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**DURING NDI MISSION, CONGOLESE POLITICAL PARTIES RECONVENE
ALL-PARTY FORUM, ADOPT ANTI-SEXUAL VIOLENCE STATEMENT**

KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO -- The Congolese National Independent Election Commission (CENI) is reconvening its forum for dialogue with all major Congolese political parties, which had not met since July. The breakthrough came during a pre-election mission organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and led by former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson.

“Despite differing views regarding some aspects of the elections, the delegation found a remarkable consensus on the need for the elections to proceed smoothly and successfully on Nov. 28,” the delegation said. “We hope that the election commission, candidates and political parties will continue to use the forum as a venue to discuss peacefully and resolve questions and concerns about the elections.”

During the delegation’s visit, the CENI also held a first ever meeting with the 11 presidential candidates to update them on the progress of election preparations and agreed to continue to hold similar weekly meetings through election day.

In addition, the pre-election mission helped move forward an agreement drafted by the major political parties and the presidential candidates to support a joint “Declaration on the Elimination of Sexual Violence in DRC.” Through the declaration, the parties call for exceptional efforts to address the causes of sexual violence, an end to impunity, care for victims and the involvement of women on issues of peace and security.

“The declaration signals a concern by Congolese leaders at the highest levels to address the problem of sexually-based violence and recognizes that their leadership is needed to eradicate it,” Richardson said. “Moreover, issuing this joint declaration during the intense political competition of an election campaign shows that Congolese political leaders are willing to work across party lines to reach agreements for the good of the country.”

The delegation, which was in the DRC from Oct. 27-Nov. 1, also included NDI’s Senior Associate for Africa, Chris Fomunyoh, and NDI’s DRC Country Director Anita Vandenberg. The mission took place as the campaign period began, amid disagreements over the conduct of the election process and questions about the country’s preparedness for the polls.

The delegation discussed plans for preventing election-related violence, ensuring election transparency and continuing democratic dialogue with presidential candidates, including current President Joseph Kabila, Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress, Vital Kamerhe, former speaker of the National Assembly from the Union for the Congolese Nation, Kengo wa Dondo, Senate president, the other presidential candidates and CENI Chairman Rev. Daniel Mulunda-Ngoy. Additionally, the delegation met with members of the diplomatic community, representatives of international nongovernmental organizations and Congolese civil society leaders to discuss the security situation and ways to eradicate sexual violence in eastern DRC.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Sexual Violence in DRC can be viewed in English and French on NDI's website.

NDI has been working with all major Congolese political parties to foster interparty dialogue and support their peaceful competition in elections. An example is a steering committee of 15 majority, opposition and unaligned political parties that has been meeting every Wednesday since July. The delegation's first meeting was a briefing by this steering committee. Over the past four months, the Institute has organized multiparty workshops on communications, campaign management and women's political involvement to help parties' participation in the elections.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan nongovernmental organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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