



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT  
OF THE NDI ASSESSMENT MISSION TO CÔTE D'IVOIRE**  
*Abidjan, December 17, 1999*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This preliminary statement is offered by an international delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) that visited Côte d'Ivoire from December 12 - 18, 1999. The delegation will issue a more substantive statement at a later date. NDI is a nonprofit organization which works to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI has conducted more than 40 international election observer delegations and more than 80 pre-election delegations around the world. The Institute has established a reputation for independence and professionalism in conducting electoral assessments.

The purposes of the NDI delegation are to express the international community's interest in the democratization process in Côte d'Ivoire, to assess electoral conditions and the political environment in which national elections will take place in 2000, and to offer an accurate and impartial report on the pre-election situation.

The delegation has conducted its assessment on the basis of international standards and comparative practices for elections and other democratic processes. NDI does not seek to interfere in the Ivorian political process, but will continue to monitor the process. Ultimately, the people of Côte d'Ivoire will make their own assessment of the electoral process and its outcome.

**II. THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK**

The delegation to Côte d'Ivoire includes election experts and political analysts: Anne-Emmanuelle Deysine, professor at the University of Paris X-Nanterre; Fernando Marques da Costa, Chief Political Advisor to the President of Portugal; Ismael Tidjani-Serpos, member of the National Assembly of Benin and President of the Constitutional Affairs Committee at the legislature; I. William Zartman, Director of African Studies and Conflict Management Programs and Professor of International Organization and Conflict Resolution at the Johns Hopkins University Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., and Chris Fomunyoh, NDI Regional Director for West, Central and East Africa.

The delegation made its observations and findings based upon NDI's work in Côte d'Ivoire since 1991, the Ivorian Constitution and election law, and analysis of information presented to the delegation during its meetings in the country. The delegation met with: members of the government including Head of State Henri Konan Bédié; leaders of the main Ivorian political parties; representatives of civic organizations involved in democracy support activities; journalists; religious and labor leaders and other Ivorians interested in the process leading up the 2000 elections. The

delegation also visited the leadership of the *Rassemblement des Républicains* (RDR) at the *Maison d'Arrêts et de Correction d'Abidjan* (MACA).

### III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Côte d'Ivoire is at a critical stage in its democratic development. Rising political tensions in the last few months have created an atmosphere that prevents inclusive and transparent elections in 2000. At the same time, Ivorians are faced with pressing social and economic problems that require increased accountability and transparency in the management of resources.

During the 1995 electoral period, political parties disagreed over the legal framework for the presidential election. This disagreement led to a boycott by the two main opposition parties. While the main parties contested subsequent legislative elections, disagreement remained over the state of the voters' register and administration of the electoral process. Since that time, the country has made an effort to ensure multiparty participation in the early stages of election preparations. The delegation noted a number of steps being taken to create an appropriate framework for the 2000 national elections in Côte d'Ivoire. Thanks to active dialogue and consultations among political parties a number of improvements have been made. These steps include efforts to prepare for a comprehensive revision of the voters' register and legislation recently approved by the National Assembly pertaining to elections.

Despite these efforts, the delegation noted serious problems involving fundamental democratic principles and political participation that cause grave concerns. These problems must be addressed promptly if the election process is to meet international standards.

Opposition party leaders have been arrested and imprisoned under an anti-riot law that has the result of restricting the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. The delegation is also concerned about questions raised regarding the independence of the judiciary and lingering questions over the administration of and legal provisions for the electoral process. Given the antecedent of election-related disputes during the 1995 elections, Ivorians that met with the delegation strongly urged that additional decisive measures be taken to resolve these problems and so doing to create the environment and conditions for a meaningful electoral process that has the confidence of the Ivorian people. The delegation recognizes that legal and political developments that may prevent Alassane Dramane Ouattara from serving as leader of the RDR or standing as candidate for presidency are having a negative effect on the political climate. The delegation recommends that all the involved parties resolve this and other important differences so that the integrity of the process may be protected and all of the RDR leadership can participate in the process. The delegation believes that there are fundamental problems with the process. Political parties expressed the need for discussions on additional changes in a number of areas including the minimum voting age, the single ballot system, redistricting and provisions for run-offs in presidential elections.

The delegation calls on all the political leaders of the country, the government and the opposition to act in the Ivorian spirit of dialogue and reconciliation to avoid actions and rhetoric that may raise tensions, threaten political stability in the country and endanger peaceful and credible elections in 2000. All political factions should be allowed to compete freely and fully and focus on the issues of national importance. In order to ensure full participation and the integrity of the

electoral process, political dialogue among all political leaders and consensus on fundamentals are needed for the country to move ahead.

The delegation greatly appreciates the hospitality extended to it by government officials, members of the National Assembly, political party leaders and their representatives, members of the judiciary and the legal profession, members of NGOs, civic and religious leaders and other Ivorians. The delegation could not have accomplished its tasks without the cooperation and openness of those with whom it met.

NDI remains committed to supporting the democratization process in Côte d'Ivoire.