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**NDI CALLS FOR URGENT STEPS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE
BEFORE GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

TBILISI – A National Democratic Institute (NDI) pre-election delegation said today that measures must be taken to boost public confidence in Georgia’s electoral process before parliamentary voting on May 21.

“The delegation acknowledges a number of positive steps since the [Jan. 5] presidential election but remains deeply concerned that urgent efforts need to be made to significantly enhance public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process,” the group said in a statement released at a news conference here.

“NDI’s experience worldwide has found that confidence in an electoral system and a perception of fairness are as important as the letter of the law,” the statement said. “The government bears the largest share of the responsibility for creating an enabling environment for campaigning and the conduct of a good election. The opposition bears responsibility for the part it plays in political discourse. Both sides should meet these responsibilities in a manner that commands public confidence.”

The delegation met with Georgian political and civic leaders including parliamentary candidates, campaign representatives, senior government and parliamentary officials, election authorities, non-governmental organizations, domestic election groups, and representatives of the media and the international community in Tbilisi.

The statement contained 18 recommendations for the pre-election period that focused generally on the responsibilities of political parties and campaigns, ways to restore public confidence, improvements in election administration and the media environment. Nine recommendations for the longer term urged review and revision of the election code through an open consultative process and other measures to bring Georgia’s election system into line with international standards.

Members of the delegation, which visited Georgia from April 28 to May 2, were Sam Gejdenson (U.S.), former member of the U.S. House of Representatives and current member

of the NDI Board of Directors; Shlomo Avineri (Israel), former director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and director of the Institute for European Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Peter Eicher (U.S.), former deputy director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR); Laura Jewett (U.S.), NDI regional director for Eurasia; and Mary O'Hagan (U.K.), NDI senior resident director in Georgia.

NDI has a long history in Georgia dating to 1995. An NDI delegation visited the country in December to observe preparations for the presidential election. The Institute also fielded an international observer delegation that was deployed around the country to observe the January presidential polling. It issued a report on Jan. 7. Those reports and the full statement issued today may be found at www.ndi.org.

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

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