



NDI Final Report

STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTIES IN TAJIKISTAN

USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 119-A-00-05-00023-00 (05153)

Project Dates: September 1, 2005 to June 14, 2008

I. SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) conducted a program in Tajikistan under U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Cooperative Agreement No. 119-A-00-05-00023-00. Although the USAID cooperative agreement officially began on September 1, 2005, NDI still had approximately three months of funds remaining from a U.S. State Department grant. The Institute decided, in coordination with USAID and the State Department, to utilize its remaining State Department funds before beginning to expend funds under the USAID agreement. As a result, NDI began utilizing funds under this agreement on December 1, 2005. The agreement was originally scheduled to end on September 30, 2007, but NDI received a six month no-cost extension through March 31, 2008 to allow NDI to pursue registration of its office. On March 31 and April 30, 2008, NDI received additional one-month cost extensions to continue to pursue registration and to pursue office closure procedures if necessary. On May 29, 2008, NDI received a no-cost extension through June 14 to finalize its financial obligations in Tajikistan. NDI's program in Tajikistan corresponded to USAID Intermediate Results 2.1.3, "Enhanced opportunities for citizen participation in governance," and 2.1.4, "More effective, responsive and accountable public institutions."

Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon has increasingly consolidated power at the expense of his opponents, moving Tajikistan in a decidedly authoritarian direction. There is little dialogue between the government and the public regarding important policy issues. Dissenting voices are met with harassment and repression. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties and independent media outlets have faced growing pressure from authorities. President Rakhmon won another seven-year term in Tajikistan's November 2006 presidential election. Tajikistan's three main opposition parties boycotted the election due in part to perceived shortcomings in the electoral system, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that "democratic practices were not fully tested" due to a lack of genuine competition. Following President Rakhmon's re-election, his administration continued to restrict space for independent political activity and democratic reform.

Under its USAID cooperative agreement, NDI sought to address these authoritarian trends by supporting political parties and independent voices seeking to press for greater pluralism in the country's political life over the long run. Despite an impasse over registration and increasing harassment of NDI staff by the Tajik government, NDI was able to provide training and guidance to all of Tajikistan's registered political parties and leading civic groups through April 2006. After completing an internal political party assessment in October 2005, NDI conducted a series of multiparty seminars with six parties on party building and the fundamentals of voter outreach, as well as several tailored, single-party workshops on voter outreach methods and campaign organizing. The Institute also provided support to the Women's Political Discussion Club, a group of leading women political activists working to promote greater women's political participation and leadership. Following these activities, NDI had already begun to record significant progress toward the program's anticipated results, including the following:

- Several political parties had established or reorganized branch offices following NDI's trainings;
- Regional chapters of several parties had initiated recruitment drives and canvassing efforts, and two parties had begun using data collected during canvassing efforts to update their voter records;
- Three parties had initiated regular reporting and dialogue between national and regional offices; and
- The Women's Political Discussion Club received outside funding to expand their efforts to regions outside of Dushanbe.

NDI's initial program successes were soon overtaken by a series of disturbing incidents. First, on February 1, 2006, NDI's country director Gegham Sargsyan was forced to depart Tajikistan after several unsuccessful attempts to renew his personal registration documents. Then, NDI's only remaining expatriate staff member, Nurul Rakhimbekov, was arrested and jailed on April 26, 2006, and deported five days later. Following this incident, it became imperative to balance NDI's commitment to continue providing assistance with the safety and security of its staff. Thus, in close consultation with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, NDI delayed all program activities in Tajikistan until NDI could discuss its concerns with the Government of Tajikistan and receive assurances that its program staff would be safe.

In June 2007, NDI sent a new interim country director, Harry Bader, to Dushanbe. During Mr. Bader's time in Dushanbe, NDI made repeated attempts to establish open lines of communication with the Tajik government, but these attempts were not reciprocated. Instead, the government harassed NDI's expatriate and local staff members and repeatedly denied the Institute's registration attempts. Following the Tajik government's failure to approve NDI's third registration attempt of 2008, NDI felt that the Tajik government had delivered a clear message that NDI was not welcome in the country. Rather than put its staff at continued risk, NDI decided, in collaboration with USAID, the U.S. Embassy and the State Department, that it would close its office. While the Institute remains open to the possibility of returning to Tajikistan at some point, the Tajik government would need to take concrete, unambiguous measures to markedly improve NDI's security status and ability to conduct programming in the country.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Political Context

Tajikistan's existence as an independent state has been marked by civil war and increasing consolidation of power in the hands of President Emomali Rakhmon. The civil war and the 1997 peace agreement that ended it resulted in a relatively pluralist political environment in which the government felt at least partially constrained by its opposition, and political parties were diverse and relatively well-organized. Beginning in 2004, however, the presidential administration increasingly consolidated power at the expense of its opponents, moving Tajikistan in a decidedly authoritarian direction. President Rakhmon justified his actions by promoting the idea that public discourse and active citizen participation were threats to post-civil war stability. The government exerted pressure on independent and opposition voices among NGOs, political parties and independent media outlets. Opposition parties' internal capacity building efforts were slowed by a hostile political environment.

President Rakhmon's grip on power was extended with his election to a second seven-year term in Tajikistan's November 6, 2006 presidential election. Preliminary results gave Rakhmon nearly 80 percent of the vote, while his closest competitor received just over 6 percent. All four candidates running against Rakhmon were from pro-government parties. Tajikistan's three main opposition parties boycotted the election due in part to perceived shortcomings in the electoral system. In its preliminary assessment of the elections, the OSCE concluded that "democratic practices were not fully tested" due to a lack of genuine competition. The OSCE also noted that the 90 percent voter turnout reported by the Central Election Commission was "improbably high."

Following President Rakhmon's re-election, his administration showed no signs of increasing space for independent political activity and democratic reform. Instead, the president issued a series of edicts enforcing unprecedented intrusions into the private lives of citizens, controlling such personal affairs as weddings, funerals, the licensing of religious leaders pursuant to state administered competency tests, clothing styles, as well as vehicle and cell phone use. In May 2007, Tajikistan's parliament adopted a new law on public associations that tightened the government's control over the registration and operation of NGOs. In August 2007, due to pressure by the government, the country director of Internews' Tajikistan office was forced to leave the country. Internews was one of the last remaining democracy-related organizations conducting programs in Tajikistan.

During the winter of 2007-08, a record cold spell gripped Tajikistan, and the country experienced widespread power and water shortages. While millions of people struggled to survive the winter, prolonged power cuts dealt a severe blow to the economy, costing it at least \$250 million dollars, according to the Tajik National Bank. Tajikistan's unemployment rate soared, and the energy crisis was combined with sharp rises in the prices of basic foods. Despite the country's dire situation, Tajikistan's government appeared to be increasingly out of touch with the concerns of citizens. These trends fed popular disaffection with the authorities. Small signs of debate and indirect criticism of the government began to appear in independent media.

News reports indicated that many people were angry that the government was slow to react and failed to accept responsibility for the collapse of basic public services and infrastructure.

Following the 1997 peace agreement it initially appeared that Tajikistan's political parties might play a pivotal role in encouraging citizen engagement in politics to counter authoritarian trends and demand a more responsive government. However, the country's opposition parties have been victims of the administration's increasingly authoritarian tendencies. Party leaders have been under constant government pressure and direct interference. Over time, political parties have become weakened and increasingly unresponsive to citizen concerns. At the same time, Tajikistan's parties have not effectively reached out to and incorporated the concerns of citizens across the country. Parties are generally organized around a handful of personalities. They tend to be elitist, Dushanbe-based organizations. Regional chapters are sparse and isolated. Connections to voters are tenuous at best, denying citizens a critical channel for political participation.

B. NDI in Tajikistan

With support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NDI began work in Tajikistan in 2002. From 2004 to 2005, NDI received funding from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) to conduct programs with all registered political parties, representatives of the country's fledgling civil society and several broadcast media outlets. When NDI first launched its democracy assistance programs in 2002, political parties were resistant to outside support and skeptical of new ideas and approaches. Over time, NDI gained the trust of party leaders, and they actively sought out NDI's input. NDI conducted numerous single and multiparty seminars and workshops on improving internal communications, strengthening regional organizations, voter outreach, and election organizing, among other topics, in Dushanbe and around the country. To complement NDI's training and to expose political parties to international best practices, NDI supported political party leaders and activists in participating in work-study visits at the European Institute for Democracy in Warsaw, Poland on internal party strengthening and campaigning in a democracy. The Institute also collaborated with the OSCE to assist regional party leaders on their organizing skills.

III. OBJECTIVES

NDI's overall objectives for this program were to address the problems facing political parties in Tajikistan by helping them to:

- develop and strengthen their regional structures;
- create two-way channels of communication with citizens;
- articulate policy agendas that incorporate citizens' concerns; and
- elaborate long-term strategies that include election campaign plans.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

This section is divided into two sub-sections: the first covers the period from the beginning of the cooperative agreement through April 26, 2006 – the date on which NDI’s sole remaining expatriate was arrested and jailed. Until that date, NDI was able to conduct program activities, despite increasing harassment by the Tajik government. The second section covers the period of April 27, 2006 through June 14, 2008, during which NDI was not able to conduct program activities.

A. Activities through April 26, 2006

NDI launched the program by working with the six established, registered political parties – the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP); the opposition Islamic Renaissance (IRP), Social Democratic (SDP), Democratic, and Socialist Parties; and the moderately pro-government Communist Party – to conduct an internal baseline assessment during October and early November 2005. The purpose of the assessment was three-fold: to systematically review the parties’ strengths and weaknesses, to evaluate how the parties developed over the previous year, and to determine the impact and future direction of the Institute’s programs. This assessment was funded under NDI’s previous DRL grant, but has been mentioned in this final report due to its direct relevance to the USAID cooperative agreement.

To conduct the assessment, NDI organized small discussion groups with each party consisting of national and district-level leaders, as well as additional consultations with selected regional party activists. The Institute facilitated discussions on four primary topics: the development and strengthening of regional party structures, two-way channels of communication between parties and citizens, the articulation of policy agendas incorporating citizens’ concerns, and the elaboration of long-term goals, including election campaign plans. These themes corresponded to NDI’s objectives under the cooperative agreement.

Because of the sensitive nature of the findings, NDI did not distribute the baseline assessment report to all parties in its entirety. However, NDI presented relevant parts of reports and recommendations to each political party, and held follow-up discussions with party leaders. In these meetings NDI made recommendations for each party tailored to meet its specific needs. A detailed summary of NDI’s findings was provided in NDI’s first quarterly report (covering October – December 2005), and a summary is included in Annex 1.

1. Party Building, Voter Outreach and Campaign Preparation

Multiparty Seminars on Party Building and the Fundamentals of Voter Outreach

During December 2005, NDI conducted a series of three multiparty seminars on the fundamentals of party building and voter outreach. The multiparty format was chosen to reinforce the nonpartisan nature of NDI’s assistance. The overall aim of this series was to review the basic building blocks of party building with party leaders and activists that included both veteran “alumni” of past NDI programs as well as new participants. Topics covered included

internal party management and communications, financial resource management, fundraising, voter outreach techniques, and methods for incorporating public opinion.

The first seminar involved 19 party representatives from party branches in the Rasht valley. It was conducted in Dushanbe to address the authorities' insistence that all Tajikistan based training take place in the capital. With the support of the ruling PDP, NDI was able to conduct the second seminar outside of Dushanbe, in Soghd region, without objection from local authorities. This was an important breakthrough for NDI's program, since party programs had previously been restricted to Dushanbe. Twenty-eight representatives from all eight parties attended. Given its breakthrough in Soghd, NDI planned to hold the final multiparty seminar in Kulyab region. However, the day before the event, local authorities in Kulyab informed NDI that the training could not take place without the approval of the region's governor, who would presumably not issue approval without permission from the Ministries of Justice and/or Foreign Affairs. Since NDI was not able to obtain approval to conduct the event in Kulyab, NDI invited the participants to Dushanbe. Fifteen representatives from the six established parties attended.

Single-Party Workshops on the Fundamentals of Voter Outreach

Following the multiparty seminars, NDI sought to help parties to build their grassroots support in advance of the 2006 presidential elections. Building on the methods and tools introduced during multiparty seminars, the Institute began a series of single-party workshops devoted exclusively to voter outreach. During the first quarter of 2006, NDI conducted five single-party workshops on voter outreach strategies, including two for the IRP and one each for the SDP, PDP, and Socialist Party. All five were held in Dushanbe, due to travel restrictions imposed by local authorities. The workshops for the IRP and SDP were attended by 20 to 25 participants each, and the workshops for the Social Democratic and People's Democratic Parties were attended by 15 to 20 participants each. The participants primarily consisted of regional party leaders and activists.

At each workshop, NDI introduced the concept of direct voter contact and how to target specific populations such as women and youth. The sessions covered volunteer recruitment, voter targeting, message development, door-to-door canvassing and questionnaires, platform development, and media relations. During the seminars participants learned how to develop questionnaires to gain insight into voters' concerns and to identify their party's existing supporters and potential new members. Participants also learned how to compile and analyze the data collected, to summarize the conclusions from their research, and to report back to the community on their findings. NDI tailored the workshops according to each party's needs, as identified through the party baseline assessment and subsequent discussions with party leaders. For example, the IRP seminars involved sessions on effective branch office management, campaign tactics, and intraparty communication, which were the key weaknesses identified in the baseline assessment. The SDP trainings included additional time for covering branch office management and intraparty communication.

NDI had planned to continue its series of voter outreach workshops in May and June 2006; however, the trainings were cancelled as a result of the May 1 deportation of NDI interim country director Nurul Rakhimbekov.

Campaign Organizing Trainings

In April 2006, former NDI-Tajikistan country director Gegham Sargsyan traveled to Dushanbe to help conduct a series of campaign organizing workshops. During his visit, NDI conducted workshops for the IRP on April 11, the PDP on April 12, and the SDP on April 14. Each event was attended by approximately 25 party activists. The campaign organizing seminars were focused on developing campaign planning strategies, including conducting research, voter targeting, message development, and campaign calendar development. Participants from opposition parties also learned how to plan and implement campaign events taking into account the government restrictions and harassment they typically face during campaigns. Each section of the seminar combined theory with interactive exercises.

NDI scheduled additional campaign organizing workshops during May and June 2006, but they were cancelled following the arrest and deportation of Nurul Rakhimbekov.

Individual Consultations with Political Parties

Until the May 1, 2006 deportation of Mr. Rakhimbekov, NDI remained in continuous dialogue with national and regional party leaders through individual consultations and discussions to follow-up on the formal seminars and to plan future programming. These consultations also helped NDI remained in close contact with party leaders to keep them informed of the status of the Institute's programming during periods of increased government harassment. For example, between late January and February 15, 2006, NDI had to temporarily delay programming, as its country director, Gegham Sargsyan, was forced to leave the country and its second expatriate, Nurul Rakhimbekov, was nearly denied renewal of his registration with the Immigration Police. NDI's open channels of communication with political parties allowed NDI to quickly resume voter outreach trainings once Mr. Rakhimbekov's registration was renewed on February 15.

2. Women Political Party Participation

Women's Political Discussion Club

NDI worked closely through April 2006 with the Women's Political Discussion Club (WPDC), a group of 14 female political activists and NGO leaders that provides a forum for women to discuss issues of relevance to them and to formulate policy recommendations for submission to the government, with the ultimate goal of increasing women's political participation.

In December 2005 and January 2006, the women's political discussion club representatives held three meetings at NDI's office to determine the topic of their next roundtable and to prepare for the event. On February 14, the WPDC held a public forum that focused on the role of women in Tajikistan's civil society. More than 45 people attended the event, including representatives of the presidential administration, government agencies, and members of parliament. The featured speaker, Tajik civic leader Ms. Khuirinisso, delivered an

opening speech, which was followed by a dynamic discussion among the participants. At the end of the forum, the participants developed a list of recommendations to the government on policies that could create a better enabling environment for political activism by civil society. The core discussion club members used these recommendations to draft a policy paper for presentation to the government, the president's office, the NGO community and international organizations. The policy paper is included in Annex 2.

The discussion club held three planning meetings at NDI's office on March 1, March 17, and April 14, 2006 to prepare for its next public forum. The group decided to focus the event on "Women, Society and Islam," which would feature in-depth debate on women's rights under Islam. NDI provided guidance to the WPDC on shaping the agenda and inviting the appropriate government officials and political and civic leaders. The event, which was funded separately, was held on April 25 in Dushanbe and was attended by more than 50 people, including representatives of the presidential administration, government agencies, and members of parliament.

With NDI's guidance, the women's political discussion club was able to diversify its funding base and evolve from an ad hoc group to a more structured organization able to manage multiple events and budgets. The group submitted a grant proposal to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in January 2006 and was approved for funding in June 2006. The grant allowed the group to greatly expand its programming to include an information campaign on involving women in politics, political debates with women from different political parties, and training for female party activists. Although NDI had planned to continue providing guidance to the group as it grew, the Institute was not able to continue these plans following the deportation of Mr. Rakhimbekov on May 1, 2006.

PDP/NDI Workshops for Women

At the PDP's request, NDI had been working for several months prior to the start of this agreement to conduct a series of workshops to help attract new, young, women activists to the party. NDI continued this cooperation under its USAID cooperative agreement. In December 2005, NDI conducted a seminar on public speaking skills. Because of the participants' positive response to NDI's interactive style, PDP organizers decided to integrate more interactive elements in their future trainings. In January 2005, Gegham Sargsyan was invited to participate in a graduation ceremony for the 37 women NDI co-trained with the PDP during 2005. The event was attended by representatives from government agencies and President Rakhmanov's office. The party chairman spoke highly of NDI's work with his party.

3. Complementary Activities

Political Television Talk Shows

Prior to the start of this agreement, NDI had collaborated with several television stations to produce and broadcast political discussion programs. These programs disseminated a wide range of political viewpoints to citizens and gave parties opportunities to air their views publicly. The programs also helped build relationships with the local government and the ruling party, as

NDI has invited PDP activists along with representatives of other parties to participate in the discussions. With funding from its previous DRL agreement, NDI continued its collaboration with *Mavji Ozod* TV in the southern district of Vose in airing five programs during October and November 2005.

NDI had planned to continue these activities under its USAID cooperative agreement. NDI also met with Dushanbe-based TV *Poitaht* to discuss a potential collaboration in media programming. However, due to increased harassment by the Tajik security services during the first few months of 2006, NDI decided to delay its media programming.

Public Committee for Election Monitoring

In advance of the November 2006 presidential election, NDI had planned to work with the Public Committee for Election Monitoring, a network of independent Tajik civic organizations, to hold forums with campaign managers to reach agreement on a code of conduct on fair and democratic campaigning. The code would provide a basis for the Public Committee to monitor the parties' participation in the presidential elections. In April 2006, NDI began discussions with the Public Committee regarding the development, implementation and monitoring of the code of conduct. The Institute also provided guidance to the group on seeking additional funding from the U.S. Embassy's Democracy Commission. Based on these discussions, NDI had planned to sponsor the Public Committee's first forum for party leaders to discuss the code of conduct during the last week of May. However, the May 1 deportation of Mr. Rakhimbekov forced NDI to cancel these plans.

EID Study Mission

During the last week of February 2006, NDI conducted a study mission to Poland for eight young political party leaders from the six registered non-government parties and two from the ruling People's Democratic Party. The trip was organized by the European Institute for Democracy (EID), a training facility affiliated with NDI in Warsaw. Although this trip was funded through a separate grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, it complemented NDI's USAID-funded party strengthening activities and provided a cost-effective way to help promote youth party leadership. The participants attended several trainings and meetings with Polish political leaders. The training and exposure to the Polish political system helped increase the participants' knowledge of party building techniques and campaigning. The participants also agreed to establish more cross-party collaboration. Upon returning to Tajikistan, some of the participants attempted to develop an informal coalition of youth political leaders.

B. Activities after April 26, 2006

NDI conducted no program activities after the April 26, 2006 arrest, detention and subsequent deportation of NDI's sole remaining expatriate staff member. In the immediate aftermath of the deportation, the Institute, in consultation with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, made the decision to delay programming until NDI could discuss its concerns with the Government of Tajikistan and receive assurances that its program staff would be safe.

In July 2006, NDI Board Member and former Congressman Sam Gejdenson traveled to Dushanbe with NDI-Washington staff member Laura Jewett to assess the situation. Gejdenson and Jewett met with representatives of the Tajik Foreign Ministry, political party and civic partners, and U.S. Embassy and USAID representatives. Despite concerted efforts and the U.S. Embassy's support, the NDI team was unable to secure meetings with representatives of the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Security or the Ministry of Interior. The Tajik Foreign Ministry advised NDI to remain open but to keep a low profile in the country until after the November 6, 2006 presidential election, when he speculated the political environment could become less restrictive. The Foreign Minister encouraged NDI to resubmit its application for registration under the terms of a new law on public associations, which was expected to go into effect in early 2007. In consultation with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, NDI decided to follow this advice.

Based on this decision, NDI's office in Dushanbe remained open under the management of capable local staff. The office provided regular reporting to NDI-Washington on political developments, drawn from news accounts, and maintained contact with other international organizations in the country, including USAID and the Embassy. The Tajik staff conducted day-to-day administrative and financial functions. However, the office had no contact with Tajik political or civic partners and provided no technical assistance. NDI's local staff members were regularly harassed and questioned by agents of the Tajik security services, who asked about NDI programming and requested "cooperation." NDI staff based in Kyrgyzstan stayed in contact with NDI's partners in Tajikistan, but did not offer advice or assistance.

In the months following the November 2006 presidential election, NDI resumed efforts to obtain visas for staff members, with the goal of resuming programming in Tajikistan. From March 26 to 28, 2007, NDI staff representatives Laura Jewett and Harry Bader visited Dushanbe to explore prospects for resuming program activities. The NDI delegation held meetings with U.S. Ambassador Tracey Jacobson and USAID/CAR Mission Director Chris Crowley, as well as Embassy and USAID/Tajikistan staff; Interior Minister Solehov and Deputy Foreign Minister Yatimov; representatives of the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, the Democratic Party, the Islamic Revival Party, and the Women's Political Discussion Club; and representatives of various international organizations, including the OSCE and the International Center for Nonprofit Law (ICNL). Requests for meetings with the Ministers of Justice and Security were not granted.

In meetings with Tajik government representatives, NDI stressed that, having followed the Foreign Ministry's advice to postpone activity until after the presidential election, the Institute was ready to resume activities; that NDI is transparent and wishes to have relationships of openness and trust with the government; and that its interest is in helping all citizens have a voice in decisions that affect them, rather than in a specific political or electoral outcome. NDI requested support for securing a long-term work visa for Mr. Bader as the NDI-Tajikistan office director and for successfully registering the NDI office. At a meeting that included U.S. Embassy Political Officer Elizabeth Horst, Deputy Foreign Minister Yatimov suggested that registration could be problematic, due to concerns in other ministries about NDI's past activities, including allegedly inappropriate behavior by former staff, cooperation with opposition parties, and

funding of NGOs. However, he agreed that the Foreign Ministry would be willing to issue a long-term work visa.

Resumption of NDI's Expatriate Representation in Tajikistan

In April 2007, NDI obtained a one-month visa for an expatriate representative, Harry Bader, to travel to Dushanbe. While NDI had originally requested a one-year visa, the Tajik Embassy instructed NDI that a longer-term visa must be requested from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dushanbe.

Mr. Bader arrived in Dushanbe on June 4, 2007 with the immediate priorities of obtaining a long-term visa and registering NDI's Dushanbe office, which could have paved the way for the resumption of programs. Mr. Bader held meetings with U.S. Ambassador Tracey Jacobson and Director of USAID/CAR's Democracy and Conflict Mitigation Office Kim Delaney, as well as other Embassy and USAID/Tajikistan representatives; Tajik government officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice; and representatives of various international organizations. NDI met frequently with representatives of various international organizations, including the OSCE, Internews, MercyCorps, Relief International, Open Society Institute, ABA/CEELI, Westminster Foundation for Democracy and ICNL. Mr. Bader also served on the steering committee of the NGO Registration Task Force, which was established by the international NGO community in June 2007 to conduct a dialogue with the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice to establish a common approach for registration.

With the support of the U.S. Embassy, Mr. Bader was able to obtain successive one-month visas through November 2007.

Registration Attempts and Office Closure

On November 15, 2007, NDI's hopes for resuming programs were bolstered when, with the support of the U.S. Embassy, Mr. Bader obtained a six-month, multiple entry visa. This provided NDI the opportunity to submit a registration application for the first time in nearly two years.¹ In November and December 2007, NDI prepared all documents and paperwork for its registration.

In January and March 2008, NDI submitted two registration applications to the Ministry of Justice. Each application packet involved a protracted process requiring multiple forms to be completed, notarized, certified and authenticated in Washington DC, and then legalized by the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both applications were rejected for reasons that were open to interpretation. Some of the reasons were minor, arbitrary, technical issues. For example, the Ministry of Justice claimed that NDI's Tajikistan branch office bylaws did not go far enough in identifying the Tajik Somoni as the legal currency for all transactions, even though the bylaws

¹ In 2002, NDI received accreditation as a foreign organization with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the U.S.-Tajikistan bilateral agreement. From 2002 – 2006, several of NDI's attempts at registration were either rejected or refused. In September 2004, NDI applied for registration with the Ministry of Justice that was initially granted, but subsequently revoked.

specifically stated that the Tajikistan office would use “the official currency of Tajikistan.” Other reasons for rejection were more troubling. The Ministry of Justice demanded that NDI’s local Tajikistan branch office bylaws should make no reference to international laws and bilateral agreements, arguing that the laws of Tajikistan exclusively govern the conduct of NGOs.

In early February 2008, while awaiting the Ministry of Justice’s decision on its first registration application, NDI held a regional planning meeting in Istanbul, Turkey to set a strategic framework for NDI programs in the Eurasia region, to exchange best practices in programming related to governance, political party development, and civic participation, and to review and improve organizational, administrative, and communication procedures. As part of the planning meeting, NDI’s resident country director and local program manager provided a presentation on Tajikistan’s current political situation and how NDI’s planned programming would help address the democratic deficits in the country.² During subsequent discussions, NDI staff from Washington and other field offices provided input and suggestions based on comparative experiences and best practices. In addition, NDI’s Director of Global Security and Operations held a discussion with the Institute’s Tajikistan-based staff members to discuss measures to improve staff security given the difficult working environment in Tajikistan.

After the Institute’s first two registration applications were rejected, NDI decided, in coordination with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, to move forward in good faith with a third, revised attempt at registration, fully addressing the issues listed in the Ministry of Justice’s previous rejection notifications. On April 8, 2008, NDI submitted a revised application packet to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for legalization – the final step before submission to the Ministry of Justice, which is the body that actually approves or denies registration. In its first two attempts, NDI received the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ legalization within a few days. This time, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the documents and refused to provide an explanation for the delay. According to Tajik law, registration applications must be legalized and submitted to the Ministry of Justice within 30 days of the dated signatures on the application documents.

NDI made multiple attempts each day to contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy and the State Department applied considerable pressure. A few days before the 30 day deadline was to expire, NDI, with the agreement of the U.S. Embassy and the State Department, issued a press statement appealing to the Tajik government to approve NDI’s registration application in the spirit of international cooperation (attached in Annex 3). Despite these attempts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allowed the 30 day deadline to pass, causing NDI’s application to expire. NDI and the U.S. Embassy agreed to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with one last opportunity to legalize the documents by suggesting May 2, 2008 as a deadline for a response, after which NDI would interpret a lack of response as a denial and would begin closing its office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs failed to respond by that date, despite numerous calls and the presence of an NDI local staff member in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ waiting room the entire day. NDI then moved forward with its decision to close its Dushanbe office. NDI released a press statement announcing its office closure, which is attached in Annex 4.

² At this time, NDI was anticipating its registration and the resumption of its programming under a new CEPPS agreement.

Following the decision to close the office, NDI implemented a disposition plan, terminated office and residence leases, notified international and local contacts, shipped files to the Washington DC office, finalized all contractual obligations and pending bills, and provided letters of recommendation for local staff members. NDI's expatriate representative Harry Bader departed Dushanbe on May 7, 2008. With assistance from USAID and the U.S. Embassy, NDI was able to finalize all of its financial obligations by the end of the agreement.

IV. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The objectives and indicators below correspond to those specified in NDI's agreement. All results reported below were achieved by the end of April 2006, since NDI could no longer conduct activities, provide consultations or monitor program results after that time.

Objective: Parties develop and strengthen their regional structures

Indicator: At least one party has established or reorganized a branch office

By April 2006, several political parties had established or reorganized branch offices following NDI's multiparty and single-party seminars. For example, the IRP established new regional branches in the districts of Khamadoni and Dangara. The SDP established chapters in more than 15 districts and was making plans to develop the strongest chapters into branch offices. The newly established Agrarian Party opened a district branch in the Rasht Valley, with an initial membership of 30 people. The Democratic Party opened branch offices in Vaksh and Qumsangir districts of Khatlon *oblast*.

Indicator: At least one branch per party has organized a recruitment campaign

NDI made significant progress toward meeting this indicator by April 2006. During NDI's multiparty seminars in November and December of 2005, each party set specific recruitment goals for a given time period. After the seminars, the regional chapters of the PDP in Khatlon, the IRP in Badakhshan, and several parties in Soghd initiated recruitment drives. Each chapter member of the respective parties committed to recruit one new member by the end of January 2006. As a result, PDP's Khatlon chapter increased membership by 125, and IRP's Badakhshan chapter increased membership by 18. In Soghd, IRP and PDP were also able to attract new members through recruitment drives. The Economics Reform and Agrarian Parties, which had just begun to establish a presence in the regions, recruited party representatives who were able to attract an average of five members each during recruitment drives.

Indicator: At least one branch per party has set up or improved its system for communicating with the center

NDI made significant progress toward meeting this indicator by April 2006. During its multi and single-party seminars, NDI addressed the need for regional chapters of political parties to send monthly reports on their activities to their respective national headquarters. By April

2006, the PDP and IRP had initiated regular reporting between regional and national offices, with branch offices providing information on membership changes and local issues of concern. The central offices of the PDP and IRP were also holding daily telephone conversations with branch offices. Following NDI workshops, the SDP was in the process of improving its reporting and communication between its central and branch offices. The party prepared a brochure with instructions on how to run chapters in the regions, which included detailed information on reporting procedures. NDI also made recommendations to the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party on ways to improve intraparty communication.

Objective: Parties create two-way channels of communication with citizens

Indicator: At least one branch per party has conducted a canvassing campaign

By April 2006, NDI had taken initial steps toward meeting this indicator. During NDI's multi-party seminars, party activists learned about the use of questionnaires in the course of their door-to-door canvassing, and were enthusiastic about conducting voter outreach efforts and gathering information. Beginning in January 2006, the IRP actively implemented the skills gained from NDI by conducting door-to-door canvassing, holding tea-shop discussions and interviewing agricultural workers in the fields. Regional activists of the PDP, SDP and Democratic Party had also begun to carry out initial canvassing efforts, although at a slower pace. NDI anticipated that the parties would summarize the findings from their information gathering efforts and report back to their respective communities. NDI's planned May and June consultations with the parties to reinforce skills and assess progress had to be cancelled.

Indicator: At least one branch per party has compiled voter records

By April 2006, NDI had taken initial steps toward meeting this indicator. During its internal party assessments, NDI documented the failure of all parties to effectively compile voter records. In its recommendations to parties, the Institute suggested to each party that it organize door-to-door canvassing operations and collect voter records during such efforts. NDI covered this topic during its multi- and single-party trainings, demonstrating to parties how to establish a voter database. By April 2006, branch offices of the PDP and IRP in Badagshan and Soghd regions had begun using data collected during canvassing efforts to update their voter records.

Objective: Parties articulate policy agendas that incorporate citizens' concerns.

Indicator: At least one branch per party has communicated community concerns to the center

Indicator: Each party has identified at least one priority issue and corresponding policy response

As indicated in NDI's Workplan for Program Year One, NDI planned to address this objective during Program Year Two. Because NDI was forced to delay programming during its first year of programming, the Institute could not address this objective.

Objective: Parties elaborate long-term strategies that incorporate election campaign plans.

Indicator: Each party has held strategic planning meetings

Indicator: At least one unit of each party, either a branch or the central headquarters, has produced a full or partial written campaign plan

NDI had just begun a series of campaign organization workshops to help address this objective in April 2006, before it was forced to delay programming. As a result, NDI was not able to address this objective.

V. EVALUATION

Despite uncertainties resulting from an impasse over NDI's registration, harassment of NDI staff, and hostility of regional authorities toward opposition parties and international NGOs, NDI was able to keep its programming with political parties and civic organizations on track during the first few months of the program. NDI was making steady inroads toward building the capacity of political parties to foster a more pluralistic political environment in Tajikistan. Prior to their participation in NDI workshops, Tajikistan's parties had not been in the habit of organizing the work of their regional branches to complement the overall party goals. With NDI's guidance, four political parties began establishing or strengthening their regional structures, initiating regular reporting between central and regional offices, and carrying out door-to-door canvassing efforts. Six parties began implementing membership recruitment campaigns in the regions. The Women's Political Discussion Club developed into a rare platform for through which women political activists can address issues of their concern, and the group remains active as of the end of this cooperative agreement. Based on these initial successes, NDI saw clear signs that political parties were becoming re-energized as they looked ahead to the November 2006 presidential election.³

At the same time, NDI had established a good working relationship with the ruling party, as the Institute's country representatives had been proactive about seeking opportunities to cooperate with the PDP. There appeared to be an unspoken agreement that the Tajik government would not register NDI, but that quiet, politically-balanced programming would be allowed to continue. However, beginning in January 2006, NDI staff and partners came under increasing harassment that directly impacted programming. Because of travel restrictions imposed by local authorities, NDI was not able to conduct party programs outside Dushanbe in January and February 2006. Some participants in earlier NDI seminars, particularly those from IRP, were questioned by security agencies and the prosecutor's office on the content of the seminars. Police showed up at several events, demanding lists of participants. NDI's local staff members were repeatedly invited for interrogations by representatives of National Security Agency (NSA). An NDI translator was approached by an NSA agent during a seminar and warned that if he did not show up for questioning, the NSA would send agents for him.

³ As noted in the Background section, however, several opposition parties eventually decided to boycott the election due to government harassment and shortcomings in the electoral process.

On February 1, 2006, NDI country director Gegham Sargsyan was forced to depart Tajikistan after several unsuccessful attempts to renew his personal registration documents. Before departing Dushanbe, Mr. Sargsyan was visited by immigration police on several occasions and was taken to the police station for questioning. The U.S. Embassy provided much-needed support to Mr. Sargsyan throughout this ordeal. NDI's other expatriate staff member, Nurul Rakhimbekov, was also nearly denied renewal of his registration documents. Fortunately, with the direct involvement of the U.S. Embassy, Mr. Rakhimbekov was able to renew his personal registration on February 15.

On April 26, 2006, NDI's sole remaining expatriate country representative Nurul Rakhimbekov was arrested at the Dushanbe airport as he was preparing to board a domestic flight to conduct a political party training in Khujand. Mr. Rakhimbekov was detained and interrogated for three full days, after which he was deported to his native Kazakhstan. Although the charges were ostensibly of a personal nature, none of the interrogation questions related to the charges against him; rather, the questions focused only on NDI's programming in Tajikistan. Following Mr. Rakhimbekov's deportation on May 1, NDI decided to delay its in-country activities. This incident forced NDI to reassess this approach. It became imperative to balance NDI's commitment to continue providing assistance with the safety and security of its staff. Thus, in close consultation with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, NDI delayed all program activities in Tajikistan until NDI could discuss its concerns with the Government of Tajikistan and receive assurances that its program staff would be safe.

The arrival of NDI's new country representative, Harry Bader, in June 2007 brought hope that, with a renewed effort to engage the Tajik engagement, NDI would be able to obtain registration and resume programming. During Mr. Bader's time in Dushanbe, NDI made repeated attempts to establish open lines of communication with the Tajik government, but these attempts were not reciprocated. Instead, the government harassed NDI's expatriate and local staff members and repeatedly denied the Institute's registration attempts. Following the Tajik government's failure to approve NDI's third registration attempt of 2008, NDI felt that the Tajik government had delivered a clear message that NDI was not welcome in the country. Rather than put its staff at continued risk, NDI decided, in collaboration with USAID, the U.S. Embassy and the State Department, that it would close its office.

NDI does not plan on returning to Tajikistan in the immediate future. While the Institute remains open to the possibility of returning at some point, the posture of the Tajik government toward NDI would need to be significantly different. Only if the Tajik government was to take concrete, unambiguous measures to markedly improve NDI's security status and ability to conduct programming in the country would NDI consider putting its staff at risk again. Meanwhile, in consultation with USAID and the Embassy, the Institute will explore prospects for distance learning projects or other approaches that would allow NDI to maintain contacts and provide limited support to partners without having a physical presence in the country.

VI. LIST OF ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Summary of Internal Political Party Assessment
- Annex 2: Women’s Political Discussion Club Policy Paper – February 2006
- Annex 3: April 21, 2008 NDI Press Statement: “NDI Awaits Registration”
- Annex 4: May 5, 2008 NDI Press Statement: “NDI to Close Office in Tajikistan”

Annex 1

Summary of NDI Internal Baseline Assessment of Political Parties in Tajikistan

November 2005

NDI conducted an assessment of all six of Tajikistan's registered political parties – the People's Democratic Party, Islamic Renaissance Party, Social Democratic Party, Democratic Party, Communist Party, and Socialist Party. The purpose of the assessment was three-fold: to systematically review the parties' strengths and weaknesses, evaluate how the parties have developed over the past year, and determine the impact and future direction of the Institute's programs. Part of the assessment was self-administered by each party, giving the parties a greater stake in the process. Because of the sensitive nature of the findings, NDI will not distribute the baseline assessment report to all parties in its entirety. However, NDI will present summary reports and recommendations to each political party, and will hold follow-up discussions with each party.

Methodology

NDI organized small discussion groups from each party consisting of national and district-level leaders. NDI also gathered information from regional party activists to ensure that information from all levels of each party was incorporated. The Institute facilitated discussions on four primary topics: the development and strengthening of regional party structures, two-way channels of communication, the articulation of policy agendas incorporating citizens' concerns, and the elaboration of long-term goals, including election campaign plans. These themes correspond to NDI's objectives for the cooperative agreement. Before each assessment NDI Tajikistan made clear to all political parties that information acquired from political parties would not be circulated to other parties. Although the assessments were conducted using structured questionnaires, they were held in a conversational manner. This provided a chance to hold an open dialogue and provided flexibility to cover areas not highlighted in the questions.

Summary of Findings

The *People's Democratic Party* is the most organized party with a large network of regional organizations, but it generally lacks sound managerial practices both between and during election periods. It tends to rely on "administrative resources" to attract and maintain its membership. While some regional party chairs would prefer to assume a more proactive role in attracting membership and building sustainable party structures, the centralized nature of the party leaves very little autonomy for the regional chapters. NDI has recommended that the party increase its internal democracy, enhance the two-way flow of information between central and regional offices, conduct more door-to-door canvassing, improve public speaking and debate skills, and involve citizens in party decisions such as message development.

The *Islamic Renaissance Party* is fairly well-organized relative to other opposition parties in Tajikistan. There are two influential groups within the party: a traditionalist faction and a progressive faction. IRP has established a wide network of regional chapters, and there are signs of improvements in intraparty communication. However, the IRP has not been able to

develop effective, unified party messages that address citizens' day-to-day needs. Only 10 to 15 percent of party members can speak "on message" and can explain how the IRP would manage the country's resources should it come to power. NDI has recommended that the party develop ways to collect information on citizens' concerns, improve public speaking skills, conduct door-to-door canvassing and collect voter records, enhance information flow between central and regional offices, and clarify the role of regional offices should the party run a presidential candidate.

The *Social Democratic Party* is a relatively new, small opposition party with potential for growth. The party has representation in nearly all regions of Tajikistan, although the majority of its regional chapters are not functioning. The party leadership is, however, committed to building regional party structures. SDP plans to hold a party congress to restructure its senior level management, particularly in the regions. The party recently announced its intentions to nominate a presidential candidate for the 2006 elections. Party membership is dropping rapidly, due in part to increased government pressure and a lack of attention by party leadership on the regions. The party lacks sound managerial practices and does not have a personnel policy. NDI has recommended that the party improve its direct contact with and collection of information on voters, increase citizen involvement in party decision-making processes, design a clear, voter-friendly party message, develop better management skills, and enhance intraparty communication.

The *Democratic Party* has faced large challenges since the arrest and sentencing of party leader Mahmadrusi Iskandarov. DP leadership is planning to elect another party chair to run the party operations, while Iskandarov will remain in the position of a party ideological leader. One of the party's main internal challenges is the current split between those who support continued radical opposition to the government and those who would prefer a more moderate stance. The DP expends a great deal of resources targeting the international community and has not focused on its own party building activities. NDI has recommended that the party develop a strategy for door-to-door canvassing, collect and use information on voter preferences to inform party message development, improve information flow between regional and central offices, and clearly define the regional offices' responsibilities should the party nominate a candidate for the 2006 presidential election.

The *Socialist Party* is split into two branches: one branch is officially recognized by the government and is largely pro-government, and the other branch is not recognized and is associated with the opposition. The party struggles to collect membership fees, claiming that most of its membership consists of the young, the poor or the elderly. The Socialist Party's political strategy tends to treat its support base as separate, isolated segments, such as women and youth. NDI has recommended that the party increase internal party democracy, improve its voter targeting so as not to treat each voter segment as an isolated group, conduct door-to-door canvassing, collect information on voter preferences, and use this information to inform message development.

The *Communist Party* has declined in membership and capacity over the past 15 years. It has been unable to attract young members, as the average age of party members is 50 to 55 years old. The central office provides little support to regional offices and no training on how to

effectively manage the branches. The party only conducts its direct citizen outreach efforts during election cycles. NDI has recommended that the party dedicate resources to researching voter preferences and using the research to inform its message development, involve party members in decision-making processes, ensure two-way information flow between regional and central offices, and initiate a door-to-door voter canvassing operation.

Conclusion

Although the recommendations for Tajikistan's political parties have much in common, NDI tailored its suggestions to meet each party's specific needs. NDI is using this assessment to inform its future activities with all parties. The Institute will closely monitor the implementation of party building activities in each party chapter and, in many cases, will provide assistance in launching party building activities.

Women's Political Discussion Club

Policy Paper: Recommendations to Increase Civil Society's Political Participation

The following recommendations are the result of a February 14, 2006 public forum hosted by the Women's Political Discussion Club. The policy paper was presented to the Government of Tajikistan, the president's office, the NGO community, and international organizations.

To the President's Apparatus

1. To issue a decree by the President of Republic of Tajikistan that guarantees human rights to all Tajik citizens.

To the Tajik Government

2. National and local governments can utilize the professional knowledge of non-governmental organizations. The Tajik government should involve members of the third sector in governing activities, by giving the latter a role of specialists or consultants.
3. Government should give an opportunity to women NGOs to be actively involved in the governmental programs on increasing women's status in the society.

To the Parliament of Tajikistan

4. There are no Members of Parliament or city and regional council members who have experience working in an NGO.
5. Parliament should be tolerant to the involvement of NGOs in legislative drafting activities.

To the Strategic Research Center under the President Republic of Tajikistan

6. In addition to promoting the government's activities, the Strategic Research Center should distribute information around the country about the activities of NGOs.
7. The Strategic Research Center could use the results of research conducted by NGOs. This information would help in conceptualizing programs to address Tajikistan's economic, political and social development.

To the Nongovernmental Organizations

8. The Civil Society Support Centers should conduct nationwide education programs targeting local NGOs to increase staff members' experience in financial and organizational management.
9. NGOs could participate in monitoring tenders executed by ministries and governmental structures to aid the social sector. This cooperation could be mutually beneficial for both sides.

To the Public Council

10. The Public Council should widen the geographical representation of NGOs in the Council.
11. The Public Council should consider the issues of civil society development and discuss various factors impeding this process.

To the Mass Media

12. The mass media should devote more attention to the activities and developments in the NGO sector. More attention on NGOs' programs will keep the organizations motivated and should help increase the number of projects and programs directed to development of Tajikistan.



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NDI AWAITS REGISTRATION IN TAJIKISTAN

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) today appealed to the government of Tajikistan to approve NDI’s application for registration as a sign of the country’s continuing commitment to international cooperation.

In a third good-faith attempt at registration so far in 2008, NDI submitted its latest application to the government of Tajikistan on April 8 for legalization and final approval.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, who serves as chairman of the NDI Board of Directors, said, “NDI’s registration in Tajikistan would be a positive sign of the government of Tajikistan’s willingness to fulfill its commitments to international cooperation.”

“NDI has worked in Tajikistan openly, responsibly, and in a nonpartisan manner that is respectful of Tajikistan’s sovereignty,” NDI President Kenneth Wollack said. “We have made every effort to comply with the registration procedures. We look forward to resuming a constructive partnership with Tajikistan.”

NDI began working in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2002, sharing international experiences with all registered political parties and with civic groups. The Institute currently operates throughout Central Asia, with offices in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. However, NDI’s program activities in Tajikistan have been on hold since April 2006, pending registration.

NDI is a non-partisan, non-profit, non-governmental organization that supports democratic values and practices in more than 60 countries.

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NDI TO CLOSE OFFICE IN TAJIKISTAN

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) announced today that it has closed its office in Dushanbe and ceased program work there because the government of Tajikistan has refused to approve the organization’s application for registration. NDI’s third application in the past four months was rejected last week.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, who serves as chairman of the NDI Board of Directors, said, “NDI’s registration in Tajikistan would have been a positive sign of the government of Tajikistan’s willingness to fulfill its commitments to international cooperation.”

“In this time of growing interdependence among nations, we regret that the Tajik government would not want to learn from the reform experiences of other countries,” said NDI President Kenneth Wollack. “NDI has appreciated its relationships with civic groups and parties from across Tajikistan’s political spectrum. We look forward to one day resuming our programs with these partners,” he said.

NDI began working in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2002, in a nonpartisan manner, to share international experiences with civic groups and all registered political parties. NDI’s program activities in Tajikistan have been on hold since April 2006 while NDI sought registration. The Institute currently operates throughout Central Asia, with offices in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

NDI is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government in about 100 countries.

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