



Preliminary Assessment
by the Election Observation Mission of the Government of Japan to Nepal

April 13th, 2008

1. The Election Observation Mission of the Government of Japan, headed by Mr. Toshiyuki Niwa, was dispatched to Nepal from March 29th to observe the implementation of the Constituent Assembly elections, held on April 10th. The Mission members have observed and have been observing the preparations for the polling day, the polling itself, and also the counting procedures. The Mission consists of 24 members from academia, NGOs and government, working together with 12 Nepali assistants. The Mission members were deployed in five regions: Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Dhulikhel, Pokhara, and Nepalganj. On the polling day, the Mission members visited some 300 polling stations at 111 locations in 34 constituencies (in 10 administrative districts).
2. Two Japanese parliamentarians (MPs), Mr. Tadahiko Ito and Mr. Gaku Hashimoto also visited Nepal over the polling day. Their presence, accompanied by the Ambassador of Japan to Nepal, H.E. Mr. Tatsuo Mizuno, and other Embassy staff reinforced Japan's support for the successful election and further development of democracy in Nepal. (In total, approximately 50 persons were on the ground during the Constituent Assembly elections, including 24 Mission members dispatched from Tokyo.)
3. The Mission's activities were limited in duration and in localities, but the Mission members have actively gathered information and exchanged views with other international and national observation teams, UN officials, and political leaders in Nepal. At this juncture, the Mission expresses its preliminary assessment of its findings. At a later stage, the Mission will submit its "Evaluation and Suggestions Report" to the Election Commission.
4. The Mission regards the Constituent Assembly elections to be an epoch - making event in the evolution of democratic Nepal. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006, together with other more recently negotiated agreements between the parties concerned, have enabled the people of Nepal to express their will on the future nationhood and governance.
5. The Mission congratulates the people of Nepal for implementing the Constituent Assembly elections. The Mission acknowledges and commends the enormous efforts made by the Government of Nepal, the leaders of the political parties, the Election Commission and the Nepal police to realize this election. The assistance provided by the UN, UNMIN and the international community including Japan, is also noted. Most importantly, the Mission expresses its most sincere respect to all the Nepalese people who actively participated in the elections, and also, to all the electoral officers who conducted their work earnestly.
6. The Mission had apprehension about the manner in which some political campaigns were conducted, especially in the initial phase. The number of reported cases of serious violations of the electoral and criminal laws was disappointing, with allegations of murders, abductions, intimidation and other violent acts. The agreement reached between the leaders of the three main political parties in early April to calm down their supporters had positive effects, but was not sufficient to stop violence at certain areas including Surkhet. The Mission urges all aggrieved persons to seek justice peacefully in accordance with the rule of law of Nepal. Some Mission members observed certain isolated cases of irregularities in the polling, where some ballots were seemingly cast under different registered names. The Mission is generally satisfied with the manner in which the Election Commission staff handled these cases. The Mission observers also noticed several technical points where improvements can be pursued in the future. The Mission welcomes the decision by the Election Commission to conduct re-polling at 60 polling stations in 20 locations as a strong manifestation of the will of the election authorities to make elections free and fair.
7. The Mission members who observed the polling and counting process in certain localities commend the professional manner shown by the electoral staff, government monitors and party observers. The Mission expects that the counting and tabulation process will continue to proceed properly and transparently. The claims of electoral irregularities must be addressed and processed through the complaint procedures prescribed in the law. The mission emphasizes the importance of accepting the results of the election by all concerned. The Mission believes that results reflect the will of the people expressed through their ballots. Violence can never be condoned.
8. Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation. Diversity can be a strength if the Nepal people move forward together. The Mission believes in the resilience of the Nepali people, as well as in their determination to assume stronger ownership in their nation-building. As Nepali "ownership" strengthens, Japan will continue to respond with "partnership".

(END)