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AFRICAN ELECTION EXPERTS LAY OUT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

WASHINGTON, DC – To achieve more peaceful and credible elections, African countries should ratify the African Union’s (AU) charter on elections and enforce its standards, according to a [communiqué from election experts and practitioners from across Africa that was released today](#).

The Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted by the AU in 2007, which requires ratification by at least 15 AU member states, calls on African governments to commit to “transparent, free and fair elections” and a “conducive environment for independent and impartial election monitoring or observation mechanisms.”

“In many African countries, successful elections have strengthened democratic institutions and practices while enhancing opportunities for economic growth,” the communiqué said. “In others, credible elections have paved the way for national reconciliation and return to civilian rule after periods of armed conflict and civil war. At the same time, flawed elections in some African countries have sparked violence, further polarized divided societies and eroded public confidence in political and electoral processes.”

The communiqué grew out of a three-day colloquium held in Accra, Ghana last month. It brought together participants from 25 countries representing election management bodies, political parties, security services, civil society and the media.

The gathering was co-organized by the National Democratic Institute and nine other organizations. Ghana was chosen as the venue for the colloquium because its 2008 elections were viewed as credible despite heated political tensions and a razor-thin margin between the presidential candidates.

After a comparative review of successful elections in countries such as Ghana, and the failed experiences in other African counties, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, colloquium participants agreed on a series of recommendations directed at African governments, civil society organizations, election management bodies, political parties, election monitoring and observer groups, security/military services and the media.

The group emphasized the ratification of the AU charter and also stressed the importance of civil society's role in promoting, monitoring and reporting on its execution. The communiqué praised actions that regional organizations in Africa have taken to adopt higher electoral standards and noted "implementation of these standards varies widely among the member states."

Participants at the colloquium committed to "apply these principles in their respective countries and establish mechanisms to continue sharing ideas and experiences."

The colloquium was co-organized by the African Center for Strategic Studies, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, the United Nations Development Programme, in partnership with four Ghanaian organizations – the Center for Democratic Development, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, the Electoral Commission of Ghana, and the Institute for Economic Affairs.

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.

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