

Opening Remarks by
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at the
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“Every Vote Counts”

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PRESENTATION

- Dear Friends and Colleagues. I am really delighted to take part, on behalf of Elections Canada, in this unique and enriching event.
- To begin, I wish to thank IFES for hosting the fourth Global Electoral Organization Conference. I truly recognize and appreciate all the work and effort required in gathering such an impressive group of participants from around the world.
- Since the first GEO Conference in Ottawa in April 1999 [April 11–14, 1999], Elections Canada has been an active partner in these events. It continues to be a unique opportunity to reflect collectively on finding solutions to the many complex challenges in the area of electoral governance.
- The broader community of experts involved in electoral organisations such as the professionals of electoral management bodies, international electoral systems experts, academics, members of the diplomatic community, and the international organisations who are gathered here today, all play a necessary part in the functioning of our electoral democratic institutions.
- Over the next three days, we will again have an opportunity to expand our collaboration, find new ways to enhance the management of electoral processes and, above all, work at maintaining the electors' trust in their democratic institutions.
- The agenda for this year's meeting is rich and varied. My colleagues from Elections Canada and I are pleased to have the opportunity to participate in three of the panels in areas where considerable efforts have been devoted by our organisation in the last few years.
- The resolution of electoral disputes and the tracking of political money are both topics which have resulted in legislative and administrative reform in Canada. New tools and new approaches to the resolution of electoral disputes were implemented. The public's need to know about money in politics has resulted in significant legislative change to establish a more transparent and complete tracking of political money in elections.
- On the *Effective Electoral Assistance* panel, we intend to share some of the main recommendations of the final reports of the international missions in Irak and Haiti in which many of our GEO network colleagues took part.
- Other topics on the program such as *Voter Participation*, *Electoral Technology* and *New Media Elections* are also matters in which we have a particular interest.

- Voter participation has been a major concern for us. The legitimacy of the results depends on participation. As it has been the case in most democracies, the turnout in Canadian elections has fallen sharply in the last 20 years.
- Turnout was estimated at 75% for the 1988 federal election and, after declining in each subsequent election, hit a record low of 61% in the 2004 election, with a slight increase to 64.7% in 2006.
- Studies tell us this decline is highly concentrated among the youngest segment of the electorate.
- Elections Canada has adopted a proactive multi-pronged strategy to counter that trend. Preliminary analysis suggests that it has had some success. For example, for the 2006 federal election, the turnout among youth rose slightly from the previous election by 4%.
- Electoral technology is also of great interest to us. The government of Canada has recently introduced legislation that calls for the selection of Senators using a Single Transferable Vote (STV) mechanism.
- It will be the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer to develop an electronic method for counting and tabulating the results.
- This will be a major change to the federal electoral process in Canada which, until now, has been able to rely on manual counting of votes under a First Past the Post electoral system.
- Another area where technology is having an impact is the role of media in elections. Since the advent of the Internet, electoral management bodies have needed to be aware of the ways parties and candidates can use electronic media, including their by-products such as blogs.
- We know, in Canada, that parties and candidates increasingly use the Internet for electoral advertising. This raises the question of whether the time has come to assess the need for regulating its use.
- These are just some of the questions we look forward to discussing with you over the next three days.
- It will certainly enable our electoral management body to perfect some of the skills that Tom Axworthy, a well-known Liberal Party strategist, recently summarized in describing the role of Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. To paraphrase him: First, you have to be a very skilled administrator dealing with a

huge field force. Secondly, you need great diplomatic skills. You've got to deal with parties in the midst of elections, and there is nothing wilder than a campaign manager who thinks that things are going against him. People in elections are almost totally irrational, and electoral administrators have to remain cool and calm but yet forceful and fair in dealing with people who are almost desperate in the face of political battle. You need diplomacy and real inner strength. Lastly, it is also good to have a little bit of idealism as well. After all elections are the final test of self-governing men and women.

- I wish us all a very good conference!