



2030 M Street, NW, Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20036-3306  
(202) 728-5500  
fax: (202) 728-5520  
mail: [contact@ndi.org](mailto:contact@ndi.org)  
[www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

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## Remarks of Dr. Madeleine K. Albright at Ceremony of Endorsement for the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation New York, October 27, 2005

Thank you very much Mr. Secretary General and Mr. President, it is not every day I have the opportunity to follow two Nobel Prize winners to the microphone. It is a daunting experience but, in this case, a welcome one.

And I am delighted to be here in my capacity as chairman of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, known more succinctly as NDI.

So to everyone, I say hello.

Today really does mark a milestone in a process that began more than four years ago. As is shown by the presence here this afternoon, it has in fact been a team effort and a team success. And the winner is democracy.

According to the UN Charter, one purpose of the UN is to promote respect for human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the will of the people, as expressed in periodic and genuine elections, shall be the basis of authority in government. Together, these fine principles accomplish absolutely nothing unless they are backed up actions.

In world politics, as in war, the high ground makes the difference. And because democracy occupies the rhetorical high ground in global affairs, many leaders like to call themselves democrats whether they have earned that right or not. And that is why we have had so many democratic people's republics that were neither democratic nor responsive to the people. And why we have seen so many elections where the official candidate has won with 100% of the vote, or 99% or, in some cases, 110%.

Saddam Hussein won elections and so does Fidel Castro. So if words are to have meaning, we must draw distinctions between real democracy and sham democracy, between elections that are free and fair and those that are phony and fixed.

Democracy needs referees. As the Secretary General mentioned, the first UN election mission was dispatched to Korea in 1948. But election observers did not truly come into their own until the cold war began to wind down. Beginning in the late 1980s, there were so many places such as the Philippines and Namibia, Haiti and Nicaragua, where international monitors and observers really have played a vital role.

Observers are now very much a regular part of many election narratives. Prior to voting, the questions are asked: will observers be allowed and under what conditions will they operate? During and after the voting, the question becomes: what are the observers saying? What are they thinking? Is President's Carter's thumb pointed up or down?

Over the past two decades, election observers have compiled an impressive record. We have exposed fraud, mitigated conflicts, validated legitimate winners and, above all, given voters a reason to believe that going to the polls makes a difference. We have also learned that unless election observers are known to be impartial, and consistent and truthful, they will not be trusted. And if they are not trusted, they will have no value.

It is this understanding that brought us here today. And just as observers are needed to draw the line between fair and unfair elections -- so our Declaration and Code of Conduct is designed to identify those who are committed to doing that job right.

The task of developing these documents has been valuable in itself. I think the process really has been important because it has allowed us to compare experiences and share ideas.

And looking ahead, I believe the Declaration and Code will be indispensable to the observer delegations we assemble, the governments with whom we deal, the media with whom we interact, and the publics whose interests we exist to serve.

We all know that elections, in themselves, are not sufficient to produce democracy, but we also know that free elections are the essential first step.

And I fully expect the monitoring of elections to remain a growth industry for years to come, I hope ahead of security, Mr. President, and I am pleased that we will go forward with this Declaration and Code of Conduct in place.

Before closing, I would like to recognize all of the regional and pro-democracy organizations that participated in this effort. I want especially to acknowledge the leading role played by the UN, and particularly the Secretary-General, who has been a steadfast champion of democracy, and Carina Perelli, who directs the UN's Electoral Assistance Division and who is taking care of business in Baghdad.

I also have to with all great humility and love praise President Carter for the trailblazing record he and the Carter Center have established in this field. I am proud of many things in my life, but serving in his administration is right up there; NDI has been proud to work with him and with the center as partners on many elections, going back to Panama in 1989.

Thanks are due, as well, to all those at NDI who have worked so hard on this project, Pat Merloe, one of my traveling companions who has been superb and represents us so well and who directs our electoral programs and was one of the initiators of this entire process—and my friend and partner in all of this, Ken Wollack as President of NDI. I think we have all worked together with all the organizations represented here and I hope been helpful in providing leadership.

It has been said that anything worth doing is done in faith. The development of this Declaration and Code of Conduct was done in faith that it would be a living document, a document that reflects our shared commitment to the integrity of the electoral process and our belief in the validity of democratic principles, and our conviction that freedom is the path to a world more peaceful, prosperous and just than it has ever been. And it is a great honor and pleasure to work with all of you on this continuing project.

Thank you very much.