



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 4, 2008

For more information, contact:

Kathy Gest, 202-294-8025, kgest@ndi.org

NDI CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF STAFF MEMBER DETAINED IN ZIMBABWE

WASHINGTON, DC – National Democratic Institute (NDI) issued the following statement today:

NDI requests the immediate release of Dileepan Sivapathasundaram, a United States citizen and a senior program officer with NDI, who is being held by authorities in Zimbabwe. The Institute also calls on the Zimbabwe government to ensure his safety and safe passage from the country.

Mr. Sivapathasundaram was taken by Zimbabwean authorities at the Harare airport as he was departing the country on Thursday, April 3, at 5 p.m. Harare time, according to eyewitness accounts. For about 22 hours there was no word from Mr. Sivapathasundaram, and police in the capital denied any knowledge of his whereabouts despite efforts by U.S. diplomats and Zimbabwean human rights lawyers to determine his location and status.

At about 3 p.m. Harare time on Friday, April 4, the American Embassy was able to determine that Mr. Sivapathasundaram was being held at the Harare Central Police Station. U.S. diplomats and Zimbabwean human rights lawyers were allowed to see him briefly.

Mr. Sivapathasundaram was in Zimbabwe as part of NDI's work over the past several years to support the efforts of non-partisan civic groups to monitor the Zimbabwean election process. All of the assistance provided by NDI was in accordance with Zimbabwean law and international standards that recognize the right of non-partisan civic organizations to observe and monitor election processes. NDI has worked in Zimbabwe since 1999.

NDI is a non-partisan, non-profit, non-governmental organization that aims to support democratic values and practices in more than 60 countries.

###