



**CARTER CENTER/NDI INTERIM POST-ELECTION STATEMENT ON THE 2005
LIBERIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS**

14 Dec 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS

In Monrovia: Ashley Barr: + 231 (0)6 452 022 jashleybarr@gmail.com

In Atlanta: Jon Moor + 1 404 420 5107 jmoor@emory.edu

In Monrovia: Thomas Du. + 231 (0)6 523 361 tdu@ndi.org

In Washington: Jean Freedberg +1 202 728 5527 jfreedberg@ndi.org

MONROVIA ... The Nov. 10 preliminary statement issued by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) / Carter Center international observer delegation provided a generally positive overall assessment of the process up to that point. Since then, Carter Center staff and long-term observers as well as NDI in-country staff have continued to monitor electoral developments, including the tabulation process, the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia's posting of final election results, and the NEC hearings on electoral complaints, including those put forward by the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) on behalf of its standard bearer, Ambassador George Weah. The Carter Center's long-term observers as well as NDI in-country staff also have continued meeting with senior officials of political parties, the NEC, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) electoral division, civil society groups, the diplomatic and donor communities, president-elect Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP), and Ambassador Weah.

On Nov. 23, the NEC announced official election results and declared Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf president-elect, having obtained 59.4 percent of the vote in the Nov. 8 presidential runoff. A number of electoral complaints have been filed, and the NEC has been conducting formal hearings for several weeks. The NEC is expected to issue rulings on most of the individual electoral complaints soon. In addition, the NEC is scheduled to begin hearings next week on a post-election contestation complaint filed by the CDC, which challenges the overall result. NEC rulings on electoral complaints can be appealed to the Supreme Court. Although the post-election period generally has been calm, the past several days have been marked by incidents of violence and intimidation.

This statement offers reflections based on the Carter Center's and NDI's observations of the overall electoral process, including the ongoing post-election complaints process.

Overall, the Center's and NDI's assessment of the electoral process is positive. While we are aware of several minor instances when polling officials did not follow procedures in completing record of count forms, as well as instances of several other irregularities, the

Center and NDI have not seen evidence of systematic fraud or problems that would materially affect the election results.

The Need for Restraint by All Parties. The Carter Center and NDI note the restraint with which political parties and their leadership have conducted themselves in the weeks following the runoff elections. We applaud all parties' stated commitment to pursue electoral complaints through the appropriate legal mechanisms. In general, the calm shown by the overwhelming majority of Liberians demonstrates their desire and determination to establish a sustainable peace in the country.

However, the Center and NDI are very concerned about the looting and violence that occurred in the wake of Ambassador Weah's public statement upon his return to Monrovia. Similarly, we are concerned about earlier allegations of threats of violence against some political figures and journalists. We join Liberian democrats in strongly condemning the politics of intimidation and violence. We call on all Liberians to renew their commitment to restraint in words and actions as the country makes its transition away from devastating conflict.

Media. Concerns have been expressed about media coverage of the election complaint hearings and other aspects of the political process. The Center and NDI urge all print, radio, and television media outlets to ensure their reporting is neutral and informative throughout this final period of the election process, as required by their code of conduct. In particular, the media should scrupulously avoid reporting unconfirmed rumors or creating unnecessary public alarm.

Complaints Process. The ongoing hearings on various electoral complaints appear to be affording due process to all parties involved. Although there have been minor problems relating to procedures and personal conduct and rhetoric, the proceedings generally are being conducted with transparency and in conformity with international standards for administrative tribunals.

During the CDC vs. NEC hearing, the Center and its long-term observers witnessed sometimes volatile, extended arguments about procedural matters and occasional personal insults among the attorneys. At times, members of the public also have been allowed to disrupt the hearings.

In the coming days, the full NEC Board of Commissioners may be requested to review CDC's initial complaint, and the board is scheduled to begin hearing new evidence in the CDC's post-election contestation complaint. In order to maximize public confidence and to ensure an orderly and transparent process, the Center and NDI urge the NEC to take steps to ensure that procedures for these next hearings are understood and followed. In addition, the Center and NDI encourage all those involved in the complaints process to restrain their rhetoric and to continue to conduct themselves in good faith.

We recognize that the electoral complaints process is ongoing, and that the NEC, and possibly the Supreme Court, will make final determinations. We encourage the NEC to issue rulings on electoral complaints publicly and expeditiously. In addition, we urge that any election complaints that go forward to the Supreme Court be handled expeditiously.

Delays should not be allowed to undermine this important part of the election process. Most importantly, the Center and NDI underscore that it is essential to Liberia's nascent democracy that NEC officials and Supreme Court justices consider these electoral cases free from intimidation of any kind.

As the electoral complaints procedure continues, the Center and NDI call for continued patience and respect for the process and the rule of law. Ultimately, the people of Liberia will determine whether the election and electoral dispute procedures were credible and transparent and whether the results accurately reflect their political will.

This statement is also available at www.cartercenter.org and www.ndi.org.

The Carter Center is a not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, advance peace and health worldwide. The Center's work in Liberia is supported by the Government of Ireland and USAID. In addition, the Carter Centre U.K. is implementing an electoral assistance program along with Electoral Reform International Services, supported by the European Commission. For more information please visit www.cartercenter.org and www.cartercentre.org.uk.

NDI is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. In Liberia, the Institute is providing assistance to civil society organizations to conduct voter education and election monitoring activities across the country. These programs are supported by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy. For more information, please visit www.ndi.org.

Consistent with the spirit and intent of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Accords of 2003, the NEC's "Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Observers," and the 2005 "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation," the Center's and NDI's international observation activities are intended to provide neutral and accurate reporting to help Liberians determine whether the elections are conducted in a manner acceptable to all. The Carter Center and NDI brought international election observation delegations to Liberia for the Oct. 11 first round and the Nov. 8 runoff, releasing preliminary statements after each delegation. NDI and The Carter Center will publish a final report on the 2005 Liberian presidential and legislative elections, drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on the full election process, including the resolution of electoral complaints, which must be assessed as an integral part of that process.