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ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE LONG-TERM OBSERVATION MISSION TO SIERRA LEONE

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE... The National Democratic Institute (NDI) announced today the arrival of a long-term international delegation to observe the electoral process surrounding upcoming presidential and legislative elections in Sierra Leone.

The multinational delegation is composed of experienced political and civic leaders from Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The purposes of the delegation are to express the international community's interest in, and support for, democratic governance and the conduct of multiparty elections in Sierra Leone and to provide an impartial and accurate report on that process to the people of Sierra Leone and the international community. Successful presidential and legislative elections would offer the people of Sierra Leone the best hope for attaining sustained peace and development in the country. Organizing credible national elections is also a critical benchmark for the country as it strives for stability and the consolidation of peace and democracy.

NDI's long-term observers will be based in the four regional centers of Sierra Leone, conducting election observation activities in all 14 districts. The delegation will meet with representatives of political parties and officials from the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and government, as well as journalists, members of civil society, and representatives of the international community. The delegation will pay due attention to the role of marginalized groups in the electoral process, including women and persons with disabilities.

The delegation will conduct its activities in a nonpartisan manner in accordance with Sierra Leonean law, the NEC's Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Observers, and international standards for election monitoring set forth in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

In March the Institute deployed a pre-election delegation to assess the voter registration process and will field a second pre-election assessment delegation during the candidate nomination and campaign period. In addition NDI will field a team of approximately 40 short-term observers around election day. Election observation activities will be coordinated with Sierra Leonean election monitoring organizations and other international delegations.

The members of the international delegation and NDI thank the people of Sierra Leone for their warm welcome.

NDI is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations; safeguard elections; and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government. In Sierra Leone, the Institute is providing assistance to civil society, political parties, and the media. NDI's programs in Sierra Leone are supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), British Department for International Development (DFID), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). For more information, please visit www.ndi.org.