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**NDI WORKS TO BOOST WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN JULY ELECTIONS
IN SIERRA LEONE**

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – To enhance women's full participation in Sierra Leonean politics, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is working with women candidates from throughout the country who are running for local council seats in elections on July 5.

Despite concrete steps to advance peace and democratic development in Sierra Leone, women, who constitute 49 percent of registered voters, are underrepresented and continue to face significant challenges to full participation in politics. Of the current 473 local councilors, only 60 (13 percent) are women.

Honorine Muyoyeta, NDI Country Director, said "The July 5 local elections provide an opportunity to increase the number, effectiveness, and visibility of women as voters and candidates. More than twice as many women candidates, 226, are running for local councilor and mayor compared to 107 in the previous local elections in 2004. They are seeking a level playing field on which to compete with their male counterparts."

NDI in collaboration with international and local partner organizations is currently training women candidates in each of Sierra Leone's 14 districts. The Institute is training women from all political parties, as well as independent candidates, on campaign planning and fundraising, public speaking, and outreach to voters and constituents. NDI has invited expert trainers to work directly with women aspirants, including Hon. Miria Matembe, former member of parliament of Uganda, Hon. Elizabeth Amoah-Tetteh, former member of parliament of Ghana, and Hon. Saudatu Sani, member of the House of Representatives in Nigeria, in addition to NDI and partner organization trainers. To date, NDI has trained more than 169 women candidates.

NDI is also conducting town hall meetings in each district, where candidates can practice skills gained in the trainings and communicate directly with citizens. Representatives of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Registration Commission

(PPRC), and the Decentralisation Secretariat (DECSEC) also attend the meetings to inform citizens of the details of the electoral process, the Political Parties Code of Conduct, and the role of local government in national development. The candidate trainings and town hall meetings will end with a public march in Freetown and all districts of the country on June 7, two days before the launch of the official campaign period.

In addition, NDI is working with civil society partners to conduct voter education campaigns that target women and remind citizens of the importance of women's participation in the elections as voters. The 50/50 Group, Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), and the Center for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) are among the Institute's voter education partners. NDI's media partner, Talking Drum Studios and Search for Common Ground, is profiling women candidates in national newspapers and developing a video of women role models.

In addition to its work to boost women's participation, NDI is helping political parties and a coalition of civic groups, the National Election Watch (NEW) to monitor the polls on election day. The Institute is also conducting a program to strengthen the capacity of the Parliament of Sierra Leone by assisting Members of Parliament (MPs) and staff to have a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of MPs.

During elections in August and September of last year, NDI worked with civil society, political parties, and other stakeholders to enhance the prospects for a transparent, peaceful, and free electoral process. NDI has also partnered with disabled people's organizations to increase the participation of disabled persons in electoral and political processes. NDI's current programs in Sierra Leone are funded by USAID and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

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

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