



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NDI SUPPORTS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS;
CALLS FOR AN END TO THE ALLEGED INTIMIDATION OF WOMEN
CANDIDATES IN ADVANCE OF JULY LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and its partners are greatly concerned by reports of harassment and intimidation of female candidates for local council seats, including threats of death and personal assault. Independent female candidates, particularly those who contested for but were not given political party symbols, are allegedly experiencing particularly high levels of intimidation.

Although a final list of candidates who have withdrawn has not yet been released, it has been reported that to date seven female candidates have withdrawn as a result of intimidation. NDI and its partners call for an end to all intimidation and appeal to all Sierra Leonean parties to respect the democratic process. Following Sierra Leone's successful presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007, we urge all citizens of Sierra Leone to participate peacefully in the local government electoral process and demonstrate to the world that Sierra Leoneans are committed to the path of peace and democracy.

To enhance women's full participation in Sierra Leonean politics, NDI, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), worked with women candidates across the country who are running for local council seats in elections on July 5.

NDI's experience around the world has shown that working to build the awareness and capacity of women candidates and women voters around local elections can help ensure that local government is more accountable to communities.

Honorable Miria Matembe, former Member of Parliament of Uganda and NDI consultant said: "When women are empowered as local leaders, communities flourish. Women leaders across Africa have brought development in education, infrastructure, and health to the local level."

In advance of Sierra Leone's July 5 local government elections, NDI in collaboration with international and local partner organizations, provided training to 215 of the 230 women candidates from all political parties, as well as independent candidates, on campaign planning and fundraising, public speaking, and outreach to voters and constituents. In addition to NDI and partner organization trainers, the Institute invited expert trainers to work directly with women aspirants, including Hon. Miria Matembe, Hon. Hanna Tetteh, former Member of Parliament of Ghana, and Hon. Saudatu Sani, member of the House of Representatives in Nigeria, and Hon. Grace Mwewa, Member of Parliament of Kenya.

In addition to candidate trainings, NDI conducted town hall meetings in each of Sierra Leone's 14 districts, where communities were able to debate issues of importance at the local level and discuss the merits of women's participation in politics. 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. Just before the launch of the campaign period, the Institute and its partners held a public march in Freetown and all districts of the country to gather support for women's participation in politics. As follow-up to this process, NDI conducted town hall meetings in ten districts during the campaign period to enable citizens to learn about the stances of female candidates on issues of importance to communities.

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 Centre 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. NDI is also partnering with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) to conduct four regional debates for candidates for mayoral and chairperson seats.

In addition to its work to support 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 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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