

**SEMINAR REPORT**

**THE ROLE OF THE LEGISLATURE IN  
CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY**

*October 7-9, 1997  
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire*

**The Role of the Legislature in  
Consolidating Democracy**

**A National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Seminar**

**National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire  
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**

**October 7 - 9, 1997**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report covers the legislative training program conducted by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Côte d'Ivoire in October 1997. West Africa Program Officer Linda Maguire wrote the bulk of the report as well as the analysis of the seminar evaluation questionnaires that is found in Appendix C. The report was edited by Regional Director for West Africa Christopher Fomunyoh, Director of Governance Programs Susan Benda, and Senior Program Officer for West Africa Tim McCoy.

NDI originally planned to conduct this legislative training seminar immediately following the legislative elections of November 1995. However, the delay in completing those elections until December 1996, and the ensuing difficulty in coordinating a date for the event, necessitated delaying the training until the fall of 1997. This proved to be good timing, however, as it coincided with the beginning of the National Assembly's second ordinary session during which many contentious issues related to constitutional and electoral reform were expected to be addressed. NDI would like to extend its thanks to the leadership of the National Assembly and to the presidents of the three parliamentary groups – PDCI, FPI and RDR – for their patience in planning this event and for their constructive suggestions on the program's content. NDI also thanks the Ivorian deputies who attended the seminar and participated actively in the discussions.

Special thanks also go to the international experts, some of whom had committed to the program as early as June 1995. These six individuals gave freely of their time and energy during the training session. The NDI staff members who worked on this program in Washington and in Abidjan -- NDI Program Assistant Susan Kupperstein, Development Assistant Alison Majors, and Logistics Coordinators Ken Morley and Nhien Le -- are recognized for their invaluable assistance.

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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

From October 7 to 9, 1997, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) organized a seminar at the National Assembly in Abidjan on the Role of the Legislature in Consolidating Democracy. The program was designed to assist Ivorian members of parliament (MPs) -- approximately 65 percent of whom are first time members -- become more familiar with their roles as legislators in the National Assembly. Topics of discussion included the role and responsibilities of members of parliament; relations between governing and opposition parties in parliament; outreach, transparency and ethics of the legislature; and the central role of committees.

One hundred and ten of the 175 members of the Ivorian Parliament attended the three-day seminar. NDI invited an international delegation of former and current legislators from both established and emerging democracies to present the topics and to facilitate discussion during plenary and question and answer sessions. The international delegation of experts comprised six members: Peter Barca, former member of the U.S. Congress from Wisconsin (Democratic Party) and current regional director for the U.S. Small Business Administration; Lise Bourgault, former member of the Canadian Parliament (Progressive-Conservative Party); Mata Sy Diallo, vice president of the National Assembly of Senegal (Socialist Party); Colin Eglin, member of the National Assembly of South Africa (Democratic Party); Maria Leissner, former member of the Swedish Parliament (Liberal Party); and Fernando Marques da Costa, former member of the Portuguese Parliament (Socialist Party) and current political advisor to the president of Portugal. Dennis Delaney, a former U.S. state senator from Vermont (Republican Party) and current NDI/Ghana legislative advisor, also attended the seminar.

NDI had anticipated organizing this seminar immediately following the November 1995 legislative elections. However, due to timing concerns and the delayed legislative by-elections, the seminar was finally scheduled for October 1997. Prior to organizing the seminar, NDI conducted an assessment mission designed to gather information on the structure, capabilities and needs of the Ivorian National Assembly. This assessment, which took place in April 1997, resulted in a report detailing areas in which NDI could offer assistance in strengthening the legislature as an institution. The seminar agenda was based in part upon the findings of the assessment mission, and in response to requests made by Ivorian members of parliament. In designing the seminar agenda, NDI consulted regularly with the leadership of the National Assembly, including the president of the Assembly and the presidents of the three parliamentary groups. This enhanced communication resulted in an agenda that took into consideration the interests and needs of the National Assembly; it also increased the level of confidence between NDI and the leadership of the Assembly. Thus far, NDI and other Côte d'Ivoire observers have noted significant results from the seminar in the form of unprecedented parliamentary initiatives during the second legislative session of 1997.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

### **A. The Post-Houphouët Period**

Since achieving independence in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire was ruled by Félix Houphouët-Boigny as a one-party state until 1990 when multipartism was formally legalized. Houphouët-Boigny's death in December 1993 was followed by a peaceful transfer of power to then-President of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié, according to Article 11 of the Ivorian Constitution which provides for the order of presidential succession. Political developments during late 1994 and early 1995 centered on preparations for presidential and legislative elections scheduled for late 1995. The adoption in December 1994 of a new electoral code, some provisions of which proved controversial, galvanized the major opposition parties. The *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) and the *Rassemblement Des Républicains* (RDR), a breakaway party from the ruling party, the *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), joined forces with a grouping of six other opposition parties to call for the revision of the electoral code and the establishment of an independent election commission. These and other complaints regarding the organization of the elections eventually led to an opposition boycott of the October 22, 1995 presidential election. After political tensions sparked widespread protests and some violence, the government set up a commission to verify the voter lists and opposition parties agreed to participate in the November 26 legislative elections.

### **B. Legislative Elections of November 26, 1995 and December 29, 1996**

With the full participation of opposition parties, the legislative elections of November 1995 and December 1996 were two of the most contested multiparty elections ever organized in Côte d'Ivoire. International observers, including a joint delegation sponsored by NDI and the African-American Institute (AAI), monitored the November 26 legislative elections and concluded that despite minor insufficiencies and disputes in some locations, those elections took place in an orderly and calm fashion. In three areas in the western part of the country, residual tensions from the presidential election prevented elections from being organized as planned. In three other cases, the elections were voided by the Constitutional Court because of irregularities and petitions filed by different parties contesting the results.

By-elections to choose deputies to the six remaining seats in the National Assembly took place on December 29, 1996. The constituencies in which elections were held -- Gagnoa, Guibéroua, Ouragahio, Adzopé, Séguéla and Korhogo -- were in the north and the west of the country, both areas which have traditionally been opposition strongholds. Elections in Gagnoa, Guibéroua and Ouragahio resulted in the election of three FPI deputies, including Laurent Gbagbo, the president of the party. The elections in Adzopé, Séguéla and Korhogo were won by the PDCI.

### **C. The Current National Assembly**

The current composition of the National Assembly is as follows: PDCI -- 149 deputies; FPI -- 13; and RDR -- 13. Approximately 65 percent of the deputies elected are newcomers who are

relatively unfamiliar with the workings of the legislative branch of government and their roles and responsibilities as elected representatives.

The administrative framework within the legislative branch in Côte d'Ivoire is highly centralized under a leadership that is heavily weighted in favor of the ruling party. The leadership comprises a president, 12 vice presidents, 24 secretaries, and two *questeurs*.<sup>1</sup> Of these 39 people, two vice presidents and three secretaries belong to opposition parties.

The Ivorian Assembly is divided into four committees comprising: general institutional affairs (with jurisdiction over the ministers of interior, information, national defense and justice); economic and financial affairs (public works, transportation, agriculture, fish and forests); social and cultural affairs (education, youth, sports, public health and population); and external relations (international relations, foreign affairs and international conferences). Although the committees represent the doorway through which bills reach the parliament, the committees have not played a significant role in the formation of policy, nor have they accumulated expertise on policy issues. As laid out in the parliament's rules of procedure, bills originate from the executive branch and are introduced by a member of parliament, then referred to the appropriate committee for study and review. Amendments are submitted for debate in committees before re-submission to the full Assembly for a vote in plenary session. In practice, however, the overwhelming majority held by the PDCI in the Assembly has meant that amendments proposed during committee meetings by opposition deputies have seldom, if ever, been submitted for debate in plenary session. No opposition-sponsored amendment or bill has ever been adopted by the Assembly, with the exception of one that proposed raising salaries for deputies.

#### **D. Proposed Reforms**

On August 8, 1997, President Bédié announced a series of proposed reforms that sought to render the political and electoral processes in Côte d'Ivoire more open and democratic. Included in Bédié's proposal were a decentralization plan to cede more authority to local administrators; the creation of a second legislative chamber -- the Senate -- that would include regional representatives; the creation of an official status for opposition party leaders; provisions for limited state funding of political parties; a change in the line of succession to the president; a prolongation of the presidential mandate from five to seven years; and the creation of a supervisory electoral commission to monitor the administration of elections. Most observers believed that some of these reform proposals would eventually be submitted to parliament for debate and approval.

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<sup>1</sup> A *questeur* is an administrative or financial officer in the French parliamentary system.



### **III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

In planning and implementing the legislative training seminar, NDI expected that the following broad objectives would be accomplished:

- ! Participating deputies, from the opposition and ruling parties, would acquire a greater understanding of their roles as elected representatives, particularly in a political system in which the legislature has traditionally played a diminished role *vis-à-vis* a strong executive branch; and
- ! Deputies would acquire new skills that they could use to make the legislature more effective by focusing on citizen input and interest in parliament, and on legislative oversight, transparency and ethical standards within the institution.

### **IV. SEMINAR ACTIVITIES**

NDI's seminar provided deputies in the National Assembly with an opportunity to address the challenges they face in trying to make their legislature more effective and responsive to the needs of Ivorian citizens. The agenda included a briefing day for the international experts, and three days of deliberations and a program evaluation session. NDI selected the topics for discussions in plenary session based on its April 1997 assessment of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire, and on consultations with the leaders of the three parliamentary groups. Areas of interest identified by the mission and Ivorian legislators included: the role and responsibilities of members of parliament; parliament's relationship with the executive branch; relations between governing and opposition parties in parliament; outreach, transparency and ethics of the legislature; and the central role of committees in the legislative process.

Before the seminar, NDI organized a full day of briefings in Abidjan for the international experts. These briefings provided the experts with the political context of Côte d'Ivoire and a review of the seminar agenda. NDI also organized informal discussions between the international experts and Ivorian political and civic leaders to share experiences and thoughts on the democratization process in Côte d'Ivoire. Among the civic and political leaders invited to the briefing were: Honoré Guié, president of the National Elections Observatory (ONE) domestic observer coalition; Mathieu Bilé, secretary-general of the Ivorian League for Human Rights; Dr. Lenissongui Coulibaly, chief of staff for the minister of state for national integration and member of the ruling party leadership; Amoakon Edjampan Thiémélé, president of the PDCI parliamentary caucus; Emile Boga Doudou, president of the FPI parliamentary caucus; and Nibi Zana Adama Coulibaly, president of the RDR parliamentary caucus.

#### **A. Seminar Plenary Sessions**

The formal opening ceremony was chaired by the vice president of the National Assembly and attended by the U.S. ambassador and other invitees. Members of the news media were invited to

attend the opening ceremony and the closing ceremony held after the last session on the third day of the seminar. However, NDI and the National Assembly decided not to invite the press to attend the entirety of the seminar so as to allow the deputies to focus on frank and open discussions. The seminar was divided into five plenary sessions, each followed by an in-depth question and answer period designed to give the participants an opportunity to explore the plenary topic in an interactive setting.

Organizing the seminar around plenary sessions that kept the deputies together as a large group, rather than dividing them into smaller discussion clusters, was important because it gave the deputies the opportunity to address together, in a frank and open manner, the questions or issues they had regarding the presentations of the experts. It also allowed all of the international experts to explain their presentations and experiences in greater detail.

!      Plenary I:      *The Role and Responsibilities of Members of Parliament*  
Presenters:      *Fernando Marques da Costa / Lise Bourgault / Peter Barca*  
Moderator:      *Maria Leissner*

The opening plenary session was designed to assist deputies to better understand their roles within the institution. Marques da Costa presented an overview of the role of legislators in transitional democracies, focusing on lawmaking, representation and oversight. Bourgault provided details on the oversight function and how the Canadian parliament serves as a forum for policy debate, while Barca spoke on the importance of constituency relations in the American model.

The Ivorian deputies inquired about how the legislatures of the respective experts had carved out relevant roles for themselves *vis-à-vis* the executive branch. In response, the experts discussed oversight mechanisms such as: budget review, committee hearings, bill markups and questioning of ministers in parliament. Marques da Costa underscored that, even in systems with a strong executive and weak legislature, oversight is possible. He elaborated by noting that deputies could assert a degree of independence by calling members of the executive branch to testify before legislative committees.

The Ivorian deputies were interested in learning how they could fulfill their roles and responsibilities with limited resources and staff support. Bourgault explained that, as a member of the Canadian parliament, she had four staff members at her disposal. Leissner, on the other hand, told the deputies that four Swedish deputies shared one staff member. Diallo noted that, in Senegal, it is not unusual for her to have no staff support at all, even as a Vice President of the Assembly. Despite the differences in their experiences, the three internationals agreed that, with some creative staffing and resource allocation, deputies could still conduct their activities efficiently.

! Plenary II: *Parliament's Relationship with the Executive Branch*  
Presenters: *Colin Eglin / Fernando Marques da Costa*  
Moderator: *Mata Sy Diallo*

During this plenary session, Eglin and Marques da Costa discussed the interaction between parliament and the executive branch on national policy initiatives. Eglin spoke on the separation of powers at the national level in South Africa; both Eglin and Marques da Costa made presentations on the legal mechanisms that facilitate productive and efficient communication links between the legislature and the executive branch in their respective countries; and Marques da Costa discussed how deputies use these mechanisms to initiate or influence the design and implementation of government policy.

Ivorian deputies -- especially those from opposition parties -- wanted to know how they could overcome the weak role attributed to the legislature by a constitution that provides for a strong executive. For example, one of the opposition deputies pointed to Article 51 of the Ivorian Constitution that gives the government the power to overrule the legislature if the National Assembly votes against the government's budget. On the other hand, some ruling party deputies wanted to know how they could address potential conflicts between their interests as legislators and their loyalty to the party hierarchy and the executive branch.

Eglin listed six key elements that strengthen every functioning democracy, even in cases where the ruling party dominates both the executive and the legislature. These elements include: supremacy of the constitution over individual institutions; limitation of power for officials; decentralization of power; separation of powers between the branches of government; transparency and accountability of the government; and genuine representation of the people. He explained further that legislatures function as "watchdogs" and that, even in cases where they lack the legal power to prevent certain executive measures from taking effect, they can still be the source of initiatives, raise issues for debate and call the government to account for its policies. Eglin also spoke of his personal experience as a member of the opposition in South Africa (both during and after the apartheid regime), and underscored his belief that minority parties play a vitally important role in the process of democratic governance. For Eglin, the opposition's role is to make the majority party and the executive branch aware of the minority views in a critical but constructive way. As the South African said, ". . . it is the minority's role not only to oppose, but to offer positive counter proposals and initiatives of its own."

Bourgault also acknowledged that elected officials may find it difficult to be critical of the government while serving as a member of the ruling party. Therefore, she reasoned, opposition party members are sometimes good conduits for such criticism. Eglin echoed her comments by saying that the South African parliament makes use of its committees -- which comprise members of parliament and civil society -- to call ministers to the parliament to explain the provisions of draft laws. Through this mechanism, committee members, even if they are from the ruling party, have an opportunity to register their disagreement with government policy at an early stage in the lawmaking process. Diallo added that in Senegal -- a country with a strong executive branch similar to the Ivorian model --

committee members from the ruling party often return bills to the executive with amendments and revisions that reflect bipartisan discussions.

! Plenary III: *Relations between Governing and Opposition Parties in Parliament*  
Presenters: *Maria Leissner / Colin Eglin / Mata Sy Diallo*  
Moderator: *Lise Bourgault*

The third plenary session examined why it is critical to involve opposition representatives in the democratic process, and how to provide the parliamentary opposition with avenues for full participation. Eglin spoke from his more than 40 years of experience in the South African opposition and how it has taught him to “fight” strategically. He told the opposition deputies that their role is to challenge policies vigorously and provide another perspective on policy issues, even if there is no foreseeable hope that their party will attain power.

Eglin then cautioned that, despite their important role, minority parties have “no special rights, only ordinary democratic rights,” and that they must realize that the population, having elected another party to govern, sent them into the legislature as a minority. He also warned that minority parties that persist in simply obstructing the process risk being marginalized by the majority party and the electorate. Eglin explained how his party, the Democratic Party, had been invited by South African President Nelson Mandela to join the government but had declined, citing its desire to remain a pure opposition force working within the system but outside of the executive branch. Eglin underscored that cooperation between majority and minority deputies can sometimes be an essential element of constructive and efficient governance.

Barca explained the need for civil discourse within the legislature, citing how members of the U.S. Congress strive to remain cordial, addressing each other as “the gentleman from Wisconsin,” and “my esteemed fellow member,” even though the debates can often become quite acrimonious. The challenge, he said, is to avoid personalizing the debate or drawing such sharp party lines that discussion and compromise become impossible.

During the question and answer session that followed, opposition party deputies openly criticized the ruling party for not giving the opposition enough of a role, while ruling party deputies said that “the opposition is overly fond of grandstanding and poisoning the waters.” As one deputy noted, “our problem is that each party thinks it is the purveyor of the truth.” Marques da Costa and Leissner acknowledged that the ruling party/opposition party divide is difficult to bridge, but that a parliamentary opposition is crucial to a healthy democracy. The Portuguese and Swedish former MPs both emphasized that a constructive opposition gives voice to societal elements that represent a perspective other than the political status quo, and needs to articulate arguments as to how and why that status quo should change.

- ! Plenary IV: *Outreach, Transparency and Ethics of the Legislature*  
Presenters: *Lise Bourgault / Colin Eglin*  
Moderator: *Dennis Delaney*

During the fourth plenary session, participants addressed the issue of the National Assembly's public image. As the NDI legislative assessment mission found, the Ivorian Assembly has in the past lacked visibility and been unable to attract the extensive interest and input of citizens. Some parliamentarians told the NDI mission that they failed to see how outreach initiatives, transparency measures and ethical standards are important for the development of the institution when other concerns, such as resource and staff needs, are far more immediate.

Eglin and Bourgault drew extensively on their experiences in South Africa and in Canada in making the case for public involvement in the legislative process. Bourgault stressed the importance of including the views of civil society in relevant legislation for two reasons that go to the heart of representation: 1) civil society often reflects the will of the electorate, and 2) civil society often possesses the issue expertise that deputies sometimes lack, but need, to draft good legislation. Even beyond lawmaking, the experts underscored the need for legislators to be easily accessed by constituents. Bourgault told the deputies how she instituted constituency outreach committees, comprising a selected group of constituents, to establish two-way communication with those she represented. This mechanism permitted her to know the issues that most concerned her constituents. Additionally, the outreach committees allowed constituents to track how their MP was representing their interests at the national level.

Eglin and Bourgault stressed the importance of transparency in all parliamentary actions. They presented different procedures available for making legislatures more open, such as public voting records, published draft legislation and open committee meetings. The two experts noted that, in both South Africa and Canada, draft laws are released to the public three weeks before being debated in parliament. As a result, the general public can become familiar with a proposed law's merits and drawbacks. Eglin also said that selected debates in the South African Parliament are televised each day. These daily snapshots of the parliament give the public a sense of what the legislature is doing and remind deputies that they are representatives of the people. As a result of this initiative, South African deputies have become more aware of their public profiles and have begun to use the media to bring their individual activities and opinions to the public's attention.

Eglin said further that ethical standards are also crucial confidence-building measures for the legislature to enact. He cited reporting obligations that the Parliament of South Africa placed upon itself, including the requirements that MPs declare their financial status every six months and that all new assets in excess of (approximately) US\$250, including speaking fees and tips, be reported.

Several recommendations for making the Assembly more transparent were put forward during the question and answer session, including designating one person from the National Assembly to serve as a press contact or even appointing one person per parliamentary group to fulfill this role. Other suggestions included televising portions of the Assembly's plenary sessions, publishing draft

laws in the print media, and inviting members of civil society to attend parliamentary sessions that are open to the public.

! Plenary V: *The Central Role of Committees*  
Presenters: *Mata Sy Diallo / Peter Barca / Maria Leissner*  
Moderator: *Fernando Marques da Costa*

The fifth plenary session focused on a review of the effectiveness and deliberative nature of legislative committees. Deputies discussed the importance of dividing responsibilities to review legislation; the importance of developing issue expertise as a legislator; the role of committees in the system of checks and balances or legislative oversight of the executive branch; and how committees can provide channels for public input and encourage increased legislative initiative.

The potential for technical and practical application of this session resonated with Ivorian MPs. Diallo described the committee system in Senegal and how it has evolved to assume more autonomy than originally envisaged. Barca explained that, even though in the U.S. House of Representatives there are 20 committees and 89 subcommittees with strong staff resources, legislative committees regardless of size or resources can develop expertise, appoint subcommittees to specialize on issues, and make fuller use of the rules of procedure to become more effective. Barca illustrated the importance of utilizing the committee system to its fullest potential by referring to a bill drafted in the U.S. Congress that dealt with the environmental cleanup of rivers. The bill reflected the recommendations of nonprofit organizations, such as the Sierra Club, as well as the recommendations of private businesses and the government. Barca noted that, because its sponsors had taken a consultative approach, the bill was more likely to be adopted. A side benefit of the process was that the committee members who worked on the bill gained considerable expertise in environmental issues.

## **B. Seminar Evaluation Plenary Session**

NDI devoted the last session of the seminar to discussing the participants' evaluation of the seminar. During the session, the presidents of the three parliamentary groups gave their impressions of the seminar and recommendations on how the National Assembly could build upon the lessons learned during the seminar. The PDCI parliamentary president emphasized the need to establish mechanisms that would allow follow-up activities on the seminar. He suggested other follow-up seminars for the deputies on more specific, technical issues, such as constituency relations, and regional seminars that would bring together legislators from throughout West Africa to share their experiences, challenges and solutions. He also requested that NDI share with the National Assembly as many documents on legislative processes and governance as possible.

The FPI parliamentary president praised NDI's international experts for being clear, concise and direct. He also thanked the Institute for having consulted the three parliamentary groups on the content of the plenaries and the selection of experts during the planning stages of the seminar. The FPI president stated that the seminar had allowed him and his fellow deputies to see not only the

flaws and insufficiencies of their institution, but also its potential. In closing, he agreed with the PDCI parliamentary president's recommendations regarding follow-on seminars.

The RDR parliamentary president also lauded the choice of international experts and said that he had benefitted from both the formal and informal interaction with them during the program. He concluded by noting that the deputies could still use more information on issues such as access to information and political party charters.

NDI distributed evaluative questionnaires to the participants during the seminar. The questionnaire covered each component of the seminar, including: the program design and implementation; plenary session topics; international experts; documentation and recommendations for future NDI activities in Côte d'Ivoire. The answers provided by the participants formed the basis of an analysis compiled by NDI (see Appendix C).

## V. CONCLUSIONS

NDI began to see some tangible results of its seminar in the weeks immediately following the event. Two “firsts” for the National Assembly -- one at the end of October and one at the end of November -- proved that the Ivorian deputies had put into practice knowledge obtained during the seminar.

In late October, the minister of finance was called before the National Assembly for a televised question and answer session to explain recent financial policy decisions taken by the government. While ministers have been called before the Assembly in the past, this episode was remarkable for its public nature and vigorous questioning. It is significant that the minister was taken to task on many issues and that the most forceful questioning came from PDCI deputies. The extensive discussions during the seminar of legislative oversight of executive branch members, and the timing of the minister’s testimony, suggest that this initiative may well have been sparked by NDI’s conference.

In late November, the National Assembly announced that an FPI-sponsored proposal on electoral reform was to be considered in full committee. This was the first time in memory that an opposition proposal had been considered in full committee. The committee dealing with general and institutional affairs proceeded with consideration of the draft proposal on November 20. Although the portions of the draft bill dealing with the institution of an independent election commission were voted down, proposed revisions to the electoral code were passed on to the president of the committee for further study.

These two modest steps represent an effort by the National Assembly to assert itself *vis-à-vis* the executive and to become a more responsive and transparent institution. This new spirit within the legislature has not gone unnoticed by the Ivorian press. An article that appeared in a December issue of the government-affiliated daily *Fraternité-Matin*, even drew a relationship between the NDI seminar and the new assertiveness exhibited by the Ivorian National Assembly. The article explained that following the seminar, the Assembly was infused with a new parliamentary spirit, and that deputies were more motivated to play their roles as questioners of the executive’s policies and representatives of the electorate’s interests (see Appendix D).



## **VI. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

Based on feedback from the seminar participants, international experts and NDI staff, the legislative seminar in Côte d'Ivoire met or exceeded the expectations of those who participated in the program. After the last day of the seminar, the NDI team was received by President Henri Konan Bédié in the presence of the leadership of the Assembly, including the presidents of the three parliamentary groups. President Bédié echoed the very favorable reports on the seminar by saying that he was impressed by the caliber of the international experts and the substance of the seminar discussions. The success of NDI's program is attributable to several factors including good timing, effective groundwork, seminar format, trainer mix, press relations and staff support.

### **A. Timing**

Organizing the seminar at the opening of the second session of the National Assembly proved to be very timely. This was a critical time for the Assembly, which remained in session following the seminar for deliberations on constitutional and electoral reforms proposed by President Bédié. The NDI seminar provided an ideal opportunity for Ivorian MPs to begin discussing the impact of these potential reforms in an open forum.

### **B. Groundwork**

The Institute worked with the leadership of the National Assembly in designing the seminar agenda. NDI sent copies of all correspondences to the president and/or secretary-general of the National Assembly and to the presidents of the three parliamentary groups, and periodically telephoned these leaders to verify that they had received the information and to elicit their feedback. The Assembly leadership and individual deputies told NDI that they were pleased to have been consulted so extensively and to have their suggestions incorporated into the final agenda. Because all three political groupings had contributed in designing the program, they had a greater sense of ownership over the seminar. As a result, attendance rates by the deputies remained high throughout the seminar. All three parliamentary group presidents attended every session of the seminar and participated actively in the discussions.

### **C. Trainers**

The international trainers invited by NDI, through their variety and richness of experiences, proved to be the most crucial element in the program's success. The six trainers represented different legislative experiences and different perspectives on executive/legislative relations. The regional breakdown among the trainers was: two North Americans, two Europeans and two Africans. There were three women and three men; three trainers were from "ruling" parties in parliament and three from "opposition" parties; three of the trainers had served in both the legislative and executive branches of government, while three had served only in the legislative branch; and three of the trainers had participated in NDI programs in the past, whereas three were newcomers to NDI. The six trainers took turns moderating or participating in the plenary sessions, thereby maximizing the amount

of time each spent interacting with participants in the different sessions. The Ivorian participants expressed their appreciation for the number of trainers and the variety of democratic experiences they represented. Some participants even suggested that future programs add trainers from Asia and the Middle East.

#### **D. Documents**

NDI distributed various documents related to legislative affairs at staggered intervals during the seminar. This approach helped ensure that the participants would not be overwhelmed with information on the first day and that they would have time to focus on each document as it was distributed. NDI also distributed to each participant a welcome packet that contained, in French, the seminar agenda, a registration sheet, the trainer biographies and information on NDI. Immediately before the plenary session devoted to discussing relations between the governing and opposition parties in the legislature, NDI distributed the NDI publication on Presiding Officers in Legislatures. On the second day, NDI staff distributed a document on the Role of Committees in Legislatures, before the plenary session on the central role of committees. Participants noted that the timing of the document distribution, and the fact that the documents were in French, helped them absorb information easily and apply it directly to the discussions that were taking place on the given topics.

#### **E. Press**

Recognizing the opportunity to draw attention to the Ivorian legislature, NDI contacted the Ivorian press -- print, television and radio -- two weeks in advance of the seminar opening to inform them of the dates and the topics of the seminar and to invite them to the opening and closing ceremonies. Once in Abidjan, NDI again contacted the press to provide NDI's in-country contact information and more background materials on the Institute's activities. When making the press calls, NDI staff highlighted that the program was being organized in coordination with the National Assembly. The Institute also kept the National Assembly leadership informed of its press outreach, thereby preventing duplication and miscommunication. One week before the seminar, the National Assembly issued a press release on the program. The Assembly's press release was cosigned by the president of the ruling party parliamentary group and the two presidents of the opposition parliamentary groups.

The result of NDI's press strategy was twofold. First, the Ivorian media was well informed on the objectives and methodology of the seminar prior to the opening and this manifested itself in the extensive media coverage of the seminar. Second, the press coverage of the NDI seminar was extensive (both in substance and quantity). All three of the major Ivorian daily newspapers -- *Fraternité Matin*, *La Voie* and *Le Jour* -- carried stories on a daily basis for up to one week after the end of the seminar. The national television and radio broadcast stories on the seminar at least twice each during the event; and two months after the seminar a major article in the government daily attributed the reinvigorated nature of parliamentary debates during the last session to lessons learned during NDI's seminar (see Appendix D).

## **VII. APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Agenda for Seminar on the Role of the Legislature in Consolidating Democracy

Appendix B: International Participant Biographies and NDI Staff

Appendix C: Participant Questionnaire Evaluation

Appendix D: Selected Press Articles