

## **PRESENTATION BY MR O. P. RAWAT, ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA**

Chair for The Session, Hon. And Distinguished Participants representing EMBs, Civil Society and other organizations working for strengthening democracy and electoral integrity worldwide, Ms Tamar Zhvania, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission of Georgia and our host and ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to you all. As you all are aware that we are running behind schedule, I fully agree to the proposition of the chair to restrict the presentation to ten minutes instead of fifteen so as to make up for the lost time and ensure that we finish by the scheduled time and are all free to enjoy the glorious surrounding in the evening.

First of all, I must say that a very comprehensive framework for ensuring electoral integrity has been presented by previous speakers in the forenoon. The same was further elaborated by the representative of IFES to strengthen electoral integrity worldwide. I want to tell you that India is working on these lines with vigour. As a result Perception of Electoral Integrity Index (PEI) developed by the team headed by Prof Pippa Norris of Kennedy School of Harvard University places India with higher than global average score as well as higher than South Asian average score. Only in the matter of campaign finance and access to media, India lags behind and those are our challenges.

I would also like to comment on Ms Tamar's question that for electoral integrity EMB alone should not be held responsible. In our case Election Commission is given the responsibility to provide superintendence, direction and control of conduct of elections by the Constitution and therefore it is the absolute responsibility of Election Commission to deliver elections with integrity. If there are gaps in

law or other provisions required the Commission needs to go in for advocacy for getting the needful done or else fill the void themselves and take shelter of Supreme Court ruling in this regard.

We have undertaken a number of steps to address these issues squarely. Recently we have had an international conference on “Role of Money in Elections” in collaboration with International IDEA where representatives of civil society organizations and political parties also participated. We are working on the recommendations of this very successful interaction to take the reform process further. Election Commission of India (ECI) has taken a number of initiatives to monitor election expenditure of political parties and candidates and this includes disclosure of audited annual accounts by the parties which are put in public domain; maintaining a separate account for meeting expenses on election campaign by candidates, submitting these accounts to Expenditure observer thrice during the campaign period and correct any under reporting detected by observer by viewing video recording or the market rates of particular item of expenditure. The law makes it a corrupt practice to wrongly report election expenditure or exceed the ceiling on such expenditure and the consequences may be disqualification of the candidate.

For equitable media access ECI allocates air time to all parties on state owned media. However, with proliferation of private ownership of all types of media, this is of little consequence. Therefore ECI has focused on paid news in private media and started adding such expenditure to candidate’s account. However, ECI could not take any action against a media house for a proven case where they published critical reports against a candidate for not paying upfront to earn their patronage. There is Media Certification and Monitoring Committee at every District Hqr. to pre-certify all

electronic advertisements and also to monitor any breach of ECI guidelines in this regard.

ECI has started deploying central forces to ensure objectivity of policing during polls, web-casting of polling process at polling stations, placing micro observers at polling stations, video recording at many polling booths in such a manner that at least one independent means is available to oversee the proceedings during actual polls and ensure electoral integrity on the poll day.

With these steps ECI has also recommended a number of legal reforms. We hope that with all such initiatives PEI score of India in Data release due anytime now of version 4.0 will certainly look up.

I would like to thank the host for giving me this opportunity and all the hospitality extended before concluding my intervention.