

Original: ENGLISH



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Elections in Kosovo

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 16, 2010

The United States commends the Government of Kosovo on its first post-independence general elections. We congratulate the citizens from all of Kosovo's ethnic communities, on their participation in these polls.

Preliminary results indicate that voter participation was the highest in any election since 2001 and that overall participation by Kosovo Serbs was almost double the participation in the 2009 municipal elections.

Early reports from several observer missions praised the Central Election Commission's technical preparations and administration of the snap polls on such short notice and noted that polling sites generally were better organized and better run than in the 2009 municipal elections. Several NGOs also praised the steps Kosovo election officials took to prepare for the elections.

Although the electoral process has been largely efficient and effective to date, U.S., international, local and NGO observers witnessed serious irregularities in certain areas. We note there are clear processes and timelines set out in Kosovo's elections law that provide for the transparent review of contested elections results. We have urged GOK authorities, and the Kosovo Elections Commission to take all required actions to address the irregularities, process complaints and appeals fairly, and ensure that the final, official results of Kosovo's elections accurately reflect the voters' intent.

One of the fundamental principles of the OSCE is to support the free participation of all peoples in the democratic process. Therefore, we must take note of the disturbing atmosphere of threats, intimidation, and violence orchestrated by Serbian sources, unfortunately even from official Serbian sources, and directed for weeks against Kosovo Serbs, especially those living in northern Kosovo, to dissuade them from engagement with Kosovo's legitimate institutions and prevent them from exercising their democratic rights on election day. It is regrettable that a series of statements from Serbian officials on the elections failed to clearly condemn and dispel this atmosphere or adequately reassure Kosovo Serbs that they would not suffer retaliation from participating in the polls. Indeed, several statements by Serbian officials state that Belgrade "instructed" Kosovo Serbs not to participate, which is consistent with prior public statements. Such statements and activities run directly counter to commitments by participating States to advance democracy and democratic values.

We commend the Kosovo Police for their role in providing security for the elections, and thank EULEX and KFOR for their support of the Kosovo Police.

We fully support the ongoing investigation by Kosovo Police with the support of EULEX into the murder of the Bosniak Community Representative and Central Elections Commission employee, Sefko Slakovic, on December 8th. Regardless of the motive behind the killing, it contributed to the chilling effect experienced by Serbs in Kosovo. We condemn the use of violence as a means of intimidating the citizens of Kosovo to prevent them from exercising their democratic right to vote, both North and South of the Ibar River.

Despite these efforts to divide Kosovo Serbs in the north and south, as noted above, overall Serb turnout was robust and likely will lead to increased representation in the Kosovo parliament – a development which the United States welcomes.

While we await the final outcome of the elections, we underscore our continued strong support for a multiethnic, democratic Kosovo under a government chosen by its people. These elections are an important milestone for Kosovo in building a multiethnic, democratic society for all of its citizens. We look forward to the expeditious seating of the new Assembly, formation of the government, and election of a president, once election results are finalized.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.