

The Situation of Election Observers as Human Rights Defenders

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GENEVA (27 October 2022) – Today marks the 17th anniversary of the first commemoration of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and 2022 also marks the 10th anniversary of the 3 April 2012 commemoration of the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring. We wish to stress that election observers are human rights defenders and civil society actors. States should therefore enable independent and impartial election observation by all monitors, including from abroad.

Across the globe, the conditions in which democratic elections are held have become increasingly difficult. Disinformation campaigns, harsh rhetoric and even violence have targeted the broad spectrum of stakeholders who participate in electoral processes, from candidates and political parties to election officials and election observers.

Both national and international election observers have reported a significant escalation in the severity and scale of attacks against them, ranging from harassment, false accusations, defamation and threats; to infringement on their right to free movement, detention, expulsion and physical violence. Some have even been killed while carrying out their work. In a number of cases, the harassment, assaults and killings have been perpetrated by members of the state's security services.

These attacks, which may seek to deter or retaliate against election observers, create an environment of uncertainty and insecurity which undermines the legitimate work and findings of observers, impacts their ability to do their work and threatens their physical safety.

The work of election observers, who can be considered as human rights defenders under specific circumstances and if they are facing violations, focuses on civil and political rights, including the rights to vote and to stand for election, the rights to political affiliation and freedom of association, the right to access information, to freedom of the

media and of expression, to peaceful assembly, movement, security of persons, and equal protection of the law for prospective voters and those seeking to be elected, as well as access to effective remedies when electoral related rights are violated. We therefore take this opportunity to remind member states of their responsibility, within the framework of international law, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, to ensure that all persons under their jurisdiction are able to access and enjoy those rights and freedoms in practice, to enable and protect civic space, and to recognize that in the context of electoral processes, national and international election observers, who are human rights defenders and civil society actors, are entitled to this protection.

Member States are urged to take all necessary steps to establish conditions that allow national and international election observers to effectively do their work, and to protect them from any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of their rights and freedoms.¹

We will continue to work on collecting information and reporting on the challenges faced by national and international election observers in carrying out their work.

ENDS

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Source: <https://srdefenders.org/information/the-situation-of-election-observers-as-human-rights-defenders%ef%bf%bc/>

¹ Commission on Human Rights, Resolution 2000/61, Human Rights Defenders, April 26, 2000, A/HRC/RES/5/1).