ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Regular, inclusive, and free and fair elections are a critical element of a functioning democracy. Canada uses its considerable expertise in this field to provide support to electoral processes and institutions throughout the electoral cycle. Canada also supports the ability of citizens to participate in the electoral cycle and build local capacity to monitor electoral processes.

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN UKRAINE

Canada supported the electoral process in Ukraine by funding the deployment of a team of 26 short-term Canadian election observers (including 3 Members of Parliament) for the repeat parliamentary elections held in five districts on December 15, 2013. The mission report provided an assessment of the conduct of the elections in these districts, as well as recommendations to help improve the electoral process for the May 25, 2014, presidential election.

Canada also worked closely with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to undertake a human rights assessment mission to Ukraine. The mission's report outlined the facts and circumstances related to the human rights situation in Ukraine and provided recommendations to help increase the capacity of Ukrainian authorities and the international community to improve the situation of human rights and minority rights in the country.

Canada's contributions to the International Organization of La Francophonie in 2013–2014 supported democracy in francophone Africa through the provision of technical and organizational support and training to electoral bodies in countries such as Madagascar, Mali, Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon in order to increase their capacity to develop credible voter lists and to address electoral irregularities.

Canada is proud of its role in La Francophonie as its second-largest donor, particularly in the context of the organization's modernization efforts. Canada's involvement in La Francophonie highlights our country's linguistic duality and our commitment to democratic development, respect for human rights, strengthening of the rule of law and poverty reduction. Participation in La Francophonie gives Canadians more opportunities to wield international influence in the areas of language and culture, economics and new technologies, and international development.

In November 2013, the Honourable Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie attended the 29th session of the Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie and in the UNESCO General Conference, where he underlined Canada's leadership role in advancing sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction, and promoted Canadian foreign policy priorities of supporting democracy, respect for human rights and good governance.

CIVIL SOCIETY, INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Civil society plays a crucial role in democratic societies. Civil society organizations provide a mechanism for citizens, including the most vulnerable and marginalized, to organize themselves to advocate for their values and interests. They serve as an essential conduit and mediator between individuals and their government and they allow individuals to hold their leaders to account, giving them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Canadian-supported programs assist civil society by providing training and technical support, and by working to promote and protect civil society space.

A strong and democratic society is also characterized by an active and independent media, which can serve as a catalyst for democratic change and encourage open, accountable governance. Yet, in many countries, the only voice that is heard is the voice of those in power through state-controlled media. Canada supports the independence of both traditional and new media and works to build capacity to equip people with the information needed to participate in well-informed, democratic decision making.