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NDI RECOMMENDS IMPROVED SECURITY, OTHER MEASURES TO AVOID PROBLEMS IN AFGHANISTAN RUNOFF ELECTION

WASHINGTON, DC – The scheduling of a Nov. 7 presidential election runoff in Afghanistan leaves authorities little time to make improvements in the election process, but there are a number of steps that can be taken to avoid the major problems of the Aug. 20 polls, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) said today.

The Institute noted that the runoff could be an important step in ensuring that the government that results from this process will be considered legitimate by the Afghan people. Despite widespread fraud that occurred in the August balloting, the complaints investigation process carried out by the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) ultimately helped protect the will of Afghanistan’s voters, NDI said.

NDI, which conducted an international election observation mission in the country for the Aug. 20 presidential and provincial council elections, has continued to monitor the process and will field a group of experts for the Nov. 7 runoff. The Institute issued a [preliminary statement](#) immediately following the August election, along with a subsequent [statement](#) expressing concern about the fraud complaints.

While NDI’s post-election statement proposed a series of recommendations to improve procedures for elections in future years, the Institute also believes there are steps that can be taken now that will have an impact on the upcoming runoff. They include:

- Security by the Afghan police and army and international forces should be enhanced so that secure voting areas are expanded. For the Aug. 20 balloting, more than 10 percent of all polling sites were closed due to a lack of security.
- To eliminate so-called “ghost” polling stations, no ballots should be sent to polling centers that are not secured by Afghan security forces and adequately staffed by the Independent Election Commission (IEC).

- Polling centers that experienced fraud during the Aug. 20 election should receive targeted IEC scrutiny on election day and during the counting process. The targeted assistance could include additional personnel from outside the area who are less likely to be susceptible to local pressures.
- Planning should begin immediately to ensure that sufficient staff from the IEC and the ECC are available for the voting, tabulation and complaint process, including female staff.
- Both candidates should make forceful public statements, as well as give instructions to their supporters, that no one should commit fraud or allow fraud to be committed on their behalf.
- The agents of both candidates, as well as domestic and international observers, should be ensured full access to all levels of election administration.

Millions of Afghans voted on Aug. 20 despite the threats of violence, demonstrating their strong desire for a government that derives its authority from the will of the people, NDI said. Everything possible should be done in the limited time available to apply lessons learned from the first round of polling to ensure that the results of the runoff election meet the desires of citizens and ensure legitimacy for the elected government. NDI will continue to offer its support for the continued development of democratic governance in Afghanistan through and beyond these elections.

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