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**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI OBSERVER DELEGATION  
TO THE APRIL 27, 1997 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN**

*Sana'a, Yemen, April 30, 1997*

The multinational election observer delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), is pleased to offer this preliminary statement on the parliamentary elections of April 27, 1997 in the Republic of Yemen. The final election results have not yet been certified according to Yemeni law, and NDI will continue to monitor the process. A more comprehensive report will be issued at a later date. The delegation came to witness the elections, to demonstrate the international community's support for democratic elections and to provide the international community with an objective report. The delegation has conducted its work consistent with the norms of international election observing and Yemeni law. The delegation recognizes that it is the people of this nation who must ultimately judge the quality and character of these elections.

**I. SUMMARY**

The delegation viewed the elections as a positive step in the democratic development of Yemen. The delegation noted the following:

Yemeni voters turned out in significant numbers, waited in long lines and travelled long distances, sometimes by foot, to cast their ballots;

A widespread desire to support the electoral process was evidenced by the commitment of electoral officials, party agents and more than 15,000 domestic observers;

The voting process was generally peaceful and orderly in spite of certain political and structural constraints -- the boycott advocated by the Yemeni Socialist Party, the tensions remaining in the aftermath of the 1994 conflict and the high level of illiteracy;

The increased participation of women, as voters and elections workers, was encouraging compared to the 1993 elections, although much remains to be done to secure an equitable place for women in public life;

The Yemenis demonstrated a strong desire to adhere to international electoral standards, and improvements have been made since the 1993 parliamentary elections. Several significant shortcomings in the electoral process are still to be addressed; the delegation offers several recommendations below regarding these and other issues.



The events relating to the April 27 elections ought to be viewed in a broader political context. While this delegation was not able to review the process by which candidates chose to enter or withdraw from the election process, an earlier NDI mission made an assessment of the pre-election environment and issued its report on March 23. The findings of that mission, together with those presented by this delegation, will be made part of NDI's final report. That report will address the political context and legal framework for the elections, registration and voting processes, the resolution of electoral complaints and other elements of the process.

## II. THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK

This 34-person delegation has been led by Chester Atkins, a former member of the U.S. Congress, and Joycelyn Lucas, the former Chief Election Officer of Trinidad and Tobago. It includes senior governmental and political party officials, election experts, civic leaders, regional specialists and democratic activists from 13 countries in North America, Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa. The delegation met with members of the Supreme Election Commission, leaders of all the major political parties and high ranking government officials, including President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The delegation arrived on April 23 and was deployed nationwide in 20 teams following briefings in Sana'a. Both in the capital and once deployed, the teams met with election officials, political parties and domestic election monitors. After observing the balloting, counting and tabulation processes throughout the country, the delegation reassembled in Sana'a on Tuesday to review the teams' findings. Delegation members visited 160 polling sites in 64 constituencies throughout 11 governorates.

NDI remained in regular communication with all the major political parties, including those that decided not to participate in the elections, as well as with the principal nonpartisan Yemeni election monitoring organizations, including the Arab Democratic Institute (ADI) and the Election Monitoring Committee (EMC). NDI exchanged information and coordinated deployment with the Joint Electoral Assistance Secretariat (JEAS) in order to enhance the observation effort. The delegation also communicated with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Foundation for Elections Systems (IFES), which have provided technical assistance to the Supreme Elections Commission (SEC).

NDI began working in Yemen before the 1993 elections, and has been monitoring the electoral environment continuously since mid-1996. In addition, NDI conducted training programs for political party pollwatchers as part of a continuing program with all the major political parties. The Institute has also supported civic education programs of the Arab Democratic Institute, as well as its effort to train and deploy more than 11,000 election monitors.

### III. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

It is regrettable that the elections were marred by at least 11 deaths, which deeply saddened the delegation. These incidents cast a shadow over an otherwise peaceful election day. Politics in Yemen are heavily influenced by tribal factors, and it would appear that election day provided an opportunity for a heightening of some tribal tensions. The majority of the violent and sometimes fatal attacks were a reflection of these local conflicts.

The Yemeni Socialist Party, an historically significant party in southern Yemen, launched an election boycott that was joined by several smaller parties. The boycott was peaceful, and the government security forces did not interfere with the party's organized demonstrations in Hadramawt and Abyan. The extent to which the boycott affected the election is unclear, but it may have contributed to a lower voter turnout in the southern governorates.

Government security personnel in and out of uniform appeared at times to be more numerous and conspicuous around voting and counting centers than was necessary. The security forces facilitated the process in many ways; however, civilian institutions should be strengthened in order to reduce reliance on the military in future elections.

The Yemeni voters conveyed their belief that they were exercising the right to choose their representatives. Election officials were committed to conducting their work in an open and transparent manner at all levels. The delegation encountered candidate agents representing virtually all the competitors, as well many of the more than 15,000 independent observers. These diverse efforts demonstrated the strong desire of the Yemenis to advance and contribute to their democratic process.

Compared to the 1993 elections, the secrecy of the ballot was greatly increased due to new administrative procedures. The use of symbols on the ballots facilitated voting for the large number of voters who could not read, which reduced the incidence of voters being obliged to state their preferences aloud. Greater efforts, however, are needed to educate illiterate voters about marking their ballots.

### IV. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Women played a significant role in these elections, a phenomenon unique in the Arabian Peninsula. The delegation noted the important role played by women in the administration of the elections, as party agents, election monitors, voters and candidates, although there were fewer women candidates than in the previous election. In 1993, women constituted 19 percent of the country's registered voters and this figure climbed to nearly 30 percent in 1997. Concerted outreach and education efforts by the SEC, the political parties and the Arab Democratic Institute contributed to this increase.

In some provincial capitals, the percentage of voter turnout among registered voters was higher

for women than men. It must be noted, however, that in a significant number of polling sites, particularly in rural villages, there were no ballot boxes for women. In some other polling stations few or no women voted. Restrictive access to polling stations and other encumbrances to women's participation were noted by the delegates. Continuing improvement is vital if Yemen is to secure an equitable place for women in public life and fully realize its democratic potential.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of international cooperation and in light of the many positive features of the election process, the delegation offers the following recommendations.

### General Considerations

- 1) **Voting by Election Workers:** A procedure should be developed to allow voting in the polling stations for the tens of thousands of civic-minded Yemenis who will participate in future elections as pollworkers, political party agents, election monitors and security personnel at the polling stations.
- 2) **Improving Conditions for Illiterate Voters:** Further voter education and literacy programs should be conducted to better prepare illiterate voters and to ensure ballot secrecy.
- 3) **Expanding Women's Participation:** The successful programs to encourage women's participation in political life should be continued between elections. In addition, steps should be taken to provide unimpeded access to voting stations and voting facilities for women.
- 4) **Reducing Conflict:** Steps should be taken by political and civic leaders to develop strategies to help reduce the potential for violence in future elections.

### Technical Considerations

- 5) **Extending Electoral Calendar:** The electoral calendar should be modified to allow sufficient time for ballot production and inspection by candidates before distribution. The electoral calendar might, for instance, set the final withdrawal date for candidates as much as 30 days before election day in order to ensure accurate ballots. Candidates would therefore have to be nominated well in advance of that date to allow time to test their political viability.
- 6) **Improving Voter Registry:** A simplified voter registration process and accurate voter registry should be developed to ensure that eligible voters are not disenfranchised and to reduce the potential for multiple voting. This would relieve confusion and related problems caused on election day by the use of a variety of voter lists that led to some prospective voters being turned away from the polls.

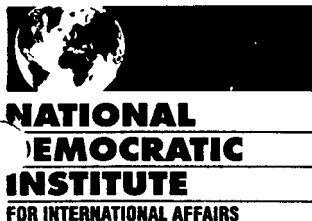
7) **Expediting Counting and Tabulation of Results:** Expedited procedures for counting and tabulation of results should be implemented. Such procedures should address the method for resolving questions regarding ballot validity and other disagreements among election officials and party agents. In addition, electoral officials and others concerned with the election process should give serious consideration to modifying the electoral law to provide for the ballot count at the polling stations; this would eliminate time and risks to ballot box security posed by transporting ballot boxes from polling stations to counting centers.

8) **Improving Procedures:** Further refinements of the legal framework and further plans for training election officials should be developed to eliminate or reduce administrative difficulties encountered on election day and to remove the possibility of persons exerting undue influence on voters. Issues to be addressed should include: voting by those whose names are on voter lists but who do not possess current voter cards; challenges of a prospective voter's identity, age or other qualifications to vote; questions relating to the validity of ballots; and determining who should be granted access to facilities during the counting and tabulation processes.

## VI. CONCLUSION

While the final tabulation and certification of results, and the adjudication of complaints that have arisen, have not yet concluded, the April 27 parliamentary elections appear to be a step forward in Yemen's democratization. The delegation appreciates that elections are but one facet of a much broader and more complex political development process. At the same time, the delegation would not want the international community to overlook the significant accomplishments that are represented by the conduct of this week's elections. Important precedents are being established among government officials, political party leaders and civic activists, as well as among the millions of Yemeni voters. Great attention is being paid to the details of the law, appreciation is growing for public accountability and transparency on the part of public institutions and a culture of civic responsibility is emerging. At the same time, many Yemenis recognize that additional efforts must be made to ensure that democratic practices take root; the national legislature will need to assume a larger role in governance, for instance, and local government ought to be established on a democratic foundation.

The delegation hopes that Yemeni political leaders, including those who did not participate in this week's elections, will respond to opportunities for continued political dialogue and search for consensus about the character of pluralistic political institutions in Yemen. Like many others in the international community, NDI is committed to supporting such efforts.



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