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**Non-Partisan Election Monitors Observe Unfair Government Interference in Belarus,  
Violations of Election Law and Threats to Opposition Candidates**

**Minsk, Belarus** – Non-partisan election monitors in Belarus have observed the unfair interference of the government in the election process, violations of election law, and physical and financial threats to opposition candidates by authorities. The civic initiative *Partnership* has organized a non-partisan long-term observation of the scheduled October 17, 2004 Parliamentary elections in all 110 districts within Belarus. *Partnership* observes the degree to which election processes conform to Belarus election law and international democratic standards for elections.

“The Belarusian government has set up an unfair playing field for candidates by forming local election commissions that lack any significant representation by opposition political parties,” said Nikolai Astrejka, Executive Director of Partnership. “Furthermore, the commissions include many of the same people from the 2000 Parliamentary elections that were not recognized by the international community.”

The election commissions were formed with 1430 members but only 2% of the members are representatives of opposition political parties resulting in a significant lack of political diversity. Also, the 2004 election commissions contain 40% of the same members from the 2000 elections. The 2000 election results and local election commissions were widely discredited by international observers as unfair. Additionally, the majority of the 2004 local commission’s chairs are government leaders who are directly controlled by the central Belarusian government.

“There has been widespread and improper pressure against parties and potential candidates by government authorities including the elimination of political parties

for minor technical violations, the destruction of property and even threats of physical violence,” said Astrejka.

The Belarus Party of Labor was liquidated by a court for not having a legal address which is a minor technical violation. The media has been reporting on incumbent members of parliament favorably while broadcasting and printing stories on opposition political candidates that are highly slanted; opposition political parties and candidates have virtually no access to the mass media in order to respond. Over 60 confirmed cases of physical intimidation and financial pressure have been observed throughout Belarus. For example, in the Leplelsky political district, authorities threatened opposition candidate O. Tychina with physical violence as well as destroying his store’s property if he does not give up his candidacy.

“Both incumbent and opposition candidates were observed campaigning prior to legal registration which is illegal under Belarus election law,” said Astrejka. “Although many of the violations were minor, they could affect the outcome of the election by giving government authorities a technical reason to eliminate opposition candidates from the ballot.” Although Partnership recognizes that Belarus election law is highly restrictive, biased and does not meet international democratic standards, they are encouraging all political parties and candidates to not campaign illegally.

Partnership’s long-term observers (LTO’s) had 1390 meetings with representatives of local authorities, parties, public unions, incumbent candidates and non-incumbent candidates. In many cases, LTO’s are being harassed and threatened personally which is a grave violation of internationally accepted norms against the intimidation of non-partisan election monitors.

This release covers the period from July 1 until August 19, 2004. LTO’s monitored the formation of political districts, mass media and campaign materials of potential candidates. LTO’s met with representatives of local executive authorities, election jurisdiction committees, political parties, public organizations and candidates.

For more information about Partnership, the non-partisan observation and their recommendations to improve the election process, please go to <http://www.belarusvote.org>.

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