



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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PRESS RELEASE

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NDI INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION ARRIVES IN BENIN TO OBSERVE RUN-OFF ELECTION

Cotonou, March 15, 1996 -- A 17-member international election observer delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) arrived in Benin today to begin preparations for observing the run-off presidential election in this West African country. The delegation includes election experts, political and civic leaders and democratic development experts from Africa, Europe and North America and is led by United States Congressman Harry Johnston, former chairman of the Congressional Subcommittee for Africa. This year's run-off is a re-match of the country's first multiparty presidential election in 1991, during which the current president, Nicéphore Soglo, defeated Benin's longtime Marxist-Leninist ruler, General Mathieu Kérékou.

The delegation's principal purpose is to demonstrate the international community's interest in and support for the continued development of democracy in Benin and to provide the international community with an objective assessment of the Beninese electoral process. In witnessing these elections, NDI does not presume to supervise the electoral process and recognizes that Beninese citizens will ultimately determine the legitimacy of the 1996 presidential elections, as well as whether the results express the will of the electorate.

While in Benin, the delegation will meet with electoral officials, candidate representatives, leaders of civic organizations, journalists and others involved with the election process at the national and local levels. The delegation will receive briefings in Cotonou before deploying throughout the country to observe voting, ballot counting and tabulation of results. The observer delegation will conduct its activities in accordance with the laws of Benin and international standards and practices concerning election processes and electoral rights. The delegation will reassemble in Cotonou on March 20 for a comprehensive debriefing and plans to issue a preliminary post-election statement at a press conference scheduled for 3:00 pm on March 21. NDI staff will remain in Benin until the announcement of official final election results and will subsequently issue a final report.

NDI, based in Washington, DC, has conducted election-related programming in more than 40 countries around the world. This delegation is the latest in NDI's nonpartisan activities to assist the democratic process in Benin. The observer delegation's activities are funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). NDI first conducted activities in Benin in 1991 and has implemented a number of programs in the country since that time, including a 16-member international observer delegation for the first-round of the election, which took place on March 3. NDI staff have remained in Benin to follow second-round preparations since that time.

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