



# NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER DELEGATION

### TO THE ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN

October 26, 1990

This is the preliminary statement of a 40-member international delegation that observed Pakistan's national elections on October 24, 1990. The delegation, organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), includes parliamentarians, political party leaders, election experts, and regional specialists from 17 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

Given the significance of these elections for the democratic future of Pakistan, it is not surprising that the elections have attracted international attention. This delegation was officially welcomed by leaders of the caretaker government as well as leaders of major political parties.

The purposes of this delegation were to demonstrate the international community's support for free and fair elections and for the democratization process in Pakistan. The delegation's mandate included the examination of three aspects of the election process: the campaign, the balloting and the tabulation of results. Our statement presents a preliminary assessment of these matters. A more detailed report, which will include a review of election complaints and how they were handled by the Election Commission and the courts, will be issued at a later date.

The delegation arrived in Pakistan on Saturday, October 21. During its stay, the delegates met with government and election officials, leaders of the major political parties, journalists and others involved in the electoral process in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad, Multan, Sukkur and Nawabshah. On election day, members of the delegation visited polling stations in approximately 30 constituencies and observed both the balloting and counting processes. The delegation also carefully examined several critical aspects of the electoral environment, including the media, the accountability tribunals and the handling of election-related complaints by the election commission.

The elections, as we observed them at the local level, were generally open, orderly and well-administered. The procedures used for the balloting process were in accordance with the applicable election law. In addition, the electoral system affords opportunities for the candidates and parties to check for abuse.

The election personnel involved in administering the process were usually well-versed in the system. They appeared to be impartial and effective. Generally, the police present at polling stations maintained law and order and provided a calming influence. At most polling sites, at least two party representatives were present. The delegation was impressed by the cooperation between the polling agents representing opposing parties.

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The delegation reviewed the processing by the election commission of several complaints. Generally, the election commission communicated with federal and provincial officials to obtain information regarding the exact nature of the allegations. In some cases, the election commission's exclusive reliance on such information made it difficult for the commission to fully ascertain the credibility of the allegations presented.

Before the election, the contesting political parties and alliances had an opportunity to communicate with prospective voters through large rallies, processions, posters, billboards and other campaign activities.

Despite these positive conditions, the election process was not without problems. The delegation members recognize that the election campaign was conducted in a highly polarized political environment, due in part to the August 6 dissolution of the government and the establishment of accountability tribunals. While rendering a judgment on these actions is beyond the mandate of this delegation, the delegation believes that the on-going tribunal process during the campaign and the selective filing of references before these special courts complicated the pre-election atmosphere. In the same vein, the caretaker government's use of the perquisites of incumbency was controversial and seems to have given an advantage to one of the contesting parties.

On election day, in certain constituencies throughout the country, and particularly in Sind, delegation members heard credible reports of several specific and serious problems. Examples of these problems are:

- the killing of candidates, party workers and other civilians;
- attacks by armed men on polling officials, polling agents and voters;
- and
- the kidnapping and arrest of party workers.

Cultural, social and religious realities make it difficult for a number of women to effectively participate in the electoral process. The large number of women that turned out to vote shows their desire to participate in the process. The administrative procedures as applied in polling stations for women, however, made it difficult for polling agents to verify the eligibility of women to vote. These problems allow the opportunity for abuse and manipulation in certain areas.

The independent, English-language print media actively covered the election campaign in Pakistan and played a positive and constructive role in the election process. Given the low literacy rate, however, it is unclear how significant an impact print media have in influencing political opinion.

The delegation heard several complaints about bias in the electronic media. The delegation concludes that Pakistan Television's news coverage of the campaign was not balanced. The coverage of Pakistan Radio was somewhat more balanced, especially on election day. The delegation notes that this is the first time that PTV has covered a general election, and hopes that there will be better coverage in the future.

Yesterday, the delegation heard allegations about tampering with the vote count by switching ballot boxes and by expelling polling agents. Our delegation saw no evidence on election night to support these allegations. It is our opinion that the safeguards in the system would make tampering on a scale sufficient to affect the overall nationwide results difficult, but not impossible.

Delegation members did receive some information that an election "cell" in a provincial chief minister's secretariat had requested progressive reports of election results in apparent violation of published election rules.

The delegation does not believe that the above-mentioned problems significantly altered the outcome of the elections.

As of today, the delegation has received no evidence that would allow us to substantiate allegations concerning irregular vote totals. Given that this is a preliminary assessment, however, the delegation will closely monitor the situation, including the use of statistical analysis, to examine further this matter. The statistical analysis, relying on data obtained from the election commission and the political parties, will permit a comparison of the results of this election with the results in the two previous elections. In addition, we urge the election commission and other authorities to act on all allegations tendered to them.

As a final comment, we hope that the level of cooperation between local party agents that we witnessed on election day leads to the peaceful evolution of democracy in Pakistan. The development of democracy in Pakistan could only benefit from a spirit of tolerance, dialogue and cooperation among the political parties. The delegation hopes that the decision of the major political parties to participate in the October 27 Provincial Assembly elections is indicative of this spirit.