

UN DPA Note — Coordination of International Election Observers

1. Since 1992, the United Nations has been offering and providing assistance for the coordination of international election observers. This modality of support was first tested in Ethiopia and Kenya (1992) and most recently has been provided in Palestine (2005 and 2006), Solomon Islands (2006) and Zambia (2006).
2. The European Union (EU) has also been increasingly requesting the United Nations to provide support to the EU deployment of observers for various election processes around the world. The support consists of all administrative actions needed to implement the mission, including contracting personnel (short and long-term observers and mission support staff), procuring of office facilities and other related activities. Examples include UNDP support to EU observer missions in Indonesia (1999) and Yemen (2006), and Nicaragua (2006).
3. The primary goal of providing assistance for coordination of international observers is to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of an election observation effort. Support provided consists of all or some of the following activities:
 - a. Organizing briefings aimed at providing observers with an understanding of the country and political context; helping observers understand the procedural requirements for conducting the elections; familiarizing observers with what to expect to find at a polling station based on provisions in the election law and related regulations; an ensuring observers understand the logistical arrangements and timetable for the observation effort;
 - b. Organising briefings by key election actors (election management bodies, domestic observer groups, security forces, etc) and facilitating liaison between the observer groups and these actors;
 - c. Assisting the electoral management body in the accreditation of international observers;
 - d. Facilitating the sharing of information and analysis among observer groups to help to improve the quality, accuracy and credibility of observer statements and reports;
 - e. Facilitating the production of joint checklists and reporting procedures;
 - f. Providing logistical and operational support so as to minimize duplication of efforts between observer missions, thereby achieving certain economies of scale;
 - g. Providing deployment plans to avoid duplication and to increase the breath of observation coverage;
 - h. Facilitating the production of a joint statement of the observer groups.
4. A serious risk associated with international observation coordination by the UN is the possibility that the UN will be misperceived as having direct involvement in the substantive observation. It is therefore important that the UN observe the following standards in all cases:
 - a. The UN should only agree to provide coordination support on request from a Member State;

- b. Neither the UN nor the government will oblige any observer group to participate in the coordination effort;
 - c. The UN should maintain a low profile throughout the coordination activity and should bar the use of UN logo or name in any materials related to observer activities or any of the observer statements reports;
 - d. The UN should not render an opinion on the electoral process or other wise seek to influence observer findings or statements;
 - e. UN staff should not be accredited as observers and should only be seen in polling stations on election-day if there is a justify reason for their presence.
5. With reference to cases in which the EU request the UN to support the implementation of its observers missions, as a general principle. UNDP should advise the EU to identify alternative administrative channels. Exceptions to the principle may be made on a case by case basis. Reasons for making exceptions would include the following:
- a. Cases in which UNDP is the only practical option for providing administrative support and where the presence of an EU observation mission is considered an essential contribution to the credibility of the elections
 - b. Cases in which a negative response from UNDP might damage EU-UN relations
6. If an exception is made in relation to the above, the following condition should be applied:
- a. If UN contracts are issued to the EU observers, DSS approval will also be required, pursuant to a Security Risk Assessment and adherence to any subsequent security requirements. If UNDP is involved in the recruitment of EU observers, they are bound by UN rules and regulations, including security guidelines. These are frequently not compatible with EU attempts to ensure a representative and widespread presence in the field which may expose the UN to security risks and other potential liabilities.
 - b. All efforts should be made to limit association of the UN with the EU observation, including barring the use of the UN logo and locating the premises of the EU observation mission away from UN offices.
 - c. The EU request for these services must be received within a reasonable timeframe prior to an election, permitting effective and efficient implementation.
 - d. The UN should issue public statement indicating the extent of its support to the EU observation mission and clarifying that the UN is not engaged in observing the electoral process.
7. We would like to request your approval for these general principles as a means of guiding and ensuring consistency in decisions made in response to UN support for international observer coordination activities