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OBSERVING ELECTIONS THE RIGHT WAY...



ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Prominent national election observation organizations have endorsed international standards in observation of the 2013 general elections in Pakistan, in a conference held on Thursday. Aurat Foundation, Free and Fair Elections Network (FAFEN), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) pledged to observe elections according to the recognized methodology defined in "Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations".

The Pakistani organizations were joined by international associations of citizen observation groups from Asia, Middle East and Southern Africa and by

Democracy Reporting International (DRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Vladimir Pran from DRI said, "The standards used by international and domestic observer groups to assess elections are an extension of the obligations and commitments Pakistan made under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These treaties include the obligation to facilitate election observation."

Sharing observation plans for the upcoming elections, Naeem Mirza from Aurat Foundation explained that the focus of AF will be on participation of women "We will be reporting on how the authorities are guaranteeing women's rights. Our special focus will be

arrangements made by the ECP."

Access of voters with disabilities will be under scrutiny of STEP, an organization promoting rights of persons with disabilities.

National civil society organizations planning election observation present at the conference acknowledged the importance of adhering to internationally recognized standards for the responsible conduct of their duties as observers.

Discussing the importance of the relationship between elections commissions and observers, Zurab Tchiaberashvili, former Chairman of Georgian elections commission, said: "Elections can never be credible and in line with international standards without proper and long-term observation. Simple fact is that election authorities need election observers to support the electoral process."