



Press Release: For Immediate Release

Chief Observer of EU Election Observation Mission Hopes Parliamentary Election Will Pass Off Peacefully

Beirut, 4 May 2009 - The Chief Observer of the European Union's Election Observation Mission to Lebanon, Mr José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, has said he hopes the forthcoming elections will be held in a peaceful and constructive atmosphere.

Mr Salafranca was speaking in Beirut today at the launch of the EU observation mission, which is the largest of the international teams observing Lebanon's parliamentary elections scheduled for 7th June 2009.

Mr Salafranca, a Spanish Member of the European Parliament, also led the EU Election Observation Mission to Lebanon for the 2005 parliamentary elections, which made a series of recommendations for electoral reforms.

"It is a great privilege for me to return to Lebanon to lead a European Union observer team for a second time," said Mr Salafranca.

"I am keenly aware that these elections are taking place in a challenging and sensitive environment and it is my sincere hope that a peaceful and constructive atmosphere will prevail when the people of Lebanon go to the polls next month."

The Chief Observer said he and his team are working in a spirit of cooperation with the Lebanese authorities.

"We see these elections as an opportunity to further strengthen the country's democratisation process and to help provide stability in the region. Our mission is independent and impartial and our mandate is clear – it is to observe all aspects of the electoral process and to assess the extent to which the elections comply with international and regional standards for elections, as well as with domestic law," he added.

Mr Salafranca said he was pleased to see that steps had been taken since the last parliamentary elections four years ago aimed at improving some aspects of the electoral framework and enhancing the secrecy of the ballot.

He also welcomed the decision to hold next month's elections on a single day instead of spreading the balloting over four consecutive Sundays as was the case in 2005.

"This step, along with the introduction of financial transparency measures for parties and a spending limit in relation to campaign finances, should provide more equitable opportunities for candidates and voters alike," he added.



EUROPEAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
Republic Of Lebanon Parliamentary Elections 2009
بعثة الاتحاد الاوروبي لمراقبة الانتخابات النيابية اللبنانية 2009



The Chief Observer also noted that the creation of the Supervisory Commission on the Electoral Campaign to supervise campaign finances and media spending was “a step forward, particularly if it proves to be the forerunner of a future independent and permanent national election authority.”

Mr Salafranca said there remained some outstanding areas of concern to the mission, which it would take into account when reaching its final conclusions at the end the electoral process.

“For the moment, I will take the time to outline just two issues. Firstly, we hope that the Constitutional Council will be fully staffed and operational in due time to address any claims of candidates.

“Secondly, we regret that steps have not been taken to introduce standardised pre-printed ballot papers, a measure which would undoubtedly help enhance the secrecy of the ballot.”

Almost 100 EU observers will participate in the EU Election Observation mission on election day. Thirty long-term observers arrived in Beirut on 2nd May and were deployed around the country today in teams of two.

Approximately 50 short-term observers will be deployed closer to election day, along with a delegation of Members of the European Parliament. The mission’s nine-member core team arrived in Beirut on 18th April.

The mandate of the EU Election Observation Mission is to observe all aspects of the electoral process and to assess the extent to which the elections comply with international and regional standards for elections, as well as with domestic law.

The EU EOM operates in accordance with the “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation” adopted by a number of international bodies involved in election observation in 2005 at the United Nations in New York. Shortly after election day, the mission will issue a preliminary statement of its initial findings at a press conference in Beirut. It will remain in the country to observe the period after the elections. A more comprehensive final report, including any recommendations for future elections, will be published within two months of the end of the electoral process.

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