



Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE NON GOUVERNEMENTALE AYANT STATUT CONSULTATIF AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES, DE L'UNESCO,
DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE ET D'OBSERVATEUR AUPRES DE LA COMMISSION AFRICAINE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DES PEUPLES

International Federation
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional
de los Derechos Humanos

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان

FIDH Oral intervention

OSCE – HDIM, Working session 17, Thursday, October 9th 2008

Item : Democratic Institutions - democratic elections

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Federation for Human Rights wishes to commend ODIHR's leading role and contribution in the field of electoral process in the OSCE area. Despite some criticism, coming mostly from participating States which have difficulties in implementing ODIHR's recommendations in this field, due to the absence of political willingness, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has developed throughout all these years a complete and well defined methodology to address challenges and issues related to the electoral process.

FIDH reminds that elections are the cornerstone of democracy, and thus undemocratic or not democratically elected governments cannot be trustworthy and legitimised interlocutors of the international community.

The International Federation for Human Rights is not surprised that the Russian Federation criticises more and more openly the electoral observation of OSCE and ODIHR in particular. While no proper OSCE observation was able to follow the electoral campaign of December 2 2007, and both the European Union and OSCE criticised the way the elections were held, in particular because of the acts of harassment against members of the opposition and Non-Governmental Organizations, the Russian authorities respond to this criticism in a particularly aggressive manner, making no effort to avoid confrontation.

FIDH notes that as the OSCE had not been able to carry out an election observation mission the local NGOs were the only independent observers able to follow the electoral campaign and denounce irregularities during the December elections. FIDH wishes to draw OSCE's attention to

the fact that the day before the elections, the members of the Voice, an association comprising 281 NGOs with sections in 40 Russian regions for observing the elections, were subjected to unprecedented pressure on the part of the authorities.

If the Russian Federation, as the delegation affirmed this morning, does not wish to see the West observe and validate the elections, then FIDH takes the opportunity to call the Russian government to allow its own citizens and the Russian civil society to follow the electoral process.

Taking this as an example, FIDH underlines the importance of the rôle played by national and local actors during the elections, especially in countries such as Turkmenistan, where in February 14, 2007 during the elections, the Chairman of the Electoral Commission stated that « he would do everything » to ensure that Mr. Berdymukhamedov won the elections. No surprise that the current president won the elections with 89,2% of the vote, a performance worthy of his predecessor. Again, before the elections and the visit of the OSCE delegation in February 2007, in support of the upcoming elections, representatives of civil society were intimidated by the Ministry of National Security and warned of the dangers that would ensue for them, in case they have contacts with the delegation.

FIDH calls all OSCE institutions, participating States and other international actors to adopt a coherent approach regarding the elaboration of common policies based on the reports of ODIHR regarding the free and fair elections in a given country. For example, FIDH expects the European Union to respect the benchmark that EU imposed itself and take into consideration the fact that the last elections in Belarus were neither fair nor democratic. Both national independent observers from « Human Rights Defenders for free elections » campaign, and the ODIHR / OSCE mission noted that although some minor improvements had taken place in the election process, as a whole the elections are neither fair nor transparent. The complete absence of members of the opposition in the newly elected parliament is probably the most blatant demonstration of the true nature of this election campaign. The EU should continue defining its policy regarding Belarus on the assessment of OSCE convening the last electoral farce.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, FIDH recommends that a more concrete and dynamic follow up should be made at the political level of the OSCE. Indeed the Permanent Council should assume the implementation by the States convened of ODIHR's recommendation and establish concrete benchmarks and deadlines that all Participating States should observe if they wish to be called democratic. FIDH wishes to remind everyone in this room that one main success of the OSCE is the human dimension, in particular the elections observation mission. Undermining human rights, and their interrelated and universal character would deprive the Organization of its relevancy today, as for FIDH human rights means security for States and people.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.