



**Macedonia 2011 Elections
Code of Conduct Signing Ceremony
May 12, 2011**

Remarks by Chris Henshaw, NDI Macedonia Director

President of the Assembly, President of the State Election Commission, Presidents of Political Parties, Excellencies, Representatives of Diplomatic and Consular Missions, NGOs, and the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Colleagues.

On behalf of the National Democratic Institute, Citizen's Association MOST, the Institute for Parliamentary Democracy, the Macedonian Women's Lobby, and Metamorphosis, welcome and thank you for being here today in the Club of MPs - crowded yes, but fitting setting for this very important event - as we return to the venue for the first signing ceremony in 2006.

At the outset I would also like to thank our donor the United States Agency for International Development. Without USAID's support this event and the campaign to follow would not have been possible. Thank You.

This will be the eighth consecutive election in the Republic of Macedonia that has taken place under the auspices of a code of conduct for free and fair elections. Personally I will, in the seven years I have had the privilege of being country director of NDI, have seen all but the first of these elections - the 2002 parliamentary elections.

Each of these elections has left its mark - obviously they have left a mark in terms of winners and losers yes - but many might argue that the more important mark they will have left is the one concerning the conduct of the elections.

Let's remind ourselves briefly of the mark that has been left in what is, after all, the historical record for these elections - the official ODHIR Reports. And I will, as our focus is the future, confine my comments to the last three ODHIR election reports.

In 2006 ODHIR commented: *"While the..... elections largely met OSCE commitments for democratic elections, instances of violence and intimidation during the first half of the campaign, and a number of cases of serious irregularities on election day, cast a shadow over an otherwise generally well-administered election."*

In 2008: *"In most of the country the elections were procedurally well administered. However, expectations of progress were not realized because of a failure..... to prevent violent acts..... including limited and selective enforcement of laws. Organized efforts to violently disrupt the process early on Election Day made it impossible for voters in many locations to freely express their will."*

And lastly in 2009: *“the elections were well administered. Election Day was peaceful and the voting process was generally well managed, although there were procedural irregularities and the counting process was assessed less positively. Nonetheless, the situation was tense in many municipalities with close mayoral races.”*

So what have we got, administration generally good, and improvements in conduct in 2009, but, if we are to be honest, and surely there is no point in being anything other than honest on an occasion such as this, it is not as good a mark as should be left by a country that is knocking on the door of 21st Century Euro-Atlantic institutions.

But that’s the past and today is not one where we dwell on the negative. This is a positive event and all of us are here because we have chosen to make a contribution, to make our own mark, on the conduct of these upcoming elections. The code you are about to sign is very much recognized as a good practice document. It is also a partnership document that involves all of us in this room. But undoubtedly the most important mark will be made by you the presidents of political parties and the signatories to this document.

By making your mark, your signature, on this code of conduct for free and fair elections, you are, in the words of the code, accepting “primary responsibility for seeing that the code is fully applied”.

Your signature makes clear, again in the words of the code:

- that acts of violence and intimidation are totally unacceptable
- that there must be respect for the campaign and campaign materials of opponents
- that there must be an end to vote buying or linking of jobs to votes
- that the participation of women and minorities in all aspects of the election process must be valued
- that there must be an end to proxy, family and group voting
- that the universal principal of one-person-one-vote is a democratic right and cannot be violated

Presidents of political parties, you have in the folder in front of you two copies of the “Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections” – a copy for the historical record and a copy for you to take with you. Your support now in making your mark, your commitment, to free and fair elections by signing these copies of the code of conduct will be appreciated.

SIGNING OF CODES

Thank you.

In the three elections I referenced earlier, by quoting the ODHIR reports, NDI and its partners ran a media campaign in support of the code of conduct for free and fair elections.

In the 2006 Elections the code of conduct media campaign was run under the simple but strong statement “It Must be Fair,” in 2008 the slogan was “We Can and We Must,” and for the 2009 Presidential and Municipal Elections we led with the slogan “Don’t Play with the Future.”

Three elections, three strong statements, three exclamation marks!

As we reflected on this we decided it's time to change direction. So this time we pose a question, an opportunity to reflect on what's been and what needs to be done for the future. The opportunity to consider, very carefully, "What Mark We Will Leave?" in these 2011 elections. A question that should have one answer that supersedes all other answers – fair elections

Presidents, you have made your mark – now we need to ensure it means something by adhering to the code you have signed. The responsibility for free and fair elections ultimately resides with you and your own party activists. Please carry that responsibility with you when you leave this room.

Let me finish as I started with thanks. A thank you to the management and staff here and to McCann Ericsson for the time and energy they have spent in preparing this room, and to the staff at NDI who have worked tirelessly in preparing for this event and will continue to work tirelessly in the weeks to come to support in the field the code of conduct for free and fair elections.

Also a thank you to you, party presidents, and our guests for putting aside time to be with us today. And also thank you to our colleagues from the media, who are often forgotten, but have a major part to play in this code of conduct campaign – for without your support this would remain a small event in a small room and the "What Mark Will We Leave - Fair Elections 2011 Campaign" can't hope to make the mark it needs to make without your support.

Thank You.