

Preliminary Report: Provincial Elections in Nineveh Province 2009

The joint UNPO-Assyria Council in Europe (ACE) election Observation Team welcome the democratic progress made in Iraq over the past four years. However several concerns have surfaced which the Team hope will be addressed by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in the coming weeks. Below is a summary of the Team's initial findings from its visit to the Nineveh Province:

Overall, the election process has shown a marked improvement from that in 2005. These improvements have included the following:

1. Security measures deployed in and around polling centers have proved effective. The team found no cases of violence in the mission areas observed.
2. Election organization has been very good in general. The Observation Team visited two polling centers during the set-up period on the evening of 30 January 2009 and can report no irregularities.
3. National media coverage has been open and has freely reported on areas of concern arising during the election period.

Despite evident progress in Iraqi democracy, the UNPO/ACE Team observed oversights in the administration of the election:

1. Minor inconsistencies have been observed between polling centers with regard to the format and conduct of the electoral process. These include different methods of recording voter identification and different ways of facilitating assisted voting for the illiterate, blind, and disabled.
2. Individually, these may not be cause for major concern but collectively undermine the quality of the process.

The UNPO/ACE Team draws attention to the following shortcomings that we consider a threat to the validity of the results in some of the observed polling centers:

1. As the only international Observation Team in the Nineveh Province (according to IHEC Baghdad) the UNPO/ACE Team believe that the lack of a more substantial international presence has curtailed the level of non-partisan observation.
2. Many Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) experienced extreme difficulty in casting their votes. The Observation Team talked with individuals who attested to having been refused the right to vote due to supposedly inadequate documentation. Such voters, returning later in the day, with the requested documentation were still refused.

Furthermore, poor communication between voters, election officials, and between polling centers, denied many IDPs the right to vote.

Inadequate provision was made for persons displaced since the IDP registration period in July-August 2008. Those affected in the Nineveh Province include many of the 3,500 families who fled Mosul in October 2008.

1. The Team learnt of cases where voters' names, present on the polling center register, had been omitted from the polling station list. As a result, polling station managers were unable to permit the casting of their votes.
2. The Observation Team witnessed improper conduct in the handling of sensitive materials at one polling station in Tellkaif district. This has raised significant questions over the legitimacy of the process and may or may not be an isolated case.

Algosh, Iraq

31 January 2009