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NDI STATEMENT ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCESS IN KYRGYZSTAN

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The National Democratic Institute (NDI), a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide, has conducted nonpartisan democracy assistance projects in Kyrgyzstan since 1996.

In recent months, NDI has been following closely the constitutional reform process in Kyrgyzstan. At the invitation of representatives of the government and the constitutional council that was assembled in September 2002, the Institute issued written commentary on procedural and substantive issues in October and early January 2003. In these documents NDI welcomed the initiative to reform the constitution and drew attention to measures necessary for advancing democratic institutions through the constitutional revisions. NDI's commentaries were offered in the spirit of international cooperation, with the underlying belief that it would be up to the people of Kyrgyzstan to draw final conclusions about changes to their constitution.

Democracy can be advanced only through a reform process that is open, participatory and that allows time for thoughtful public consideration. Democracy in Kyrgyzstan also requires a meaningful and enhanced role for the legislative and judicial branches of government. Changes along these lines were proposed by the original constitutional council.

Unfortunately, recent developments have undermined a genuine constitutional reform process. The abrupt naming of a new constitutional advisory board, the issuance without public consultation by that board of new amendments that further expand the powers of the presidency and the calling last week with only two weeks' notice of a referendum on February 2 all jeopardize the potential for democratic progress in Kyrgyzstan. The referendum should be postponed until an open and meaningful constitutional reform process is restored.

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