

PRESS RELEASE

Mongolia's presidential election competitive and well-organized, but ongoing court cases caused uncertainty over candidacies, international observers say

ULAANBAATAR, 27 June 2017 – The 26 June 2017 presidential election in Mongolia was competitive and well-organized, featuring a short yet fierce campaign; the election administration largely enjoyed public confidence and the freedoms of assembly and expression were generally respected. However, protracted resolution of complaints, as well as pending court cases, led to uncertainty regarding candidacies. The media coverage was extensive, but largely devoid of analytical reporting, the international observers concluded in a statement released today.

“These were competitive and well-run elections, and are overall promising for the future of Mongolia’s democracy. Pending court cases related to candidacies caused confusion and doubt, and this must be addressed because, to put it plainly, voters must know if the candidates they are voting for on election day will be legally allowed to take office,” said Guglielmo Picchi, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “I look forward to the second round confirming this overall positive experience.”

The legal framework for elections provides for fundamental rights and freedoms, forming an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, the observers noted. While a number of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been addressed, several previously identified shortcomings, in particular regarding suffrage rights, remain.

The General Election Commission (GEC) enjoyed stakeholders’ trust, met key deadlines and operated in a transparent manner, the statement says. Composition of many mid-level commissions was changed following the transition of power in local assemblies in 2016, which led a number of stakeholders to question their independence.

“Yesterday was an impressive display, and many European politicians would be envious of how technologies were put to good use in polling stations, enabling Mongolians to freely choose their next president,” said Georgios Varemenos, Head of the delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Stakeholders expressed overall confidence in the accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter register, the observers said. Meanwhile, the Law on Elections contains disproportionate provisions restricting suffrage rights, contrary to OSCE standards and other international commitments.

Three candidates representing all three parliamentary parties contested the election. By law, no other party had the right of nomination and candidates could not stand independently. Overall, current candidacy requirements are overly restrictive and limit voters’ choice, the statement said.

The election campaign was dynamic, however, the political discourse was not exempt from xenophobic rhetoric, the observers noted. Several leaked recordings alleging candidates’ involvement in corruption and other illegal activities shaped the campaign narrative, and instances of blurring the line between state administration and campaigning were observed.

“Campaign financing regulations on transparency and accountability did not allow to tackle concerns of corruption. While addressing this issue, the candidates largely limited themselves to mutual accusations, resulting in an unconvincing message to the electorate. This campaign narrative discouraged voters, especially the youth, from voting,” said Laima Andrikienė, Chair of the European Parliament delegation. “Limitations on the right to nominate candidates did not help the average voter to truly engage in this contest.”

The statement noted that citizen observers contributed to voters’ understanding of the electoral process, including by issuing timely statements on a range of issues. The GEC accredited some 18,000 observers from political parties that nominated candidates.

In the limited number of polling stations visited by the international observers on election day, voting and counting were orderly, but transparency was somewhat limited by the GEC releasing only aggregated results, the statement says. Female polling workers outnumbered men. Party observers were present in all polling stations visited, while citizen observers did not observe election day in a comprehensive manner. The police received more than 150 complaints on election day, including 86 on alleged vote buying.

“I think that the Mongolian people had, in the first round of the presidential election, the possibility to express their choice in a genuinely democratic election, although there were a number of shortcomings. The campaign contained some very nasty moments,” said Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, Head of the ODIHR limited election observation mission. “Our mission will stay here until after the second round. I and my colleagues from the ODIHR mission are looking forward to a further fruitful presence in this wonderful and democratic country.”

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