



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
30 September, 2005

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Participation is High But Some Issues Continue to be a Problem, Reports NDI Delegation in 3rd Round of Local Government Election

An international election monitoring delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute has compiled preliminary observations of the September 29, 2005 local government election in the West Bank. Delegates from Canada, Croatia, France, Italy, Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States were led by Mr. Kevin Deveaux, a Member of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly in Canada.

With few exceptions, Election Day was orderly and generally peaceful. The HCLE made a number of improvements, which resulted in a more efficient system of processing and facilitating voting.

There was better coordination between election officials and security forces in this round of voting. Despite some problems with crowd control, observers generally found security officials well-briefed and trained in their Election Day duties.

Voter turnout was comparatively high, and voting was generally smooth. The Higher Commission for Local Elections (HCLE) staff was consistently professional and well-trained in their duties. The election was contested vigorously and administered fairly.

Despite a higher voter turnout and improved coordination, the delegation observed that there were some problematic areas, with some of the same problems of previous rounds being repeated, the most significant being abuse of the provisions for assisting illiterate voters by party agents and election officials.

The NDI observers reported that the HCLE continues to give mixed directives about how to deal with illiterate voters. Polling staff received one set of instructions prior to Election Day, but on the morning of Election Day, the HCLE changed its policy and

issued another directive to the District and Polling Commissions. As a result NDI observers reported that some voters were coached by supporters of specific lists.

While campaign activities were conducted in most areas without significant impediments, recent arrests by the Israeli military of candidates, campaign managers and workers, and members of electoral administrations influenced campaigning.

Campaigns had significantly more of a factional character than campaigns in previous rounds. Several campaign forums were organized by local non-government organizations and community groups. However, NDI observers reported aggressive campaigning in and around polling centers by candidates and factions, despite regulations prohibiting such activities 24 hours before an election.

The delegation made a series of observations and recommendations, which will be released in the Institute's final report on the 3rd round, in order to improve the administration of the remaining rounds of election.

Backgrounder

The NDI delegation to the 3rd round of the local government election is a continuation of the NDI Palestinian elections monitoring missions that commenced with the voter registration process in September 2004, continued with the 1st round in December 2004 and January 2005 local election, the January 2005 Presidential election, and most recently with the May 2005 2nd round of local elections.

The Institute also plans to monitor the planned Palestinian Legislative Council election currently slated for January 2006, as well as the final rounds of local elections. These election monitoring missions are supported by funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

NDI is a non-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Through a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders, advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

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