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**NDI DELEGATION FINDS ARMENIA HAS THE CAPACITY TO ORGANIZE
DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS BUT MUST BREAK FROM ILLICIT PRACTICES**

Yerevan, November 23, 2002... A multinational delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs made a week-long assessment of the electoral conditions and the political environment in advance of Armenia's 2003 elections. The presidential elections are to be held on February 19, and the parliamentary elections are set for May 25; a constitutional referendum is also scheduled for 2003.

In its statement, the delegation found that: "Armenia continues to suffer from its troubled electoral history. While improvements have been made in some respects, critical areas remain to be addressed if credible democratic elections are to be achieved. It is essential that these problems be corrected and a clean break be made from past illicit practices in advance of the 2003 elections. Otherwise, public confidence in the election process and governmental institutions will not be established, and Armenia will put its democratic development in jeopardy."

The delegation added: "The country has yet to meet its international commitments to hold democratic elections. The establishment of a valid legal framework and the good practices of many electoral actors demonstrate that Armenia has the capacity to organize genuine democratic elections. The principal issue that Armenia must confront in the electoral arena is mustering sufficient political will to ensure that: fair campaign conditions are provided; election commissions and government bodies act impartially; political parties and other interested forces act within the law, while parties guard their legitimate electoral interests; and voters have a free choice that is accurately tabulated and respected.... Electoral practice in 2003 must at least meet minimum standards for genuine elections in order for Armenia to integrate itself into the international community of democracies."

The delegation offered nine recommendations for improving the country's electoral and political processes, which addressed among other matters ensuring impartiality of electoral bodies, eliminating electoral intimidation and fraud, ending impunity for electoral crimes and improving transparency and campaign fairness.

The delegation, which included members from Germany, Portugal and the United States, visited Armenia from November 18-25 and met with the Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly and other government officials, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, leaders of Armenian political parties in government and opposition, civic leaders and representatives of the international community. NDI has been active in Armenia since 1995 and has observed past Armenian elections.

The full text of the statement is available on NDI's web site at: www.ndi.org.