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Statement by the International Republican Institute (IRI), IFES and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on Expulsion of their Representatives from Ethiopia

The International Republican Institute (IRI), IFES and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) regret the recent action by the government of Ethiopia to expel our representatives from the country on the grounds that they had not registered as nongovernmental organizations, even as all three of our organizations have been making good faith efforts to gain registration in accordance with established laws and procedures. We had been assured that our registration would be approved expeditiously.

On March 30, representatives from the three organizations were asked to attend a meeting at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the meeting the director general for Europe and America informed the representatives that all programming must cease and all foreign nationals working for the organizations must leave Ethiopia within 48 hours.

With support from USAID, the three organizations had sought to assist the democratic process and preparations for the May 15 general elections. Programs were planned to support the work of the election commission, dialogue among political parties and election authorities as a means of enhancing confidence and participation in the electoral process, political party pollwatching, and the creation of a code of conduct for the elections.

Our organizations carry out nonpartisan programs and do not support any particular party in the May elections. We support a democratic environment in which the integrity of the election process is ensured and all parties understand their rights and responsibilities, and are able to freely communicate their views to the electorate.

This is the first time in 20 years that a government has taken such collective action against our organizations. We are surprised by this move, particularly as it comes at a time when the government of Ethiopia has stated its intention to organize an open and democratic election process. We continue to support the democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people, and hope that the government of Ethiopia will reverse its decision.

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