

Prominent groups endorse poll monitoring standards

Urge EC, observers to ensure transparency in whole election process

OUR STAFF REPORTER

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

At a conference held in Islamabad on Thursday, the Pakistani organisations 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).

Khawar Mumtaz, Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women,

opened the conference and commended Pakistani organisations for taking the step towards ensuring credible election observation: “Accountability and transparency in elections is a two-way street - we ask for it from the Election Commission and seek equally from the observers to be transparent and share the standards being used”.

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. National Coordinator for HRCP Core Groups Hussain Naqi said that HRCP is planning to monitor the elections in those 56 constituencies, which are sensitive in the context of human rights violations. Calling upon the voters to exercise their right to franchise on Election Day, he said, “Your destiny is in your hands! Prove it”.

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”

Mirza commended the ECP for planning to provide data on women’s turnout on polling day for the first time in Pakistan. He also said that while the national and international organisations and networks would be observing and monitoring general elections, Aurat Foundation would also be observing and monitoring the Election Commission of Pakistan to see whether it has made necessary arrangements for maximizing women’s participation in the elections and if see there were no violation of women’s right to vote and representation.

Sarwar Bari from FAFEN called for formalization of these rights, “The ECP should give accreditation to local observation networks as organisations instead of giving it to individual observers,” he said.

Telibert Laoc, from National

Democratic Institute, introduced the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, which has been endorsed by 180 independent election monitoring organizations in over 75 countries around the globe. The declaration incorporates global standards into citizen observation in order to strengthen the role of domestic observers in the electoral process.

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.”