaders both in government and in the opposition as well as concerned civil society organizations and NGOs.
7. Specific attention should be paid by observer missions to the reports and findings of human rights groups, particularly for assessing the suitability of the political context of the intended election.
8. International election observers should draw increasingly upon the knowledge and expertise of domestic electoral observers.
9. International IDEA should convene a meeting of leading domestic observation organizations, to explore ways to improve co-operation between domestic observers and international observer missions.
10. International IDEA should examine the problem of "grading" the essential elements of a credible election in the style of the World Bank's grading of economies, and convene a workshop on the possibility of refining and implementing such a process.
11. Organizations and states concerned with electoral democracy should seek a method of assessing the cost-effectiveness, in material and in human resources, of their activities in relation to the major elements of the electoral process.
12. An examination should be undertaken of the consequences of diverting a small proportion of national defence budgets to democratizing activities, including the electoral process, as well as an assessment on the inter-relationship of elections, democracy and peace.

ANNEX 1: CHECKLIST FOR ELECTION ASSESSMENT

Explanatory Note

The following list, prepared by Professors Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svenson, seeks to describe and classify, under the headings “Free” and “Fair”, the minimum features, rights and procedural arrangements expected to be in place during the three critical phases of a credible democratic election process: Pre Polling Day, On Polling Day and Post Polling Day.

Dimension



Time Period	“Free”	“Fair”
Before polling day	■ Freedom of movement ■ Freedom of speech (for candidates, the media, voters, and others) ■ Freedom of assembly ■ Freedom of association ■ Freedom from fear in connection with the election and the electoral campaign ■ Absence of impediments to standing for election (for both political parties and independent candidates) ■ Equal and universal suffrage	■ A transparent electoral process ■ An election act and an electoral system that grant no special privileges to any political party or social group ■ Absence of impediments to inclusion in the electoral register ■ Establishment of an independent and impartial election commission ■ Impartial treatment of candidates by the police, the army, and the courts of law ■ Equal opportunities for political parties and independent candidates to stand for election ■ Impartial voter-education programs ■ An orderly election campaign (observance of a code of conduct) ■ Equal access to publicly-controlled media ■ Impartial allotment of public funds to political parties (if relevant) ■ No misuse of government facilities for campaign purposes

**Annex 1:
Checklist for Election Assessment**

Time Period	“Free”	“Fair”
On polling day	■ Opportunity to participate in the election	■ Access to all polling stations for representatives of the political parties, accredited local and international election observers, and the media ■ Secrecy of the ballot ■ Absence of intimidation of voters ■ Effective design of ballot papers ■ Impartial assistance to voters (if necessary) ■ Proper counting procedures ■ Proper treatment of void ballot papers ■ Proper precautionary measures when transporting election materials ■ Impartial protection of polling stations
After polling day	■ Legal possibilities of complaint	■ Official and expeditious announcement of election results ■ Impartial treatment of any election ■ complaints ■ Impartial reports on the election ■ results by the media ■ Acceptance of the election results by everyone involved

Adapted from Professors Elklit and Svensson’s article “What makes elections free and fair?” which appeared in *Journal of Democracy*.

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organization
Abdool Rahman, Mohammad	<i>Mauritius Electoral Commission</i>
Åberg, Mats	<i>Parliament of Sweden</i>
Adhin, Kanta	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands</i>
Aula, Maria Kaisa	<i>Parliament of Finland</i>
Austin, Reg	<i>International IDEA</i>
Belleau, Claude	<i>United Nations Volunteers</i>
Boneo, Horacio	<i>UN – Department of Economic and Social Affairs</i>
Brylle, Torben	<i>Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
Capaccio, Daniela	<i>International IDEA</i>
Christen, Viktor	<i>Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland</i>
Concepcion, Jose	<i>NAMFREL</i>
Dhoore, Luc	<i>AWEPA</i>
Drijbooms, Dirk	<i>International IDEA</i>
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Francois, Hugo	<i>Ministry of Home Affairs, South Africa</i>
Gillette, Terrence	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat</i>
Gjellerod, Henning	<i>Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly</i>
Halsteen, Marie-Louise	<i>Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
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Hartland, John	<i>Council of Europe</i>
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Jokhadze, Tea	<i>International IDEA</i>
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Kingsley, Jean-Pierre	<i>Elections Canada</i>
Kinnock, Glenys	<i>European Parliament</i>
Koch, Inger	<i>Parliament of Sweden</i>
Kombo-Yaya, Dieudonne	<i>Organization of African Unity</i>

**Annex 2:
List of Participants**

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Lekgoro, Mpetjane Kgaogelo	<i>Parliament of South Africa</i>
Madsen, Jens Hald	<i>Parliament of Denmark</i>
Mahoux, Philippe	<i>Parliament of Belgium</i>
Mair, Stefan	<i>Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik</i>
Maley, Michael	<i>Australian Electoral Commission</i>
Meadows, Mervyn	<i>Canadian Embassy in Denmark</i>
Merloe, Patrick	<i>NDI for International Affairs</i>
Milliken, Peter	<i>Parliament of Canada</i>
Nielson, Poul	<i>Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
Noonan, Eamonn	<i>European Parliament</i>
Nordlund, Per	<i>Swedish International Development Agency</i>
Oliver, Robert Spencer	<i>Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe</i>
Olsen, Erling	<i>Parliament of Denmark</i>
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Worsøe, Lars-Henrik	<i>Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
Zijlstra, Martin	<i>Parliament of the Netherlands</i>
Zovatto, Daniel	<i>International IDEA</i>

ANNEX 3: ABOUT INTERNATIONAL IDEA

About International IDEA

Objectives

Created in 1995 by 14 countries, International IDEA promotes and advances sustainable democracy and improves and consolidates electoral processes world-wide. It provides a forum for discussion and action among individuals and organizations involved in democracy promotion. Global in ownership and scope, independent of specific national interests, and flexible and quick in its responses, International IDEA is the only international organization with this unique mandate.

Members

Membership in International IDEA is open to governments, inter-governmental and international non-governmental organizations. In contrast to many other international organizations, all members in IDEA have equal standing. There are currently 17 member-states: Australia, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, India, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In addition, associate membership is open to international non-governmental organizations. There are currently five associate members: International Federation of Journalists, International Press Institute, Parliamentarians for Global Action, the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights and Transparency International.

International IDEA also has formal agreements and co-operates closely with Switzerland, International Commission of Jurists, Inter-Parliamentary Union, the United Nations development Programme, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Action

International IDEA:

- Promotes and advances sustainable democracy world-wide.
- Helps countries build capacity to develop democratic institutions.
- Provides a meeting-place for and facilitates dialogue between democracy practitioners around the world.
- Increases knowledge about elections and election observation.
- Promotes transparency, accountability, professionalism, and efficiency in elections in the context of democratic development.
- Develops and promotes norms, rules and guidelines that apply to multi-party pluralism and democratic processes.

Secretariat

The Secretary-General is Bengt-Säve Söderbergh. The Institute, based in Strömsborg, Stockholm, has 50 staff members from over 20 countries.

Board of Directors

Sir Shridath Ramphal (Chairman), former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and Co-Chairman of the Commission on Global Governance.

Ambassador Thorvald Stoltenberg (Vice-Chairman), Ambassador of Norway to Denmark, former Foreign Minister and Minister of Defense of Norway, and UN Special Representative in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr Ignacio Astarloa Huarte-Mendicoa, Professor of Constitutional Law, former Secretary-General of Chamber of Deputies and Secretary of the Central Election Commission.

Dr Adama Dieng, Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists.

Ms Kuniko Inoguchi, Professor at the Faculty of Law, Sophia University, Tokyo.

Ms Mónica Jiménez de Barros, Executive Director of PARTICIPA and member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Chile.

Mr Manmohan Malhoutra, former Assistant Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and adviser to the former Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi.

Ms Maureen O'Neil, President of the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

Dr Erling Olsen, former Speaker of Danish Parliament and Economics Professor at the University of Roskilde, Denmark.

Lord Steel of Aikwood, member of the House of Lords, former President of Liberal International.

Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy in Burma and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

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