

July 1, 2004

The Honorable Kofi Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

We, the undersigned Members of Congress, hereby request the Electoral Assistance Division of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs to send election observers to monitor the presidential election in the United States scheduled for November 2, 2004. We are deeply concerned that the right of U.S. citizens to vote in free and fair elections is again in jeopardy.

As you may know, the 2000 presidential election was steeped in controversy. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, a bipartisan federal agency, investigated widespread allegations of voter disenfranchisement and questionable practices in the state of Florida relating to the purging of names from voter registration lists, methods of balloting, and the independence of counting and certification procedures. In a report released in June 2001, the Commission found that the electoral process in Florida resulted in the denial of the right to vote for countless persons and further that the "disenfranchisement of Florida's voters fell most harshly on the shoulders of black voters" and in poor counties.

Moreover, Florida was not the only state in which voters were wrongfully denied their right to vote and have their vote counted. Experts have concluded that over half of the votes that went uncounted nationwide during the last election were cast by "nonwhite voters." In Florida, the Commission found that black voters were "10 times more likely than non-black voters to have their ballots rejected" - a result that experts say is typical of states across the country. The election was finally determined by the U.S. Supreme Court which prevented further counting of the votes in what has been widely criticized as one of the most politicized and improper decisions in U.S. jurisprudence.

As the next Election Day approaches, there is more cause for alarm rather than less. In April of this year, the Commission issued a status report which found that despite promised nationwide reforms relating to voting equipment, voter list maintenance, poll worker training, election certification, and reinstatement of ex-felon voting rights, adequate steps have not been taken to ensure that a similar situation will not arise in the coming election. Rather, upon evaluating the current state of affairs, the Commission concluded "the potential is real and present for significant problems on voting day that once again will compromise the right to vote."

The right to vote, and have votes counted, in free and fair elections is a cornerstone of representative government. In addition to violating amendments 15, 19 and 26 of the U.S. Constitution, and laws adopted pursuant to it such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the events in Florida violated the right to vote as it is enshrined in several international instruments that the U.S. has either agreed to, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 21), or ratified, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 25) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (article 5).

As a member of the international community, we firmly believe in the importance of international human rights law and its applicability and relevance to the U.S. Given the deeply troubling events of the 2000 election and the growing concerns about the lack of necessary reforms and potential for abuse in the 2004 election, we believe that the engagement of international election monitors has the potential to expedite the necessary reform as well as reduce the likelihood of questionable practices and voter disenfranchisement on Election Day.

In addition, we believe that international oversight is critical in this election not only because of the role the U.S. has in the world, but also because the issues related to the methodology of elections inside the United States, such as the use of electronic and paperless voting technology, are likely to have international impact. The danger that these methodologies could become a standard to be exported and emulated involves broader issues of democracy that should be of concern to the United Nations and the international community as a whole.

For all these reasons, we urge the UN to favorably consider this urgent request.

Eddie Bernice Johnson <<http://www.house.gov/ejohnson/>> (TX-30)

Joseph Crowley <<http://crowley.house.gov/homepage.asp>> (NY-07)

Raul Grijalva <<http://www.house.gov/grijalva/>> (AZ-07)

Danny K. Davis <<http://www.house.gov/davis/>> (IL-07)

Corrine Brown <<http://www.house.gov/corrinebrown/>> (FL-03)

Carolyn B. Maloney <<http://www.house.gov/maloney/>> (NY-14)

Jerrold Nadler <<http://www.house.gov/nadler/>> (NY-08)

Michael M. Honda <<http://www.house.gov/honda/>>

Elijah E. Cummings <<http://www.house.gov/cummings/>> (MD-07)

Julia Carson <<http://www.juliacarson.house.gov/>> (IN-07)

Edolphus Towns <<http://www.house.gov/towns/>> (NY- 10)