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STATEMENT BY NDI PRESIDENT KENNETH WOLLACK ON SUSPENSION OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN ZAMBIA JUNE 17, 1996

Since early 1991, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has been working to assist Zambian efforts to promote and then consolidate democratic institutions in the country. This effort has been a concrete expression of the international community's interest in and support for democracy and human rights in Zambia. The Institute is proud of its association with courageous democrats from across the political spectrum who have struggled against tremendous odds to establish a political system that reflects the hopes and aspirations of the Zambian people.

Five years ago, the citizens of Zambia made a historic turn in their call for multiparty democracy. In fact, the 1991 elections were a watershed event that influenced positively democratic elections throughout the region. Zambia's political transition was a model of democratic change for other states on the continent and beyond.

However, we are deeply concerned that the political environment leading up to this year's elections threatens to undermine these achievements. Actions that have curtailed electoral competition and participation, political discourse and freedom of expression raise serious questions about the prospects for meaningful elections.

Under such circumstances, and in the absence of genuine interparty dialogue, NDI is not able to effectively carry out programs that are designed to help ensure an open and fair electoral process. Therefore, once our funding from the U. S. Agency for International Development (AID) expires on June 30, NDI plans to suspend its election-support program and withdraw its Lusaka-based staff.

Given NDI's longstanding presence in Zambia and our commitment to the democratization process, this decision was a difficult one for us to make. At the same time, our activities to support the upcoming elections were becoming incompatible with political developments that hinder the ability of Zambians to participate fully and freely in the civic and political life of the country.

NDI remains committed to those civic and political leaders who are seeking peaceful ways to restore the integrity of the electoral process. We will continue to monitor the situation and if these efforts succeed, the Institute would hope to resume its program activities in Zambia.

