

OHR's Statement at the International Agency's Joint Press Conference

Municipal Elections

Today marks the start of the municipal election campaign. The October elections will be the first in which mayors of municipalities are directly elected. The elections offer citizens an opportunity to do two things:

- impress upon politicians that the issues that matter are creating jobs and improving public services, such as schools, infrastructure and medical care
- introduce new blood into a ruling establishment characterized by a preponderance of familiar faces. It's not invariably the case, but it is often the case that new faces mean new ideas.

Likewise, the elections offer political parties an opportunity to tackle the everyday problems faced by voters – problems for which they have practical solutions.

OHR urges the parties to campaign on the strength of their policies, not on the basis of fear. Too often politicians of all colours cynically play the politics of competitive victimisation, exploiting nationalist issues for crude electoral purposes instead of focusing on improving life for the citizens. Cheating the voters out of dealing with the issues that really matter to them undermines the basic democratic premise that representatives act to improve the lives of those they have been elected to represent.

Faced by the daily reality of low incomes, poor services and a crumbling infrastructure, citizens have a right to expect practical, specific, concrete commitments from their

politicians, not the irrelevant nationalistic politics of competitive victimisation.