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“THE ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING CAMBODIA’S UPCOMING JULY 27 ELECTIONS IS CRITICALLY FLAWED,” says NDI international pre-election delegation

June 5, 2003, Phnom Penh. An international pre-election assessment delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) visited Cambodia from May 29-June 5. In its statement, the delegation said that: *“It is deeply troubled by the critical flaws in the environment surrounding Cambodia’s upcoming July 27 elections for the National Assembly.”*

The delegation noted a number of improvements in electoral preparations and reduced political killings compared to elections held in 1998 and 2002 and added that:

“[I]t is crucial that Cambodian authorities exert extraordinary efforts to create effective opportunities for voters to gain the information they need to make informed political choices, to ensure that voters are free to exercise their choice without intimidation or undue influence and to guarantee political competitors effective opportunities to reach voters with messages seeking their support. Extraordinary efforts are also needed to ensure that the will of the voters is honestly counted, tabulated, reported and respected. Such efforts will encourage participation in the election process by political contestants and voters alike.”

The delegation further noted that: *“There are just 52 days until the July 27 elections. Unless these and related issues are urgently and effectively addressed through and beyond the July 27 polls, the elections and the broader political process of which they are a part are likely to have little democratic meaning.”*

The delegation issued a series of 12 recommendations focused on specific measures that could improve the election environment addressing topics such as: providing fair news coverage of political contestants and broadcast access, including paid political advertisements; protecting against political violence, intimidation, vote-buying and coercive oath for pledging votes; ensuring neutrality of state authorities and resources; and protecting the integrity of voting and balloting counting processes.

The delegation conducted extensive meetings in Phnom Penh and in the Cambodian provinces of Kampot, Kampong Speu, Kandal, and Kampong Cham. It met with a wide range of representatives of the Government of Cambodia, leaders of the ruling and opposition political parties, legislators, representatives of domestic election monitoring organizations, journalists and representatives of the international community.

The delegation’s statement can be found on NDI’s website at: www.ndi.org.