



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI ELECTION
OBSERVER DELEGATION TO JORDAN'S 2010
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
Amman, November 10, 2010**

This preliminary statement is offered by the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) international election observer delegation to Jordan's November 9, 2010, parliamentary elections. The delegation visited Jordan from November 5 to November 10, 2010, and was deployed throughout the country.

The delegation was led by Andrés Pastrana, former president of Colombia; Paul Dewar, member of parliament in Canada; Sam Gejdenson, former member of Congress from the United States; Margaret Anderson Kelliher, speaker of the House of the state of Minnesota in the United States; and Leslie Campbell, NDI's regional director of programs in the Middle East and North Africa. The delegation was comprised of 61 credentialed observers, both long- and short-term, from 18 countries and territories.

The delegation's findings were informed by a pre-election assessment mission in September 2010. A team of eight long-term observers has been monitoring the electoral process since October 2010. 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. NDI has sponsored democratic development programs in Jordan since 1993 and has maintained an office in the country since 2004.

Prior to the elections, the delegation met with senior government officials, election officials, candidates, citizen election monitors, civil society leaders, and media representatives. On election day, the delegation visited more than 250 polling centers in all 12 governorates.

The purpose of the delegation was to demonstrate the interest of the international community in the development of stronger democratic political processes in Jordan and to provide an impartial assessment of the character of the election process. NDI conducted its activities in accordance with the laws of Jordan and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

Summary of Observations

Jordan's November 9, 2010, parliamentary elections were held under a new election law and with improved procedures that mark a clear improvement over the conduct of the 2007 elections.

The technical preparations for balloting and the conduct of the voting on election day compared favorably to accepted international practices, although the delegation noted that structural shortcomings – widely unequal districts, lack of an independent election body and limited press freedom – means that Jordan’s political processes need further improvement.

Poll workers were well trained and conducted their duties efficiently and professionally. Polling stations were well organized, the procedures for identifying voters were clear and the counting process was transparent. Technology was used effectively with a computer network that linked polling stations around the country and allowed for immediate verification of voter identification and continuously updated voter turnout figures.

There were sporadic incidents of election-day violence and, regrettably, one reported death. Many observers reported that security forces provided appropriate support to the voting process and that responses to incidents were prompt and effective. Some violence seemed to be linked to competition among candidates and tribes, reinforcing the imperative of adopting measures to reduce tribal influence on politics in Jordan.

The kingdom’s largest organized political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), announced a boycott of the parliamentary elections, potentially depriving a significant group of voters of an electoral choice. Efforts were made by Prime Minister Samir Rifai and other government officials to convince the party to rejoin the election process, but the party, after consultation with its members, declined to participate.

Voter turnout varied across the country. A lower percentage of registered voters cast ballots in urban areas than did in rural areas, where turnout has traditionally been higher, but the overall percentage of voters casting ballots appeared to be close to the average of past elections.

Domestic election observers were officially accredited in Jordan and this election also marked the first time that international observers were welcomed. International observers were given access to every level of election administration and were given full cooperation by poll workers and security forces at polling centers.

Jordan’s new election law doubled the number of parliamentary seats set aside for women to 12. While final results have not been released, Jordan’s new parliament will include the first woman representing a Bedouin district and two women elected from the capital, Amman. At least one woman won a seat outside the quota.

NDI’s observer delegation noted an unusually high number of voters claiming to be illiterate, and many cases of “public voting” – the practice of announcing a voter’s choice out loud. Many observers witnessed insignia, brochures, candidate cards and other voting materials inside polling stations, which is a contravention of the law and which went largely unchallenged by polling officials.

Although the government conducted a publicity campaign to encourage voters to update their voter registration, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of voters whose identification cards did not match the district where they tried to vote were turned away. Other potential violations reported by observers included: voter intimidation by tribal members, attempts to vote with fake identification cards, and instances of voter secrecy being compromised. (Not systemic.)

There were numerous allegations of vote buying, both in the pre-election period and on election day. The government reported a number of arrests and NDI's observer delegation recommends further measures to address vote buying and the role of money in politics.

Jordan's government tried to address a long-standing complaint about Jordan's single non-transferable vote system (often described as "one man, one vote") with the creation of "virtual" sub-districts. In some polling stations, the candidate lists were broken down by sub-districts while in others only the overall candidate list was displayed. Voters had to make their choice without knowing the full list of competitors in each sub-district. This system should be improved or changed for future elections.

King Abdullah called for elections "that are a model of integrity, impartiality and transparency," and Jordan has made significant progress in that direction. Still, voter skepticism and apathy remains, in part because elections are organized and conducted by the government itself rather than an arms-length election body. Consideration should be given to the creation of an independent election commission.

The addition of four new seats for heavily populated areas like Zarqa and Amman was a welcome improvement, but large discrepancies in district sizes mean that citizens in urban areas, large numbers of whom are of Palestinian origin, continue to be underrepresented.

Although the conduct of the 2010 election is a significant improvement over 2007, the true test of whether it is a successful exercise will come in the acceptance by the public of the results and in the conduct and effectiveness of the parliament that arises from this event. A parliament that provides meaningful representation, robust government oversight and effective laws will increase citizen confidence.

The increased integrity of the 2010 polls should also encourage more Jordanians, particularly young Jordanians, to participate in the political system. Further improvements to election administration, including some of the recommendations included in this report, could encourage more confidence in Jordan's political processes, furthering democratic development and enhancing government accountability.

Electoral Context

In response to public dissatisfaction with the parliament elected in 2007, King Abdullah dissolved parliament in November 2009, calling for a revised electoral law and early elections “that are a model of integrity, impartiality, and transparency.” Political observers, analysts, and civic groups, which had long engaged in a public debate on Jordan’s political system, increased their calls for changes to the system. Civil society organizations saw this as an opportunity to strengthen their role in shaping the electoral process in Jordan and worked to build public demand for electoral reform. A coalition of civil society organizations as well as women’s groups formally submitted recommendations to the government, advocating specific changes they believed would support healthy competition and produce a more representative and effective legislature, including increasing women’s representation in parliament to 20 percent.

After much anticipation, the government released the new temporary election law in May 2010. The new law introduced a unique system of districting, in which the country’s main electoral zones are divided into “virtual” sub-districts equal to the number of seats assigned to the zone. Candidates register to run in a sub-district of their choosing and voters cast one ballot for a candidate in any sub-district in their electoral zone. The sub-districts are called “virtual” because they do not correspond to any particular geographic area.

The new law preserved the single, non-transferrable vote system, which has been controversial in Jordan as some argue that the system favors tribal voting over the development of political parties. It also increased the number of seats in the lower house from 110 to 120, adding four seats for heavily populated areas in Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa, as well as six new quota seats for women. Furthermore, the law invoked stricter penalties for electoral fraud (including vote-buying), broadened election administration beyond the Ministry of Interior (adding a judge as a deputy to the head for each election committee and an independent judge to arbitrate electoral disputes) and introduced a number of procedural changes to protect the secrecy of the vote and enhance the transparency of the process.

While the new law incorporated several recommendations that were put forward by civic and women’s groups—including increasing the women’s quota, the publication of voter lists, transparent counting procedures at polling stations, and increasing penalties on electoral transgressions—it fell short of public expectations. The number of seats allocated for women doubled to 12, but failed to reach the 20 percent representation as advocated by women’s organizations. A number of civil society organizations and political commentators have expressed concern that the new system does not solve the problem of the disproportionate weighting of districts, which under-represents citizens in urban areas (who are largely of Palestinian origin). Political parties and others have criticized the law because its retention of the single, non-transferrable vote system presents an obstacle to the development of a multi-party political system in Jordan.

In the weeks following the introduction of the new law, the Jordanian government announced that domestic groups would be allowed to observe the election. This marks a major achievement for civic groups, which launched the kingdom’s first limited domestic

election observation effort for the 2007 parliamentary elections, when 150 monitors were formally accredited by the government in 2007 to observe the polling.

Building on their experiences in 2007 and with NDI assistance, two domestic monitoring partners, the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) and Al Hayat Center for Civil Society Development (Al Hayat) launched election observation efforts for the 2010 elections. NCHR and Al Hayat have built national coalitions, trained and deployed observers to monitor the voter and candidate registration processes, and released statements with specific recommendations on ways the government can improve electoral processes. In several instances, the government has responded positively to these recommendations. Nevertheless, questions remained about the level of access that would be granted to citizen observers on election day and whether all qualified and interested civic organizations will be formally accredited. Early reports on election day suggested that as many as one third of Al Hayat's accredited observers were denied entry to polling stations.

In a departure from previous statements, government officials in July 2010 signaled a willingness to allow international election observers to monitor the upcoming elections. A comprehensive international election observation mission—assessing the pre-election, election-day, and immediate post-election periods—provides relevant stakeholders such as Jordanian government officials, political parties, and domestic monitoring organizations with feedback and recommendations on all aspects of the electoral process, including areas of recent reform. International observation also sets an important precedent in Jordan, which has previously maintained that international observation is a violation of its sovereignty. The presence of international observers contributes to a growing acceptance of international election observation and electoral standards in the region and buttresses and informs the work of domestic election observers.

Pre-election Observations

The pre-election period witnessed important positive developments.

Voter lists were produced electronically and publicized, an important step to restore public confidence in light of the vote transfers that the government acknowledged had plagued the 2007 polls. Following an official challenge period in August 2010, the government moved 165,000 voters to their pre-2007 districts and published the final voter list online.

Officials introduced a series of election-day procedures designed to protect the secrecy of the vote and ensure greater transparency in the polling process. New procedures require polling stations to keep a separate record of illiterate voters. Pollworkers are required to count the ballot papers in each polling station prior to the opening of the polls and count the ballot papers again prior to classifying them during the counting process. Objection forms should be made available in polling stations. Candidate representatives now have the option to record the serial numbers that mark ballot box seals and to sign the official

polling station opening and closing forms. The voter identification system has been computerized, linking individual polling stations with the central database list in real time.

The procedures also introduce new measures in the counting and tabulating process. Pollworkers must show the ballot papers to candidate representatives during the vote count and candidates can sign the official results form in each polling station. Redundancy has been built into the tabulation process: results are transmitted electronically from polling stations to district tabulation centers, but are also reentered manually at tabulation centers from the official polling station results that have been signed by candidate representatives.

Arrangements have been made to accommodate disabled voters, including the opening of dedicated polling stations for voters with disabilities and an allowance for voters with disabilities to bring a personal assistant of his or her choosing to assist during the voting process. The poll worker procedures manual includes a section on “tips” for dealing with voters with disabilities.

Election officials published these changes in a polling-and-counting procedures manual, produced a short documentary film on election-day proceedings that has been used to train pollworkers and educate the public, and adopted a code of conduct for polling officials.

In addition to these procedural changes, the government accredited 2,750 nonpartisan domestic election observers—a vast improvement over the 150 who were accredited only 48 hours ahead of the 2007 election—including 100 observers to monitor the polling stations for disabled voters. Throughout the pre-election period, these citizen observers made a number of recommendations on how to improve the voter registration and candidate registration processes, a number of which were addressed by election officials.

In addition, the acceptance and accreditation of international election observers for the first time in Jordan’s history brings an added degree of transparency to the process and helps to build confidence in the elections among Jordanian citizens.

At the same time, the pre-election period highlighted challenges for the election and post-election period.

The 2010 temporary election law, which was enacted by the government without parliamentary approval, should be revisited by the new parliament.

One of the most significant features of the electoral context in Jordan remains the disproportionality among electoral districts. The underrepresentation of urban, largely Palestinian-origin voters, has long been an issue of political contention. Although the new law adds four additional seats for urban areas, further progress in this area is needed to meet international standards.

There also remain widespread concerns about the effect of money in Jordanian political processes. Unclear political spending limits, weak financial disclosure laws, and opaque enforcement of rules limit public awareness of the role of political contributions. Notwithstanding the tougher penalties for vote-buying introduced by the 2010 law and the fact that the government has initiated investigations into a number of alleged cases during the campaign period, more than two-thirds of Jordanians believe that vote-buying is taking place.

Election-day Observations

Conduct of Elections

While there was active campaigning in the streets outside of polling centers and candidate representatives were present in most polling stations. Observers did note some instances of candidate insignia or material inside of polling stations, a contravention of the law that went largely unchecked by election officials. The government reported 53% turnout, ranging from a high of 80% in at least one rural Bedouin region and as low as 34% in Amman.

Organization of Polling Centers

The vast majority of polling stations NDI visited were calm and orderly. Pollworkers were well-trained and followed electoral procedures conscientiously. Measures to ensure the secrecy of the vote were in place and observed by election officials. For the most part, polls opened on time and workers processed voters efficiently.

Election day witnessed the trial of a high-tech, computerized voter identification system. Voters who presented identification cards were checked against the database of eligible voters, with changes made in each district updated in real time throughout the entire system. Despite isolated reports of system malfunction, the system seemed to work efficiently.

Security

For the most part, Jordanian security forces, which were charged with maintaining public order on election day, performed their responsibilities professionally and efficiently and in accordance with procedures. Observers did note, however, the presence of plain clothes security inside polling centers and expressed concern about the influence that may have had on voters. Observers and public reports also indicate that there was sporadic violence in areas of the country, including one death.

Vote Buying

Observers heard numerous allegations about vote-buying before elections and on election day. The delegation notes that the government has announced a number of arrests and would encourage further measures to discourage this practice.

Voter Identification and Voter Rejections

In a number of polling stations visited by NDI, observers witnessed voters being turned away because their voter identification cards did not match the computerized list. Many of these voters were among the 165,000 voters who had been moved back into pre-2007 districts during the pre-election period and who did not get new identification cards.

Role of Domestic Observers and International Election Observers

These elections were the first in which Jordan accepted and accredited significant numbers of domestic and international observers. Jordanian civil society organizations, led by the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) and Al Hayat Center for Political Development (Al Hayat), deployed citizen observers throughout the country, in both stationary and mobile teams. Although, a certain number of domestic observers were not allowed access, the delegation notes that international observers were welcomed, afforded full cooperation, and given every access to every level of election administration.

“Virtual” Sub-districts

The unusual “virtual” sub-districting system, a source of confusion among candidates, was addressed inconsistently inside of polling stations. In some stations, the candidate list noted the sub-district in which each candidate was running. In other stations, the candidate list did not include sub-district. Although Jordanian officials explained that including the sub-district in the candidate list was not necessary for voters, who only cast one vote for the candidate of their choice, the delegation believes that a lack of information about candidates and their direct competitors limits the ability of voters to vote strategically.

Illiterate voting

While the procedures for illiterate voters were improved, it would appear from observer reports that an abnormally high number of voters claimed to be illiterate, raising concern about the secrecy of the vote, potential vote-buying, and other irregularities.

Recommendations

On the basis of these pre-election and election-day observations, NDI’s delegation respectfully suggests that the government of Jordan consider:

- Establishing an independent election management body.
- Continuing efforts to achieve better representation through balancing the distribution of voters per seat.
- Revising the election system to promote political party development.
- Introducing in parliament a permanent election law that incorporates different stakeholders’ views.
- Regulating campaign finance for more transparency and accountability and addressing concerns about vote buying. Regulations on electoral violations should

also be reviewed to ensure that existing rules are enforced and that penalties are adequate and appropriate.

- If the “virtual” sub-district system is retained, assigning voters to specific polling stations. Candidate lists, delineated by sub-district, should be clearly posted at every polling center.
- Reforming voting procedures for illiterate voters, including through the use of a printed ballot with candidate photos or symbols.
- Regulating media conduct during the campaign period to ensure equitable air-time and coverage for candidates.
- Introducing regulations to allow for the appeal of election results by candidates in a systematic, neutral and timely manner.
- Encouraging parties and candidates to provide better training for candidate representatives.
- Improving procedures for assisting voters with disabilities.
- Adopting measures that allow voters whose names do not appear on the voter list to cast a provisional vote under alternate procedures with proper identification.

Background on the Delegation and International Observation

International election observation has become widely accepted by countries around the world and it now plays an important role in informing citizens and the international community about the nature of each country’s electoral process. International election observation, when done in accordance with accepted principles for impartial assessments, seeks to enhance the integrity of election processes by encouraging best electoral practices and deterring misconduct, as well as by identifying problems and irregularities, which can lead to effective redress.

International election observers are welcomed by countries in all stages of democratic development. NDI has organized more than 150 delegations to assess pre-election, election-day and post-election processes around the globe and in the Middle East and North Africa region, including in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, and Yemen. NDI conducts its election observation in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which is endorsed by 35 intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, including the United Nations Secretariat.

The delegation is grateful for the welcome and cooperation it received from voters, election officials, candidates, domestic election observers, and civic activists. NDI has been officially accredited to conduct an international election observation mission by the Ministry of the Interior and is grateful to the Ministry and to the Ministry of Political Development for welcoming this and other international observation groups. The delegation offers this election statement in the spirit of supporting and strengthening democratic institutions in Jordan.

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