



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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STATEMENT OF THE NDI MISSION TO THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES Mahé, Seychelles July 27, 1992

This statement reflects the preliminary observations of a two-member team sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The team, which comprised Lionel C. Johnson, NDI senior program officer and East Africa program manager, and Program Officer Peter Silverman, came to Seychelles at the invitation of a range of Seychellois leaders. NDI is a political development institute affiliated with the Democratic Party of the United States and headquartered in Washington, D.C. that conducts nonpartisan programs to foster democracy in nations around the world. The NDI team's mission to Seychelles builds upon the Institute's programs in countries throughout Africa, including Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. NDI has also conducted a series of regional election programs in Africa, the most recent of which was held last May in Burundi and was attended by several prominent Seychellois.

During its visit, the NDI team met with officials of the Government of Seychelles and political and civic leaders to assess the state of the country's transition to multiparty democracy, and to evaluate the prospects for future NDI programs to support this important process. As part of its visit, the team witnessed the historic July 26 election of members of the Constitutional Commission, Seychelles' first multiparty election in fifteen years.

The NDI team did not come to Seychelles to judge the country's election process, or to interfere in the internal affairs of this sovereign nation. Although the NDI team visited nearly all of the country's polling stations, a formal election observation effort in Seychelles by NDI would have required a more systematic pre-election assessment and extensive coverage of the balloting and vote tabulation process across the country at the time of the elections.

NDI offers its strong support for the historic initiative restoring multiparty democracy undertaken by the government and people of Seychelles. The overwhelming participation of Seychellois in these elections underscores their desire to advance the country's political process and to establish Seychelles as a member of the community of democratic nations. NDI wishes to recognize the Director of Elections and election administrators, who through their dedication and professionalism earned the confidence of the electorate.

Considering that this election for members of the Constitutional Commission represents an important phase in Seychelles' democratic transition, the NDI team has been greatly encouraged by the expressed commitment of the country's government, political and civic leaders to respect the results of these elections, and to continue working within the transition framework.

Political parties must cooperate to ensure the continued conduct of free and fair elections. They must also engage in open competition and debate, offering the voters clear choices on a range of substantive issues. Political parties and nonpartisan civic organizations can also help promote confidence in the election process through voter education efforts, as well as through pollwatching activities. It is critical that domestic groups continue to develop the capability to impartially monitor future elections.

The new multiparty Constitutional Commission embodies an emerging democratic spirit in Seychelles. The NDI team notes, however, that the present situation requires acts of good faith, particularly on the part of the government, which carries the heaviest burden for promoting in earnest the political change it introduced. The NDI team is also concerned that the political environment in Seychelles has been tense and polarized, and that there has existed an atmosphere of doubt that the transition will in fact go forward. The present political and social climate calls for compromise, accountability and meaningful dialogue between Seychelles' leaders. For democracy is not a game of winner-take-all, but rather it is the business of give-and-take.

Through its presence and that of other observers, the NDI team wishes to demonstrate the international community's support for meaningful democratic change in Seychelles. It is, however, ultimately the people of Seychelles who must determine the credibility of this historic transition. Having undertaken this important and challenging endeavor, we encourage Seychellois to continue moving this process forward toward the consolidation of democracy in their country.