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Georgia’s Election Broadly Meets International Standards: Technical Improvements Needed
Preliminary Statement on the January 5, 2008 Presidential Election

Tbilisi, Georgia – The International Republican Institute (IRI) supports the development of democracy in more than 70 countries around the world. It has a long history of supporting political party development in Georgia and has observed three previous elections here.

The January 2008, IRI election observation delegation found that Georgia’s presidential election broadly met international standards. However, technical problems continue to affect the electoral process. The delegation urges the government to work with all Georgian political elements, including opposition parties, to jointly resolve these issues in advance of parliamentary elections, to be held later in 2008.

Despite tensions resulting from the events of November, the campaign period was competitive and was conducted without violence. The delegation applauds all candidates and campaigns for their efforts to meet voters and to conduct nationwide door-to-door efforts, and to conduct a campaign based on issues affecting Georgia’s future.

IRI commends election officials at the polling station commissions and district election commissions for generally providing a calm and organized process on Election Day. Similarly, the parties and candidates competing in the election are to be commended for maintaining a calm and peaceful environment during voting and tabulation.

Above all, the citizens of Georgia should be applauded for exercising their constitutional right to vote, despite difficult weather conditions.

While the Central Election Commission has implemented significant improvements in various aspects of election administration, problems persist with the voters list that continue to be an issue of concern of many political actors. While IRI applauds the government’s attempts to begin the process of improving the voter lists, it is imperative that this process be completed well in advance of the parliamentary elections.

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The ability of the judicial system to function as an equal and independent body has been called into question. Doubts persist regarding the judiciary’s impartiality and its ability to resolve election disputes.

The delegation urges the new administration, together with parliament, to make judicial reform and the rule of law a top priority for continued democratic reform in Georgia.

IRI delegates witnessed the presence of unidentified individuals in a few polling stations, requesting the names of voters and their voter list numbers. The Georgian parliament should amend the Election Code to prohibit such practices, which could be interpreted by some to be an attempt to intimidate voters.

IRI will issue a comprehensive report which will include more detailed conclusions and recommendations.

IRI’s 26-member international delegation included representatives from the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Ukraine and the United States. Delegates observed the election process at more than 120 polling stations in regions of Imereti, Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Samtskhe Javakheti, Shida Kartli, the cities of Poti, Rustavi and Tbilisi, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Ajara.

IRI’s delegation was led by The Honorable Jim Kolbe, member of IRI’s Board of Directors and a former-Congressman from Arizona’s Eighth District. Other delegates are Geoff Connor, former Secretary of State for Texas and co-founder and Chairman of CACH Capital Management; Urszula Gacek, Member of the European Parliament from Poland; Bill Graham, founder of Shenandoah Capital LLP; Marek Hannibal, Member of the European Parliament from the Czech Republic; Ambassador Stephan Minikes, member of IRI’s Board of Directors and former Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; Eirik Moen, Secretary General of the International Democrat Union; Bill R. Phillips, founder of The Bill Phillips Company; Andriy Shevchenko, Member of the Ukrainian Parliament; and Mark M. Spradley, Executive Vice President of Mazao Capital LLC.

IRI staff also served as observers and assisted in the mission. IRI staff were led by Georges Fauriol, Senior Vice President of IRI and Stephen B. Nix, Regional Director for IRI's Eurasia division.

IRI has monitored more than 135 elections in 42 countries since 1983.

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