



The MUMBAI Declaration

Made on 26th October, 2018, at the 1st International Conference on **“Better Election for Healthier Democracy”** for Local Governments; hosted by State Election Commission, Maharashtra at Mumbai.

Preamble:

Local Government and their elections do not received the due importance from the various stakeholders of democracy including the National & State governments. There is an urgent need to bring local government and their elections to the centre stage of the political discourse, if democracy is to flourish in true spirit at the grassroots level.

(2) Accordingly an International Conference on “Better Elections for Healthier Democracy” for local governments was organized by the State Election commission, Maharashtra at Mumabi, on 25th & 26th October, 2018;

(3) Recommendations made by the participants in the conference are given in 2 parts as shown below:

PART A

Recommendations relevant to all including the various democratic countries and the International Organizations

- (i) An international platform be established focusing on local government elections for:
 - a. continues exchanges of ideas and good practices on various subjects including technology process and practices
 - b. capacity development (job/ operational training, professional development, stakeholder awareness training, peer to peer exchange etc.) for key stakeholders through the electoral cycle.
 - c. assessing the needs of training and exchanging of independent election observers
 - d. conducting research and new innovation for local government elections.
- (ii) Local governments be encouraged to come together to form Associations for asserting themselves and for conducting research & training etc. in all aspects of elections and local governance.
- (iii) To Promote, encourage and use the Institute of Democracy & Elections for Good Governance (IDEGG) established by the State Election Commission of Maharashtra, for working on key issues relating to local government elections.
- (iv) State Election Commission, Maharashtra to start with and thereafter various election Authorities shall lead and co- ordinate the above activities by turn.

PART B

Recommendations relevant primarily to the Indian stakeholders especially the various State Election Commissions:-

- (i) Governments at national and sub national levels be requested to:
 - (a) Devolve funds, functions & functionaries to local governments in a time bound manner
 - (b) create mechanism for training of both prospective & elected representatives especially women and vulnerable sections at the earliest.
 - (c) Undertake and implement urgent electoral reforms to cleanse the system of corrupt practices, in particular
 - debarring candidates with criminal backgrounds from contesting elections
 - limit the eligibility of a person to maximum 2 terms in a local body
 - curtail the undue influence of money power and social media
 - (d) ensure adequate and timely financial grant for meeting election expenses by electoral authorities
 - (e) empower SECs to have full control on election cycle from delimitation, reservation, voter list preparation upto post election settlement of accounts.
- (ii) State Election Commission should
 - (a) Use their constitutional powers & try to be fiercely independent
 - (b) Fill in vacuous areas wherever possible
 - (c) Evolve innovative methods towards authentic and error free electoral rolls;
 - (d) Promote voter and citizen education and awareness

- (e) Have "Societal Conversation" with various stakeholders
- (iii) State Election Commissions may consider the following
- (a) Compulsory "Constituency / ward Development Plan" by all the candidates, giving their vision of development and its; display in public domain.
 - (b) System of yellow/ red cards etc. for violations / defaults misbehaviour etc. by candidates during the period of Model Code of Conduct and its display in public domain.
 - (c) Audit of expenditure incurred by candidates and political parties through auditors empanelled with Accountant General.
 - (d) System to gather information regarding contributions made by third parties etc.
 - (e) Chairmen of All India Association of State Election Commissions shall lead and co- ordinate the above activities.

Background to the Declaration

Historic amendments to the constitution of India were made in 1992 through the 73rd & 74th amendments in order to provide Local Self- Governments (LSGs) their rightful place in the process of Nation Building and fulfill the aspirational needs of citizens. It provides, amongst others for (i) Constitutional status to all LSGs in India and (ii) Independent State Election Commission at par with election Commission of India in each state for conducting the elections to the LSGs in a free, fair & transparent manner.

It is ironic that inspite of 25 years of the passage of the above amendments, many people still do not adequately recognize the role of LSGs and are not aware about the Status, Authority & Role of State Election Commissions. Similar situation exists in various other democratic countries as well.

Realising the urgent need to bridge the above gap, State Election Commission, Maharashtra hosted an International Conference on 25th & 26th October 2018 at Mumbai with an effort to bring elections to the local governments to the centre stage of electoral process. The objective was to share experiences and disseminate good practices adopted by the various Election Authorities. This conference, a first of its kind, was attended by nearly 150 eminent persons, including 14 delegates from Election Authorities of various countries, 6 from global CSOs (including Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), London and International IDEA, Stockholm), 10 State Election Commissioners of India, representatives from various SECs, NGOs, CSOs, Election Managers, Media, Researchers/ Academicians, Political Parties etc.

The conference was inaugurated by Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra Shri Ch. Vidyasagar Rao, in the presence of Hon'ble Smt. Pankaja Munde, Minister of Rural Development, Women & Child welfare, Government of Maharashtra & Hon'ble Shri Radhikrishna Wikhe- Patil, Leader of Opposition of Maharashtra Legislative assembly. The Valedictory function was chaired by Hon'ble Shri Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra and attended by Hon'ble Shri Sudhir Mungantiwar, Minister of Finance & Planning, Government of Maharashtra and Hon'ble Shri Dhananjay Munde, Leader of Opposition of Maharashtra Legislative Council.

Following 5 major themes were deliberated at the conference over two days, with active participations of the delegates:-

- (i) Public ownership of democracy
- (ii) Misuse of money of power
- (iii) Inclusiveness
- (iv) Menace of social media/ fake news etc.
- (v) Role of various stakeholders