

PRESS RELEASE

## **Upcoming Elections a Litmus Test for Bangladesh Democracy**

*NDI & IRI Release PEAM Recommendations*

**Dhaka, Bangladesh** – From October 8 to 11, 2023, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) deployed a bipartisan, international delegation to provide an independent and impartial assessment of electoral preparations in advance of Bangladesh's upcoming 12th Parliamentary Elections; examine factors that could affect the integrity and viability of the electoral process; and offer recommendations that could help improve the prospects for inclusive, transparent, and peaceful elections and public confidence in the process.

Bangladesh's robust economic growth and strong tradition of democratic values have set a strong foundation for the country to achieve its 2041 vision of becoming a developed country. However, the current political environment presents several challenges to electoral integrity, including uncompromising and zero-sum politics, highly charged rhetoric, political violence, a widespread climate of uncertainty and fear, contracting civic space and freedom of expression, and a trust deficit among citizens, political leaders, and other stakeholders. Women, youth, and other marginalized groups also face significant barriers to participation. Bangladesh is at a crossroads and the upcoming elections provide a litmus test of the country's commitment to a democratic, participatory, and competitive political process.

The delegation offers the recommendations below as a roadmap for progress toward credible, inclusive, participatory, and nonviolent elections that can advance Bangladesh's democracy. They are outlined in greater detail in the statement presented today.

- Moderate rhetoric and engage in open and substantive dialogue on key election issues.
- Protect freedom of expression and ensure an open civic space where dissent is respected.
- Commit to nonviolence and hold perpetrators of political violence accountable.
- Create conditions to allow all parties to engage in meaningful political competition, including bolstering independent election management.
- Promote a culture of inclusive and active electoral participation among citizens.

To develop these recommendations, the delegation met with government officials; the Bangladesh Election Commission; party leaders from across the political spectrum; civil society representatives; current and former women members of parliament; representatives of organizations engaging with youth, persons with disabilities and religious minorities; media representatives; members of the legal community; and representatives of the international and diplomatic communities.

"We appreciate all those who shared their views freely about the challenges and opportunities that exist in Bangladesh for holding inclusive, participatory, and nonviolent elections," said

Bonnie Glick. “We came away from these conversations with concerns about the election environment, but hopeful that our recommendations can help to improve the process.”

“We feel the primary problem is lack of constructive engagement among key political actors,” said Karl Inderfurth. “The best way to end the stalemate is through good faith dialogue, in the run-up to the January 2024 elections and beyond.”

The delegation recognizes that it is the people of Bangladesh who will ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of their elections and their country’s democratic development. The delegation therefore offers this pre-election statement in the spirit of supporting and strengthening democratic institutions in Bangladesh.

The full statement can be found **here**.

**Background:**

Members of the joint delegation included Bonnie Glick (IRI Co-Chair), Former Deputy USAID Administrator; Karl F. Inderfurth (NDI Co-Chair), Former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs; Maria Chin Abdullah, Former Member of the House of Representatives, Malaysia; Jamil Jaffer, Former Associate Counsel to the President of the United States; Johanna Kao, IRI Senior Director, Asia-Pacific Division; and Manpreet Singh Anand, NDI Regional Director, Asia-Pacific. The delegates were joined by technical and country experts from NDI and IRI.

NDI and IRI are nonpartisan, nongovernmental organizations that support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices worldwide. The Institutes have collectively observed more than 200 elections in more than 50 countries over the last 30 years.

The delegation conducted its assessment in accordance with the laws of Bangladesh and consistent with the [Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation which was signed in 2005 at the United Nations.](#)

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