

**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE CONDUCTS INITIAL
PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION IN MEXICO
*Mexico City, May 12, 2000***

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Mexico City...An international pre-election delegation from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) visited Mexico from May 7-12, 2000 and issued its statement today. It was the first in a planned series of three NDI delegations that will observe the pre-election period and the election itself. In addition, NDI will establish a field presence in Mexico from May 31 until after the July 2, 2000 elections, in order to more fully assess the entire electoral process.

NDI is an independent, nongovernmental organization working to promote democracy around the world. NDI has conducted impartial election observation programs in more than 50 countries in the Americas and around the globe.

Summary of Observations

The delegation's observations were formed in the course of intensive meetings with representatives of broad sectors of Mexican society that are playing key roles in the developing electoral process. This includes meetings with leaders of the major political parties, government and election officials, and prominent members of civil society. The delegation expresses its gratitude for the warm reception it received from all with whom it met.

The 2000 presidential, congressional and state elections present a critical opportunity for Mexico to advance its democratic process. If the opposition were to win, it would be the first peaceful presidential transition of one party to another in Mexico since the end of the nineteenth century.

Mexico's electoral history is marked by controversy and, more recently, reform. These reforms have resulted in a more competitive and open electoral system. In particular, the now autonomous Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral - IFE*) enjoys the confidence of the major political parties and is highly regarded for its ability to administer efficient and transparent federal elections. Public confidence in elections has also increased markedly, but more reforms will likely be needed before Mexican citizens and political parties are fully confident in the process.

Despite these reforms, important concerns remain, including the need for more balanced news coverage, the misuse of public resources to support governing parties, vote buying and coercion (*compra y coacción del voto*), and an inefficient complaints/dispute resolution process. Thus, many of the legal mechanisms improved or established by the reforms are failing to ensure a transparent, efficient and fair electoral process. As stated by the delegation leader Gerardo Le Chevallier, "elections are ultimately about governability and all aspects of the electoral process must be credible in order to ensure a democratic governability and the participation of the populace."

The delegation commended Mexicans for fostering a competitive

election campaign and lauded the critical contributions to the election process of nonpartisan election monitoring organizations like Civic Alliance. In the spirit of international cooperation, the delegation offered recommendations to improve public confidence and participation, including thorough training for casilla officials and party poll watchers, and a continued mandate and support for agencies that tackle the issues of the use of state resources for electoral advantage. The delegation also offered suggestions on how to ensure more objective news coverage during the pre-electoral period.

The NDI delegation included: Luis Alberto Cordero, an elections and campaign expert from Costa Rica; Angel Vivas, a former congressman and political consultant from Venezuela; Gerardo Le Chevallier, a former congressman from El Salvador and NDI Director for Latin America and the Caribbean; Peter Manikas, a Senior Associate and Consultant to NDI's programs on elections and political processes; Katy Mudge, NDI Senior Program Officer; and Anya McMurray, NDI Program Assistant.

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