



# NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## STATEMENT OFFERED BY THE NDI PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION

September 25, 1992

From September 19-25, an international delegation sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted the second of two pre-election survey missions to Georgia. The delegation visited Georgia to assess preparations for the October 11 national elections, focussing particularly on the political atmosphere in Georgia at the start of the campaign and state of administrative preparedness.

Delegation participants included:

**Katharine I. Butler**, a lawyer and Professor of Law at the University of South Carolina and an expert on U.S. voting rights law;

**Lisa C. McLean**, NDI program officer and project director for NDI's program in Georgia;

**Miroslav Sevlievski**, National Secretary of the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR), a nonpartisan civic organization that has recruited thousands of volunteers to monitor democratic elections in Bulgaria; and

**Ron Sims**, an elected councilmember for King County in Washington State and chairman of the County Council's Fiscal Management and Human Services Committee and the King County Board of Health.

To obtain the necessary information, the NDI delegation met with political party leaders and activists, members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), members of the State Council, members of minority groups and key figures in the print media. On September 23, the delegation divided into two teams and travelled to Dimanisi and Telavi to meet with members of the District Election Commissions, local authorities, political party organizations and candidates for local deputy positions.

This statement is offered by the NDI delegation, incorporating information gathered by the first NDI assessment delegation (of which Ms. McLean was a member) that visited Georgia from September 3-7, 1992. Both multinational pre-election missions organized by NDI were present in Georgia at the invitation of the Central Election Commission.

The multinational delegation sponsored by NDI noted the overwhelmingly desire on the part of political parties, government authorities and the election commissions to hold elections that will comply with international standards for free and fair elections. All groups expressed the desire for Georgia to have a legitimate government.

The delegation noted also that, while no election system is ever perfect, the Georgian election regulations adequately provide the legal framework for equal access of all competing parties to government financing and the media. In addition, the election regulations offer all competing parties the opportunity to participate in the administration of the elections by appointing representatives to election commissions at the national, district and precinct level. Moreover, the Georgian election system, which combines single-mandate elections and multimember proportional elections, and the participation of many political parties offers the voter a wide range of choices on election day.

Finally, the delegation would like to commend the election commissions, especially the Central Election Commission, for its herculean efforts to organize the October 11 elections given limited financial resources and election regulations that have been amended twice in the last months before the elections.

At the same time, the multinational NDI delegation considers the following issues to be of concern for the conduct of free and fair elections in Georgia:

1. Unrest in Abkhazia, Mingrelia, and southern Ossetia threatens to disrupt the election process there such that elections in these regions may not be held on October 11. If elections are held as scheduled in these regions, election officials must recognize that the current violence is disrupting the distribution of newspapers and television and radio broadcast, all of which are important sources of information for the voter about election procedures and party and local candidate programs. The delegation hopes that the election administration would recognize the seriousness of this vacuum of information and find the means to ensure that the voters in these regions are able to make informed choices. If elections must be delayed in these regions, the NDI delegation urges the government to hold elections as soon as conditions permit and to consider interim provisions for representation of these regions in the new parliament.

2. The NDI delegation is troubled by the many political forces in Georgia who are relying on the international observers to guarantee the conduct of free and fair elections. The NDI delegation urges the political parties and all the people of Georgia to recognize the limited role of international observers and strongly recommends that, in the weeks before the elections, the political parties and the voters, exercising the rights provided to them by the election

regulations, assume responsibility for ensuring free and fair elections.

First, the political parties must educate their supporters, party agents, and appointees to the election commissions at all levels about election day procedures delineated in the election regulations. The international observers will be unable to visit all of the 3,000 polling sites in Georgia. The party representatives on the election commission and the party agents observing the elections must be prepared with proper knowledge of election procedures to play a crucial role in preventing intentional and accidental irregularities in the balloting and counting.

Therefore, the parties must organize efforts to train party representatives on the election commission and party agents to observe the elections. Organized cooperative efforts on the part of political parties (especially those with limited personnel) can ensure that multiparty participation at all precincts will provide a "check and balance" on election officials' compliance with election regulations thereby assuring the voter of the fair conduct of elections.

Second, while recognizing the current state of political party development in Georgia (many of the competing parties readily admitted to the delegation that parties are in a nascent state of development) and the limited financial resources of many of the parties, the delegation is disturbed by the low level of effort on the part of political parties to educate the voters about individual party platforms. Active campaigning on the part of the political parties will provide the voters with a clearer picture of the choices they have on election day and will serve as a first step in continued party development.

Third, in a democratic society, voters are active participants in the political process. The voters of Georgia must take personal responsibility for learning about the candidates, the parties and the procedures for casting ballots.

3. The NDI delegation commends the CEC on the instruction booklet it has prepared for election commissions on election day procedures. NDI urges that, in addition to the election law, this booklet be widely distributed to chairmen of election commissions, other election commission members and political parties, as well as be available to other interested Georgians. NDI believes that familiarity with these two publications prior to election day will help prevent irregularities on election day that may undermine voter confidence in the elections.