

PRESS RELEASE
NDI ASSISTS KENYA'S DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

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Current Situation in Kenya

With Kenya's presidential elections scheduled to be held within the next three months, public pressure for democratic reforms has increased significantly. Earlier this year, a broad effort by religious, civic and opposition political leaders known as the National Convention Executive Committee (NCEC) set forth demands for constitutional, legal and administrative reforms. The NCEC successfully mobilized popular support for the reform agenda over the course of the summer.

Members of Parliament from the ruling party and from the opposition, including NCEC participants, developed the Inter-Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG), which recently advanced a reform package. The National Assembly completed debate on the IPPG package, embodied in three bills, and passage of the reforms is imminent. The reforms include: repeal of provisions in colonial-era laws that restrict civil and political rights; enhancing the independence of the election commission; and facilitating the rights of political parties to organize.

Serious and potentially far-reaching questions have been raised both about the government's willingness to implement these reforms, and their feasibility given the limited time prior to the elections. In addition, concerns have been raised about the limited role played by civil society organizations in the IPPG context. Some of the reforms they are calling for which go beyond the IPPG package include: postponing the upcoming elections, completely revamping the election commission and changing the presidential election system.

In turn, President Moi has agreed to accept the IPPG proposals prior to the national elections. The government has also promised a constitutional review after the election. Most opposition parties now appear ready to participate in elections.

Civic and religious leaders have increasingly focused their attention on the need to monitor the election process to provide an impartial account and to discourage electoral abuses before as well as on election day. Important civic and religious organizations, including the Institute for Education in Democracy (IED), National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK), Kenya Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and other nongovernmental groups are actively preparing to monitor the pre-election period and election-day processes.

NDI's Activities in Kenya

NDI has maintained a continuing presence in Kenya since 1993, when it initiated a National Endowment for Democracy (NED)-funded program to train women candidates and their staff.

In July 1997, the Institute initiated a US Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded program to support election monitoring by Kenyan civic and religious groups. Since late July, the NDI election program representative has held frequent consultations with Kenyan

throughout Kenya to conduct workshops, training approximately 650 election monitors, observers and pollwatchers in the provinces.

A second NDI seminar took place October 2-3 in Nairobi, which resulted in 125 NGO leaders receiving training on campaign monitoring and media monitoring. These efforts were significant in laying the groundwork for future collaboration between these NGO's.

Finally, NDI is organizing an "International Advisory Committee", consisting of senior level political and civic leaders from the U.S., Europe and Africa, to provide critical support for domestic monitors. The committee members will participate in short-term missions, meet with Kenyan government officials, monitoring groups and other civic, religious and political leaders and provide advice as appropriate.

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