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**THOUGH TRANSPARENT, MOROCCO'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
SHOW CITIZEN INTEREST IN FURTHER AND DEEPER REFORM**

RABAT, MOROCCO – Morocco's Nov. 25 parliamentary elections – the first since popular protests earlier this year prompted a reform process and revisions to the country's constitution – were conducted transparently, according to an international observation mission organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

In its statement, however, the mission noted that the lack of voter enthusiasm, calls for an election day boycott, and the significant number of invalid and spoiled ballots collectively "signal citizen interest in further and deeper reform."

"From a technical point of view, it was a fair election, but democracy is about substance as much as form," said Bob Rae, leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, former premier of Ontario, and co-leader of the delegation. "Seeing the number of people who actively spoiled their ballots as well as those who did not participate, it is clear that the path to real change will take more effort and time."

The NDI delegation is composed of 41 accredited observers from 21 countries who deployed to over 200 polling stations throughout Morocco on election day. Among them were 10 long-term observers who have been in the country since late October and who will remain through early December to observe post-election developments. The purpose of the delegation is to provide an impartial assessment of the electoral process and to demonstrate the interest of the international community in the continued strengthening of democratic governance in Morocco. The mission builds on NDI's 25 years of experience observing more than 200 elections around the world, including delegations in Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, Yemen, and Morocco in 2007.

The delegation was led by Rae; Kastriot Islami, former chairman of the Albanian parliament and former minister of foreign affairs; Sally Shelton-Colby, former deputy secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; Abdullah Al Derazi, secretary general of the Bahrain Human Rights Society; and Shari Bryan, NDI vice president.

NDI observers found that electoral authorities administered a technically sound voting process that – while not without flaws – allowed voters to cast their ballots without fear of tampering or procedural violations on election day. “The professionalism and neutrality which the polling officials displayed are a good step forward for the evolution of Morocco’s democracy,” said Shelton-Colby.

Inspired by the Arab Spring, earlier this year Moroccans demonstrated an unprecedented level of political engagement in calling for systemic political reform. The evident lack of public enthusiasm during the campaign and on election day contrasted with this earlier energy. Yet on election day, the statement notes, “many citizens showed that they have not yet given up on the electoral process as a means of forging change.”

To capitalize on the opportunity that still remains, “Morocco’s new government will need to carry progress in the right direction,” said Islami.

The delegation recognized revisions to Morocco’s constitution that promote gender parity in decision-making bodies, which sets a strong example for the region. While the delegation was pleased to see a substantial turnout among women voters, in order to play a meaningful role in future electoral and political processes women must also be included in the electoral administration, in the leadership of political parties, and other key posts. Al Derazi noted that Moroccan women “cast their votes with spirit” and that “they want to contribute to the development of their country’s democratic process.”

“This is an encouraging sign and we hope that women in other Arab countries will follow suit,” he said.

In light of its observations, the NDI delegation recommended the following steps to enhance future electoral processes and Morocco’s democratic process as a whole:

- The organization of an open and participatory public dialogue on political reform that more fully engages Morocco’s diverse and vibrant citizenry;
- Review of election procedures, including ballot design, and the use of more robust voter education programs to reduce voter confusion and improve the ability to make accurate and informed choices at the ballot box; and
- Further measures to promote gender parity as enshrined in Morocco’s constitution.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan nongovernmental 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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