



2030 M Street N.W.
Fifth Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: (202) 728-5500
Fax: (202) 728-5520
<http://www.ndi.org>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 8, 2007

Contact: Kathy Gest, kgest@ndi.org or
202-728-5535

NDI URGES RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC CIVILIAN RULE IN PAKISTAN

WASHINGTON, DC – Calling the imposition of a state of emergency in Pakistan deeply troubling, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) today called on the government immediately to reinstate the constitution, release political prisoners, and pave the way for inclusive, transparent, and credible elections to be held on schedule in January.

“The mass arrests, the stringent curbs on independent media, and the abrogation of basic civil liberties undermine the fundamental human and political rights of the Pakistani people and the stability of the country,” said NDI President Kenneth Wollack. “The current political crisis is the result of the increased authoritarianism of the government, which continues to stifle efforts toward democratic, civilian rule and has led to greater political instability.”

NDI has organized two pre-election assessment missions to Pakistan this year to examine the environment in advance of general elections. The most recent mission, led by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle in October, concluded that urgent steps were needed to contain political violence, produce an accurate voters’ list, curtail security agencies’ interference in the electoral process, ensure the involvement of all political party leaders, and protect the rights of women voters.

Daschle, who is a member of NDI’s board of directors, noted that before the declaration of emergency it was hoped that parliamentary elections enjoying the confidence of the people of Pakistan would bolster stability, help lessen civil strife, and decrease political violence.

“The upcoming elections had at least the potential to move the nation along a democratic path after eight years of increasingly unpopular military rule,” Daschle said. “Credible elections are the only way out of the current crisis, but they cannot take place until the government reverses the anti-democratic measures imposed this week. Any elections held under the current situation will not be viewed as legitimate by the people of Pakistan or the international community.

“NDI urges the government of Pakistan to immediately reinstate the constitution, lift restrictions on the media, return the dismissed Supreme Court justices, and restore all civil and political rights. In addition, President Musharraf should abide by his commitment to remove his military uniform and take the steps necessary to ensure free and fair elections by mid-January.”

Among the recommendations of NDI's pre-election assessment mission were:

- steps by the Election Commission to improve the quality of the voters list, which is widely believed to contain as many as 10 million faulty entries;
- actions by the government to prevent election-related violence and to promptly investigate and prosecute all attempts to disrupt the election process;
- cooperation by the government with judicial inquiries into the killing and abduction of journalists and political party workers;
- establishment of a neutral caretaker Cabinet in consultation political parties and civil society;
- use of the government's full authority to improve the law-and-order situation, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and southern districts of the North West Frontier Province, to ensure that campaigning and voting can take place;
- ensure that criminal laws not be used to impede political activity and that no law designed to protect public order be selectively applied; and
- terminate the involvement of intelligence agencies in the electoral process.

“Without such steps, crucial parliamentary elections risk being perceived as compromised and unrepresentative, and could lead to deeper civil unrest and military involvement in politics,” Daschle said

###