

Conference of Global Election Organizations and ACEEEO

**General Assembly Meeting
Plenary Session: New Challenges in Democracy**

**Thursday 15 September
14.00 – 15.40**

CEO Speaking Notes on

“International Cooperation:

The Case of the International Mission for Iraqi Elections”

It is a privilege to be here. I wish to thank Dr. Zoltan Toth for inviting me to speak to you about new challenges in electoral observation, and about the experiences of international cooperation with regard to the International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE).

In my remarks to you today, I will provide an overview of the challenges we face in international electoral missions. In so doing, I will offer some reflections on how electoral missions are indeed more and more challenged. I will then provide an overview of the particular experiences of the IMIE since its creation last December, and describe the IMIE's next steps for the forthcoming constitutional referendum, expected to be held on October 15, 2005, and the general election expected in December 2005.

You will see that, threaded through my remarks, is the belief that international cooperation in electoral missions contributes to the consolidation of electoral democracy in general and in Iraq in particular.

The pertinent question, to begin, is why are electoral monitoring missions increasingly challenged? The reason can be found in the fact that the fundamental character of elections, being their role in securing democratic development, is becoming increasingly apparent to the public at large. The importance, indeed intrinsic value, of the vote is recognized by each citizen as a mechanism to enable their participation in their respective governments.

The participation of election observers, by their presence, confers legitimacy on electoral processes. And the participation of electoral observation missions can bring to the fore broader questions of a country's ability to put in place the mechanisms of democratic governance. Elections are increasingly understood as fundamental to the aim of increasing public participation in national government. In addition, elections are increasingly and rightly understood to be only one element of wider processes and structures that must be put in place to secure ongoing, democratic public participation.

Meanwhile, the world at large is following electoral developments on an unprecedented scale. Modern communications has intensified the interest of the world in difficult electoral contexts. Elections in countries facing serious challenges with regard to ensuring security and legitimacy illustrate how the constituency for a given election is much wider than the voters *in situ*, with diaspora communities seeking to renew their participation in strengthening their countries' prospects for democratic development.

International electoral monitoring missions play an important role in satisfying "our" own appetite to be there on the ground—our appetite being that of the international community of electoral experts and observers from around the world. The desire is to bear witness. The broad scope of cooperation involved in international electoral missions attests to the shared belief that mechanisms of international governance play an important role in securing the futures of individuals in all pockets and regions of the globe.

In short, we all have an unprecedented stake in the real and symbolic value of elections. Sometimes, the cost of this presence is too high in terms of security. Nonetheless, in these difficult contexts the need to ensure the security of voters is paramount.

Another important aspect of international electoral missions is their impartiality. A mission's impartiality enables it to play an accompanying role—that is, provide ongoing guidance in developing the most appropriate electoral rules, a sound legal framework, and effective administrative processes.

In order for this model to work, it is important to have an independent national electoral commission. While, ultimately, it could be important that the national electoral commission attain permanence as an electoral body, the independence of electoral commissions is key to ensuring the sustainability of electoral structures. This enables a country to increase the legitimacy of, and public confidence in, its electoral processes.

To sum up my preliminary remarks, elections today play an encompassing role. Further, the context of the world today presents challenges that we all have to rise to. These are the challenges of longer-term participation of voters, and the longer-term need for stability and security in societies and states in transition.

The International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE)

As I will now try to illustrate, I believe the model of the International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) is a commendable example of international cooperation. The IMIE model for monitoring elections is distinct from, but complementary to, traditional electoral observation. Formed of independent electoral management bodies, the IMIE provides peer review before, during and after the election. The focus is on providing advice and accompanying the Iraqis over the longer term. Our ultimate goal is to build the institutional capacity of the IECEI – and to learn from them in turn.

While other traditional observation models play a valuable role, they tend to be short-term, lasting only one to three days, and focused on election day itself. More often than not, they are not coordinated. Organizations do not talk to each other to compare findings. This makes it difficult to arrive at conclusions that have statistical validity.

The model of the IMIE provides an effective means of addressing both the short-term need to verify the legitimacy of elections, as well as the long-term need to foster democratization and prospects for social and economic development. One key to the approach of the IMIE is the independence of the IECEI.

A) How did the IMIE come to be?

Not surprisingly, the idea of creating an international mission for Iraqi elections was fraught with many challenges. Initially, no one was coming forward to conduct international monitoring of the Iraqi elections. The UN could not because it was directly involved in organizing the elections.

The IMIE was established on December 20, 2004, as a result of the Iraq Election Monitoring Forum, organized by Elections Canada in Ottawa, with the encouragement of the United Nations and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), and the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

A Steering Committee was established, with myself as Chair. The Committee is made up of independent electoral management bodies from around the world, including Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Panama, Romania, United Kingdom, Yemen, as well as the Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials (ACEEEO). In addition, the League of Arab States agreed to accompany the mission as an observer. Elections Canada has established a secretariat for this mission to lead and coordinate the activities of the Steering Committee.

Elections Canada's rationale for participation in the IMIE is simple. Our motivation was, and has always been, the democratic rights of 14 million or so Iraqi electors. Regardless of how people felt about the events leading up to this point, what was important—and what remains important—is to help the Iraqi people seize this admittedly fragile and imperfect, but also historic, opportunity to begin the process of building democracy in their country.

Security requirements meant that a traditional election observation mission - involving hundreds of international observers visiting thousands of polls on election day - was not

possible. Traffic restrictions that were put in place by the Iraqi authorities for three days before and after the election greatly reduced the ability to carry out monitoring activities. Finally, a very short time frame was available before the first electoral event on January 30, 2005.

B) What are the IMIE's main tasks?

As an impartial and neutral mission, the IMIE's main tasks are to follow the election preparations and make informed judgments, and to build capacity and confidence through assessment of identified targets and activities for the three electoral events scheduled for 2005. For the January 30, 2005 elections, the IMIE focused on the election process inside Iraq, and the Out-of-Country (OCV) registration and voting processes.

C) The IMIE's activities to date:

To date, there have been three meetings of the IMIE Steering Committee.

The first Steering Committee meeting took place in London on January 4–5, 2005. There, the Committee agreed to establish a Secretariat for the IMIE with liaison offices in Amman and Baghdad. The Committee also developed a 10-point system of evaluation, consisting of the following elements:

- legal framework
- voter registration

- electoral preparations
- voter information and education
- equitable access to media
- certification of political parties, coalitions and candidates
- pre-polling and post-election complaint procedures
- polling [i.e. *voting on election day*]
- vote counting and compilation of results
- out-of-country registration and voting

For each area, an international expert was hired to write an assessment report, following criteria and questions laid out by the Steering Committee, and relying on the legal and regulatory documents developed by the IECI, and information provided through the Amman and Baghdad offices.

During its second meeting in Amman, Jordan, on January 28–30, 2005, the Steering Committee examined six preliminary assessments: legal framework, voter registration, electoral preparations, voter information and education, equitable access to media and out-of-country registration and voting.

Drawing on judgments from academic experts and experienced practitioners, the Steering Committee agreed that the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq had prepared and put in place a sound system, generally in keeping with international standards, although some areas required further review and discussion.

The IMIE released its preliminary report on January 30, after the close of polls in Iraq. This report was sent to the IECI and posted on the IMIE Website (www.imie.ca) in English and Arabic.

The third meeting of the Steering Committee took place from March 16-19, 2005 at the UN headquarters in New York city as part of the UN-organized “Iraq Electoral Process Technical Debriefing: Lessons Learned and Upcoming Challenges”. The IMIE’s main objectives for the meeting were to review the conclusions of the expert assessors obtain feedback from the IECI and others, and make recommendations for the forthcoming electoral events in Iraq. We also wanted to explore future collaboration with the IECI and the UN.

Since the last meeting, a final report was circulated in draft to IECI and IMIE members for their feedback. Their comments were received and integrated. The Final Report includes recommendations for future electoral events, focusing on the most immediate needs: the October constitutional referendum and December general elections. The recommendations will serve as benchmarks for assessing future events in Iraq and provide a better understanding of where to go from here. The IMIE’s Final Report is available on the IMIE Website in English and Arabic.

Out-of-country registration and voting

An important element of the January 30 elections was the out-of-country registration and voting process. The IECI mandated the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to conduct the out-of-country vote in 36 cities across 14 countries. This was a significant achievement, and both the IECI and the IOM are to be commended.

The IMIE monitored the out-of-country registration and voting for the January 30 elections. More than 100 monitors were recruited from 13 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the government of Japan (through its embassies), The Electoral Commission in the UK, the Australian Election Commission, and in the United States, the Federal Election Commission, as well as a number of state and local election agencies. Canadian embassy staff also provided valuable assistance in a number of countries.

IMIE's final assessment of the OCV program has also been posted on the IMIE Website.

D) Future plans – what next?

After accompanying the IECI through the January elections, the IMIE was asked by the IECI to continue its mission for the forthcoming electoral events in Iraq.

For the October constitutional referendum and the December general elections, the IMIE process will be similar to the one used for the January 30 elections: expert assessors will evaluate key areas of the electoral process, and the Steering Committee will draw on these assessments when evaluating each electoral event. Over the longer term, the IMIE is prepared to accompany the IECI as a professional and skilled independent electoral management body and to help the Iraqi people as they build and strengthen their democratic process.

E) Overview of the IMIE model:

In addition to providing pre-election assessment and evaluation of the election itself, the IMIE also provides follow-up after the event. The IMIE's approach of accompaniment (*démarche d'accompagnement*) is based on respect for the independence of the Iraqi Electoral Commission, as well as for the culture and history of the country. The IMIE model is, in fact, similar to the approach Elections Canada has taken with Mexico, where we have been involved – in a mutually beneficial relationship – with the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) since 1992.

The IMIE has been received positively, but has encountered skepticism also, partly because people did not see international observers on the ground. We knew from the start that it would not be possible to convince the skeptics of the value of this type of mission without tangible proof. We knew we would have to “deliver the goods” before they would believe.

No doubt, one key to the success of the IMIE's mission was the presence of thousands of national election observers. The IECI accredited some 23,000 non-partisan observers, and 34,000 political entity agents. Many received training from international organizations. For example, the more than 9,000 observers deployed by the Iraqi Election Information Network (EIN) received training and support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), IFES, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the

European Union Electoral Support Program (EUESP). The most important point, though, is that these were Iraqi citizens observing their own elections.

There is a place for traditional international observation. But the IMIE approach, I would suggest, places greater emphasis on capacity-building through the sharing of information and expertise on a peer-to-peer basis.

However, it is neither necessary nor desirable to wait until the ideal conditions are in place before moving on democracy. There are two reasons for this. First, who gets to decide what those conditions are? Second, who is to be the judge of when all the necessary conditions are met? The point is, the judgment is not ours to make.

In conclusion, nobody knows what the impact of holding elections will be. There are risks involved and nothing guarantees that democracy will prevail after the first or even second election. But what is important is that the decisions about when and how to proceed must be made by the Iraqi people. They will devise a democracy of their own choosing.

The January 30, 2005 Iraqi elections have proved to be an important learning experience for all involved and showed that the IMIE can be a model for future electoral assistance missions – in addition to international observers.

Thank you.