

ANSWERING THE CALL

Canadians from all walks of life are volunteering to help strengthen governance in developing countries around the world.

When the Canadian government looked for volunteers to help observe the repeat presidential election in Ukraine over Christmas in 2004, more than 4,000 Canadians came forward for the job. Following training in election observation, regional history, politics and intercultural effectiveness, a delegation of 463 people, led by former prime minister John Turner, was deployed across Ukraine in 20 teams. By taking part in the historic event, they had a chance to watch—and support—democracy in action.

The eight-day mission marked the inaugural deployment by Canada Corps, an initiative of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that allows Canadians to travel to developing countries and fragile states and help all levels of government work in a more honest, effective and accountable way. Through Canada Corps, seasoned development veterans and enthusiastic youth alike offer their skills and expertise around the world to support democracy and human rights, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, entrepreneurship and gender equality. And they're willing to do so in insecure places.

"Canadians are eager to share their knowledge with other countries," says Claire Dansereau, Vice-President of Canada Corps at CIDA. "Their experiences abroad not only benefit developing countries by supporting good governance, they also enrich their own personal and professional lives. These people truly become part of our global community."

Since that first send-off of volunteers to Ukraine, Canada Corps has deployed Canadians to observe elections in a number of trouble spots, including Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon and Haiti. A team of 58 Canadians stepped forward to observe the Palestinian Legislative Council elections that took place on January 25. In that vote, as in many others in regions of instability, every precaution was taken to ensure that observers were out of harm's way, and a team of 58 Canadians stepped forward to the task.

"They did it for something they believed in," says Paul Adams, a former Middle East correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*, now teaching at Carleton University, who headed the Canadian observer mission.

"They found joy and satisfaction and excitement in witnessing a free and open democratic process conducted under difficult circumstances."

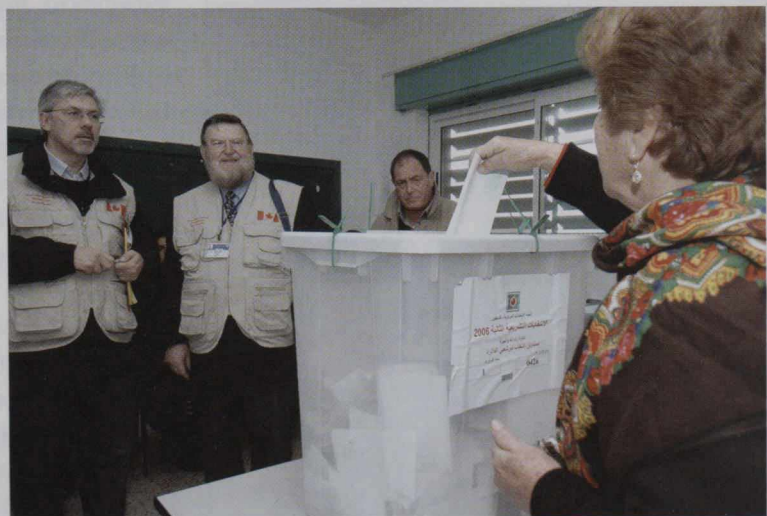
For long-term observers, such assignments begin well in advance of the election, with observing the registration of voters and candidates. Short-term observers sent prior to the vote focus on election day, watching for transparency and



Democracy in action: A delegation of Canadians observed the repeat presidential election in Ukraine over Christmas 2004.

fair access to the ballot box and reporting their observations.

While observing elections is one area of focus for Canada Corps, the initiative, which employs a whole-of-government approach to policies and programs that affect developing countries, also supports a variety of other efforts centred on governance, from strengthening human rights in tsunami-affected areas of Indonesia to building the capacity of youth fighting HIV/AIDS in Lesotho.



Paul Adams (left) headed the Canadian observer mission in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections that took place in January.