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PRESS RELEASE

OSCE Office supports townhall meetings to help Tajikistan prepare for 2010 parliamentary elections

TAJIKABAD, 2 September 2009 - Local government officials, civil society members, representatives of political parties and journalists participated in an OSCE-supported townhall meeting today that was part of preparations aimed to help Tajikistan hold its February 2010 parliamentary elections in line with OSCE commitments and internationally accepted standards.

The meeting, held in the centre of Tajikabad district, a mountainous region northeast of Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, was the third in a series of nine townhall meetings scheduled to be held throughout the country until the end of the year. The meetings are designed to be semi-formal gatherings moderated by the OSCE Office in Tajikistan and the National Association of Political Scientists of Tajikistan (NAPST).

"Bringing together representatives of the local government, political parties and civil society encourages frank and open discussions about democracy, representation and the needs of local residents, who are major stakeholders in the forthcoming elections," said Klaus Rasmussen, Acting Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan.

Participants in the meeting discussed recommendations for reform of the parliamentary electoral laws, including proposals presented to the Government of Tajikistan in 2005 by the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, recommendations presented in 2008 by Tajikistan's eight registered political parties and others presented to the President and heads of the lower and upper houses of Parliament in 2009 by a coalition of 14 civil society entities.

Some participants in today's meeting found Tajikistan's electoral mechanisms sufficient. Others argued, however, that there was an urgent need to reform parliamentary electoral laws and implement the recommended reforms.

"The need for increased pluralism in the national and local election commissions is real," said Abdughoni Mamadazimov, chair of NAPST. "Other urgent areas of reform, to name a few, are: Ensuring transparency in vote counts, provision of signed protocols of election tallies, elimination or substantial reduction in the candidate registration fee and the legalizing of non-partisan civil society representatives to serve as election observers."

Tajikistan has 56 election districts that will be served by more than 3,000 polling stations. The February 2010 parliamentary elections will determine the composition of district, province and national parliaments.

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