



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 9: Democratic Elections Right of Reply

As delivered by Patrick Merloe
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I have the honor of being able to reply on behalf of the United States and, in another sense a personal reply, since I have the distinction of being the only person singled out by name by a delegation today. And I have to say that I am honored that my esteemed Russian colleague would consider me a worthy opponent. While he used the analogy of throwing stones, I happen to be glad that this is not a wrestling match. It has been too long since I have engaged in that sport, and in the OSCE we are all on the same team.

In answer to his question of “why do we need election observers?” I would address citizen observers in a country, as well as international observers. The Copenhagen Document and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide a clear answer to his question. They both say that the authority of government derives from the will of the people expressed in genuine elections. So, citizens, in effect, own elections, because that is where sovereignty truly resides. Citizens have the right to know that their elections are genuine. Hence, domestic observers are needed.

International observers help states to be more aware and to improve in future elections, as my Russian colleague suggests. That is what the ODIHR does, based on impartial criteria and without double standards, in my eighteen years of experience.

Regarding ballot access, universal and equal suffrage includes both the right to vote and the right to seek office, without unreasonable restrictions. In the fifty states of the United States there are different rules, some more restrictive than others, and there may be room for improvement. However, all of those rules are subject to an independent and impartial judicial review. Moreover, in all fifty states and in all US elections, there are significant choices and robust, pluralist political competition, which is essential to a healthy democracy.

Again, the US welcomes OSCE observers, in whatever numbers they deem fit, and we are committed to promote effective election observation by the OSCE and other appropriate organizations, free from barriers to that effort, irrespective of whether some individual election official, even from my home state of Pennsylvania, might say otherwise.

I look forward in my personal, private capacity to continue this discussion with my esteemed Russian colleague and through NDI to contribute to enhancing electoral integrity, democracy, and human rights.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.