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DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE



REPORT OF THE PRE-ELECTION MISSION TO GABON

JULY 2016

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THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (NDI)

About NDI

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights.

Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit www.ndi.org.

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FOREWORD

From May 29 to June 3, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) sent an international delegation to Gabon to assess preparations for the 2016 presidential election and to support Gabonese efforts at ensuring peaceful, transparent and credible polls.

Traveling at the invitation of the Gabonese government and welcomed by all Gabonese political parties – from the majority and opposition – the delegation included political and civic leaders, and election and regional experts from North America, Europe and Africa. It comprised Right Honorable Joe Clark, former Prime Minister of Canada; Ambassador Maria Leissner, Secretary General of the Community of Democracies; Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh, Senior Associate for Africa at NDI; and Dr. Sophia Moestrup, Deputy Director for Central and West Africa at NDI.

During its stay in Gabon, the delegation met with election authorities, notably the National Autonomous and Permanent Election Commission (CENAP), the Ministry of Interior, the Constitutional Court, and the National Communications Council (CNC); members of the major political parties from ruling and opposition coalitions; the National Council for Democracy (CND); representatives of civil society organizations and labor unions; the Mediator of the Republic; and representatives of international development partners resident in Libreville. The team was also received by President Ali Bongo.

The delegation conducted its activities in conformity with Gabonese law and international standards as reflected in the 2005 “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.” Prior to departing Libreville, the delegation issued a preliminary statement at a press conference widely covered by Gabonese media. Since the end of the mission, the delegation has continued to follow closely political developments in Gabon.

The delegation expresses its deep appreciation to everyone with whom it met for welcoming the mission and for sharing freely their views on the electoral process.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NDI delegation to Gabon was well received by Gabonese election stakeholders, including: election authorities; members of the major political parties from ruling and opposition coalitions; the National Council for Democracy (CND); representatives of civil society organizations and labor unions; the Mediator of the Republic; and representatives of international development partners resident in Libreville.

Gabon is in full pre-election mode, with candidates meeting with constituents in various parts of the country. The delegation heard significant concerns about growing tensions and the possibility of election-related violence. These concerns derive in large part from the history of past competitive presidential elections in Gabon and an increasingly polarized socio-political environment. Although Gabon has the reputation of being a peaceful country, disagreements over electoral outcomes have led to violence and loss of life, notably in 1993 and 2009.

The constitution and election law clearly define the roles of various institutions in the Gabonese electoral process; however, the delegation heard concerns about potential shortcomings in the full implementation of these provisions that could undermine the peacefulness, transparency and credibility of the August 2016 presidential poll. Many Gabonese expressed a desire for reforms to the constitutional and legal framework for elections that would include revising the electoral system, reinstating term limits and guaranteeing better representation of parties and civil society on the election management body.

In the spirit of international cooperation and the principles of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the delegation offered recommendations in a preliminary statement issued at the end of its visit. These recommendations, further detailed in the present report, include confidence and peace building measures that should be implemented in the lead up to the August election in order to further increase the transparency and credibility of the electoral process. The recommendations also highlight the need to address structural reforms in the electoral framework to strengthen the country's democracy for the long term.

NDI calls on Gabonese leaders and the population at large to consider the upcoming elections as a historic opportunity to advance peace and democracy, and protect the highest interests of the country.

II. INTRODUCTION

Gabon is scheduled to hold a presidential election in August 2016, to be followed by legislative polls for the country's 120-member National Assembly in December. This is the second time national elections will be held after the passing of former President Omar Bongo in 2009. During the NDI delegation's stay in-country, and although the legal campaign period had not yet opened, there was already intense political debate regarding the presidential election with several political parties and groupings planning to participate actively in that poll.

Ongoing election preparations are being overshadowed by acrimonious debate over eligibility issues and pending legal proceedings against some of the major candidates. Against this backdrop, many Gabonese are fearful that continued political polarization could lead to violence, even as they hope that Gabon would remain the peaceful country that it has been, in a sub region noted for violence and armed conflict around elections.

1) The electoral framework

The outcome of presidential and legislative elections in Gabon is determined on a **first-past-the-post basis, without the need for a run-off** or absolute majority. The candidate or party with the most votes wins with a plurality of votes cast.¹ There will be approximately 2,400 polling stations for the upcoming presidential election, with a maximum of 500 voters at each polling station. Additionally, Gabonese in the diaspora will vote at 50 diplomatic missions around the world.

According to the election law, the **voters list** must be published one month prior to election day along with the listing of polling stations. Political parties are allowed to monitor voter registration in the country's 157 voter registration centers, and are entitled to deploy pollwatchers on election day. Candidates' representatives receive copies of results sheets at their respective polling stations. In 2013, approximately 590,000 registered voters were on the voters list – a significant drop from previous voter rolls – following the introduction of biometric registration and elimination of double entries. The voter roll for the August 2016 election includes 628,124 voters.² After the election, the government of Gabon plans to update its biometric capability and establish a centralized citizen identification system, with a personal identification number (NIP), a new identity card, and automatic voter registration for citizens. Ballot papers, results sheets and secured envelopes are printed locally.

Election results for the presidential poll are aggregated and published by province, for each of the country's nine provinces, and by embassy for its diplomatic missions. Ballots are burned immediately after counting. Results verification, if required, is done on the basis of the results sheets signed by polling officials and representatives of candidates.

¹ Constitution of Gabon, Art 4.

² <http://www.interieur.gouv.ga/9-actualites/430-remise-de-la-liste-electorale-a-la-commission-electorale-nationale-autonome-et-permanente-/>, accessed July 10, 2016.

According to the 1996 electoral code as amended in 2006, the following **institutions** are responsible for the conduct and oversight of elections in Gabon:

a. National Autonomous and Permanent Election Commission (CENAP)

The CENAP was established in 2006, as a permanent replacement to the previous election management body which usually dissolved after every election. The executive committee of the CENAP is composed of eight members, including: a president nominated by the Constitutional Court; two vice-presidents, two rapporteurs and two questeurs, representing the ruling and opposition coalitions, evenly split. The rapporteur-general of the CENAP is a senior official of the Ministry of Interior, nominated by the Minister.³

The CENAP's main functions are:

- setting the electoral calendar;
- verifying and correcting the voters list;
- receiving and reviewing candidacies for elective office;
- creating the ballot;
- administering the polls on election day through its provincial, departmental, communal and local branches; and
- collecting and centralizing election results, and providing same to the Ministry of Interior and Constitutional Court.

b. Ministry of Interior

The Ministry of Interior has important attributes regarding the electoral process, including:

- creating the voters list;
- procuring election materials;
- conducting civic education; and
- announcing preliminary election results upon receipt of same from the CENAP.

c. Constitutional Court

The Constitutional Court rules on the constitutionality of laws and governmental action. In electoral matters, the Constitutional Court is responsible for:

- appointing the president of the CENAP;
- swearing in members of the CENAP;
- resolving electoral disputes (including disputes around candidacies); and
- proclaiming final election results.

The court certifies the final election results 8 days after preliminary results are announced by the Ministry of Interior, unless the process is delayed by election petitions and litigation. In that

³ Election Code, Art. 12 (as amended, 2006). A 2011 amendment adds article 12bis which expands representation on the CENAP plenary assembly during election periods to include representatives of parties, political groupings or independent candidates running for a given election. Eight ministries are similarly represented in the plenary assembly during election periods – Interior, Defense, Communication, Education, Budget, Economy, Justice, and Foreign Affairs (only for presidential elections).

event, the court rules within 15 days upon receipt of complaints. Constitutional Court rulings are final and not subject to appeal.

d. National Communication Council (CNC)

The CNC regulates media activities around elections to ensure equal treatment of, and access to public media by all parties and candidates. The CNC can also suspend private media outlets that do not respect the rules pertaining to the coverage of the electoral campaign. The CNC has nine members – three nominated by the Head of State, three by the president of the Senate and three by the speaker of the National Assembly.

2) Dialogue fostering entities and opportunities

Gabon has often been described as a safe haven (“*un havre de paix*”), compared to other countries in a sub region affected by armed conflict and civil strife. Many Gabonese with whom the delegation met expressed hope that the country will remain peaceful; yet they voiced strong concerns over mounting tensions in the lead-up to the presidential election.

Gabon has platforms for dialogue – the National Council for Democracy and the Mediator of the Republic – that could play a catalytic role in fostering peace building and democratic participation. However, these entities are new and require to be further empowered to play their role and earn the confidence and trust of Gabonese.

a. The National Council for Democracy (Conseil National de la Démocratie – CND)

The CND was created after the 1994 Paris Accords, but not seated until about four years later. The CND was revamped in January 2015, and is intended to serve as a “permanent consultative organ, charged with elaborating a code of conduct for national political actors, and with mediating conflicts among political actors and political parties.”⁴ The CND leadership was renewed in 2015 and representation on the CND extended to all 56 registered political parties, although only 51 have taken up seats so far. The National Union party (*Union Nationale*) and four of its allies boycott CND sessions on the grounds that the CND has only an advisory role and its opinions are not binding on the government. Within the CND, each party has one vote. The chair is supposed to represent the opposition, while the vice-chair and the secretary general are of the ruling majority.⁵ All former prime ministers, speakers of the National Assembly and Senate presidents are members of the CND, although they do not exercise voting rights.

In November 2015, the CND issued non-binding opinions on constitutional issues and electoral matters, focusing on:

- term and age limits for the office of the president;

⁴ Presidential Decree No. 001/PR/2015 of January 29, 2015, Article 2.

⁵ Some opposition parties contend that the CND chair no longer represents the opposition, as his political party, the PDS, recently signed a pact with the ruling party and endorsed the candidacy of incumbent president Ali Bongo.

- a two-round voting system for presidential and legislative polls;
- the appointment of the vice-president⁶ by the president within 48 hours of taking office;
- enshrining the powers of the CND in the constitution;
- enhancing the use of biometrics in order to have an integrated system that allows for cross-checking voter lists with national identity registries; and
- the holding of an inclusive national dialogue.

The CND shared its recommendations with President Bongo who later indicated his openness to a dialogue that would be expanded to cover political as well as social, cultural and “intergenerational” issues. The CND also shared its recommendations with the National Assembly.

The CND recently facilitated the drafting and adoption of a code of conduct, described as “a moral charter” for the conduct of transparent elections. The Code outlines the rights and responsibilities of participating parties. It was adopted by 39 votes (within the CND), while 10 parties abstained because of disagreement over Article 8 which states: “Political parties and candidates reaffirm the principle of political pluralism which is premised on the existence of a majority and of an opposition.” A number of opposition parties wanted the provision strengthened to ban carpet-crossing between parties in opposition and majority coalitions, given the constantly shifting political alliances in Gabon.

b. The National Mediator (*le Médiateur de la République*)⁷

The National Mediator is charged with: investigating complaints against public authorities; seeking solutions aimed at restoring social peace during periods of crisis; ensuring fairness in the application of the rule of law; and contributing to the modernization of public administration.⁸

In May, 2016, after extensive consultations with political parties, civil society groups, religious authorities, and the presidency, the Mediator called on all political leaders to engage in dialogue. She was concerned that further polarization of the political debate could degenerate into violence. She was also critical of the media (on both sides) for “lowering the political debate and fueling antagonism among Gabonese.” The Mediator’s call for dialogue was, however, rebuffed by a government spokesperson.

In a speech to a joint session of the National Assembly and Senate at the end of June, President Ali Bongo restated his willingness to discuss “everything,” including constitutional reform and presidential terms (“*mandats politiques*”); but such discussions about institutional reform must

⁶ The Gabonese Constitution, Art. 14, provides that a vice-president will assist the president. The vice-president is not, however, the constitutional successor to the president. Didjob Divungi di Ndjinge served as Omar Bongo’s vice-president from the time the position was re-established in 1997 until Bongo’s death. Ali Bongo has never appointed a vice-president.

⁷ The National Mediator is broadly comparable to an Ombudsman in Anglo-Saxon tradition.

⁸ Law No. 43/2010 of May 2, 2011, ratifying presidential decree No. 23/2011 of August 12, 2010 regarding the Mediator of the Republic, Article 3.

respect the constitutional framework and deadlines.⁹ His statement was interpreted by some opposition leaders as meaning that he would engage in dialogue only after the presidential election, a proposition they found unacceptable.

c. Civil Society and other non-institutional actors

Gabonese civil society has not been as vibrant as in some other African countries. In 2014, a USAID study on the sustainability of civil society organizations (CSO) ranked CSOs in Gabon sixth to last in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Burundi and Sudan. The few CSOs that exist have so far not been very active in elections and advocacy. One local non-governmental organization – “Brainforest” – has promoted good governance and the accountable use of natural resources, notably by exposing lopsided mining agreements. An umbrella network -- the Network of Free Civil Society Organizations (ROLGB) – monitored local elections in 2013 and is preparing to do the same, along with other groups, for the upcoming presidential election. Most civil society groups are, however, seen by various Gabonese as aligned with political groupings – some with the opposition coalition *Union Sacrée pour la Patrie*, and others with the majority coalition *Dynamique Plurielle*. This perception, if widespread, could seriously undermine the ability of Gabonese civil society organizations to serve as non-partisan proponents of credible polls and democratic governance.

Since the then Bishop of Oyem, Archbishop Basile Mvé, presided over the 1990 National Conference, the Gabonese clergy has not played a prominent role in peace building and mediation. Similarly, Gabonese traditional authorities do not have the same prominence and influence as their counterparts in some other African countries, and are therefore less likely to play a significant mediating or dialogue facilitation role.

⁹<https://www.facebook.com/notes/ali-bongo-ondimba/discours-du-chef-de-letat-%C3%A0-la-nation-devant-les-deux-chambres-du-parlement/1198274073562535>, accessed July 1, 2016.

III. POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND SHIFTING ALLIANCES

Since the return to multi-partism in 1990, Gabon has experienced several contentious presidential elections, some resulting in violence and loss of life. For example, after the 2009 presidential poll, besides Ali Bongo who was declared the winner, two other candidates announced themselves as winners.

In May, the NDI delegation heard complaints that reforms agreed to during the 1990 National Conference and further incorporated in the 1994 Paris Accords¹⁰ have largely been rolled back. For example, the 1991 constitution required an absolute majority of at least 50 percent plus one vote to win the presidency, and a run-off election between the two top contenders should none of the candidates win an absolute majority in the first round. It also established a five-year presidential term renewable once — provisions that were changed in 1997 to a seven-year term. In 2003 term limits were eliminated, and a single round of voting in presidential and legislative elections replaced the run-off system. In recent years, the Gabonese government has sought to modernize and enhance the transparency of the electoral process by adopting a biometric voter registry, but the use of biometrics is still viewed as incomplete by many Gabonese.

At the time of the delegation's visit, three major political blocs had emerged:

1) The ruling coalition

The Gabonese Democratic Party (*Parti Démocratique Gabonais* – PDG), created by Omar Bongo in 1968 a few months after he became president, has ruled the country till now, first as the only legalized political party until 1990, and thereafter by winning competitive elections. In 2009, the PDG nominated Ali Bongo Ondimba as its flag bearer in a contentious exercise following which some PDG leaders left the party and ran as independent candidates in the August 2009 poll. The PDG remains one of the country's main political organizations, despite recent departures of other leaders. Ali Bongo will stand for reelection as his party's candidate and that of the presidential majority which until recently included opposition leader and former mayor of Libreville Paul Mba Abessole and his Rally for Gabon (*Rassemblement pour le Gabon* – RPG). Mba Abessole initially opposed Ali Bongo in 2009 before joining the presidential majority a few years later. Then, in June, Mba Abessole and the RPG were excluded from the presidential majority coalition, based on indications that Mba Abessole was interested in a presidential bid of his own.

In May 2016, Ali Bongo extended his base of support by launching the Dynamic Pluralism (*Dynamique plurielle*), as a coalition with other parties to support his reelection bid. This coalition now includes some civil society groups and labor unions. Most recently, the Party for Development and Solidarity (*Parti pour le Développement et la Solidarité*) declared its support

¹⁰ More background information on past political agreements and changes to the electoral framework is available in Appendix D.

for Ali Bongo's candidacy, even as the party spokesperson underscored that "the PDS remains an opposition party."¹¹

2) The opposition from the last presidential poll

Shortly after the 2009 polls, three political parties merged to form the **National Union (*Union Nationale – UN*)**, one of the more prominent opposition parties in the country. The UN's founding members comprised individuals that ran for president in 2009, including former Interior Minister André Mba Obame, who obtained 25.33 percent of the votes. The National Union was banned by the government after Mba Obame declared himself president-elect and appointed a parallel government. The ban was lifted in 2013 as part of the government's effort to revive the National Council for Democracy (CND). Obame died shortly thereafter, in 2015. Other UN leaders include party chairman Zacharie Myboto who left the PDG in 2005, and Casimir Oyé Mba, who was Prime Minister from 1990 to 1994 and served in the PDG leadership till 2009. Both Myboto and Oyé Mba were presidential candidates in 2009, although Oyé Mba dropped out of the race 24 hours before the polls opened. Following party primaries conducted in June, Oyé Mba won the nomination as the UN's presidential candidate.

The **Union of the Gabonese People (*Union du Peuple Gabonais – UPG*)** was one of the first opposition parties to be registered after the return to multipartism in 1991. Its founding chairman Pierre Mamboundou was one of the few Gabonese political leaders that never participated in a PDG-led government until his passing in 2011. According to official results, Mamboundou placed second in the 2009 presidential balloting with 25.64 percent of the vote, although many UPG supporters believed he had more votes. Since Mamboundou's passing, the party has been plagued by factional disputes, with some members now supporting Ali Bongo, and others seeking to lead a new opposition coalition.

3) New opposition actors

In the past two years, a number of prominent PDG members have left the party to join opposition movements. They include:

Heritage and Modernity (*Héritage et Modernité – H&M*) began as an internal faction of the PDG, led by party officials dissatisfied that "a small entourage around the president had supplanted party officials in policy-making." The PDG responded by excluding some of the H&M leaders. Others then resigned from government and the legislature as well as the PDG early this year to join H&M ranks. The new party has still to be legalized; however in May, H&M leadership announced it would support the candidacy of **Guy Nzouba-Ndama** for president. Nzouba-Ndama was the Speaker of the National Assembly for the past 19 years. Former PDG legislator Alexandre Barro Chambrier, also a former minister and former executive director at the International Monetary Fund, is the current H&M chairman.

¹¹ The PDS decried the absence of strong candidates from "historical" opposition parties and said it was unwilling to support what it called a "PDG-opposition" (with reference to former PDG veterans now in opposition to Ali Bongo), <http://gabonreview.com/blog/presidentielle-2016-pds-adoube-ali-bongo/>, accessed July 1, 2016.

The United Opposition Front for Change (*Front Uni de l'Opposition pour l'Alternance – FOPA*) was formed in 2014 as an electoral alliance to identify a single opposition candidate who would run against Ali Bongo. In January 2016, a majority of FOPA members selected Jean Ping as the Front's presidential candidate, although others argued that proper procedures had not been followed in the candidate selection process. Jean Ping formerly served as Foreign Minister under Omar Bongo and was later elected Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU) in 2008 with Omar Bongo's support. In 2014, Ping decamped from the PDG and later joined the Gabonese Party for Progress (*Parti Gabonais du Progrès – PGP*) before being selected as their presidential candidate.

Another coalition, the Sacred Union for the Fatherland (***Union Sacrée pour la Patrie – USP***), was created in March 2016 as a loose alliance of political parties, labor unions and civil society groups. The principal objective of the USP is to block the candidacy of Ali Bongo whom the USP does not consider Gabonese by birth. While some USP members are determined to disrupt the elections should Ali Bongo be a candidate, others assert that they would participate in the poll and are confident they can defeat Bongo at the polls "based on the poor performance of his government." The USP includes both recent opposition leaders (such as Guy Nzouba-Ndama and Jean Ping), as well as opposition leaders who ran against Bongo in 2009 (including UN leaders and Pr. Albert Onda Osso who chairs the USP).

IV. FINDINGS

1) Areas of agreement

Gabon has entities that could play a role in fostering citizen participation in politics, such as the National Council for Democracy (CND) and the office of the Mediator of the Republic. These innovative institutions can foster and advance democracy in Gabon; and strengthening their capacity would provide additional platforms for ongoing communication and regular interaction among political actors. These organs can also facilitate the resolution of political differences or disagreements and avoid further escalation into violence. Similarly, initiatives over the past few years to modernize the Gabonese electoral system raise citizen's confidence that important aspects of the electoral process can be safeguarded.

a. The need to preserve peace and social justice

The Gabonese with whom the delegation met all expressed a strong desire that their country remain peaceful and an anchor of stability in the sub region. A number of steps have been taken or are in preparation to mitigate tensions and support the preservation of peace in the country. For example, the **CND** adopted a series of recommendations in November 2015 that laid the groundwork for political dialogue around systemic grievances relating to some provisions of the constitution and election law. The CND has also spearheaded the elaboration of a Code of Conduct that establishes standards for good behavior by political parties, candidates and other election stakeholders during elections. The CND plans to expand its outreach to other Gabonese stakeholders, including traditional authorities, opinion leaders, religious leaders, and academics.

For its part, the **Constitutional Court** undertook citizen outreach programs in all of the country's nine provinces to raise citizens' awareness and understanding of the electoral code as a means of mitigating violence around electoral disputes, should they arise. Members and senior staffers of the Court met with political parties, local authorities and government administrators, security forces, the media, civil society and the clergy in the different regions of the country. The Court had been concerned that political parties were often unaware that petitions against election results had to be backed by a copy of the results sheet from the polling station(s) in dispute, collected by the pollwatcher deployed to that polling station. The Court's information campaign therefore sought to better inform various electoral stakeholders about the technical aspects of the electoral process and their role therein. Currently, the Court is preparing an informational campaign on the legal repercussions for candidates and party leaders that instigate violence.

Similarly, the **National Communication Council (CNC)** is aware that the campaign season has started early and therefore is thinking about creative and proactive ways of dealing with the reality of an ongoing pre-campaign period and the need for equal access to public media by the declared contestants. The CNC and the Ministry of Communication are also looking at ways to dampen or discourage inflammatory pronouncements on social and other forms of electronic media.

b. Standards for transparent and credible elections

All Gabonese with whom the delegation met embraced various initiatives aimed at contributing to a transparent and credible presidential election and further consolidating democratic progress in Gabon. The delegation learned that an open invitation had been extended to **international observers**, and the African Union and the European Union planned to field international election observation missions for the presidential election. In meeting with the NDI delegation in May, one Gabonese expressed a widely shared sentiment when he stated that: “We want the process to be impeccable; we want to be like other countries that have successful elections.”

Political parties mentioned that they planned to train and deploy **pollwatchers** on election day so they can stay at their assigned polling sites all day in order to follow closely the voting, vote counting, tabulation and transmission of results through the various collation centers. Similarly, civil society groups and coalitions plan to field **citizen observers** on election day to a large sample of polling stations, and are seeking opportunities for technical support from potential partners.

The Ministry of Interior also informed the delegation of the government’s efforts to use the **biometric voter registry** as a means to effectively curb double registrations and “voter nomadism” (where voters register in locations other than their home constituencies in return for payment from political candidates). According to the Ministry, even if a voter registered more than once, double voting is no longer possible as the voter’s name would only appear once on the voters list, and the voter would be assigned to the first location where he or she registered. Both the Ministry of Interior and the Constitutional Court stated that compared to previous years, complaints about the voters list in the 2013 local elections declined considerably. The Constitutional Court used to receive more than 100 complaints per election before the biometric voter registration was used for the first time in 2013; that has not been the case since 2013. While there is general agreement that a biometric registry is a significant improvement for Gabon, some Gabonese maintain that the current state of biometric voting is incomplete and open to manipulation (see details below).

c. Reforms that would strengthen Gabon’s democracy and elections

The delegation heard appeals by Gabonese across the political spectrum on the need to discuss, and reach consensus on institutional reforms that are at the heart of recurring tensions around elections in the country. These reforms pertain to **constitutional and electoral matters** such as: the duration and limitation of presidential terms; the electoral system (one round versus two rounds); and the independence and inclusivity of election management bodies. Some Gabonese advocated for more representation on the CENAP for civil society leaders and academics or other independent personalities. Most Gabonese that met with the NDI delegation would like to see greater efforts at dialogue about such institutional reforms among political leaders at the highest level. According to many interlocutors, it is the absence of dialogue about these structural issues that causes recurring tensions. As summed up by one Gabonese: “Decisions reached in a collegial manner are more sustainable.”

2) Potential sources of election-related disputes and violence

While various institutions have clearly defined roles in the Gabonese electoral process, some Gabonese are concerned about potential shortcomings in the operationalization of the country's electoral framework that could undermine prospects for a transparent and credible presidential poll in August 2016. Long-held grievances about the current legal framework regarding elections include citizen criticisms of the electoral system, the lack of term limits and absence of independent-minded individuals on election management bodies. If left unaddressed, these grievances could become a source of recurring tensions around each electoral cycle.

a. Polarization of political discourse

In the past few months, Gabon has experienced growing political tensions and an increasingly polarized socio-political environment, exacerbated by lack of equal access to public media by opposition parties and/or absence of professionalism within some private media outlets.

The NDI delegation heard significant concerns regarding the use of extreme rhetoric and hate speech, especially through social media. On the one hand, opposition leaders worried about an “undeclared emergency situation” with infringements on the freedoms of movement and association. They also alleged that the government was “purchasing arms and recruiting mercenaries.” On the other hand, ruling party supporters were dismayed that instigators of violence were mostly “from those who yesterday were with us and who today use violent words and postures as a way to attract attention.”

b. The scope and modalities for dialogue

While Gabonese political leaders all call for dialogue, they blame each other for the lack of success in meeting to discuss and resolve outstanding issues that risk undermining peaceful polls. While the reviving of the CND may provide an appropriate institutional venue for dialogue, that body in the eyes of opposition leaders has lost some of its credibility, as the chairman—who traditionally has been a representative of the opposition—recently signed on to the policy platform of the ruling majority. To be effective, the CND needs to maintain its neutrality as a platform for genuine interparty dialogue. It should also act forcefully to organize inclusive dialogue to which other stakeholders such as CSOs, academics, labor unions, and religious leaders could be invited to contribute positively to the conduct of peaceful elections. Many Gabonese would like to see dialogue initiated soon, to “overcome rough edges” [*arrondir les angles*] before the August poll.

Opinions on the timeliness of dialogue split along partisan lines: some Gabonese expect President Bongo to champion the cause for genuine dialogue that would lower tensions before the elections, while others claim that the country missed the opportunity for dialogue when the incumbent president declared his candidacy for reelection. Moreover, others argue that some opposition leaders want political agreements to supersede the law of the land and fear that organizing a national dialogue at this time could delay the election beyond the end of the current presidential term, thereby triggering a much deeper political crisis.

c. Pending litigation that could undermine peaceful polls

Recent court cases or pending investigations against political leaders on both sides are heightening tensions in this pre-election environment. For example, candidate Jean Ping was sued by the government for “violations of public order and safety,” by using language interpreted as hate speech during a political rally, and separately by Ali Bongo for slander in a Facebook post. Ping in turn is alleged to have filed a complaint against President Bongo with the International Criminal Court (ICC), for “instigating a massacre” in Port-Gentil during post-election violence in 2009.

A Libreville court earlier found Ping guilty of defamation against a member of the ruling coalition (Hervé Patrick Opiangah, chairman of the Union for Democracy and Social Integration, *Union pour la démocratie et l'intégration sociale* - UDIS). As a result of this judgment, Ping's bank accounts in Gabon and Paris have been frozen. Ping and his supporters consider these legal actions “attempts to stifle his campaign.” Also, in June, two journalists were prosecuted for defamation of Ali Bongo and given suspended sentences.¹² At the same time, there is a pending legal procedure for slander initiated by Ali Bongo against Chantal Myboto Gondjout¹³ for statements made during a press conference earlier this year. Gondjout questioned Ali Bongo's relationship to Omar Bongo. Chantal Myboto Gondjout has recently had her hotel business shut down for tax evasion and back payments owed to the public treasury.

Incumbent President Ali Bongo is also the subject of a lawsuit filed by Onaida Maisha Bongo (daughter of Chantal Myboto Godjout), regarding the authenticity of his birth certificate archived at the civil registration center in Nantes, France.¹⁴ The French judiciary has appointed a judge to review the lawsuit.

The delegation is concerned that these legal proceedings may become a proxy for actors seeking to settle otherwise political differences. The cumulative effect of these investigations or trials could have a negative impact on political dialogue and diminish prospects for peaceful elections.

d. Specific concerns about electoral fairness

In the absence of dialogue and regular communication between political camps, there is significant mistrust among Gabonese political actors and intense speculation about each other's motives and commitment to play by the rules.

Ability to organize rallies: Political parties are concerned that there seems to be a tacit ban on political rallies and public meetings during the week, a move which the Ministry of Interior explains as temporary and designed to avoid a dislocation of professional activities and the

¹² They were found guilty of “insulting” President Bongo in a satirical article published by “*l'Aube*,” a pro-opposition newspaper.

¹³ Chantal Myboto Gondjout is the daughter of opposition leader Zacharie Myboto and the mother of Onaida Maisha Bongo.

¹⁴ The Nantes civil registration center is responsible for all birth certificates of people born in French Equatorial Africa up to 1960, when the former French colonies in the region gained independence.

possibility of violence. Some political leaders argue that these measures are not applied uniformly, and therefore continue to demand equal access to public spaces for political meetings. The delegation also heard about instances of police deployments around opposition meetings even in private locations. While it is challenging to gauge the impact of the above actions taken individually and/or the appropriateness of explanations provided, the complaints and explanations taken together underscore the mistrust that currently exists among political contestants, and between political party leaders and their supporters and election management authorities. They also point to the urgent need for neutral platforms for open and frequent discussions and information sharing, where political leaders can derive a common understanding of the rules of engagement and clear any lingering suspicions or misunderstandings.

Access to public media: In this period prior to the official campaign period which starts 14 days before election day, not all political parties have equal access to public media. The delegation heard complaints that while state-run television regularly covers ruling party visits to public institutions and to the interior of the country, it never does the same for events held by opposition parties.

The voters list: Some Gabonese expressed doubts about the current voter registry and asserted that because the voter registration system is not linked to the civic registry, non-Gabonese may be registered on the voters list and that double registration and double voting can occur on election day. They advocated for electronic voter identification at the polling station, and that all polling stations be linked up to a central database. The Ministry of Interior explained that the government was handicapped by the high costs and logistical challenges linked to such an exercise at such short notice, also noting that the absence of electricity in some parts of the country would hamper biometric identification prior to voting on election day.

The centralization of results: The delegation heard concerns that the process for the transmission and consolidation of election results was not transparent, with some alleging that in the past election results have been announced while the process of centralizing results was still ongoing. As currently laid out in the law, after the counting of votes at the polling site, only CENAP members (including opposition representatives) are explicitly authorized to be present at subsequent levels of vote centralization, from the rural commune to the provincial and national levels. The law is silent on whether national and international observers can observe the vote centralization process.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of international cooperation and the principles of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and taking into consideration the open-mindedness of the Gabonese with whom the delegation met which aligns with their best national traditions, the delegation offers the following recommendations:

1. **Elections as a political process:** Political and civic leaders should be mindful that elections are a key pillar of democracy, and viewing them as solely an administrative exercise would diminish the nature of what is inherently a political process. Therefore, the perception of fairness can be as important as the letter of the law. Gabonese political leaders and election administrators should thus open and expand channels of communication on election related matters. They should create neutral platforms for regular information sharing on the electoral process so all parties and candidates receive the same information in real time and from direct sources. They should similarly minimize attempts to use the court system as a substitute for political negotiations and mediation or dispute resolution.

Many African countries, including Ghana and Sierra Leone, have instituted regular meetings between political parties fielding candidates in national elections and electoral management bodies. In Ghana, the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) regularly brings together representatives from the Electoral Commission and political parties to discuss the electoral process and elicit parties' input on the process. These meetings foster collaboration and can diffuse tensions before, during and after elections. In Sierra Leone, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) established a permanent two-way dialogue with political parties through the Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC) to inform parties of the electoral processes and incorporate their feedback on actions of the NEC. The PPLC continues to meet regularly and is an avenue for dialogue among NEC officials and political party leaders.

2. **Dialogue:** Political and civic leaders should initiate a high level dialogue as soon as possible in order to lower tensions in the pre- and post-election periods. A political dialogue initiated before the election could, at a minimum, get the parties to agree on the agenda for more elaborate discussions on substantive reforms after the polls.

Were the parties to agree on a two-step dialogue process, issues of access to the media and security for presidential candidates, for example, could be addressed immediately, with publicly signed commitments to tackle the broader issues of structural reforms after the presidential poll, irrespective of the outcome. Such a move is likely to clear the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the political horizon, and would ensure greater citizen participation and engagement in the election. If appropriate, Gabonese could explore the possibility of an independent-minded credible facilitator to maintain the

inclusiveness of the dialogue. The Mediator of the Republic should also be encouraged to undertake confidence building and conflict mitigating steps in this regard.

3. **Voters list:** Concrete steps should be taken to enhance the confidence of citizens, candidates and political parties in the voters list. Initiatives to raise public confidence in the list could include: a professional, public audit of the registry; public exhibition of the list; and information sharing sessions during which the voters list is shared with political parties and civil society organizations. For example, in Niger earlier this year and weeks before the presidential election, the International Organization of the Francophonie (*Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* - OIF) conducted an audit of the voters list that alleviated opposition concerns about its credibility. In other countries, such as Kenya in 2012 and Côte d'Ivoire in 2015, a machine-readable copy of the list has been shared with competing political parties to enable them undertake their own voters list analyses.
4. **Centralization of election results:** The election management body (CENAP) should take concrete steps to speed up the vote counting and transmission of election results and to increase the transparency of the vote centralization process. Also, burning of counted ballots should await the conclusion of the complaints period in case additional evidence is needed by candidates and parties.

The CENAP should emulate best global practice to enhance transparency and confidence in the election results by opening the compilation and transmission of results to observation. The CENAP should also release poll results at each level of compilation (polling place, province, and nation). In addition to party participants as CENAP officials, party agents, citizen election monitors and international observers should be allowed to witness the counting and tabulation of results at each stage of the consolidation of official results. These measures, which are becoming common practice in Africa and around the globe, build public confidence and mitigate political tensions concerning election results.

The CENAP could also organize public events such as an "Election Night" with the participation of political parties, media houses, civil society and international observers, to publicly share results as they come in. For example, in Senegal in 2002 and 2012, civil society groups set up a communication center to receive, analyze, and publicize real time observation reports that tracked violence trends, vote buying, media reporting, and traditional election monitoring.

Gabonese political parties should actively recruit, train and deploy pollwatchers to be present on election day at the opening of polling stations, throughout the voting process, and at the closing and counting of results. Pollwatchers should be instructed to collect and transmit results sheets to their party headquarters to enable the party to track election results and, should the need arise, have handy proper documentation for the Constitutional Court should a complaint be filed. Political parties or alliances should

also consider establishing data collection centers, to record and analyze results from their respective pollwatchers. During the 2015 election cycle, political parties in African countries such as Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso set up similar data collection centers to follow election returns and tabulate their own results.

5. **Access to public media:** The National Communication Council (CNC) should adopt measures in partnership with public media to guarantee equitable access to public media during the two-week election campaign as stipulated by law. Additionally, the CNC should initiate supplementary positive actions to facilitate access to public media for all political parties in light of the reality that the country is already in campaign mode. Also, the CNC should take a lead role in a public information campaign to promote increased civic responsibility and professionalism, including in the use of social media, partnering for example with Gabonese civil society and international groups with expertise in media monitoring.

Ongoing support from potential partners to enhance the capacity of journalists and media houses should be intensified. The possibility of conducting interparty debates should be explored as a conflict mitigating tool that enables candidates to focus on issues rather than on personalities. Broadcast widely on television and radio, debates help voters make informed choices, enhance political tolerance and help citizens hold officials accountable after they have been elected on the basis of publicly made promises and platforms. Candidate debates also show that political rivals can appear at the same forum to discuss differences in a constructive and dignified manner. Presidential debates in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria have been widely seen as contributing to the public's expectation of peaceful conduct by candidates and their acceptance of the results.

6. The **Code of Conduct** recently adopted by the National Council for Democracy (CND) should be publicly endorsed and implemented by all presidential candidates and party leaders as a means of reassuring the public of their commitment to peaceful, transparent and credible elections. The CND should redouble its efforts to rebuild consensus on the entire text of the Code, including the hitherto contentious provisions, in order to pave the way for its signing by all political parties and presidential candidates. The contents of the Code should be widely disseminated by the CND and political parties and a mechanism set up to monitor and report on the implementation of the Code.

In Nigeria, international and domestic observers noted that the "Abuja Accord" signed by all candidates prior to the 2015 presidential election was an important confidence and peace building measure. Upon signing the "Accord," the presidential candidates pledged publicly to conduct issue-based campaigns, peacefully accept the electoral results, refrain from using inflammatory language and denounce acts of violence during the election campaigns committed by their supporters.

7. **Civil society participation:** Steps should be taken to facilitate the optimal participation of civil society groups by enhancing their capacity to recruit, train and deploy citizen observers to systematically monitor all phases of the electoral process before, during and after the election. Nonpartisan civil society organizations that deploy well-trained citizen election observers can provide an accurate, impartial, trusted and evidence-based assessment of the electoral process. Citizen observation's impact has been demonstrated for over three decades around the world, with groups helping to deter and report credibly on irregularities, build public confidence in the process, mitigate electoral violence and provide a means to advocate for and recommend electoral reforms and improvements. Globally, as of 2015, more than 300 nonpartisan citizen election observation coalitions in over 100 countries have conducted monitoring activities, and the number continues to grow. In Africa alone, citizen election observation groups have monitored elections and electoral processes in over 45 countries.

In many African countries, civil society groups have also been instrumental in conducting civic and voter education and non-violence campaigns. For example, in Cote d'Ivoire, youth, women and interfaith groups conducted a successful peace messaging campaign in at-risk communities in the lead up to the 2015 presidential election. The groups' message, "*C'est dans enjaillement que je vote*" (It's with excitement that I vote), invited voters to participate peacefully in the election. The campaign featured well-known Ivorian comedian "*Le Magnific*" as its official ambassador, and encouraged citizens to vote as the election was an important step toward national reconciliation. Similarly, in Nigeria, NDI partnered with popular Nigerian musical icon "2face Idibia" and the Nigerian Youngstars Development Initiative (YDI) to organize a nationwide youth non-violence and get-out-the-vote campaign, with the slogan "Vote Not Fight." Through concerts, roadshows, and a robust media campaign, Nigerian youth were encouraged to sign on to a non-violence pledge and to address their grievances through political activism rather than violence. It was estimated that the campaign reached over 62 million people (out of a total population of approximately 170 million). On election day, #votefight was one of the top three trending hash tags in Nigeria. Similar initiatives in Gabon could leverage Gabonese artists and traditional musicians to spread a message of peaceful participation in the upcoming polls.

Many countries in Africa have shown real leadership in establishing meaningful electoral practices and institutions that foster transparency, fairness and the right of citizens to determine their future. NDI calls on all Gabonese leaders across the political spectrum – from majority and opposition parties – heads of institutions, civil society, labor unions, the media, religious leaders and the population at large to consider upcoming elections as a historic opportunity to advance peace and democracy, and protect the highest interests of the country.

ATTACHMENT A: LETTER OF INVITATION

Original:

MINISTÈRE DE L'INTERIEUR, DE
LA DECENTRALISATION, DE LA
SECURITE ET DE L'HYGIENE
PUBLIQUES

CABINET



N° 000586 /MIDSHP/CABM

Libreville, le 28 AVR. 2016

Le Ministre

A Monsieur Kenneth Wolleck

Président National Democratic Institute for
International Affairs (NDI) 455 Massachusetts
Avenue, NW Washington, DC, 20001 USA

Monsieur le Président,

Dans le cadre du suivi des questions évoquées lors de l'audience que Son Excellence **Ali BONGO ONDIMBA**, Président de la République Gabonaise a accordée à vous-même et à Monsieur Christopher FUMONYOH, Directeur régional Afrique du National Democratic Institute (NDI), je viens par la présente, confirmer l'accord du Gouvernement pour l'envoi d'une mission de votre Organisation au Gabon dans le cadre des préparatifs de la prochaine élection présidentielle prévue fin août 2016.

Le Gouvernement voudrait compter sur l'expertise et la grande expérience du NDI pour procéder, efficacement, au renforcement des capacités des structures électorales et à l'adoption de mesures visant à consolider la bonne gouvernance. Comme Son Excellence Monsieur le Président de la République n'a de cesse de l'exprimer, il souhaite que les prochaines élections continuent d'être dignes des standards en vigueur dans les nations démocratiques.

Le Gouvernement sera ouvert aux suggestions et autres recommandations dans le cadre d'une démarche inclusive.

Je vous prie d'agréer, **Monsieur le Président**, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.



Pacôme MOUBELET BOUBEYA

English Translation:

Dear President of NDI,

Following up on the issues raised during the meeting His Excellency **Ali BONGO ONDIMBA**, President of the Republic of Gabon, held with you and Mr. Christopher FOMUNYOH, Regional Director for Africa at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), I hereby confirm the Government's agreement to receive an NDI mission in Gabon during the preparation of the upcoming presidential election scheduled for the end of August 2016.

The Gabonese government would rely on your expertise and NDI's extensive experience in effectively reinforcing the capacities of election stakeholders to adopt measures aiming to consolidate good governance. As His Excellency the President of the Republic expressed during the meeting, he hopes that the upcoming elections will meet the standards of elections in democratic societies.

The Government is open to suggestions and other recommendations in regards to an inclusive process.

With warmest greetings, please accept, Mr. President of NDI, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours faithfully,
Pacôme MOUBELET BOUBEYA

ATTACHMENT B: DELEGATION MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES



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The Right Honorable Joe Clark was elected Prime Minister of Canada in 1979 and served until 1980. He later served as Secretary of State for External Affairs (Foreign Minister) from 1984 to 1991, and then as Minister of Constitutional Affairs; as such he presided over complex negotiations that resulted in the unanimous agreement of all provinces, territories and the national government. Mr. Clark served twice as Opposition Leader in Parliament, and for ten years as the National Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. He was elected eight times to the House of Commons in Canada, retiring in June 2004. Mr. Clark is Vice-Chairman of the global Leadership Foundation, has served as Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Cyprus and has led or co-led election observation missions to Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Lebanon.

Ambassador Maria Leissner is currently the secretary general of the Community of Democracies, a global intergovernmental organization headquartered in Warsaw, Poland. As secretary general, she leads the organization's permanent secretariat and serves as a vocal advocate for democracy, human rights and rule of law around the world. She served as a member of the Swedish Parliament from 1985-1991. Also, she was elected leader of the Liberal Party (FP) in 1995, becoming the first woman to lead that party. During her diplomatic career, Ambassador Leissner has served as Sweden's envoy to Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize and Costa Rica (2000-2004) and as ambassador-at-large for democracy (2006-2012). She has participated in a number of international programs in Africa and elsewhere in the world, including a large number of election-monitoring missions. She was responsible for a mission on the Roma minority in Europe (2006-2010) that resulted in significant reforms. Ambassador Leissner led the National Democratic Institute's governance program in Iraq (2004-2005) and served as Senior Adviser for Human Rights with AMM (EU/ASEAN peace monitoring mission) in Aceh, Indonesia (2005-2006).

Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh is currently the Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and West Africa at NDI. He has organized and advised international election observation missions to Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. He has also designed and supervised country specific democracy support programs with civic organizations, political parties and legislative bodies throughout the continent. Dr. Fomunyoh designed and helped launch the African Statesmen Initiative (ASI), a program aimed at facilitating political transitions in Africa by encouraging former democratic heads of state to stay engaged in humanitarian issues, conflict mediation, and public health. Dr. Fomunyoh is an adjunct faculty member at the African Center for Strategic Studies and a former adjunct professor of African Politics and Government at Georgetown University. Dr. Fomunyoh holds a *License en Droit* from the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon, a master's degree (LL.M.) in international law from Harvard Law School and a Ph.D. in political science from Boston University.

Dr Sophia Moestrup is the Deputy Director for Central and West Africa at the National Democratic Institute (NDI). She has worked for NDI since 2005 on the design and implementation of democracy support programs in the region. Prior to joining NDI, Dr. Moestrup spent six years in Francophone Africa, working for the United Nations in Cameroon, and for the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) in Niger where she served as Country Representative. She has been a consultant for the World Bank on public expenditure management and social accountability issues, authoring a number of chapters for the World Bank's Social Accountability Sourcebook. Dr. Moestrup has co-edited four books on semi-presidentialism. Dr. Moestrup holds B.A and M.A degrees in Economics from the University of Copenhagen, and a Ph.D. in political science from the George Washington University.

ATTACHMENT C: NDI DELEGATION MEETINGS

I. GOVERNMENT

Presidency

- President of the Republic of Gabon, His Excellency Ali Bongo Ondimba

Ministry of Interior, Decentralization, Security, and Public Hygiene (*Ministre de l'Intérieur, de la Décentralisation, de la Sécurité et de l'Hygiène publiques*)

- Mr. Pacôme Moubelet Boubeya, Minister of Interior, Decentralization, Security, and Public Hygiene
- Mr. Guy Maixent Mamiaka, Delegate Minister to the Minister of Interior, Decentralization, Security, and Public Hygiene
- Mr. Noël-Lambert Matha, General Secretary
- Ms. Tathiana Chimène Maghouya Iga-Iga, Diplomatic Advisor
- Mr. Hervé Boukamba Mavandji, Cabinet Director
- Mr. Kevin Ferdinand Ndjimba, Legal Advisor
- Mr. Léon Ngadi, General Director for the Directorate General of Elections and Public Freedom (Direction générale des élections et des libertés publiques)
- Mr. Aimé Martial Massamba, Deputy Director of the Official Biometric Identification Project in Gabon (Projet Identification biométrique officielle du Gabon - IBOGA)
- Mr. Jean Clotaire Thierry Oye Zué, Commander in Chief of the National Police
- Mr. Célestin Embinga, General Director of Customs and Immigration (Direction générale de la documentation et de l'immigration - DGDI)

II. CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

- President of the Court Marie Madeleine Mborantsuo
- Justice Hervé Moutsinga (Doyen)
- Justice Louise Angue (Vice-Doyen)
- Justice Christian Baptiste Quentin
- Justice Claudine Menvoula Me Nze
- Justice François De Paul Adiwa-Antony
- Justice Christian Bignoumba Fernandes
- Justice Jacques Lebama

III. INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

National Autonomous and Permanent Electoral Commission (*Commission Electorale Autonome et Permanente - CENAP*)

- Mr. Réne Aboghe Ella, Chairman
- Mr. Gislain Oyoua, Vice-Chairman

IV. NATIONAL COUNCIL OF DEMOCRACY (*Conseil National de la Démocratie - CND*)

- Mr. Séraphin Ndaot Rembogo, President
- Mr. Jérôme Kwenzi-Mikala, Vice-President
- M. Jean Sylvain Mamdza, Secretary General
- Mr. Stephane Riligi, Protocol Officer

V. NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL (*Conseil National de la Communication - CNC*)

- Mr. Jean François Ndongou, President
- Ms. Brigitte Anguilet Diop, Vice-President
- Mr. Jean Robert Mabobet, General Secretary
- Mr. Alexandre Matsinga, Director of the CNC's President Cabinet
- Mr. Jean Ossie Otounga, Communications Counselor
- Mr. Godel Inanga Yendiyika, Member of the Council

VI. POLITICAL PARTIES

a) Ruling party and allies

Gabonese Democratic Party (*Parti Démocratique Gabonais - PDG*)

- Mr. Faustin Boukoubi, Secretary General
- Ms. Angeline Ngomz, National secretary in charge of civic education
- Mr. Ange James Akanda, National secretary in charge of national defense

Liberal Reformers Center (*Centre des Libéraux Réformateurs - CLR*)

- Ms. Patricia Taye, Deputy Secretary General
- Mr. Jean Boniface Assele Babani, First Deputy assistant to the Libreville Mayor

b) Opposition parties

Union of the Gabonese People (*Union du Peuple Gabonais - UPG*)

- Mr. Moukagni Iwangou, President
- Dr. Pélagie Itsana, Secretary General
- Mrs. Modeste Boussouka, Deputy Secretary General

New Democracy (*Démocratie Nouvelle*)

- Mr. Jean Ping, Presidential candidate
- Mr. John Nambo, Counsellor

Union for a New Republic (*Union pour la Nouvelle République - UPNR*)

- Mr. Louis Gaston Mayila, President

Congress for Democracy and Justice party (*Congrès pour la démocratie et la justice - CDJ*)

- Mr. Jules Aristide Bourdes Ogouliguende, Secretary General
- Mr. Jean-Louis Orango, Advisor to the Secretary General
- Mr. Albert Yangari, National Secretary
- Mr. François Nguema-Gbane, Deputy Secretary General
- Mr. Eugene Massima, Campaign director
- Ms. Marguerite Okomo Obame, National Secretary

National Union (*Union Nationale - UN*)

- Mr. Casimir Oyé-Mba, Presidential Candidate
- Mr. Zacharie Myboto, President
- Ms. Marie-Agnes Koumba, National Coordinator - Women's Movement
- Mr. Jean Martin Mba Nzoghe, UN Elections Center
- Ms. Chantal Myboto Gondjout, Deputy Treasurer
- Mr. Emmanuel Ntoutoume Ndong, Deputy Executive Secretary
- Mr. Jean Gregoire Mapaga, National Commissioner
- Ms. Victoire Moussounda, National Commissioner
- Mr. Leopold Essone Bibang, National Commissioner
- Mr. Jean-Christophe Owono Nguéma, Senator, External Affairs
- Mr. Romuald Engo Nauema, Special Counsellor
- Mr. Georges Mbadinga, party member
- Mr. Firmain Ollo Obiang, National Coordinator - Youth Movement

Sacred Union for the Homeland (*Union sacrée pour la patrie - USP*) - Coalition

- Mr. Albert Ondo Ossa, President of Sacred Union for the Homeland (Union sacrée pour la patrie - USP)
- Mr. Pierre André Kombila, President of the United Opposition Front for a Change in Power (*Front Uni de l'opposition pour l'Alternance*)
- Mr. Luc Bengono-Nsi, Founder and President of the National Recovery Movement (*Mouvement de Redressement National - MORENA*)
- Mr. Jean De Dieu Moukagni Iwangou, President of the Gabonese People's Union (*Union du Peuple Gabonais - UPG*)
- Mr. Léon-Paul Ngoulakia, President of the Patriotic and Republican Movement (*Mouvement patriote et républicain - MPR*)
- Mr. Sosthène Nguema Nguema, Leader of Civil Society Organization Enough is Enough (*Ça suffit comme ça*)
- Mr. Benoit Sosthène Yala, Reporter for the United Opposition Front for a Change in Power (*Front Uni de l'opposition pour l'Alternance*)
- Ms. Madeleine Moughounou Mboma, USP member
- Mr. Didjob Divungi Di Ndinge, United Opposition Front for a Change in Power (*Front Uni de l'opposition pour l'Alternance*)
- Ms. Marie Joselle Pelogie Itsana, USP member
- Mr. Jonas Poaty-Ibinga, USP member
- Mr. Arnauld Iwango Nzamba, Representative of the Muslim community

Heritage and Modernity (*Héritage et Modernité*)

- Mr. Alexandre Barro Chambrier, President
- Mr. Guy Nzouba Ndama, Presidential Candidate
- Mr. Maurice Serge Mabilia, Deputy General Secretary
- Mr. Phillippe Nzengue Mayila, Spokesperson and National Secretary
- Mr. Vincent de Paul Gondjout, Campaign Coordinator and Second National Secretary
- Ms. Christelle Koye, Fifth Deputy General Secretary
- Mr. Mesmin Ngabikoumou Wada

Rally for Gabon (*Rassemblement pour le Gabon - RPG*)

- Mr. Paul Mba Abessole, President and Presidential Candidate

VII. CIVIL SOCIETY

- Mr. Georges Mpage, President of the Free Civil Society Organizations for Good Governance Network (Réseau des Organisations Libres de la Société Civile pour la bonne gouvernance - ROLBG)
- Mr. Tyton Yvon Bibalou Bibalou, Free Civil Society Organizations for Good Governance Network (Réseau des Organisations Libres de la Société Civile pour la bonne gouvernance - ROLBG)
- Mr. Roger Edima Mavoungou Wilson, Free Civil Society Organizations for Good Governance Network (Réseau des Organisations Libres de la Société Civile pour la bonne gouvernance - ROLBG)
- Mr. Sentiment Ondo Elibiyo, Brainforest and Group of Civil Society Organizations of Francophone Africa (Dynamique des Organisations de la Société civile d'Afrique Francophone)
- Mr. Steeve Tchinga, Gabonese Civil Society Coalition (Coalition de la Société Civile Gabonaise - CSCG)
- Ms. Sandrine Mbazoghe Metoulou, Gabonese Civil Society Coalition (Coalition de la Société Civile Gabonaise - CSCG)
- Mr. Guy Roger Bouassa, Gabonese Civil Society Coalition (Coalition de la Société Civile Gabonaise - CSCG)
- Mr. Roger Albert Nzambo, Coordinator at the Gabonese Civil Society Coalition (Coalition de la Société Civile Gabonaise - CSCG)
- Mr. Guy René Mombo Lembomba, Gabonese Civil Society Coalition (Coalition de la Société Civile Gabonaise - CSCG)
- M. Lebeka Mambup C. Mayombo, Policis
- Ms. Nathalie Zemo-Efoua, Club 90
- Mr. Noel Bertrand Boundzanga, Club 90

VIII. LABOR UNIONS

- Mr. Evariste Ndong Allogo, Education Labor Union
- Mr. Louis Patrick Mombo, General Secretary of Education and Teachers Union (Syndicat des enseignants de l'éducation nationale - SEENA)
- Mr. Alfred-Désiré Encone, National Convention of National Education Labor Unions (Convention nationale des syndicats de l'éducation nationale - CONASYSED)
- Mr. Cyrille Macarie Ndzenk, National Convention of National Education Labor Unions (Convention nationale des syndicats de l'éducation nationale - CONASYSED)
- Mr. Jules O. Bibang, National Convention of National Education Labor Unions (Convention nationale des syndicats de l'éducation nationale - CONASYSED)

- Mr. Simon Ndong Edzo, National Convention of National Education Labor Unions (Convention nationale des syndicats de l'éducation nationale - CONASYSED)

IX. OTHER PROMINENT GABONESE FIGURES

- Ms. Laure Olga Gondjout, National Mediator (*Médiateur de la République*)
- Mr. Gervais Oniane, Political Counsellor for National Mediator (*Médiateur de la République*)

X. UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL OFFICE FOR CENTRAL AFRICA

- Mr. Abdoulaye Bathyly, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA)
- Mr. Boris-Ephrem Tchoumavi, Political Advisor
- Ms. Anne-Ghislaine Ndoye, Personal Assistant
- Mr. Karna Soro, Chief of Political Affairs

