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PRESS RELEASE

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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) AND OSWALDO PAYÁ OF THE VARELA PROJECT IN CUBA TO RECEIVE NDI DEMOCRACY AWARDS ON SEPTEMBER 30

*Payá still awaits permission from Cuban government to travel to Award ceremony.
Documentary with rare footage of Payá, filmed recently in Cuba, to be premiered.
Secretary General César Gaviria to accept the Democracy Award on behalf of the OAS.*

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) will honor Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas of the Varela Project in Cuba and the Organization of American States (OAS) with its W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award at a dinner at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. on September 30.

NDI also announced that a new documentary on Oswaldo Payá and the Varela Project will be premiered at the ceremony. Filmed recently in Cuba, the documentary features rare footage of Mr. Payá describing the challenges of collecting the signatures for the Varela Project, a Cuba-based initiative calling for a referendum on open elections, freedom of speech, freedom for political prisoners and free enterprise. The Varela Project draws upon a provision in the Cuban constitution that enables citizens to introduce legislative initiatives when accompanied by 10,000 signatures. The organizers of the petition submitted more than 11,000 signatures to the National Assembly in May; since then the total number of signatures has grown an estimated 30,000.

The documentary also features commentary on the Project by Nobel Peace Laureate Oscar Arias, Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel, Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar and NDI Chairman and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Mr. Payá has applied with the Cuban government for a permit to visit Washington, D.C. to receive the Award, but has yet to receive a reply.

The OAS will be honored for its evolving and growing role in protecting and promoting democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. The leadership role of César Gaviria, the Secretary-General of the OAS, who will accept the Award on behalf of the Organization, will also be recognized.

The OAS is the only inter-governmental organization whose Charter calls on member states to “exercise representative democracy.” By adopting instruments such as Resolution 1080 in 1991 (known as the Santiago Declaration), the Protocol of Washington in 1997, and the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, the OAS has not only defined democracy in the hemisphere, but has defended the rights of citizens when democracy has been under threat. The OAS also has agencies tasked with supporting democracy, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which provides recourse to citizens who have suffered human rights violations, and the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, which supports countries in strengthening their democratic institutions and practices.

Mr. Gaviria became Secretary General in 1994 and was re-elected in 1999. Through his strategy for a "New Vision of the OAS," he has fostered institutional changes that have reinvigorated the inter-American agenda. He has strengthened the Organization’s programs to promote democracy and human rights, and he has carried out numerous personal missions in defense of democratic institutions and processes in the hemisphere. Secretary General Gaviria served as president of Colombia from 1990 to 1994.

Also speaking at the Awards ceremony will be NDI Chairman and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; NDI President Kenneth Wollack; and Genaro Arriagada, coordinator of the “NO” campaign for the 1988 presidential plebiscite in Chile. Arriagada received NDI’s Democracy Award that same year. It was that plebiscite campaign that inspired the Varela Project, according to Payá.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

For more information about NDI visit our website at www.ndi.org. For more information about the Varela Project visit www.proyectovarela.org, and about the OAS visit www.oas.org

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NOTE: MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA ARE INVITED TO COVER THIS EVENT.

WHERE: Omni Shoreham Hotel, Regency Ballroom

WHEN: Monday September 30, 2002

TIME: Program starts at 7:30 p.m. (camera set-up by 7:00p.m. please)

Press please call (202) 728-5527 to RSVP.