

**Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of
Conduct for International Observers**

United Nations, New York
October 27, 2005

Thank you very much.

We are assembled here, as election observers, in what is one of the fastest growing enterprises in the world. As the field of election observation has expanded in recent years, we have been able to accomplish a great deal by exchanging information among ourselves and identifying best practices. The Declaration of Principles and Code of Conduct that our organizations have jointly endorsed today is an important milestone in our efforts to improve election observation. This is a great achievement and was long overdue.

It has been increasingly difficult for host nations to engage with the various monitoring organizations, especially when we speak a different language and utilize different principles, methodologies, and procedures. Host countries confront many serious challenges in administering credible elections without also having to face a cacophony of approaches and principles from the observer organizations. So, it is very good that this group is assembled here, and that we have committed ourselves to adhering to the practices and approaches set forth in the Declaration of Principles and Code of Conduct.

I want to thank Secretary General Kofi Annan for welcoming us here at the United Nations and for the great contributions the UN has made to this process over the last several years. I also want to thank the National Democratic Institute which has been at the forefront of our joint initiative, in particular Ken Wollack and Patrick Merloe for their efforts and commitment, as well as Secretary Madeleine Albright for her leadership.

Looking around the table, I see many organizations that The Carter Center has had the particular privilege and opportunity of working with, including the African Union, the Commonwealth, the European Union, IFES, the International Republican Institute, the OAS, the OSCE, and others. We have had excellent working relationships with these and others in various election observation efforts, and look forward to continued partnerships.

There have been a few occasions in our election work when The Carter Center had to leave a country in a hurry after we determined that the electoral process was very likely to be fraudulent. Either we condemned the election and departed before election day, or we concluded that we could not undermine our reputation by issuing a statement that might be interpreted as endorsing the election. I hope that these cases will be fewer in the future.

As the Secretary General noted, The Carter Center and NDI were in Liberia the week before last. Over the years, the Center has been involved in over 60 elections and we have cooperated with many of your organizations in some of these elections. Through this experience we have learned how important it is for us all to share experiences with one another and to improve the methods, practices and principles that guide our efforts. The Carter Center has been eager to form such partnerships and to work closely with you.

The collaborative efforts among our organizations that led to this meeting should be continued in the future so that we can jointly address a range of new challenges that confront the community of international election observation organizations. One major development we need to be concerned with is the increasing use of automated voting systems.

Other key challenges include the need to develop better methods for observing and assessing campaign finance and media access. In addition, we need to continue to improve our techniques of assessing voter registration processes and electoral dispute resolution mechanisms. More broadly, we also need to promote the idea that all countries should welcome international observers. I think that the Declaration of Principles will be a great help in this regard, and will encourage all countries to recognize the importance of international election observation.

Looking forward, we need to engage a more difficult challenge, which is to build broad consensus on standards for democratic elections. I think this is critically important, and ultimately such standards could provide the basis for the assessment made in our election observation work. Clearly, however, it is not possible or desirable for there to be complete uniformity among countries in terms of democratic practices. And, I certainly wouldn't want countries to pattern policies after those of the United States of America. The important thing now is that we have managed to come to consensus among ourselves on basic approaches to election observation, and these efforts provide an important foundation for promoting greater consensus on standards for democratic elections.

The United States has had two very troubled elections recently, in 2000 and in 2004. Following both elections, I worked with other US political leaders, including former President Gerald Ford and former Secretary of State James Baker, to develop recommendations for reforming and improving the US electoral system. While the US has made some progress, we still have a long way to go. The US has policies that make it difficult for international organizations to monitor the election, and which would be severely criticized by observer groups. For example, in the US the process of choosing nominees is only susceptible to the influence of about 8 percent of the American voters. There is no restraint in the amount of money coming into a campaign. Potential presidential candidates have to raise \$100- \$150 million to be seriously considered as a nominee. There is not equal access to the media and there is not a central election commission in charge of administering elections.

The point is not to criticize my own country but to say that all nations need to learn how best to have an honest, fair, open, safe and constructive election. The leaders must be

committed to the democratic process and to building democratic institutions; they must respect human rights in all aspects; civil society must be increasingly involved and there should be a willingness to welcome international observers. We still have a lot to learn and I hope on behalf of the Carter Center that all of us assembled here today can learn from each other.

Thank you very much.