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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

NDI INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER DELEGATION TO THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS

October 8, 1993

This is the preliminary statement of a 35-member international delegation that observed the October 6 National Assembly elections in Pakistan. The delegation, organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), includes parliamentarians, political party leaders, election experts and regional specialists from 17 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Latin America and North America.

Given the significance of these elections for the democratic future of Pakistan, it is not surprising that the elections have attracted international attention. This and other observer delegations have been welcomed by the Central Election Commission and the caretaker government, as well as by major political parties and civic organizations. Our delegation came as observers. We did not seek to supervise the elections or certify the integrity of the process. Ultimately, it is the Pakistani people who must judge the elections.

The purpose of the delegation is to demonstrate the international community's continued support for the democratic process in Pakistan. We also are here to learn from the people of Pakistan about the nature of the electoral process and its implications for the further development of Pakistan's democratic institutions.

This is NDI's third international observer delegation to Pakistan. NDI delegations also observed the 1988 and 1990 polling. Since early September, NDI has maintained a continuous presence in the country. A 10-member international team visited Pakistan September 11-17 to assess the pre-election environment and preparations for the elections. Six members of this team remained in Pakistan to continue pre-election monitoring throughout the country and prepare the visit of this delegation. The delegation was briefed extensively by these pre-election missions.

NDI carefully reviewed media coverage of the campaign leading up to the elections. It also maintained close communications with other international observer delegations as well as Pakistani nongovernmental organizations monitoring the electoral process. Members of the delegation will remain in Pakistan to observe the provincial elections and to monitor post-election developments.



The delegation's mandate included the examination of three distinct aspects of the election process: the campaign; election-day proceedings; and the tabulation of results to date. This statement is a preliminary assessment of these issues. We note that the tabulation of results and the resolution of any electoral complaints have yet to be completed. NDI will continue to closely monitor developments and will issue a more detailed report at a later date.

The delegation arrived in Pakistan on Saturday, October 2. During our stay we met with government and election officials, leaders of the major political parties, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and others involved in the electoral process in all four provinces and in the federal capital. On election day, members of the delegation visited polling stations in rural and urban areas throughout the nation.

The delegation noted significant improvement of the pre-election environment over that of the 1990 elections. The caretaker government sought to establish an environment in which the elections would be administered impartially. Opposing parties agreed that the government successfully promoted an open, competitive process.

The electronic media provided generally balanced coverage of the campaign and access for 22 parties to present their messages directly to the public. Contesting political parties were able to communicate with the electorate through the printed press, rallies and other avenues. The printed press also enjoyed freedom in political reporting. Additional steps taken to ensure impartial election administration included the policy of transferring government officials.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) adopted new procedures that promoted the transparency of the election. These actions included providing party polling agents with signed copies of the official tally sheets, announcing results at the polling stations, promoting greater awareness of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and accrediting independent Pakistani election monitors. The CEC also considered carefully recommendations by political parties and nongovernmental organizations and sought consensus on a number of electoral reforms.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, a number of recurring features remained only partially addressed. These include the quality of the electoral rolls, which had not been fully updated since 1991. After the elections were called, there was not enough time to remove all of the names of those who were deceased, had relocated, or were deemed "bogus" upon investigation. Concern was also expressed that some prospective new voters could not be registered because of cumbersome procedures to acquire the

national identification cards. Also, the delegation noted reliable reports from numerous sources that parties and candidates often ignored legal requirements regarding campaign spending limitations as well as aspects of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties.

The delegation notes with deep regret serious incidents of violence that resulted in a number of deaths during the campaign.

The MQM(A)'s allegation of interference with its ability to contest the elections is a serious charge. However, the delegation is not in a position to judge how valid these charges were, or whether they justified the decision of the party to boycott the National Assembly elections. The delegation regrets that the party's withdrawal apparently deprived voters of the full range of political choices. We hope that the proper authorities will investigate and act upon these and similar allegations by other parties.

On election day, the balloting was generally open, orderly and well-administered. The atmosphere in and around the polling stations was peaceful. In the polling stations observed by delegation members, election officials generally carried out their tasks impartially and with diligence. Polling agents from major contesting parties were present at voting booths, appeared to work cooperatively, and expressed confidence in the election officials' resolution of disputes. The delegation was also encouraged by the presence of independent domestic monitors organized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in polling sites around the country. The counting was conducted in an expeditious and transparent manner, and the consolidation and announcement of results has generally proceeded in accordance with the law.

The delegation nonetheless noted some problems and irregularities. The most frequently observed problem was in identifying and verifying voters which, because of either inaccurate electoral rolls or possibly false ID cards, resulted in some persons not being able to vote. Other irregularities included delays in opening the polling stations and occasional ineffectiveness of the indelible ink. However, the delegation did not receive evidence that these problems were systematic or that they affected the outcome of the elections in the constituencies observed.

The delegation wishes to emphasize that we have maintained contact with the political parties throughout the pre-election and election day period. Although parties identified electoral issues that were cause for concern, at no point did they accuse the CEC, the military or the caretaker government of partisanship. Parties or candidates that alleged pre-election fraud often did not appear to be prepared to document their complaints. In addition, the delegation noted that on election day, party agents were in some instances not investigating or recording potential irregularities

or challenges. The absence of such documentation hinders the parties' ability to substantiate claims of electoral abuse.

The delegation expresses serious concerns regarding the participation of women in the electoral process. As NDI noted in its report on the 1990 elections, cultural and social realities, as well as identification procedures in the polling station, make it difficult for women to vote. For example, in certain areas designated to have a polling station for women, presiding officers did not even bother to set up the facilities because of expectations that women would not come to vote. The delegation also observed significantly more confusion and disorder in women's polling places.

The active involvement of the armed forces in these elections deserves special attention. It was generally viewed by party leaders and the electorate that beyond maintaining law and order, the military's role in support of the Central Election Commission was aimed at guaranteeing the integrity of the entire process. The large-scale military presence on election day provided a calming influence. Except for isolated instances, members of the armed forces did not interfere in the process or act in an intimidating manner.

While the armed forces played a positive role in this election, it is essential that other institutions be strengthened. This would obviate the need for the military to assume extraordinary roles in the election process. These institutions include democratic political parties, active civic organizations, vigilant and independent media, a strong independent electoral commission, and a government and parliament responsive and accountable to the citizenry.

Democracy in Pakistan will only advance through tolerance, dialogue and cooperation among ruling and opposition parties alike. In this immediate post-election period and beyond, Pakistan's political leaders must reach out not only to their own supporters, but to the millions of Pakistanis who did not vote. This election provides an important opportunity to broaden popular support for and confidence in democratic governance.