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**THIRD STATEMENT OF THE NDI/CARTER CENTER
PRE-ELECTION MONITORING PROGRAM**

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Carter Center continue to monitor the pre-election environment in advance of the January 20 elections for the Council and Ra'ees of the Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority. In order to ensure that Palestinian voters, election organizers, candidates and responsible officials remain informed of our findings, The Carter Center and NDI issue periodic public assessments of the preparations for the elections. This third statement is being issued three weeks before election day, as the electoral calendar, after considerable fluidity in recent weeks, appears to have been clarified.

Overall, we remain encouraged by many aspects of this important process, particularly by Palestinian enthusiasm for elections and by the laudable efforts of the Polling Station Commissioners and District Election Officers who continue to surmount challenges in preparing for the elections. Administratively and technically elections can be conducted on January 20 provided that further major alterations in the framework and in the calendar are not introduced. Nevertheless, we are increasingly concerned that some environmental problems raised earlier have not been addressed and in some cases have worsened.

Of particular concern is the lack of a stable framework for the elections, an issue that the European Union Election Unit and other observers have also raised. An election law exists, and timetables have been promulgated and announced, but they have been frequently changed by the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Palestinian Authority. Important components of the election process, including the length of time for the campaign, the number of seats in the Council, the procedure and timetable for registering voters and the timetable for registering candidates have been altered several times without public explanation by authorities. While some of these changes have been made to promote greater participation in this first Palestinian election, they also may increase voter confusion and diminish public confidence in the electoral process. Election officials have asserted that they may not be able to respond to all the changing procedures. A further concern is that the Council seats appear not to have been allocated in proportion to the number of inhabitants in each constituency, as required by law, which could weaken the principle of fair representation. We recommend that the population figures used for the allocation be made public to clarify the matter.

The recent arrest and continuing detention of *Al-Quds* Editor Maher Al-Alami furthers concerns about respect for freedom of speech. NDI and the Carter Center have raised the issue of press freedom in the past and are concerned that the circumstances of this detention suggest a worsening of the

situation. NDI and the Carter Center add their voices to those calling for the immediate release of Mr Alami and others who have been detained without due process.

In previous statements, NDI and the Carter Center have stressed the importance of balance in the media and the need for specific guidelines for the role of the Palestinian Broadcast Corporation (PBC) during the campaign. The CEC and PBC have drafted an agreement governing access to the broadcast media during the campaign. This agreement should be completed and promulgated as soon as possible, and provisions allowing for access free of charge should be respected, in accordance with Article 57 of the election law. The draft agreement reserves time for candidate spots on the radio but not on television. The agreement also calls for "balanced coverage in news and current affairs media" and specifies that the PBC should ensure that "the total time allocated to each party or candidate matches roughly the number of candidates." At present access to the television is unbalanced as the December 30 report by Reporters Sans Frontieres documents. This imbalance should be corrected.

We are also concerned about voting procedures for police officers, who will not be registered at the polling station where they vote. According to volume three of the CEC's Manual of Instruction and Guidance of Members of Commissions and Offices, the officers are required to turn in their voter certificates when they vote. This provides a check on multiple voting, but care should be taken over the distribution of certificates and observers should track the number of certificates turned in on election day to check against registration figures. As NDI and The Carter Center have suggested previously, the use of indelible ink on fingers provides another way to assure the public that the possibility of multiple voting has been reduced.

We commend the Central Election Commission for having addressed some issues that have been raised by observers. For example, some 200 volunteers of the Palestinian Domestic Monitoring Committee (PDMC) have now received their credentials. As the PDMC hopes to have more than 2000 monitors by election day, we hope that the remainder will also receive credentials in a timely manner. Despite its late establishment, recent statements from the CEC warning against early campaigning and the use of Palestinian Authority resources by candidates are helping the Commission establish the necessary reputation for independence. Nevertheless, the well-known partisan affiliation of several members of the Commission will necessitate extra effort to demonstrate its impartiality and independence.

As 1996 begins, peace and prospect of democratic elections have brought hope to Palestinians and the friends of Palestinian democracy around the world. The realization of these hopes depends in part of how Palestinians meet the challenges of these first elections, which help determine the nature of the future political system in the West Bank and Gaza.

NDI and The Carter Center will continue to monitor the pre-election preparations ,along with other election observers. In order to obtain as much information as possible, NDI and The Carter Center have established telephone lines for candidates who have concerns about election-related irregularities. In the West Bank, the number is (02) 283-396, and in Gaza, (07) 864-805.