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CONTACT: Nino Vardosanidze, +995 77 554-055
Kathy Gest, +1 202-728-5535

**NDI CODE OF CONDUCT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES HAS RAISED
STANDARDS OF POLITICAL CULTURE, BUT FURTHER
MONITORING NEEDED**

TBILISI – Georgian political parties that signed the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) Code of Conduct have made progress toward ensuring accountability of party activists in the campaign process ahead of May 21 parliamentary elections, but close monitoring is still needed to encourage best practices and deter breaches of the code, NDI announced at a news conference today.

On April 11, NDI published a Code of Conduct for Political Parties that has been signed by nine parties. Under the code, the parties agreed to take responsibility for the conduct of their leaders, candidates, members of the election administration, election observers and activists. It was announced at today’s news conference that NDI has discussed complaints with the parties concerned and urged them to take immediate and concrete steps to distribute and enforce the code.

“NDI appreciates the active participation of the signatory parties in the process of raising and responding to complaints,” said Mary O’Hagan, NDI’s senior resident representative in Georgia. “Monitoring of the code will continue and further reports will be issued on its implementation.”

To date, NDI has received 34 complaints from six parties. In addition, we are tracking 10 other incidents which have been covered by the media. Of these cases, 20 have been closed, either because appropriate steps have been taken by the parties to resolve the complaint or because there was insufficient evidence to pursue the case, O’Hagan said.

The complaints received by NDI concern the following:

- Difficulty in opening and maintaining campaign offices;
- Misuse of administrative resources for campaign purposes;
- Intimidation of candidates;

- Lack of access to billboard space;
- Lack of access to the voters list;
- Pressure on a business to donate to a party;
- Inappropriate public protests;
- Intimidation of public employees;
- Intimidation and assault of party activists; and
- Use of inflammatory language.

O'Hagan highlighted two cases. In the first, Valery Giorgobiani, a ruling party candidate, was implicated in the intimidation of public employees and withdrew from the race as a result. "NDI strongly supports the statements made by the President, the United National Movement and the Central Election Commission following the resignation of Mr. Giorgobiani," O'Hagan said. "The fact that a candidate stepped down as soon as allegations surfaced that he had intimidated public employees sends a strong message that this type of conduct will not be tolerated."

In the second case, activists from the United Opposition, amongst others, conducted a protest outside the home of Central Election Commission Chairman Levan Tarkhnishvili.] "NDI urges all signatories of the code to exercise their right to protest in a responsible manner," O'Hagan said. "Protests outside the homes of public officials are inappropriate. We hope parties will not participate in protests outside private homes and that plans to protest outside the Central Election Commission on Election Day will be reviewed to ensure that the electoral process is not harmed."

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PARTY ACTIVISTS DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The undersigned political parties have reached agreement with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) on a series of commitments regarding the activities of their activists during the 2008 Parliamentary election campaign in Georgia. Their aim in doing this is to promote good conduct and enhance the campaigning environment. All the parties that sign this document subscribe to these principles and regard this Agreement as binding on their leaders, candidates, representatives in the election administration and activists. They undertake to publicize and enforce its provisions within their parties. The parties to this Agreement will maintain communication about these commitments and seek to resolve any disputes.

1. General

- This Agreement, the Election Code and all other relevant laws and regulations should be respected.
- Parties should use their own disciplinary mechanisms to deter breaches of this Agreement and encourage best practice.
- Violations of the law should be reported to the appropriate authorities.

2. The Election Campaign

- The campaign should be conducted in a manner that respects the rights of all election subjects to campaign freely. Harassment of any kind is unacceptable.
- Xenophobic or hate speech should be avoided during the campaign.
- Parties should not obstruct journalists from carrying out their professional duties.
- Campaigning should not be carried out in a manner that might seek to influence citizens' votes unfairly, such as employers pressuring their employees to vote in a particular way.
- The role of domestic and international election observers should be respected. This means avoiding any steps that could prevent them from carrying out their duties freely and impartially.
- Parties will not seek to obstruct their opponents from setting up and maintaining access to their campaign offices.
- Parties will not stage events, or engage in other activities designed to impede their opponents' rallies but will try to maintain communication with each other so that clashes between their supporters can be avoided.

3. Election Day

- Parties should play their full part in ensuring that the electoral process is free and fair. This includes desisting from campaigning inside polling stations and avoiding any behavior, inside or outside polling stations, which could impede the electoral process or unfairly influence voters.
- Party representatives in the election administration at all levels should apply a spirit of public service rather than narrow partisan interest to their work. Parties will ensure that their representatives receive sufficient information about the law to carry out their duties properly.
- Party observers at the election will follow and enforce the procedures contained in the Election Code. The parties will ensure that their observers receive sufficient information about the law to carry out their duties properly.
- The parties to this Agreement understand the importance of the impartial adjudication of election complaints and undertake to play their full part in submitting and pursuing complaints through official channels if they observe any irregularities in the electoral process.

The following political parties have signed the code:

- United National Movement (alphabetical order in Georgian)
- Conservative Party -For United Georgia
- Labour Party of Georgia
- Freedom Party
- Christian–Democratic Movement
- Industry Will Save Georgia
- Republican Party
- Our Georgia

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide by promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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