



## Report of the National Democratic Institute Pre-Election Assessment Delegation

### 2011 Mauritanian Legislative and Municipal Elections

August 31, 2011

*From July 24-27, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized a pre-election assessment mission to observe preparations for the October 16, 2011 legislative and municipal elections in Mauritania. The delegation met with political party leaders, members of parliament, civil society activists, representatives of the international community, journalists, and Mauritians interested in the electoral process. The members of the delegation included Francesca Binda, NDI's senior director for the West Bank and Gaza and former elections official from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); Badié Hima, former leader of the Nigerien Association for Human Rights and current NDI resident director for Togo; Megan Doherty, NDI program officer for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); and Jacques Veilleux, former member of the National Assembly of Quebec and current NDI resident director for Mauritania. The purposes of the delegation were to express the support of the international community for the continued strengthening of democratic processes in Mauritania; assess the evolving political environment surrounding the upcoming elections, as well as the state of electoral preparations; and offer accurate and impartial observations and recommendations. The delegation's work was based on the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, launched at the United Nations in 2005 and endorsed by NDI and 36 other international and intergovernmental organizations.*

*The delegation benefited from the hospitality and frankness of everyone with whom it met. Mauritians continue to demonstrate a determined interest in continued democratic development.*

#### **Executive Summary**

Mauritania's upcoming legislative and municipal elections offer an important opportunity to strengthen the country's fragile political institutions. The pre-election landscape is marked by several positive factors, including relatively free media, a genuine desire on the part of majority and opposition parties to develop the foundation for a national dialogue on political rights and efforts by civil society organizations to engage in the unfolding political process.

However, political activists are losing confidence in the process, and are especially concerned that the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) lacks the technical capacity to prepare for legislative and municipal polls and the independence to ensure a credible and fair process. The government disbanded the National Independent Election Commission (CENI) in 2009, leaving the MOI solely responsible for conducting the elections. It also remains unclear whether domestic or international election observation will be welcomed, as the MOI did not respond to NDI's requests for meetings.

As all political parties are preoccupied with the upcoming National Dialogue (the dialogue), there are few visible efforts by parties to differentiate themselves through issue-based platforms. In addition, the lack of clarity regarding the legal framework is preventing parties from preparing their campaigns and civic groups from preparing potential monitoring and voter education efforts.

Positive efforts, such as the initiative by the MOI to encourage refugees, former slaves and other marginalized groups to add their names to the electoral lists are offset by a census process that is perceived as discriminatory by the African-Mauritanian population. While the census is not expressly related to updating the voter registry, there is widespread confusion over how the processes relate to one another. As the MOI is responsible both for conducting the census and updating the voter registry, a census process perceived as flawed could ultimately undermine the credibility of the electoral lists. It also remains to be seen whether the MOI will be able to meet its August 31 deadline for finalizing the voter rolls; the ministry itself estimated in late May that approximately 600,000 Mauritians (18 percent of the country's 3.28 million inhabitants) are unregistered.

Given Mauritania's history of instability and the military coups in 2005 and 2008, the delegation was concerned by the widespread disregard for constitutional deadlines. According to the Mauritanian constitution, the current legislative mandate expires in October. While the delegation was encouraged by parties' desire for consensus on an electoral timeline, there was a near total lack of concern regarding the constitutional implication of delaying the elections. While elections are not the sole barometer of democracy, respect for constitutionally mandated election timetables in a country with such a volatile political history could improve public confidence and lead to greater political stability.

Even as the opposition parties and president continue to negotiate over conditions for the dialogue, the MOI declared that the elections will take place on October 16. With an increasing number of issues wrapped up in the pending dialogue, the delegation was concerned that protracted negotiations could become an excuse to delay elections while avoiding measures to guarantee a transparent, participatory process agreeable to all sides. The non-electoral issues on the table for the dialogue are important and warrant careful consideration, but participants should consider the urgency of the electoral timeline in the context of the constitution, and prioritize establishing agreement on conditions for credible elections. If politicians intend to delay the elections, they need to develop a roadmap that establishes firm commitments, deadlines and consequences.

#### Key Recommendations to the Mauritanian Government:

- Establish a permanent independent elections management body with decisionmaking powers for the organization of all elections.
- Lift the prohibition on peaceful demonstrations.
- Irrespective of the pending dialogue, immediately work with opposition and majority parties and civil society representatives to determine an acceptable electoral timeline and framework, with measurable benchmarks to ensure a transparent and participatory process.

- Provide political parties and nongovernmental organizations with full access to observe every aspect of the electoral process including voter registration, the campaign period, balloting, tabulation and publication of final results.
- Take the legal and technical steps necessary to facilitate election observation by impartial Mauritanian organizations to monitor and report freely on all aspects of the election and political processes.
- Accept and accredit observers from credible international organizations to observe the elections.

The risk of a political or constitutional crisis in the coming months is very real. Mauritians are increasingly taking to the streets to express their frustrations with the protracted negotiations for the dialogue and the lack of concern being paid to the economic hardships and social tensions that affect their daily lives. In this climate of uncertainty, Mauritanian political parties have the opportunity to work together toward agreement on the conditions necessary for credible elections, while also demonstrating their ability to move beyond political posturing so that citizens can make their choices through the ballot box. Moreover, the upcoming elections will provide parties with a much greater opportunity to present their programs and plans for governance to the public than would the more limited dialogue with the president, a dialogue that for now will exclude the participation of civil society and the broader population.

### Recent Political Context

On June 1, 2011 the MOI announced a revision of the national voter registry in anticipation of constitutionally-mandated legislative and municipal elections to be held on October 1. The following week, President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz confirmed the date in an interview with *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), claiming “the mandate of a member of parliament is five years; that is to say that October 1, there must be elections, period. There will be no legal vacuum.”

The CENI, the multipartisan body charged with electoral preparations, was disbanded after the 2009 presidential elections. Although the Coordination of the Democratic Opposition (COD) – the main coalition of opposition parties – has demanded the reconstitution of the CENI, the government has mandated the MOI with all electoral preparations.

The MOI is updating the 2009 electoral lists and registering the hundreds of thousands of young Mauritians who

<b><u>Main Political Parties</u></b>	
	<b>Party Name</b>
<b>Coalition of the Majority (CPM)</b>	Union for the Republic (UPR)
	Republican Party for Democracy and Renewal (PRDR)
	National Pact for Democracy and Development (ADIL)
<b>Coordination of the Democratic Opposition (COD)</b>	Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD)
	Union of Forces of Progress (UFP)
	Democratic Renewal (RD)
	National Rally for Reform and Development (Tewassoul)
	Mauritanian Party for Unity and Change (HATEM)
	Popular Progressive Appliance (APP)
	El Wiam

reached voting age over the past two years and other citizens who were not included in the 2009 voter rolls, including many undocumented refugees who had returned from neighboring Senegal. The opposition has criticized the unilateral efforts to revise the voter registry and is suspicious of the opaque provisions for verification and appeal.

Since its launch in early June, the Mauritanian government's attempts to conduct a census have been increasingly decried as discriminatory by the African-Mauritanian population. There have been reports of officials targeting African-Mauritanians in northern communities with humiliating questions to verify their ethnic backgrounds, including demanding that African-Mauritanians prove they are not slaves and requiring speakers of Soninke and other African-Mauritanian dialects recite the Qur'an and speak Arabic to prove that they are citizens. A group of young African-Mauritanians recently used Facebook to launch an initiative, "*touche pas à ma nationalité*" ["Don't touch my citizenship"] and are now organizing sit-ins and demonstrations across the country.

On July 11, the opposition Union of the Forces of Progress (UFP) called the census "doubtful in its goals, dangerous for national unity and chaotic in its procedures" and requested an audit of the census office. In response to citizen complaints, the MOI organized a television program to share information on the process and combat allegations of impropriety. In the last week of July, Ibrahima Sarr, president of the predominantly African-Mauritanian Alliance for Justice and Democracy/Movement for Renewal (AJD/MR), made public recommendations to improve the process, including stronger recruitment protocols for census workers and public information campaigns in all of Mauritania's main languages.

#### **Political Timeline**

- November 1960: Mauritania becomes independent from France
- July 1978: Post-independence president, Moktar Daddah, deposed in a military coup
- December 1984: Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya assumes power in a military coup
- January 1992: Taya wins the presidency in an election considered fraudulent by opposition groups and external observers
- August 2005: Military Council for Justice and Democracy (CMJD) deposes Taya and announces plan for democratic transition
- June 2006: A new constitution is approved by referendum
- November - December 2006: RFD wins the most seats in parliamentary elections
- March 2007: Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi wins presidency in Mauritania's first democratic presidential contest
- August 2008: President Abdallahi is deposed in a military coup by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
- June 2009: Aziz and opposition groups sign Dakar Accords to end political stalemate and agree on conditions for elections
- July 2009: General Aziz wins presidential elections contested by opposition groups

Some parties are threatening to boycott rather than participate in a process they say is designed to ensure a victory for the ruling Union for the

Republic (UPR). In late June, opposition parties presented President Aziz with a platform outlining their demand for an official dialogue on a range of political issues, including acceptable standards for elections. The COD platform requested direct negotiations with the president, to reach an official agreement and the establishment of a joint majority-opposition monitoring committee to oversee the agreement's implementation. The platform also stipulated that the dialogue would take place in the capital Nouakchott, but that parties would have the right to appeal for international mediation in the case of a stalemate. After hosting meetings with the presidential majority, President Aziz rejected three major aspects of the COD's platform: the adoption of the 2009 Dakar Accords<sup>1</sup> as the basis for the talks, establishment of the joint monitoring commission and potential use of international mediation.

The Dakar Accords pose a quandary. Some opposition parties, such as the Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD), insist that the dialogue must be held within the context of the agreement that ended the stalemate preceding the 2009 presidential elections. The president, however, claims that the Dakar Accords pertained to the 2009 elections and are no longer applicable. Opposition groups claim that the government is in violation of the Accords and that it would be difficult to have confidence in any new agreement, when it is clear that the president has little regard for the previous one.

Responding to the COD platform, the president issued his own call for dialogue to "strengthen democracy, national unity and civil liberties." The president's statement claimed he was willing to discuss "seriously and without any taboo issues" topics including the independence of the judiciary, the role of the opposition, electoral preparations and media access. Notably, the president's list of topics excluded several key opposition concerns, including the role of the Mauritanian military in civilian affairs. On July 27, one month after submitting its initial roadmap for dialogue, the COD formally presented the president with a slightly amended platform. In the revised roadmap, the Dakar Accords are referred to as "the agreement initiated in Dakar and signed in Nouakchott" and references to international mediation have been removed.

The resubmitted COD platform outlines priority themes, including national unity, civil liberties, the professionalization and depoliticization of public institutions, judicial independence, good governance, the role of the army, the role of the press, and the electoral code and timeline. Both the COD platform and the president's response state that "practical measures will be taken for the implementation" of the results of the dialogue, but there is no information on how that would work.

One day after receiving the amended COD platform, the government announced that legislative and municipal elections would be held on October 16 instead of the originally stated date of October 1. This announcement surprised opposition parties who had been expecting to negotiate

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<sup>1</sup> Following the August 2008 coup d'état in which General Aziz overthrew democratically elected President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi, Mauritanian political actors convened in Dakar, Senegal under the auspices of the international community to negotiate an end to the political impasse. The Accords set the stage for participatory elections by creating a bipartisan CENI and reforming the electoral code. The agreement also created a mechanism for dialogue between the opposition and the president. Since June 2010, the COD has criticized the president for failing to use this mechanism.

a new electoral calendar during the dialogue. The Mauritanian political landscape has been dominated by talk of dialogue and it is unclear how the government's announcement will impact planning for talks between the opposition parties and the president. While the opposition and the presidency condemn each other in the press, the Mauritanian public is increasingly weary with political maneuvering. In addition to the popular marches against the census, there has been a recent rise in labor strikes and sit-ins throughout the country. Political parties are not making efforts to campaign or articulate platforms on any of the economic concerns – inflation, soaring food prices, and unemployment – that citizens face in their every day lives.

## **I. Findings**

### Electoral Administration:

The July 28 announcement mandates that legislative and municipal elections will be held in two rounds on October 16 and 30. Given the recent decree that the senatorial elections<sup>2</sup> will be held in two rounds on September 25 and October 2, this announcement gave the MOI just over two months to organize four rounds of elections.

NDI's delegation was unable to obtain full information on the progress of electoral preparations, as representatives from the MOI declined to meet or provide updates. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is providing limited support to the MOI, but the UNDP consultant within the ministry could not confirm whether preparations, including the designation of polling stations and recruitment and training of poll workers, were taking place.

In its meetings with political and civil society leaders, NDI's delegation encountered a widespread lack of confidence in the MOI, which is perceived as opaque and unilateral in its actions. Steps need to be taken by the MOI to increase the transparency of electoral preparations and to communicate its efforts to a broad Mauritanian audience.

### *National Independent Election Commission (CENI)*

Although the CENI played a key role in overseeing elections in Mauritania in 2006, 2007 and 2009, it has not been reconstituted since its dissolution after the last presidential election. NDI's international observation delegation for the second round of the 2007 presidential elections found that the decree establishing the CENI contained provisions for its immediate dissolution after the elections – a serious flaw for the longer term sustainability of a fair and transparent electoral process. Nearly all Mauritians with whom the delegation met expressed the need for an independent election commission to oversee election preparations and reassure the public of the impartiality of the administration of the elections process.

While most politicians insist that the CENI be formed by consensus, it would be a cumbersome and potentially impossible undertaking to have individual members vetted by all major political actors, or even a majority of Mauritania's 75 political parties. An alternate approach would be for the major actors to agree on parameters for the CENI's formation and achieve consensus on a

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<sup>2</sup> Indirect contests for one third of the legislature's upper house were indefinitely postponed from April.

mechanism for selecting members that is transparent and allows both the majority and opposition parties and civil society to play a role.

### *Constitutional Framework*

According to the Mauritanian constitution, the parliament's mandate will expire in October. Most politicians expressed a belief that the elections would be delayed into 2012, leaving as an open question responsibility for lawmaking during what would be an extra-constitutional period. In the case of any delay, it is unclear whether there would be attempts to extend the current parliament's mandate in contravention of the constitution or who would assume responsibility for lawmaking. Given the longstanding dominance of the country's executive branch and a historically politicized military, the delegation found the lack of attention to the pending legislative vacuum troubling. Many claimed that the constitutional question could be solved if consensus was reached during the dialogue. A likely approach now under review is to peg the constitutional five-year mandate with the first sitting of the National Assembly in May 2007, rather than the date of the last election. Through this interpretation, elections could be held by May 27, 2012 and still be consistent with the constitution.

### *Electoral Law*

According to official circles, if there is no dialogue, the elections will be held according to the 2009 electoral code. However, if the dialogue does take place, the door will be open for amendment by consensus. Several political leaders spoke about the possibility of an extraordinary session of the National Assembly in mid-August or mid-September to formally vote on revisions agreed to during the dialogue.

Mauritanian party and civic representatives have a number of concerns that will need to be addressed in any legal reform process, including independent candidates, proportionality, provisions to promote greater participation of women, a transparent and accessible appeals process and whether to include measures against political nomadism (the common phenomenon of switching parties). Should it take place, the electoral law revision represents an opportunity for the government to engage opposition parties and civil society in the process and to build public confidence in the amended code.

Given that elections are scheduled for October 16, lack of public information is a serious concern. There has been no communication from the MOI regarding whether citizen groups will be allowed to monitor the polls. This limits their ability to organize domestic monitoring efforts and hurts the credibility of the overall process.

### *Voter Registry*

The MOI is attempting to update the electoral lists used in 2009. It has taken steps to inform citizens of the need to register, and the delegation was particularly encouraged to hear of the ministry's efforts to reach out to refugee and traditionally marginalized populations in the country's interior. The UNDP's technical assistance to the MOI includes construction of a new data center to house the electoral list. The delegation hoped the ministry would also take advantage of the opportunity to build confidence in electoral preparations by providing

opposition parties and civic groups with information on the revision process and access to the revised voter lists. To the delegation's knowledge, there are currently no citizen groups monitoring the revision or informing citizens of the process and requirements.

### *International Observation*

It is unclear whether credible international organizations will be allowed to observe the elections. International election observation, when done in accordance with accepted principles for impartial assessments, enhances the integrity of election processes by encouraging best electoral practices and deterring misconduct, as well as by identifying problems and irregularities that can lead to effective redress. NDI and other organizations have organized international delegations to Mauritania's neighbors including Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Mauritania welcomed observers in 2006, 2007 and 2009.

### Political Environment for Holding Elections

#### *Dialogue and Consensus-Building*

While the delegation was encouraged by the interest of both the majority and opposition parties in holding a dialogue, the delegation was concerned by the increasing number of issues that are expected to be resolved by the process. Most political actors agree that the dialogue will take place, but few could describe how they felt the consensus process should work. As more and more issues get lumped into the dialogue process, the delegation is concerned that this could adversely impact the electoral environment. During a roundtable with Mauritanian media, one journalist commented that "the citizens are the victims of this debate." Moreover, the dialogue is slated to take place between negotiators representing opposition parties and the presidency, with no express role for majority parties or civil society.

According to the roadmap submitted by the opposition, the dialogue should address national unity, professionalization of the administration, the role of the military in civilian affairs, independence of the judiciary, electoral code and timeline, media access and the formal role of the opposition. It is unrealistic to expect that all of these issues – particularly the larger issues related to confidence in political processes – could be solved overnight, especially when the procedures for decisionmaking and achieving consensus are unclear. While discussion of these issues is important, the delegation believes that Mauritians would benefit more from immediate attention to establishing conditions for credible elections.

Opposition parties claim that they are ready for dialogue, but that they have little confidence in the sincerity of the president. Several opposition members referred to the need for the president and the majority parties to make concessions to prove their "good faith." The delegation believes that the opposition should demonstrate its good faith as well. One of the repeated demands of the opposition was removal of the prohibition on public demonstrations. A small labor strike took place in Nouakchott during the delegation's visit with one of the opposition representatives. When the delegation asked whether the representative considered the government's willingness to allow the strike to proceed as a sign of good faith, the representative did not give a clear answer.



### *Political Parties*

The delegation found that with the exception of the UPR and Tewassoul, no parties were actively mounting electoral campaigns, making efforts to articulate platforms, or reaching out to citizens on voter issues. Most party activities appeared to be taking place within the context of preparing for or reacting to the latest events related to the dialogue. It is clear that political parties face significant organizational challenges and would benefit from training and technical support.

In the past weeks, several parties have raised the threat of a boycott if election preparations are seen as unfairly benefiting the ruling UPR. The delegation was encouraged to hear from UPR representatives on their commitment to avoiding an opposition boycott. Averting a boycott would send a powerful, positive signal to voters that the government is committed to a fair and open process.

The delegation observed that many parties appeared content to complain about the current political stalemate, rather than present clear alternatives or ideas to move the country forward. Opposition parties must be willing to take stands beyond denouncing the government.

Opposition parties identified several measures the government could take in the short term to build confidence in electoral preparations, including providing parties access to the revised electoral lists and creating an impartial, competent CENI.

### *Role of Civil Society*

The delegation was encouraged by the array of civic organizations interested in participating in the dialogue and electoral processes. The Forum of National Human Rights Organizations (FONADH), the African Meeting for the Defense of Human Rights (RADDH), and the Civil Society Platform are currently meeting with party representatives to build support for greater civil society involvement. While most civic organizations in Mauritania have limited resources, there are a number of international organizations, including NDI, that are poised to assist civic groups with the design and conduct of campaigns to inform voters and support for electoral process monitoring.

The public outcry over the census has led some groups to organize advocacy campaigns. Technical support and training could empower these and other civic groups to monitor political processes, including the census and voter registry update, drawing attention to needed improvements and building public confidence. These efforts could extend to monitoring the elections themselves. While Mauritians have limited experiences mounting public monitoring campaigns, there are several groups with national reach who have expressed interest in partnering with NDI on domestic observation efforts.

Domestic election observers can provide invaluable support to an election process. However, there has been no indication from the government on whether observers will be encouraged. The Mauritanian government should act swiftly to clarify the legal parameters for observation.

### *Role of Media*

The Mauritanian media is somewhat free, but the sector faces technical and other capacity constraints. The delegation heard complaints of a lack of equitable access and coverage of political party activities by public and private media. These concerns were echoed in discussions with representatives of Al-Jazeera's Mauritanian bureau, which noted the challenge of trying to provide "equal" coverage for the country's 75 political parties.

The delegation met with the president and secretary general of the High Authority for the Press and Broadcasting (HAPA) and was encouraged by the HAPA's stated commitment to equitable media access to political parties. The HAPA operates a media monitoring department which provides qualitative and quantitative reports on coverage. Although HAPA representatives claimed that monitoring information was publicly accessible on their website, several journalists complained that they had no access to HAPA reports.

### *Role of Women*

As a result of a successful quota campaign and civil society efforts to galvanize and train women candidates, women won 18 percent of seats in the National Assembly and 34 percent of municipal council seats in 2006. Despite these encouraging gains, women still face a number of constraints, particularly in rural and tribal communities in the interior.

Women's civic groups and women within parties are eager for opportunities to promote women's representation and prepare women candidates to run more effective and competitive campaigns. It is unclear whether the 20 percent quota for which a coalition of women successfully advocated in 2006 will be retained for the legislative and municipal elections. Some political actors are currently discussing a potential national list approach to guarantee an allocation of seats for women. Concurrently NDI, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) and the Spanish Cooperation are providing technical assistance and support to a multipartisan, cross-sectoral women's coalition – comprising many activists from the 2006 quota campaign – to push for an increase of the quota to 33 percent.

### *Voter Education*

The voter education process has not yet begun in earnest, and it is too early to evaluate whether or not it will be effective. It is essential that voters are provided with full and clear guidance on where, when and how to vote. During the mission, the delegation found a dearth of electoral information, beyond speculation over a potential delay. If the government intends to hold to the October 16 date, then citizens need to be informed as soon as possible of the proper procedures.

Given declining public confidence in the voter registration process, it will be important to complement voter information with broader efforts to demonstrate transparency in the election preparations. Several people expressed concern about the challenge of reaching illiterate populations (just under half of Mauritania's adult population is illiterate), particularly within the country's vast rural interior. The delegation suggested the possibility of using radios, which are widely available in Mauritania, to conduct civic education and voter information campaigns.

## II. Recommendations

In light of its findings, the delegation respectfully offers the following recommendations:

- Electoral Administration
  - It is important that election authorities demonstrate their commitment to impartiality to electoral contestants and the public. Political parties and nongovernmental organizations should have full access to observe every aspect of the electoral process including registration, the campaign period, balloting, tabulation and publication of final results.
  - In order to build public confidence in its operations, the MOI should establish a regular, formal mechanism for consultation and information-sharing with political parties and civil society organizations. Greater communication and engagement with all sectors of society would allow the MOI to hear the public's concerns firsthand, and would, in turn, allay some misgivings.
- CENI
  - An independent and respected CENI should be established on a permanent basis, with responsibility for the organization of all elections. While there are many models available for the design of the CENI, it should be formed in consultation with civil society and opposition and majority parties.
  - The CENI must be given the human and financial resources to function in a manner that inspires confidence among Mauritians. Steps should also be taken to delineate the lines of communication and collaboration between the CENI and the MOI in order to strengthen and guarantee the CENI's independence.
  - A training plan should be designed for polling officials in the period leading up to the election so that all staff are well-versed in the correct procedures. This will also increase public confidence in the process.
- Electoral Environment
  - To improve the overall electoral environment and enhance citizen confidence in political processes and institutions, the government should lift the prohibition on peaceful demonstrations. The right to peaceful assembly should be guaranteed through legal safeguards and reinforced by government pronouncements.
- Dialogue on Electoral Issues
  - The government should use the dialogue as an opportunity to engage a representative group of political and civic leaders in discussion on an acceptable electoral timeline and framework. All participants should recognize the negative message sent by delaying elections, unless accompanied by measurable benchmarks toward a transparent, participatory process.
  - While the non-electoral issues on the table for the dialogue are important, Mauritanian actors should consider the urgency of the electoral timeline, as dictated by the constitution, and prioritize establishing agreement on conditions for credible elections.
  - To enhance confidence in the dialogue and demonstrate international support for Mauritania's democratic development, international organizations should explore

the possibility of convening roundtables or informal public talks to discuss the current situation and share experiences and lessons learned from similar contexts in other countries. Facilitated in partnership with Mauritians, these discussions would not interfere with the official dialogue, but would instead provide majority parties and civic groups – who are currently excluded from the official process – the opportunity to convene and share experiences in a neutral setting.

- Citizen Monitoring
  - Domestic observation is an important means to engage voters in the democratic process. The government should take the legal and technical steps necessary to encourage domestic observation. Accreditation should be provided to impartial Mauritanian organizations to monitor and report freely on all aspects of the election and political processes. A network of nonpartisan domestic observers should be allowed to field as many qualified and trained observers as they deem necessary. Political parties should be encouraged to deploy well-trained agents to monitor the electoral process. These steps will increase citizen participation and public confidence.
  - The international community, including NDI, should support domestic observation efforts by providing technical support to civic partners to increase their capacity to conduct impartial and professional nationwide monitoring of the upcoming elections. Such efforts would help enhance public confidence and deter fraud through the visible and widespread presence of observers throughout Mauritania, while providing more timely and representative information about the conduct of voting and counting and the accuracy of the official results.
- International Observation
  - International observation enhances transparency and helps build confidence in the elections among the international community and Mauritanian citizens. To increase public and international confidence in the electoral processes, the Mauritanian government should accept and accredit observers from credible international organizations.
- Media
  - The HAPA should continue its efforts to promote accurate and balanced coverage of political parties, potential candidates and issues of national importance in the public media. Given journalist uncertainties about the transparency and accessibility of HAPA monitoring reports, the HAPA should take every effort to share their findings publicly.
  - Journalists from both state-owned and private media should adopt ethical standards, such as a code of good conduct, to ensure accurate and balanced news coverage during the upcoming campaign period.
  - The professional development of Mauritanian journalists should be supported with training and technical assistance, including workshops on international best practices for covering electoral campaigns and political events.
- Role of Women

- The long-term effects of the electoral structure on women’s participation should be closely monitored and evaluated to determine the best means to increase women’s political empowerment and representation in parliament, local councils and political party leadership.
  - Mauritanian women should be supported in their efforts to compete as candidates and campaigners and to participate in all aspects of the electoral and political process. NDI, UNDP, GIZ, and Spanish Cooperation should continue to provide training and technical assistance to Mauritanian women during and beyond the electoral period.
  - All political parties should consider taking immediate steps to identify and register female supporters around the country; recruit and nominate female candidates; place more women in positions of responsibility within the party; and develop policy positions that appeal to female voters.
- Political Party Support
    - NDI—or other organizations committed to political development in Mauritania—should help political parties recruit, train and deploy pollwatchers in advance of elections. More visible and qualified pollwatchers would continue enhancing public confidence in future elections and improve the electoral organization of political parties on polling days.
    - Majority and opposition parties should supplement their focus on negotiating political outcomes by strengthening their contact with and appeal to voters, as well as their grassroots organizations. NDI would be in a position to assist political parties undertaking these efforts.
- Public Participation
    - The Mauritanian government should work with political parties and civil society organizations to ensure that as many Mauritians as possible are included in political and electoral processes in the country. In view of the short time frame prior to the legislative and municipal elections, broadening the base for participation in electoral and other political processes remains essential.
    - In order to enhance confidence in the voter registry, the MOI should open its newly constructed data center and provide political parties with computerized copies of voter lists. The lists should also be made available for public review and verification by interested parties and potential voters.
- Voter Education
    - The government, in collaboration with political parties, civil society organizations and opinion leaders, should conduct extensive civic education on the importance and need to exercise one’s right to vote and the procedures for registering and casting one’s vote.
- Post-Electoral Support
    - Given the current political dynamic and the further undermining of the parliament posed by a legislative vacuum, it will be important for Mauritanian authorities to take all reasonable steps to strengthen the elected parliament in order to build confidence in political institutions and the democratic process. It will be equally

important for the newly elected Mauritanian members of parliament to actively exercise the responsibilities allocated to them by the constitution.