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**STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE/THE CARTER CENTER
PRE-ELECTION DELEGATION TO NIGERIA'S 2003 ELECTIONS**

Abuja, 22 November 2002

“This statement is the product of The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Carter Center pre-election assessment mission that visited Nigeria November 17-22, 2002. To support the work of the delegation, a 13-person advance team of observers visited nine states in all six geo-political zones November 7-15 and conducted more than 100 meetings and interviews. The statement details the delegation's observations and respectfully includes specific recommendations for ways to improve the conduct of the elections.

The delegation was warmly welcomed throughout the country, for which it expresses its profound gratitude, and urges all Nigerians to work together to ensure the integrity of the 2003 election process to advance the overriding goal of consolidating civilian, democratic government in Nigeria.

The delegation views very positively the enthusiasm of Nigerians to participate in the election process as voters and candidates. The high level of turnout for voter registration and expressed interest of so many political aspirants to compete for political office at the local, state and national level are promising signs of a growing commitment to democracy. The delegation was impressed by the open political climate and vigorous public debate.

However, with only five months remaining before the constitutional deadline for presidential elections, the electoral process appears stalled, though many Nigerians with whom the delegation met expressed the view that the elections ultimately will be held within the constitutional stipulation for the inauguration of the next administration by May 29. The delegation urges that the legal framework for the conduct of elections be resolved as soon as possible. Nigerians who met with the delegation expressed concern that the consequent failure as of this late date to establish and announce an election calendar and a firm timeline for necessary electoral implementation steps has damaged the integrity of the elections in the eyes of the public. Given the present state of uncertainty, the delegation itself was unable to fully assess the adequacy of election day preparations, such as the voters register.

From all sides, the delegation heard strong expressions of a lack of confidence in the independence and capabilities of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC). INEC pointed to the delay in receipt of needed funding. Taking concrete steps to build necessary confidence in INEC and the upcoming elections is an urgent and essential task. The serious flaws observed in the 1999 elections must not be allowed to reoccur.

In view of the rising political tensions in the country, the delegation recommends that action be taken to put into place soon a comprehensive electoral security plan to prevent the possibility of violence, intimidation and electoral fraud. Leaders and members of political parties in particular should demonstrate by their behavior a commitment to violence-free elections. As only an informed electorate can make a truly free voting choice, the delegation recommends greater voter education efforts and equitable access to public print and broadcast media for political parties and contestants.”

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For the full statement visit NDI's website at www.ndi.org or the Carter Center site at www.cartercenter.org