

universal and equal suffrage,"<sup>1</sup> and since no electoral event can be evaluated as entirely free and fair in terms of the definitions listed previously, the observer must determine the degree to which the will of the majority of the voters was expressed clearly, knowledgeably and in secret, and reported accurately -- keeping in mind all of the factors which could influence the expression of their views.

The presentation of the rationale leading up to the ultimate conclusion is much more critical than the conclusion itself. First and foremost, observers' reports should be factual, and descriptive. In some instances it may be preferable to let the facts speak for themselves, and let the reader draw his or her own conclusions rather than to seek to make an overall assessment. This approach is especially applicable where there was a high incidence of serious irregularities or problems.

Therefore, the observer should resist being pressured into making a judgement as to whether the election was "free and fair" in every case. In instances where such a conclusion may be appropriate, observers should normally qualify the degree to which the election met the "free and fair" definitions and determine to what extent the election made a significant and positive contribution to the democratic evolution or development of the country concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> Free and Fair Elections - International Law and Practice, *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, 1994