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**NDI / CARTER CENTER PRE-ELECTION DELEGATION TO BANGLADESH FACILITATES  
GROUNDBREAKING MEETING BETWEEN POLITICAL LEADERS**

*Main political parties reach points of agreement that could contribute to reducing political violence  
and enhancing democratic elections*

**Dhaka, Bangladesh** -- A National Democratic Institute (NDI)/Carter Center delegation to Bangladesh led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter resulted in the first meeting since last November between political rivals Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League, and Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party. The leaders of the two main political parties in Bangladesh made commitments to the delegation which can ensure a more democratic and peaceful parliamentary election, expected by October this year, as well as a more stable political environment following the polls.

The delegation emphasized Bangladesh's steady progress toward institutionalizing democracy and noted the serious challenges that remain. In a statement, presented on August 4 by President Carter and Cambodian Member of Parliament Tioulong Saumura, the delegation noted, "The largest single obstacle to ensuring a democratic environment is the hostility between the two major parties that breeds politically motivated disharmony and violence." The statement continued, "Our interactions with the leaders of these two parties and the points of agreement that we could identify between them, give us reason to hope that the political will can be found to establish a more constructive political process in these elections."

The five points on which Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, who have both served as prime minister, agreed with the delegation included:

- Renouncement of violence, the collection of weapons and their parties' compliance with the Election Commission's Code of Conduct for Political Parties;
- Support for domestic election monitoring for the upcoming elections;
- Commitments not to boycott the next parliament, and to ensure a meaningful role for the opposition, including a nonpartisan Speaker of Parliament;
- Increasing the number of elected women members in parliament;
- Renouncement of the use of *hartals* (general strikes).

The six-member NDI/Carter Center delegation also made several additional recommendations for improving the electoral process, such as encouraging an issues-oriented campaign, supporting an election reform package, and creating a level playing field for all participants in the election.

*NDI and The Carter Center are independent, nongovernmental organizations that have conducted more than 100 impartial pre-election, election-day and post-election observation delegations around the globe. The delegation was invited by the government of Bangladesh and by political and civic leaders. The delegation conducted its activities according to international standards for nonpartisan international election observation and Bangladeshi law. NDI and The Carter Center are planning to organize an international observer delegation to the elections and will continuously monitor the electoral process through the post-election period.*

*The full text of the delegation's statement is available on the NDI web site at [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org) and the Carter Center site at [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)*

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