**PRESS RELEASE**

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# NDI INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVER DELEGATION ARRIVES IN MALI

*Bamako, April 17, 1997* -- In November 1996, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) opened a field office in Bamako and began implementing a voter education and domestic pollwatcher training program in preparation for the Malian national elections of 1997. During the first round of the legislative elections, two NDI representatives observed the elections in Mopti and Ségou.

A five-member international election observer delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) arrived in Mali on April 15. This delegation was planned as part of NDI's pre-election assessment activities for the presidential election scheduled for May 4 and will include an assessment of the electoral environment between the first and second round legislative elections of April 13 and 27, respectively and observation of the second round legislative elections. The delegation includes former elected officials, election experts, political and civic leaders and democratic development specialists from Africa and the United States. The delegation is led by Patrick Merloe, NDI Senior Associate for Election Processes and includes: M. Tadjoudine Ali-Diabacté, a member of the Togolese Election Commission since 1993, member of Togo's Transitional Parliament (1991-1993) and a member of the main opposition party in Togo; Mr. Timothy W. Docking, Coordinator of the African State and Democracy Project in Boston and a returned Peace Corps volunteer in Mali; Mr. Justin Hughes, an attorney from California and organizer for gubernatorial, state and national electoral campaigns; and Mr. Parfait Moukoko, the President of the Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (ODCH) based in Brazzaville. If circumstances allow, this group of individuals will be joined by additional NDI international observers prior to the presidential elections.

The delegation's principal purposes are to demonstrate the international community's interest in and support for the continued development of democracy and transparent elections in Mali and to provide the international community with an objective assessment of the Malian electoral process. The delegation will conduct its activities in accordance with Malian law and established standards for international election observation, which is now an accepted practice around the world. In doing so, NDI does not seek to interfere in the electoral process and recognizes that Malian citizens will ultimately determine the legitimacy of the 1997 legislative, presidential and municipal elections.

While in Mali, the delegation will meet with electoral officials, candidates and representatives of the political parties, leaders of civic organizations, journalists and others involved with the electoral process at the national and local levels. The delegation will receive detailed

briefings in Bamako before deploying to several regions of Mali to observe election preparations and the second round legislative contests, assuming they are held as scheduled. The delegation will return to Bamako and, if necessary, brief the full delegation should one arrive in Mali prior to the first round of the presidential elections. If a full international NDI delegation does observe the presidential elections, the delegation will issue a statement that touches upon the period leading up to the presidential elections and discusses issues that have arisen subsequent to the first round legislative elections on April 13. In that case, NDI staff will remain in Mali until the announcement of official final results of the presidential elections. NDI will issue a final report on Mali's electoral process at a later date.

NDI, based in Washington, DC, is a non-profit organization conducting nonpartisan programs to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions in new and emerging democracies. Since its founding in 1983, NDI has organized more than 30 large scale election observation missions and has conducted election-related programming in more than 40 countries around the world.