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February 23, 1993

NDI ELECTION OBSERVER DELEGATION PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

A 38-member multinational delegation, organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), has observed the February 21 presidential election in Senegal. The delegation includes members of parliament, party leaders, election experts and regional specialists from 15 countries in Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East.

This election observer delegation is an important part of NDI's effort over the past several years to support the electoral process in Senegal. In 1990, at the invitation of President Diouf and with the concurrence of the opposition parties, NDI organized a multinational delegation that visited Senegal to evaluate the electoral system. The government, the political parties and the multiparty reform commission welcomed the delegation's recommendations as they prepared a new electoral code.

More recently, NDI has worked actively to support the 1993 elections. It organized seminars throughout the country on the electoral code and pollwatching for representatives of all political parties. NDI representatives in Senegal also monitored election preparations and the pre-election environment.

Members of the observer delegation arrived in Senegal on Wednesday, February 17. The delegation met with the president, government and election officials, presidential candidates, political party leaders, academics, media representatives and hundreds of Senegalese voters. On Saturday, February 20, the delegation divided into 16 teams, which were deployed to nine regions: Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Louga, St. Louis, Tambacounda, Thies and Ziguinchor. There the teams met with political party leaders and government officials at the regional level on the day before the election. On election day, delegation members observed the polling in urban and rural areas throughout the country. Following the closing of the polls, they observed the counting of the ballots at the polling stations and tabulation of results at the departmental level. The teams reassembled in Dakar on Monday, February 22.

The delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank the government and political parties who facilitated the observer mission. The delegation also wishes to express its gratitude to the Senegalese people for their warm hospitality.

The delegation notes that the tabulation of results and the resolution of election complaints have not yet been completed. Therefore, this statement represents only the delegation's preliminary observations and assessments. NDI will continue to closely monitor developments and will issue a more detailed report at a later date.

This election was the first national election in Senegal conducted under a new electoral code agreed to by all political parties. For the first time, the electoral system guarantees the secrecy of the ballot and gives parties a direct role in administering the balloting and counting processes. Moreover, the process by which the election code was negotiated and approved by the parties now serves as a model for resolving contentious issues before they become intractable.

The delegation was impressed with a number of positive aspects of this election.

- A generally peaceful pre-election environment allowed candidates to campaign freely throughout the country.

- Except for the tragic incidents in the Casamance, election day was generally calm and orderly.

- Despite initial concerns about the fact that the code specified no practice for disposal of unused ballots, the secrecy of the ballot appeared to have been respected. Nevertheless, the delegation suggests that election administrators consider how to standardize the disposal of these ballots.

- Two or more party representatives were present in virtually all polling stations observed by delegation members. The presence of party representatives at polling sites increased transparency in the administration of the election and allowed most disputes to be addressed inside the polling stations. The electoral code also established mechanisms that enabled some issues of broader concern -- such as the application of indelible ink in the Dakar region -- to be quickly resolved.

- Over the experience of previous elections, there was substantial improvement in candidates' access to broadcast media during the campaign.

Along with these positive findings, the delegation also observed administrative shortcomings, procedural inconsistencies and other irregularities.

- Many registered voters were unable to obtain electoral cards and/or national identity cards before election day. Problems

with distribution of these documents compromised trust in this aspect of the electoral process.

•There were frequent discrepancies between voters' electoral cards and their identification documents. Because an individual needed both documents in order to vote, it was commendable that the government provided the means to correct these discrepancies by the issuance of "certificates of conformity." However, this process imposed additional burdens on potential voters. Moreover, the delivery of certificates of conformity and the significant number of special voting "ordinances" raised concerns about the accuracy of the electoral lists and resulted in claims of misuse.

•Observers saw a few instances of duplicate electoral cards -- two cards apparently issued to the same person -- bearing identical information except for differing addresses and voting places.

•In one area, observers were presented with a significant number of electoral cards that had allegedly been confiscated.

•There was widespread concern about the ineffectiveness of indelible ink. Because of this concern, some polling stations did not open on time, others temporarily closed and many voters were troubled about the possibility of multiple voting.

While these problems were cause for concern, the delegation received no evidence that they materially affected the election.

Delegation members observed polling in three areas of Casamance: Ziguinchor, Bignona and Nyassia. In these areas, the observers' findings were similar to those in other regions of the country. There were, however, circumstances unique to the region. Due to the turbulent political climate in the Casamance, there was controversy over the location of polling sites for villagers who had fled to Ziguinchor. Reinforced security in some urban centers of the Casamance helped reassure many voters. Such security, however, was lacking in more rural areas; this appeared to affect voter turnout.

The delegation strongly condemns the violent acts in the Casamance and deeply regrets the loss of life.

The delegation is pleased that parties are taking advantage of the institutions created or designated by the code to resolve electoral complaints. The delegation hopes that the courts will act expeditiously on all challenges tendered.

This election represents a positive step in the consolidation of Senegal's multiparty political system. The further development of democracy in Senegal, however, can only occur in a peaceful environment in which disputes are resolved in a spirit of tolerance, dialogue and compromise. The delegation therefore hopes that party leaders will appeal to their supporters for calm.

The Senegalese people are justifiably proud of the country's new electoral code and the process that led to its adoption. Political leaders have an important stake in building upon that success. The delegation, therefore, suggests that all political parties get together to discuss the country's experience with the implementation of the new electoral system. In support of Senegal's commitment to enhancing its democracy, the NDI delegation hopes that emphasis will be placed upon improving (1) the registration process, (2) civic education, particularly in rural areas, (3) training for pollworkers, and (4) mechanisms for cooperation between election authorities and political parties before, during and after election day.