



CENTER for DEMOCRACY & ELECTION MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS ★ AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

CDEM Hosts Regional Conference for Gulf Election Officials in Kuwait, Prepares for Follow-on Study Tour to India

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 12, 2009). In response to a need identified by election officials and election partners in the Gulf region, American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management (CDEM) convened a conference in Kuwait on February 15 and 16, 2009, to explore establishment of a regional association of Gulf election officials.

Funded by the U.S. Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the conference provided an opportunity for wide-ranging discussions on regional electoral cooperation that could serve as a platform for improved professional development, networking, data sharing and promotion of electoral best practices and procedures.

The conference included election officials from Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Speakers and facilitators were provided by CDEM, and the Asian Association of Election Administrators (AAEA), the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO).. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, the National Democratic Institute, the Kuwait Graduate Society and other interested civil society groups were invited as observers.

Conference participants broadly accepted the usefulness of forming a Gulf region election association; discussion thus focused on *how* such an association would best be established, organized, funded and empowered. Although no final decision was taken whether the association should be established as a non-governmental organization or as an inter-governmental association under GCC auspices, all participants agreed that some measure of independence from government is necessary.

Next steps following from the conference are:

- Participants agreed to discuss formation of a regional election association with their parent governments, and agreed as well to coordinate with CDEM in drafting a concept paper for the association, to seek input from two Gulf states that did not send representatives to the conference (the United Arab Emirates and Oman), and to submit the concept paper to the GCC.
- MEPI has agreed to fund a study tour for conference participants to an area nation holding national elections in the coming months. Because most upcoming elections in the Middle East and North Africa region will take place too soon during 2009 to organize logistics, CDEM has begun preliminary work to coordinate a week-long election study tour to India during that nation's upcoming national elections which will span a period of several weeks during April-May 2009.

- Conference participants have been invited to two global/regional election association events planned for later in the year – the ACEEEO annual conference in September 2009 in Yerevan, Armenia, and the Annual Conference of Global Election Organizations, tentatively scheduled for September 2009 in Mauritius. CDEM will facilitate participation.

CDEM was established in 2002 and has been a part of the School of Public Affairs at American University since January 2008. CDEM works to pave the way for and strengthen democracy through improved electoral performance, employing three inter-related activities: training and education, applied research and public engagement. CDEM has conducted election management training since 2006 and election observation since 2004. It also organized the Commission on Federal Election Reform, co-chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James A. Baker III, and directed by Dr. Robert A. Pastor, Co-Director of CDEM. For more information about CDEM and the recent Kuwait conference, please visit www.american.edu/cdem

MEPI is at the forefront of the United States' efforts to advance democratic reform and promote vibrant, prosperous societies in the Middle East and North Africa. An integral instrument of U.S. foreign policy, MEPI provides coordinated, tangible support and public commitment to indigenous efforts in the spheres of women's empowerment, educational advancement, economic development and political participation. Through timely, responsive and innovative approaches, MEPI programs provide critical assistance to local reformers as they lay the necessary institutional and legal foundations for sustainable political, economic and human growth. For more information about MEPI, please visit mepi.state.gov.