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VOTER ENTHUSIASM STILL STRONG IN SECOND ROUND OF EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

NDI Delegation Notes Administrative Improvements and Less Campaigning in Polling Centers

CAIRO, EGYPT – Voting in region two of Egypt’s People’s Assembly elections showed continued enthusiasm on the part of Egyptians to exercise their right to select the candidates and parties of their choice in the country’s first open parliamentary elections, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) said in a statement released here today.

NDI’s region two election delegation included 32 accredited witnesses from 15 countries. Their findings indicated significant improvements in several logistical aspects of electoral administration, including a larger number of polling stations that opened on time, fewer instances of assisted voting on the part of polling station staff and party agents, and less campaigning inside polling centers. “Despite the challenges they faced, the judges we saw carried out their duties professionally and impartially,” said Janusz Onyszkiewicz, former minister of defense of Poland who co-led the delegation.

The delegation also remarked on the continued enthusiasm of Egyptian voters. “I was impressed by the commitment of the Egyptian people to have their voices heard in this election,” said former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State and co-leader James Steinberg.

NDI also noted the often chaotic and frenzied environment that surrounded the counting centers where ballots were delivered to be tallied. “As an election administrator myself, I applaud the transparency and accessibility with which these elections have been conducted,” said Missouri Secretary of State Robin Carnahan, who co-led the delegation. “However, I certainly hope that concerns raised by judges related to centralized counting facilities and the movement of ballots are addressed in future elections.”

The Institute’s delegation was deployed for the two-day election period on Dec. 14 and 15 throughout all nine governorates voting to elect 180 seats to Egypt’s People’s Assembly. Prior to their deployment, delegates met in Cairo with senior government and election officials, political party representatives, candidates, citizen election monitors, civil society leaders and

representatives of traditional and new media. The purpose of the delegation was to provide an impartial assessment of the electoral process and to demonstrate the interest of the international community in the strengthening of democratic governance in Egypt. The group included 12 long-term witnesses who have been in the country since early November and who will remain throughout the three rounds of voting and the post-election period.

The delegation recommended the following actions to prepare for future rounds of People's Assembly elections:

- Explore all possible avenues to allow for the possibility of counting the ballots for round three initial voting in the polling stations in which they are cast.
- Publish the candidate and party lists as soon as possible to ensure that parties and candidates have time for the filing and adjudication of any ballot-related complaints prior to the printing of ballots so that voters are given accurate voting materials.
- Post the voters list inside each polling center and consider placing nonpartisan information desks inside each polling center monitored by the Supreme Judicial Commission on Elections to facilitate the voter check-in process.
- Post sample ballots outside polling stations to help voters identify the candidates and parties of their choice.
- Issue identification badges to accredited party agents to increase their visibility and further discourage them from assisting voters with balloting.

NDI's international election delegation was funded under a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development. NDI programs in Egypt are also supported by the Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor at the U.S. Department of State.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 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.