



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER DELEGATION POST-ELECTION STATEMENT

JUNE 1, 1993 BURUNDI PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 16-member international observer delegation, organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), congratulates His Excellency President Pierre Buyoya and the Government of Prime Minister Sibomana for the leadership and commitment they have shown in guiding Burundi's democratic transition. The delegation also commends the people of Burundi for the patience, perseverance and dedication they have shown in moving Burundi to a new era based on peace and democracy. In Central and East Africa, where elections have been marred by significant problems or repeated delays, the Burundi election process offers an historic model.

For the June 1 presidential election, the delegation visited more than 300 polling stations and counting centers in eight provinces. These observations were complemented by the reports of other observers and the findings of the NDI in-country team. Thus, the delegation confirms what the people of Burundi know for themselves: the June 1 election permitted the free expression of the Burundian people in choosing their new president.

Credit for the successful conduct of the election is widely shared. The National Election Commission performed in a generally exemplary manner. Guided by a spirit of openness and flexibility, the commission credibly resolved a great number of potentially detrimental logistical and political issues. Each of the three contesting parties must also be commended for organizing orderly and peaceful campaigns. The security forces, meanwhile, maintained order without interfering in the electoral process.

A successful election proved possible despite a number of significant challenges. Once an election code was agreed upon in March, less than three months remained to prepare election materials, register voters, train election officials and conduct civic education programs. While voter registration has often been the source of controversy in other countries, Burundian election officials ensured that the 10-day registration period proceeded in a professional and efficient manner. Although voter lists were not without error, the vast majority of eligible voters were able to register, and a high percentage voted on election day.

The 12-day election campaign also surpassed expectations. Heated accusations and incidents of censorship, which had marred earlier phases of the transition, gave way to an open and peaceful campaign environment. The NDI in-country team noted improvement in media fairness during this period and concluded that radio and television news programs offered mostly balanced coverage.



The balloting process was generally well executed. Some polls opened late, and others were beset by confusion early on election day. The system allowed for relatively efficient identification of voters and safeguarded the secrecy of the vote. The transport of ballot boxes was handled in a manner that limited the possibility for fraud. In addition, the integrity of the entire process was reinforced by the presence of pollwatchers from at least the two principal parties at virtually every polling station and counting center.

One problem that should be noted, however, were the delays and difficulties encountered by the Group of Independent Observers. This Group, comprising several Burundian civic organizations, was formed to participate in the process as national election observers and to verify the election results. They achieved their objectives, including the implementation of a parallel vote tabulation, only after overcoming a series of bureaucratic and political obstacles before and even on election day.

Based on observations throughout the country, the delegation offers the following suggestions for consideration by the National Election Commission and other concerned parties in preparing for legislative elections scheduled for June 29:

- Registration lists should be reorganized to increase efficiency;
- Training programs should be organized for polling officials to ensure that they are familiar with the election materials;
- Polling stations should open on time and individuals waiting in line at the closing of the polls should be allowed to vote; and
- New procedures, which balance efficiency with security, should be found for the counting of ballots.

We congratulate President Buyoya and Mr. Sendegeya for conducting a serious campaign throughout the electoral process and, most importantly, for the sense of responsibility they have demonstrated to their supporters following the election. The UPRONA and PRP parties have made a great contribution to the democratic process in this country and their efforts should continue as they and other parties prepare to contest the June 29 legislative elections.

President-elect Ndadaye will begin his term in office with the solid foundation created by this election. He must consolidate the gains that have been made in establishing Burundi as a country where the rights of the individual are the paramount concern of the government.

NDI, which sponsored this delegation, has committed to continuing its effort in Burundi during this historic period. Others in the international community also are prepared to assist in the transition process.

Even in countries with years of democratic experience, transitions to a newly-elected government pose special challenges. In Burundi, a successful transition will require the goodwill and cooperation of the entire population. Thus, the commitment to consolidate democracy in Burundi cannot end with the announcement of the winner of this election.

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