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POSITIVE CHANGES MADE IN JORDANIAN ELECTION PROCEDURES, BUT CONCERNS REMAIN FOR NOV. 9 POLLS, NDI DELEGATION SAYS

AMMAN, JORDAN – While a number of improvements have been made in Jordan’s electoral process in preparation for parliamentary elections on Nov. 9, challenges remain to overcome voter apathy and cynicism to ensure a meaningful poll, according to the findings of a National Democratic Institute (NDI) pre-election assessment delegation.

“Many of the Jordanians that the NDI delegation spoke with expressed cautious optimism about the prospects for a better election process,” the delegation said in a [statement released here today](#). But the delegation also noted that a number of concerns, such as “voter cynicism and a boycott could seriously undermine the effectiveness of the parliament resulting from the 2010 election, and therefore should be of concern to Jordan’s government.”

The assessment mission, which took place Sept. 14-17, was comprised of Frances Fitzgerald, senator from Ireland; Sam Gejdenson, former U.S. representative, D- Conn.; Francesca Binda, NDI’s senior director in Jerusalem and former elections official from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and Leslie Campbell, NDI’s regional director for the Middle East and North Africa. While in Jordan, the group met with senior government officials, political party representatives, prospective candidates, citizen election monitors, civil society leaders, and media representatives.

The Nov. 9 vote will be the Kingdom’s third parliamentary election in seven years. It is the first since the dissolution of parliament last November by King Abdullah, who cited public dissatisfaction with the performance of the lower chamber and called for a revised electoral law and elections “that are a model of integrity, impartiality, and transparency.”

The government issued a temporary election law in May. “While there have been improvements,” the statement said, “many Jordanian political activists and analysts emphasized that the most significant recommended electoral changes—redistricting and the possible revision of the voting system—have been postponed.”

Positive steps that have been taken to enhance the upcoming election include the expanded role of domestic election monitors, the publication of voters' lists, the enhanced role of judges in election committees, the increased women's quota, special provisions to accommodate disabled voters, and the professional quality of election administration.

However, the delegation also "observed concern over potential voter apathy and the impact of an election boycott advocated by the Kingdom's largest organized political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and a number of allied opposition parties...."

"Combined with the perception of a flawed election in 2007 and disenchantment with the resulting parliament, there is a distinct lack of enthusiasm for another political exercise that may have little meaning," the delegation said.

It went on to suggest further improvements to be put in place before election day to promote greater voter confidence in the process. These included:

- Publication of candidate lists by sub-district during the registration period and publication of final candidate lists by sub-district.
- Confirmation that election results at all levels of the counting and aggregation process will be made public immediately after the counting and that counting of the votes will happen at the polling station where the voting took place before ballot boxes are transported and/or moved in any way.
- Good faith attempts to maximize the choices available to voters by encouraging the broadest possible participation.
- Introduction of regulations to allow for the appeal of election results by candidates in a systematic, neutral, and timely manner.
- A concerted media campaign to discourage vote buying and financial violations and to encourage voter participation. A voter education campaign should also include information about the sub-districts to help ameliorate confusion.
- Implementation of appropriate measures to ensure against multiple voting, as voters can vote in any polling station.
- An initiative to provide equitable air time at no or reduced cost to all registered candidates.

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

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