



Every Vote Counts

Speech of Welcome
at the
Global Electoral Organisations Conference

Washington DC
27 March 2007

Andrew Ellis
Director of Operations
International IDEA

The GEO Conference is the occasion when we come together as an electoral community. As election administrators, international democracy organisations, electoral technicians, we meet, share experiences, and take stock.

IDEA's objective is the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes, and we are proud to be part of this electoral community. In taking stock today, the theme of this conference – 'Every Vote Counts' – lies at the heart of all our work in the electoral field.

Every Vote Counts in the growing recognition of the importance of the full electoral cycle – law making and planning to registration to nomination to campaigning to polling to counting to declaration of results to dispute resolution to review and evaluation of our performance, and on to another cycle of lawmaking and planning. And Every Vote Counts in seeking to make electoral assistance effective, redirecting donor effort towards sustainability, supporting electoral management bodies in delivering legitimate and credible elections within their own human and financial resources, electoral cycle after electoral cycle.

Every Vote Counts underlies the continuing efforts to encourage electoral participation. These include making voting accessible, ensuring there are enough polling stations, ensuring that the disabled can access them. And these include designing and building political systems which encourage participation, in which elections are competitive and in which people believe that the results matter because there is a real choice of government.

Every Vote Counts is a philosophy which underlies the need to support professionalism in electoral management and administration. As Jean-Pierre Kingsley said last year while still Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, the voters expect the same high level of service from every one of Elections Canada's nearly 200,000 staff, whether they are career electoral officials or temporary staff on polling day who have just had a short training course. Every member of an electoral administration needs to uphold the same principles of fearless independence, commitment to a level playing field for electoral participants, and commitment to service delivery. And every member of an electoral administration needs to recognise that elections not only need to be free and fair, but to be perceived as free and fair. Professionalism reflects in how stakeholders are dealt with.

Every Vote Counts involves inclusion in the electoral process. We see efforts to increase the number of women candidates, and of women elected members. We do not yet do enough to encourage inclusion women in electoral administration and give a more inclusive face to the voters. As we can see looking round the hall, we still have some way to go to achieve gender balance here at the GEO.

Every Vote Counts emphasises the need not just for training but for capacity building, so that EMBs develop a long term institutional memory. I am delighted that we are in the final stages both of extending the BRIDGE electoral administration capacity building curriculum and of extending the BRIDGE partnership, so that IFES and UNDP will join IDEA, UNEAD and the Australian Electoral Commission as partners.

Finally, Every Vote Counts is reflected in the growing emphasis on peer support between EMBs and on practitioners' networks. EMBs are increasingly sharing their own regional experience – drawing on the wisdom of the neighbours. Twenty years ago, all the flow of knowledge was from the global North. Now, knowledge and expertise from the global South is rightly standing alongside that from the global North. Experts from the South and the North are answering together the questions from electoral administrators on the ground received by the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. Regional expertise from around the world is coming together in the new Regional Electoral Resource Centre network within ACE. The value of sharing our experiences to deliver elections and referendums that are seen as legitimate and credible has never been greater. The value of this GEO Conference is as a very special forum to work together, because Every Vote Counts.