



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Fifth Floor, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 328-3136 ■ FAX (202) 939-3166 ■ E-Mail: demos@ndi.org

STATEMENT OF FIRST NDI/CARTER CENTER PRE-ELECTION DELEGATION TO THE 1996 PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

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The first pre-election delegation of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and The Carter Center has concluded a week-long mission to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This pre-election mission is part of a comprehensive international election monitoring program designed to demonstrate international support for democracy and the electoral process in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to assess the electoral process in relation to Palestinian law and international norms.

The delegation includes Sakumzi Macozoma, South African Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Election Committee of the African National Congress; Matyas Eorsi, Hungarian Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee; Karen Shephard, former Member of the U.S. House of Representatives; and Claudio Grossman, a native of Chile, Vice President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Dean of the Washington College of Law at the American University in Washington, DC. Representatives of NDI and The Carter Center accompanied the delegation. NDI and The Carter Center are coordinating their international monitoring program with the international monitoring program of the European Union and other national and intergovernmental organizations involved in monitoring the elections. The NDI/Carter Center international monitoring program draws on the resources and experiences of the Institute's work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since February 1994 in civic and voter education, women's participation, and domestic election monitoring.

The delegation met with representatives of the Palestinian Authority, representatives of political parties and groups, civic leaders, leaders of women's organizations, educators, journalists, diplomats, domestic and other international election monitors, and representatives of the government of Israel. The team met with the caretaker chairman of the Central Election Commission and members of the former Commission on Elections, coordinators of the election offices in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, district election officers for Gaza City, Gaza North, Gaza-Middle, Khan Yunis, Rafah, Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron and Jerusalem, and teachers involved in voter registration process. The delegation observed registration canvassing in Deir Al Balah, Nuscirat, Shabora and the Swedi section of Rafah camp in the Gaza Strip, Ras Al-Joura and Jabal Al-Rahma in Hebron District, and Al-Izariya and in Jerusalem District.

Mirroring a universal trend, the Interim Agreement and the Palestinian election law call for international observation of the Palestinian elections. In the past 10 years, the National Democratic Institute, often in cooperation with The Carter Center, has organized international monitoring programs for more than 50 elections in every part of the world, including Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East.



FINDINGS OF THE DELEGATION

We have witnessed a rich process of discussion and dialogue among all sectors of Palestinian society. We are heartened by the enthusiasm we witnessed for registration and for the election process. We are greatly impressed with the commitment and resourcefulness of all the election officials, including teachers who are responsible for the voter registration canvass. There are strong aspirations for democracy throughout Palestinian society. We note that even parties that are skeptical about the elections have nevertheless encouraged Palestinians to participate in voter registration. Recognizing the right of political participation, we are confident that all political groups, even those that will not choose to participate, will respect the rights of each individual Palestinian to make a choice. We value, too, that Israel has committed itself to facilitate democratic elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

These first Palestinian elections, like transition elections everywhere, create new opportunities to raise democratic awareness, involve larger parts of the public to participate in public affairs, lay the foundation for genuinely democratic institutions and satisfy international requirements for the democratic establishment of authority. We congratulate Palestinians for approaching the elections in this spirit. We offer the support of the international community to the opportunities opened for the development of Palestinian democracy.

1. Registration

- **Canvass of Voters.** The registration of voters that begins the Palestinian election process is generally well-organized and enthusiastically accepted by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The voter registration canvass began on November 12. While there were a few technical and administrative difficulties at the beginning of the canvass-- e.g. a lack of identity cards for teachers conducting the canvassing, shortages of some registration materials, some confusion about transportation arrangements for teachers, and a shortage of canvassers to begin registration of the Palestinians of Jerusalem--- election officials seem to be adequately addressing these problems. Our impressions are that canvassers are committed to completing the canvass fairly and thoroughly and that eligible voters generally want to register. This positive beginning of registration is encouraging.

- **Voter Awareness.** We have observed a high level of awareness of the voter registration process, even though the local media have not covered registration canvassing as a significant story. The official voter education campaign of the Central Election Commission (CEC) in newspaper advertisements, through posters and on the broadcast media was evident, although we noted that some television spots were delayed.

- **General Support for Registration Process.** The extremely important registration process seems to have begun well. No one with whom we spoke questioned the legitimacy of

the registration process, and Palestinians everywhere we went greeted registration with great enthusiasm. Various concerns were raised about the Interim Agreement, the election system and specific provisions of the election law. None of the parties raising these issues, however, considered them sufficient to question the legitimacy or fairness of the registration process.

● **Identification Documents for Eligible Residents.** The Interim Agreement guarantees that residents without proper identification documents who meet certain criteria can obtain such documents that will allow them to register and vote. Because the canvass is set to end on December 2, the procedure for obtaining identification documents for such individuals should be clarified and explained to the canvassers and the public immediately. Palestinian election officials have told us that radio and newspaper announcements will address this issue in the near future.

2. Timing of Elections.

Concern was expressed to us as to whether holding elections as soon as January 1996 will allow enough time for proper preparations, including time to complete registration lists and make administrative preparations or time for parties and candidates to communicate their messages. Key sectors of Palestinian society believe, however, that it is critically important to hold early elections. These sectors trust that the political maturity of Palestinian society will allow for expeditious and effective resolution of election-related issues and complaints.

A maximum effort by all will be required for successful elections to take place in January. Urgent resolution of important technical and organizational issues must occur as soon as possible, including:

- The election law should be approved and measures should be adopted to promote public awareness of its provisions, such as broad distribution of the law or of information about its key provisions.
- Deadlines and procedures for filing as candidates should be established and made public.
- The process for filing appeals of problems with regard to voter and candidate registration should be defined and explained.
- The procedure for obtaining identification documents for individuals without identification documents should be clarified and explained to the canvassers and the public.
- Specific procedures to ensure fair access to broadcast media during the campaign should be established.
- Procedures for providing access to accredited domestic and international election monitors, in accordance with the election law and the Interim Agreement, to all aspects of the electoral process, including election day should be clarified.

- The Central Election Commission should be formed.

We understand that the final election law will make technical changes to address these issues and that the Palestinian Authority will promulgate the new law in the coming days. It is important that the law be announced and the CEC be formed in the very near future.

3. Facilitation of Electoral Process

We were impressed by the spirit of cooperation between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Because of the complexity of the election, a maximum effort should be undertaken by all relevant actors. In that respect it is crucial to ensure that members of the Israeli administration and military on the ground are properly informed for the elections to proceed smoothly. We expect that these measures will further facilitate the transfer of election materials from Jericho to Gaza at the Erez checkpoint and the issuance of necessary travel permits to qualified Palestinian election officials, in accordance with the terms and spirit of the Interim Agreement.

4. Role of Domestic Monitors

We believe that international monitoring cannot be successful in the absence of domestic election monitoring, and we recognize that nongovernmental organizations have a fundamental role to play in the election process. We are impressed with the efforts of the Palestinian Domestic Monitoring Committee to organize a comprehensive, independent national monitoring coalition, in accordance with the Interim Agreement and the Palestinian electoral law. We note the Interim Agreement's commitment to freedom of movement of accredited domestic election monitors and expect that this commitment will be fully respected.

5. Role of Women

Palestinians from diverse sectors of society also commented on the key role of women in the building of democratic institutions. We hope that election officials, election monitors, candidates and parties will take into account the particular concerns of women and that these elections will provide greater opportunities for women to participate in the public affairs of their society. We note with satisfaction that the CEC has made a concerted effort to recruit women for all polling station commissions and that the CEC voter education materials feature women and seek to address their concerns.