



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Statement on U.S. Elections

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 6, 2008

Colleagues,

For the past twenty months the United States of America has treated you and the rest of the world to a front row seat to watch democracy.

Anyone in the world with internet access, a newspaper, TV set or radio has had the opportunity to listen to or watch over two dozen American citizens stand up and announce that he or she ought to be president of our country. Everyone had the opportunity to learn about the candidate's personal and family life, his or her health, the health of his or her spouse, of his or her children, where he or she bought his or her suits and where he or she stood on issues genuinely important to the governance of our republic.

Everyone in our country could decide by watching, listening and/or reading which of these fine citizens might be the one to best lead our country for the next four years. There was no filter. If anyone chose not to believe what a television commentator told them about what a candidate had said in a particular debate, all that person had to do was watch C-Span and watch that candidate speak for himself or herself in entirety so as to understand any statement in its proper context.

Local media, national media and international media swarmed our country. I will bet that there are any number of citizens in other countries who have read or heard things about our candidates that I even haven't read or heard. Media had access everywhere.

For months and months this went on. People sighed and thought this was too long, that it was too expensive, but they watched, they listened, they read. It took time to learn about these men and women. The expense was no more than about the annual Burger King advertising budget. And by the end of Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, from voting precincts neighboring Pearl Harbor to those neighboring Arlington National Cemetery, about 136 million Americans had voted for president, vice-president, representative and in other cases, mayor, sheriff or dogcatcher. They stood in line sometimes for up to four hours. They sang, they read, they texted, they laughed and talked with each other. They didn't grumble. They felt good. They were acting freely and openly to select the person they truly felt would lead us best. Some of them told others who they thought that person was. Others did not. They do not have to. Our ballots are secret.

And on Tuesday night in Grant Park in Chicago, well over one hundred thousand people stood in respectful silence to watch Senator McCain deliver his concession speech as they waited to hear from the person they had chosen to lead us for the next four years; and they are looking forward to uniting peacefully in support of President-elect Obama.

Colleagues - that is democracy. The months and months of transparent election activity, the broad and endless media exposure, the sincere and successful attempts to make it as easy as possible for voters to vote: mail, walk-in, drive-thru, whatever worked.

The ODIHR observation teams suggested that our elections displayed all fundamentals of the democratic vote but that electoral reform efforts should continue. And I can assure you that they will and for all the world to see.

The perfection of democracy is in its imperfection. That is why it continues to enrich itself, to adapt itself, to grow with the imaginations of free citizens. That is what makes it possible for anyone to rise and become the leader of the free world. It is such liberty, such freedom that we have all fought for and we will continue to work to preserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.