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EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES NEEDED TO RESTORE CREDIBILITY AND CONFIDENCE IN NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS

Abuja, April 21, 2007 – An international observer delegation to Nigeria's 2007 elections sponsored by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) today issued a preliminary statement on the April 21 polls. The NDI delegation was led by Madeleine Albright, Chairman of the NDI Board of Directors and former US Secretary of State; Mahamane Ousmane, Speaker of the ECOWAS parliament and former President of Niger; Amos Sawyer, former President of Liberia; Joe Clark, former Prime Minister of Canada; Jeanne Shaheen, Director of the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University and former Governor of New Hampshire; Justice Yvonne Mokgoro of the Constitutional Court of South Africa; and Kenneth Wollack, president of NDI.

Comprised of 61 observers and NDI staff, the delegation includes former elected officials, political and civic leaders, elections experts and regional specialists drawn from 16 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. Delegation teams were deployed to observe the elections in the Federal Capital Territory and in 14 states drawn from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, including: Abia, Adamawa, Anambra, Bauchi, Benue, Cross River, Enugu, Kaduna, Katsina, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Oyo and Plateau.

The delegation emphasized that its assessment is preliminary, as elections in several states have been re-scheduled, the tabulation process has not been finalized for the presidential and National Assembly elections, and the adjudication of electoral disputes has not yet begun.

As noted by the delegation, *"In many places, and in a number of ways, the electoral process failed the Nigerian people. The cumulative effect of the serious problems we witnessed substantially compromised the integrity of the electoral process. As a result, at this stage, it is unclear whether the April 21 elections reflect the will of the Nigerian people."*

The delegation was impressed by the determination of thousands of Nigerian voters who waited patiently to exercise their fundamental political and civic rights, and by the commitment of many pollworkers to conduct themselves and administer the polls in a professional manner under difficult circumstances. However, polling stations in many states opened hours late, closed early or failed to open at all. This represented a fundamental barrier to popular political participation and likely disenfranchised many prospective voters.

In addition to noting problems with the electoral framework and technical preparations for April 21 elections, the delegation cited serious concerns about the conduct of the elections. Serious irregularities in the majority of states visited included: failure to post the voter register; an inadequate supply of voting materials; ballot papers that did not include all of the candidates; inadequate locations and facilities for voting and collation; lack of secrecy of voting; disenfranchisement due to errors in the voter register and underage voting. There were also incidents of improper conduct by security agents, stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation by party agents and vote buying.

The serious flaws witnessed during this electoral process threaten to further erode citizen confidence in the Nigeria's democratic institutions. Therefore, the delegation urges all stakeholders in the elections

to pursue peaceful and constitutional means with all sense of urgency to resolve election-related disputes. In particular, the delegation recommends that:

- INEC should release results by polling site, and post these figures publicly as stipulated by the Electoral Act. This will enable citizens to independently verify the accuracy of the announced results. The delegation views the inability to track election results from the polling station to the national level as a major weakness of the electoral process.
- The election tribunals, contesting parties and INEC should cooperate to ensure the speedy judicial resolution of complaints, paying careful attention to their responsibility to give voice to Nigerian voters, and to address issues which adversely affected voters on election day. In particular, the delegation calls on INEC to make available information and materials needed for the resolution of electoral disputes.
- All offences and crimes committed within the electoral context must be prosecuted expeditiously. This would reduce the impunity which has marred Nigeria's electoral process to date, and which threatens to undermine citizen confidence in the country's political institutions.
- All aggrieved parties should continue to respect the rule of law and exercise their constitutional rights peacefully. We commend the efforts of Nigerians, who through this entire process have sought redress through constitutional means and demonstrated respect for the rule of law.
- The Commission should ensure that the technical failings witnessed on April 21 are corrected before the rescheduled elections are held.

Resolution of these problems would contribute to the legitimacy of the incoming government, build trust in the country's institutions and demonstrate Nigeria's continued leadership on the continent. This delegation has faith in the resolve of the Nigerian people to rise to this challenge.

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

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