

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 19, 2008

**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE,  
PRE-ELECTION DELEGATION RELEASES STATEMENT**

DHAKA, BANGLADESH -- The National Democratic Institute's (NDI) delegation is pleased to release its statement on the preparations for the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2008. The mission, which was conducted from November 16-19, 2008 included Sam Gejdenson, former U.S. Congressman and current NDI board member; Honorable Saumura Tioulong, member of the National Assembly of Cambodia; and Peter Manikas, senior associate and regional director for NDI's Asia programs. The delegation was assisted by Jacqueline Corcoran, NDI/Bangladesh resident senior director; Dileepan Sivapathasundaram, NDI program manager for Asia; and Najia Hashemee, NDI/Bangladesh resident program manager. The delegation met with electoral and government officials, political party and civil society leaders, and representatives of the news media and the international community. The delegation stresses that it did not seek to reach any final conclusions on the 2008 electoral process.

This delegation has arrived in Bangladesh at a critical time. After almost two years of rule by a military-backed caretaker government, the nation is on the eve of national elections. If the elections are participatory and conducted in an impartial manner, they will be an important step toward restoring the democratic process. If, however, the elections fail to gain the confidence of Bangladesh's citizens, they could lead to a continued erosion of the nation's democratic institutions and further entrench the role of the military in governing the country. All of the nation's political parties have not yet agreed to participate in the coming polls. Broad participation in fair and credible elections is an essential feature of a democracy. The delegation hopes that the caretaker government and political parties can quickly resolve any outstanding issues so that the elections are as inclusive as possible.

The interruption of the democratic process in Bangladesh was a tragedy for the nation and a return to democratic rule as soon as possible is imperative. The pending transition is an opportunity to renew the public's confidence in the ability of nation's political parties to govern the nation effectively and honestly in the interests of citizens. Bangladeshis are weary of rampant corruption, hartals (general strikes called by political leaders) and political violence. An important opportunity will be lost if the transition back to elected government is not sustained through more accountable and modern political organizations capable of gaining the public's trust.

The delegation recommends first and foremost that the state of emergency should also be lifted as soon as possible and the military accept its proper role in a democratic society and refrain from intervening in the political and electoral process. The parties should agree to sustain several of the caretaker government's reforms and use their elected roles in parliament as the principal forum for constructive deliberation on issues and resolving disputes. Civil society should also educate the public about the need to refrain from violence, calling for accountability to the law through and beyond the elections.

*NDI is a nonprofit organization that supports people around the world to build more democratic societies. Responding to requests for assistance, NDI's international network of experts and practitioners provides people with tools to strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.*