



MEDIA RELEASE

Local Elections Gave Fair Representation of Voters' Wishes

Yesterday's Palestinian local elections generally went smoothly, according to the National Democratic Institute's international observer delegation.

"Once again, Palestinians demonstrated their enthusiasm for the democratic process," the delegation said in its preliminary report, released Friday in Jerusalem. "The results of these elections, if fairly tabulated and presented, should be considered a fair representation of the desires of the electorate."

NDI had four long-term observers and 12 short-term observers stationed in communities where elections were being held in the West Bank and Gaza. They witnessed voting in 60 polling centers out of the 110 operating yesterday. The delegation, which was led by Paul Adams, a Canadian public opinion researcher and academic, included election and democracy experts from Australia, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Yesterday marked the fourth round of Palestinian local elections in a year.

The main problems identified on election day by NDI observers were vigorous campaigning around, and sometimes in, polling centers, something prohibited by law, and large numbers of voters receiving assistance to vote, not always in strict conformity with the law.

"Despite these irregularities, we believe the elections were generally sound," said Mr. Adams. He pointed out that NDI will continue to monitor and assess the official vote count, which has yet to be released, and any complaints that may arise. A final report will be released afterwards.

The NDI delegation said that many of the problems identified yesterday would best be addressed by the transfer of authority for local elections from the Higher Commission for Local Elections to the Central Election Commission as required by law at the end of 2005.

The NDI also called on Palestinian authorities to set a date for a re-vote in Rafah, Al Burej, Beit Lahiya, and Anata, as ordered by the Palestinian courts after the elections held in May and later voided. In addition, the NDI delegation said that a new date for elections in Hebron should be set as soon as possible. Originally scheduled for elections in the fourth round, the vote in Hebron was postponed for "security" reasons.

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