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**LIBERIANS ACKNOWLEDGE HISTORIC NATURE OF UPCOMING POLLS,  
EAGER FOR INCLUSIVE, PEACEFUL, AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS, NDI  
DELEGATION FINDS**

MONROVIA, Liberia – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) today released its [statement of findings and recommendations](#) from its pre-election assessment mission to Liberia’s presidential and legislative elections, scheduled for October 2017.

Liberia’s October 2017 elections have the opportunity to be a historic moment for the country -- the first peaceful transfer of power from one elected president to another since 1944. The country is on the cusp of consolidating democratic gains since the 2003 political transition, following years of devastating conflict. Successful polls would also continue a positive trend towards democratic elections and peaceful transitions of power in West Africa.

NDI’s delegation includes regional and election experts from Africa, Europe, and North America: Ms. Robin Carnahan, Former Secretary of State of Missouri, and Member of the Board of Directors, NDI (United States); Commissioner Terry Tselane, Vice Chairperson, Electoral Commission (South Africa); Christopher Fomunyoh, Regional Director, NDI (Cameroon); Alessandro Parziale, Observation Mission Director, NDI (Germany/Italy); and Michael McNulty, Senior Program Manager, NDI (United States).

The delegation met with: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Chairman and Commissioners of the National Elections Commission (NEC); potential candidates and political party leaders; government officials; civil society leaders, including citizen election observers; women political leaders; justices of the Supreme Court; elder statespersons; journalists; security officials; and representatives of the international community. The delegation also visited voter registration centers.

“The delegation is encouraged that Liberians recognize this historic opportunity to take full ownership of their electoral process,” said Robin Carnahan. “All Liberians with whom we met expressed a resolute commitment to nonviolence and peaceful elections that earn public confidence.”

**Key Findings & Challenges**

The delegation notes that the October 2017 elections will be conducted within an open political environment. Most electoral stakeholders regard the NEC as an independent and impartial institution and expressed confidence its commitment to running credible elections. The NEC and other state bodies demonstrate genuine political will to hold elections that reflect the will of the people. Platforms for inter-party dialogue, as well as for party engagement with the NEC and other stakeholders, are being utilized and should be enhanced. Barriers to participation for youth and women still exist, but there are unique opportunities in 2017 for more inclusive elections.

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Despite the prevailing will of Liberians, the October 2017 polls are being prepared as the country faces developmental challenges, such as poor infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, the lack of a national identification system, and difficult macroeconomic trends. Dissatisfaction with some elected officials and service delivery may affect voter enthusiasm. Moreover, lingering grievances persist from previous election-related disputes. Against this backdrop, the NEC and security services may face challenges in effectively carrying out their responsibilities in light of diminished international assistance.

The delegation paid particular attention to the voter registration process, as this first phase of the 2017 electoral process is the foundation upon which credible elections are built and voters' first impression is likely to influence how they ultimately view the legitimacy of the outcome. Delegates found that despite some issues, there do not seem to have been systematic attempts to undermine the integrity of the voter registration process. The dedication and commitment of thousands of voter registration staff should be acknowledged. Voter education efforts started later than initially anticipated. Efforts should now be doubled to ensure maximum participation during the final days of the registration period.

## **Recommendations**

In the spirit of international solidarity with the people of Liberia, the delegation offers the following recommendations to various stakeholders on steps that can be taken in the pre-election period to enhance confidence in the electoral process and foster peaceful, credible elections in October 2017. NDI's international election observation mission will monitor these recommendations and will issue additional statements at key points in the 2017 electoral process. These included:

- **Voters** - Register by March 7, 2017 to secure the right vote in the October 10, 2017 elections; and practice nonviolence and hold each other, candidates, parties, and the media accountable for behaving peacefully and respectfully throughout the electoral process.
- **National Election Commission** - Intensify voter education during the remaining days of voter registration, with a particular emphasis on outreach to rural communities, women and youth; intensify planning and logistical preparations for election day; and engage in more proactive, timely, and accurate public communication to share its work.
- **Political Parties** - Urge all supporters and party members to register to vote; reaffirm a commitment to peaceful, credible elections, and update the code of conduct signed in 2011; and recruit and train in advance party agents for the October polls.
- **State Institutions and Security** - Prioritize and expedite funding of electoral operations and security budgets; and expand and publicize election violence mitigation efforts as a means of enhancing citizen confidence with regards to election security.



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- **Civil Society** - Intensify civic and voter education regarding the registration process, particularly among women, youth and rural communities; and integrate into systematic pre-election observation data collection on triggers of electoral violence.
- **Media** - Intensify efforts to educate voters about voter registration and the electoral process more broadly; and promote responsible, objective, and issue-oriented election reporting, and refrain from using inflammatory language and disseminating misinformation.

This mission is the first activity in NDI's comprehensive international election observation. In the coming months, NDI, in partnership with the West African Election Observation Network (WAEON) and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), will deploy analysts and long-term observers. NDI will deploy a second pre-election observation mission during the campaign period and an international election day observation mission.

NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. Over the last 25 years, NDI has conducted more than 150 election observation missions in 62 countries. NDI first worked in Liberia in 1997, providing technical assistance to Liberian voter education and election monitoring efforts. The Institute has maintained a permanent in-country office in Liberia since 2003. NDI's election observation mission is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

More information is available at [www.ndi.org/liberia](http://www.ndi.org/liberia).

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