



## ADDENDUM ON RECENT FINDINGS The Post-Coup Context in Mauritania October 25, 2005

**Political developments are unfolding very quickly in Mauritania.** The government has scheduled a formal consultation period with political parties to begin on October 25<sup>th</sup>. Parties were asked to send three representatives to participate in consultative workshops on the National Election Commission, the constitution and electoral laws and processes. At the request of the main political parties in Mauritania, NDI representatives traveled to Nouakchott from October 16 to 20 to provide them with individual technical assistance. The Institute's representatives held consultations with five of the most important parties, including roundtables on women's quotas and models of electoral systems, as well as meetings with the Ministers of Justice and Interior.

The mission reinforced the Institute's findings from its September 19-27 post-coup assessment, and two key points emerged:

- The democratic transition in Mauritania can be successful if the international community 1) monitors the process very closely and 2) is ready to invest the necessary resources to support the transitional government in reaching required benchmarks.
- The current government is responsive to international and internal pressures to enhance and improve the transition plan.

### *Inter-ministerial Reports on Transition*

Just prior to the visit, NDI obtained a copy of the provisional reports of the inter-ministerial committee on transition, justice and governance. These reports have received approval by the cabinet but have yet to be enacted by the military council.

The report on transition contains a number of positive political developments.

- The constitution will be amended in order to limit to one term the reelection of the president.
- The principle of democratic alternation will be given constitutional status.
- Important legal safeguards will be inserted to render the revision of those articles almost impossible.
- The principle of a quota for women at the local and legislative elections will also be the object of a constitutional amendment. However, there is no stipulation on the manner in which such a quota would be implemented. Building on the transitional government political will, NDI organized a roundtable with women political activists and to discuss comparative models of quotas.
- Finally, the widely contested article 104 that grandfathered decrees used against opponents will be abrogated and replaced by a transitory clause.

- The inter-ministerial committee also proposed the creation of a National Electoral Commission aimed at being independent. Its status will be affirmed in the constitution.
- In addition, the report considers various measures such as an extraordinary updating of the voter list, a revision of the party funding mechanisms and the implementation of a single ballot.

Nevertheless, the proposed measures are still insufficient for fair and meaningful elections to happen.

- The revision of the electoral list would be based on the 2003 voter list. It is widely recognized that the list was manipulated by the Taya administration. NDI has proposed, at a minimum, to test the accuracy of the list before taking any decision on updating it or redoing a new one.
- The report is completely silent on the modification of the electoral system and the redistricting process necessary for more representative and fair elections.
- NDI is also concerned that the electoral commission would not be sufficiently independent from the Ministry of Interior as currently detailed. Moreover, the proposed decree gives undue discretionary power to the government to appoint the members of the commission.

NDI representatives have raised those concerns with the Ministers of Justice and Interior, who continued to call on continuing international technical support.

### *A Dynamic Context*

**Political parties are requesting sustained support** during the transition process—they realize the need they have to acquire skills to be able to compete effectively and reach out to the citizens across the country. They feel considerable pressure as one of opposition parties is already starting to pick up momentum: The Rally of Democratic Forces (RDF), led by the formerly imprisoned Ahmad Ould Daddah, is gaining strength from the defection of groups of political activists from the former ruling Republican, Democratic and Social Party (PRDS).

On the other side of the equation, **the ruling Military Council finds itself in a weak position**. It has no legitimacy with the international community, and the conditions for a violent and bloody outbreak have been tempered but have not disappeared. Citizens will need to see real changes and improvements if social pressures are to be substantially reduced.

In fact, the Military Council's weakness is making it **more receptive to international and internal pressure**. For example, the Ministers of Justice and Interior have told NDI that the government is now considering the modification of the electoral system and that the political parties would be consulted in this process. Given the strong interest of the political parties in changing the electoral system that was mainly designed to favor the PRDS, the Institute conducted a roundtable on various models of electoral systems and their impact on national reconciliation processes.

Furthermore, the Ministers informed NDI that the **duration of the transition period would be reduced**. Considering the illegitimate nature of the Military Council's status, this was an important concern of the U.S. government and the European Union.

While in Nouakchott, NDI representatives also met with a United Nations (UN) assessment mission, which was mobilized following a formal request by the Military Council for UN assistance in the transition. Both shared their analyses and views on the issues at stake. These proved to be quite similar with regard to the necessary requirements for a successful transition. The two organizations will maintain contact and discuss the most meaningful ways to collaborate as events unfold in Mauritania.