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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nigeria's April 12 Elections Unfolded More Positively Than Expected, But Concerted Steps Must Be Taken If The 2003 Elections Are To Be Credible, Says NDI

Abuja, Nigeria, April 14, 2003: An international delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to Nigeria's 2003 elections today issued a preliminary statement on the April 12 National Assembly elections. The delegation includes 50 observers from 12 nations in Africa, Europe and North America. The leaders of this phase of the delegation are the Honorable Sam Mpasu, Speaker of the Parliament of Malawi; Ambassador Sally Shelton Colby, former Deputy Secretary General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Kenneth Melley, Secretary of the Board of Directors of NDI; and Patrick Merloe, NDI Senior Associate and Director of Electoral Programs.

The delegation emphasized that this preliminary statement was not a conclusive assessment of the process, since the tabulation of results for the National Assembly elections has not been completed, and elections for president, governors and other officials are yet to be held.

The delegation said: "Nigeria is facing the challenge of successfully transferring power from one elected civilian government to another for the first time since its independence in 1960. It is vital to the nation, the region and all of Africa that Nigeria consolidate civilian rule and develop genuine democratic practices. The 2003 elections are critical in this respect. They are crucial both for resolving peacefully the competition for political power in Nigeria and for providing a genuine democratic mandate, that is the basis of the legitimacy and the authority of government."

Delegation teams were deployed in Adamawa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, Niger and Ogun states, and Abuja. Among the positive developments noted by the delegation were that the voting and counting processes unfolded in a more peaceful environment than was expected. The patience of voters, the efforts of electoral officials, the cooperative approach of political party agents in many places and the significant mobilization of domestic nonpartisan election monitors contributed greatly to this outcome.

However, concerted and extraordinary steps must be taken immediately by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the government and the political parties to remedy fundamental flaws in the election process if the 2003 elections are to be credible. The delegation made a series of recommendations regarding steps that should be taken before the April 19 presidential and gubernatorial elections. These include:

- **Peaceful elections must be promoted:** Political party leaders, governmental and electoral officials and civic leaders and public security officials must take all appropriate steps to eliminate political violence throughout the election period;
- **Logistical problems must be surmounted:** INEC must ensure the prompt delivery of election materials and safeguard the integrity of ballots and other electoral items. Government authorities should make available resources needed for INEC to accomplish its work. Provision should be made for effective conduct of secret voting, proper counting and accurate tabulation of results;
- **Ballot secrecy must be maintained:** INEC should instruct all polling officials to create private voting spaces and take steps to inform the public of the importance of such secrecy;
- **The vote tabulation and collation process must be made more secure;**
- **The tendered ballot mechanism should be modified to conform with the practices of other countries.**

The full text of the delegation's statement can be found on the NDI website at www.ndi.org.