



IFES Reacts to Haitian Election Situation

CONTACT: (French) Vincent de Herdt, vincent.de.herdt@skynet.be, 509-562-8149
(English) Chris Hennemeyer, chennemeyer@ifes.org, 202-350-6801
(Spanish) Pablo Galarce, pgalarce@ifes.org, 202-350-6811

WASHINGTON, DC – FEBRUARY 21, 2006 – For the past seven months, an IFES team of twelve long-term observers has been monitoring Haiti’s electoral process. During that time our team has commented on issues ranging from voter registration, voter education, electoral law, logistics and other topics related to the efficiency and transparency of the presidential and legislative elections. Our findings have always been technical and non-partisan. Our long-term observers were joined in early February by an additional 24 short-term observers who monitored the conduct of the Feb. 7th Presidential and Parliamentary first-round elections. While there were technical and logistical problems, including overcrowded polling stations and inadequately trained electoral staff, IFES’ team neither detected fraud nor received allegations of fraud or intimidation.

Civil unrest in the days that followed the elections resulted in a political decision being taken to change the way the blank ballots were counted (contrary to Art. 185 of the electoral decree). The result of that fundamental disregard of electoral law was the declaration of Rene Preval as winner by a narrow margin. IFES cannot now and may never be able to say whether this result reflects the will of the people, but we regret that a proper re-count and/or review were not allowed to proceed. As an institution dedicated to upholding the integrity of the electoral process, we must state that electoral law governing ballot counting was clearly not adhered to.

IFES remains concerned that this deviation from national electoral law may not bode well for Haiti’s democratic transition, and may not contribute to an environment conducive to good governance. Whoever occupies Haiti’s presidential palace requires both popular support and electoral legitimacy.

IFES urges both Haitian and international authorities to reaffirm their commitment to the promotion of democratic principles and the rule of law.

Finally, we hope that the experiences in Haiti will be studied and documented so that lessons learned, particularly regarding ballot security and early civic and media education related to the counting process, can be documented and applied in future elections in Haiti and elsewhere.

IFES is an international non-profit dedicated to building democratic societies through its work in election administration, civil society strengthening, and the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and good governance. IFES works in more than 25 countries worldwide and in a number of locations in the United States.