

**DECLARATION
OF
THE LOCAL OBSERVERS' FORUM
FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (12 OCTOBER 2003)**

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of a democratic society. The necessary precondition for achieving such elections is that all relevant state institutions, political parties, civil society actors and Albanian citizens recognize, respect and implement the requirements of the Electoral Code as well as of all other acts regulating the election process.

In the framework of this process, all local organizations participating in observing this process and members of this Forum, express their full engagement and will to contribute to ensuring free, fair and democratic elections in Albania.

The co-operation of the signatories of this declaration is an important element in the process of strengthening civil responsibility and building local observation capacities.

The observation of an election process is a right and obligation deriving from the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the European Human Rights Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Copenhagen Document, other international commitments, the Constitution of the Republic of Albania as well as the Electoral Code.

We, the signatory organizations, through this declaration, inform the public, state institutions, the election administration and electoral commissions, the parties and various electoral subjects, that we will carry out our activity as observers of the electoral process for the election of Local Government Units on 12 October 2003, in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Code, CEC instructions and the Professional and Ethics Code for Local Observers.

All the signatory organizations accept the principles approved by this Forum and freely agree that, in all their observation activities, they will respect the following principles:

1. The observation of the election process by local non-profit organizations is an ulterior guarantee for the conduct of free, fair and democratic elections, through which is implemented the right to vote and to be elected, as one of the fundamental human rights.
2. Observation, as a right guaranteed by the Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, will be conducted only and always in conformity with the provisions of this Code and the instructions issued by the Central Election Commission.

3. The observation of the electoral process by each group of organizations, individual organizations or observers, will be guided by the principles of impartiality, political independence, objectivity, transparency and responsibility. The reporting of the results of the observation will be carried out with dedication and in respect of democratic principles. Reports will be unbiased, accurate and easily verifiable.
4. The observation of the electoral process can be effective only if it is carried out by qualified and professionally trained observers. For the fulfillment of this requirement, the Forum of signatory organizations will undertake the following responsibilities:
 - a) Elaboration of, familiarization with, and implementation of the observation methodology
 - b) Standardization of observation methodology as one of the most effective ways of increasing professional observation capacities
 - c) Training of observers in order to develop pools of professional observers for future elections.
5. The signatory organizations undertake to co-operate with each other and exchange information on those issues they deem necessary. They undertake to organize as complete coverage of polling stations as possible, taking into consideration the specifics of different areas. The joint conclusions that will be presented by this Forum do not preclude participating organizations, the signatories of this declaration, from issuing individual reports on the electoral process.

This Forum considers that the engagement of Albanian civil society actors is a major contribution towards the consolidation of democratic society, institutions and the rule of law in Albania.

Signatory Organizations

Albanian Institute for the Development of Election Systems
Society for Democratic Culture
Albanian Helsinki Committee
Albanian Human Rights Group
Albanian Youth Council
“F. Noli” Center for Democratic Culture
Kombinat Women Center
Albanian Disability Rights Foundation
Albanian Student Government
Citizens’ Initiative for Change
Citizen Civil Forum

Tirana, 26.09.2003.