



**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**Statement on Ensuring Equal**  
**Enjoyment of Rights at HDIM Working Session**

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As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Kozak, Head  
of Delegation  
Warsaw  
September 13, 2017

The ability of the individual to participate in political life is critical to democratic development, good governance, and stability. Participation encompasses a wide range of activities, from platforms for private citizens to comment on proposed legislation at the local level, to running for high office. Barriers to participation reduce social cohesion and can engender dislocation or even radicalization to violence. It is incumbent upon all participating States to address these barriers.

In the United States, most election law is governed by state and local authorities, which provide crucial oversight and protection for elections in their jurisdictions. That protection is supplemented by the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, which works at the federal level to protect the civil and constitutional rights of all Americans. In particular, the Civil Rights Division enforces federal statutes that protect the right to vote. The Division regularly evaluates its enforcement tools, including litigation, to ensure that the Division is meeting current challenges.

Protecting the voting rights of all Americans includes protecting against discrimination in voting based on race or need for language assistance, and protecting voting access for service members serving away from home as well as American citizens living abroad. We also have strong legal guarantees to ensure voting rights for persons with disabilities. Polling stations are required to be accessible and include specialized equipment to assist voters.

Voter enfranchisement and election integrity are subjects of robust debate in the United States. The Civil Rights Division actively monitors elections for compliance with federal law. In the November general election, the Division coordinated the deployment of more than 500 personnel to monitor elections in 67 jurisdictions in 28 states for compliance with the federal voting rights laws. The Division monitors elections throughout the country and throughout each year to ensure compliance with the federal voting rights laws. No voting system is perfect, so it is incumbent upon all of us to constantly reevaluate our policies and procedures to ensure best practices are incorporated.

For American citizens who wish to run for office, the various procedures and requirements are generally modest. Although only natural-born U.S. citizens are eligible to be President, naturalized U.S. citizens are eligible for all other elected positions in the federal government. Candidates are often not required to have political party affiliation or support in order to run for office, whether local or national, so barriers to participation are low.

In addition, few legal restrictions exist to joining or starting political parties or affiliated organizations, including NGOs, news or opinion outlets, or others. America's NGOs cover a wide swathe of political and social issues, and provide opportunities to voice political opinions or take part in activism on any issue. Journalists publish opinions on-line and in print, adding to the multi-faceted political discussion that characterizes America.

There is no perfect system that guarantees one hundred percent participation in all political processes. We make every effort to ensure that the highest number of citizens can easily and meaningfully participate in our political processes. We also assess our efforts on a regular basis to ensure that Constitutionally-guaranteed protections for political participation are adequate and meet the needs of our dynamic population.

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