



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **GEORGIA HAS SOLID FOUNDATION FOR CREDIBLE LOCAL ELECTIONS, BUT CONCERNS REMAIN, NDI DELEGATION FINDS**

**TBILISI** – Noting that Georgia continues to benefit from the fundamentals of democracy, a pre-election mission fielded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) said the country has created a solid foundation for local elections scheduled to take place on June 15. But the delegation also noted that efforts to delegitimize and criminalize political adversaries are still commonplace, fueled by polarization between the country’s two main political parties.

“The overall political environment is characterized by pluralism and activism,” NDI said at a press conference today. The electoral administration appears equipped to support a credible process, and the government has expressed a strong commitment to ensuring a fair and open campaign process.

“The line between state and party remains blurred,” the mission statement said. “Allegations of politically-motivated harassment tarnish an otherwise vibrant political landscape.

“The responsibility now lies with Georgia’s officials and political leaders to set examples of impartial governance, constructive campaigning, defense of the rights of opponents and minorities, and respect for the country’s democratic institutions,” the delegation said.

The mission, which visited Georgia from April 28 to May 2, was made up of Per Eklund, former ambassador and head of the European Union Delegation to Georgia; Sam Gejdenson, former ranking member of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee; Robert Adams, international elections and democratization expert for Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS); Laura Jewett, NDI regional director for Eurasia; and Luis Navarro, NDI senior resident country director in Georgia.

The group assessed the status of electoral preparations, the conduct of political activity by announced major electoral participants, and the general electoral environment through a series of meetings with government officials, candidates, political party leaders, election authorities, representatives of civil society and the international community.

The delegation noted that the June polls will take place against the backdrop of nationwide changes in allegiances and party affiliations of local governments that followed Georgia’s 2012 parliamentary polls in which power shifted from the United National Movement (UNM) to the

Georgian Dream coalition. Thousands of employees at the central and local levels resigned or were dismissed, and nearly all of the country's municipal governments, which were held by UNM, shifted to Georgian Dream control.

“The June 15 local elections provide an opportunity to return to voters the right of selecting their community leaders,” the delegation said. By governing in an open, consultative, responsive and inclusive manner, newly-elected municipal officials “will contribute to the consolidation of Georgia’s democracy as well as progress toward the prosperity, stability, and European and Euro-Atlantic integration to which Georgians aspire.”

The June polls, the first under a parliament, government and presidential administration all controlled by Georgian Dream “give the ruling party a clear opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to credible elections, opposition rights, and a broader political environment conducive to democratic progress,” the delegation said.

The mission’s report also included a number of recommendations calling for extensive voter education, investigation of election law violations, civil service reform, measures to increase the number of elected women, curbing violence, establishing political party and executive branch codes of conduct, candidate debates, improved voter registration procedures and prosecutions for intimidation of journalists, among others.

Funding for the delegation’s work was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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