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**NDI PULLS OUT OF ELECTION DRAFTING GROUP,
CALLS FOR MORE INCLUSIVE AND TRANSPARENT ELECTION REFORM**

KYIV, Ukraine - Citing the need for public confidence in Ukraine's election reform efforts, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) today notified Justice Minister Olexander Lavrynovych that it is suspending its participation in the election law working group that he chairs.

"NDI has decided it must suspend its participation in the group unless steps are taken to make the entire election law drafting process more inclusive and transparent," Laura Jewett, NDI's Eurasia regional director, said in a letter to Lavrynovych. "Unless they are addressed, the election legislation that results will lack the confidence of the public. This in turn, will set back, not advance, the goal of democratic elections."

Jewett cited concerns about the closed working group process in which major opposition parties and nonpartisan civic groups have not been allowed to participate fully, noting that the group's deliberations and drafting have taken place behind closed doors. The makeup of the group "remains disproportionately government or pro-government," she said.

The letter outlined a number of steps to improve the working group process, including sharing information publicly and soliciting input from interested parties.

Jewett stressed that NDI is only suspending its participation and would be pleased to re-join any election drafting effort under improved conditions.

NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan nongovernmental organization that works to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. The Institute has had an office in Ukraine since 1992 and has participated in election law reform in more than 30 countries around the world.

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