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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Parliamentary Elections in Tajikistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 4, 2010

The United States concurs with the findings of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which said in its statement of preliminary findings and conclusions that despite certain small positive steps, the February 28 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan "failed to meet many key OSCE commitments contained in the 1990 Copenhagen document and other international standards for democratic elections."

The U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe closely followed Tajikistan's parliamentary election campaign, assisted in monitoring the voting, and served the accredited observers. In the run-up to the election, Embassy representatives met with government officials, political party leaders, and Tajik political scientists, and staff served as accredited observers. The Embassy's efforts reflect the U.S. government's support for the ongoing development of Tajikistan's electoral system.

Initial evaluation of observations by Embassy staff election observers indicated that the vote was beset by procedural irregularities and fraud, including cases of ballot stuffing. Embassy observers reported widespread proxy voting and family voting, general lack of adherence to requirements that voters show identification to obtain ballots, disorganization and procedural irregularities in the counting phase, and cases of bias by local election officials in favor of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT).

Though opposition political parties were able to conduct limited election campaigns, they faced an uneven playing field due to substantial support provided to the PDPT by government officials.

There was also a lack of coverage of elections in the media, particularly on state television. The four state television stations declined to broadcast national debates. They allotted the legally required minimum number of minutes for candidates to address voters, but there was little opportunity for candidates to openly debate national issues or discuss government policies in the media. Additionally, recent lawsuits by government officials against five newspapers had a negative impact on the media's ability to report on political issues in general.

We urge the government of Tajikistan to work proactively with ODIHR to implement both previous and forthcoming recommendations to improve the conduct of future elections. We stand ready to assist the government in implementing these recommendations and in improving its implementation of the full body of OSCE principles and commitments. We also urge the government of Tajikistan to work with civil society and the international community to strengthen democratic institutions and to undertake real steps to develop strong democratic institutions before the next presidential election in 2013.