



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005

**YEMEN: STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND
INCREASING INCLUSIVE NATIONAL DIALOGUE (04929)
USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement #279-A-00-04-00040-00, under the Leader
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I. SUMMARY

Yemen has long considered itself at the forefront of democratic progress in the Middle East, yet elected representatives to the legislative branch lack the skills necessary to challenge the traditional supremacy of the executive. Bills are introduced by the executive and adopted by parliament with little attention and few modifications. A lack of basic awareness about the role of parliament in the checks and balances of a democracy, the strong grip of the parliamentary leadership on procedures in parliament, and the minimal role of the opposition parties in guiding and supporting opposition members of parliament (MPs) has allowed the executive to maintain its domination. However, a cadre of newly elected MPs have recently joined a small number of reform minded experienced and re-elected members to show unity in checking government authority; these newly elected MPs are younger and better educated than their predecessors, and have a greater awareness of the benefits of good governance. There is a growing potential for the parliament to play a more active role in the political process. If parliament does not effectively serve its representative function and perform its constitutional role, citizens could lose faith in the country's emerging democratic system.

Within this context, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) launched the Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions and Increasing Inclusive National Dialogue program in October 2004 to address issues facing Yemen's parliament by providing a series of trainings for reform-minded MPs and select committees and establishing a legislative resource center for research and public debate. This program seeks to meet the following objectives:

- To strengthen core skills of Members of parliament, particularly democratically reform-minded MPs, in such areas as assessing legislation, identifying policy priorities, working in coalitions, constituency outreach, media relations, executive oversight and representation; and

- To develop resource capabilities of parliamentary committees in such areas as legislative research and consultation, obtaining specialized input, and modifying legislation.

To meet these objectives, NDI undertook the following activities, meetings and consultations during the past quarter:

- Held regular meetings with MPs, members of the Parliamentary Secretariat and political party leaders to:
 - Gain a detailed understanding of the functioning of parliament;
 - Develop a strategic plan of activities, meetings and discussions to strengthen processes of sound decision and policy making by parliament and committees; and
 - Develop an effective recruitment strategy and build capacity among committee staff;
- Established a Parliamentary Advisory Group to:
 - Provide support and expertise to program activities;
 - Facilitate the identification of standing committees with whom to initiate capacity building projects; and
 - Engage parliamentary caucus activity amongst their respective party members;
- Inaugurated the Democracy Development Center (DDC);
- Facilitated discussions with parliamentarians interested in forming a Yemen Chapter of Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC);
- Initiated a series of dialogue sessions between policy makers and civil society leaders to discuss important issues they face, including proposed legislation; and
- Initiated a series of fora for MPs and governance experts to discuss aspects of good governance and its indicators in the Yemen context.

Additionally, NDI President Ken Wollack traveled to Yemen for meetings with President Saleh, Dr. Al-Qirby, Minister of Foreign Affairs and other leaders. These meetings served to further dialogue on the progress of democratic reform in Yemen as well as lend support to the DDC and the Parliament program.

II. BACKGROUND

Under the Yemeni Constitution, the parliament possesses considerable power, enjoying constitutional provisions necessary to perform the full-range of parliamentary functions. The president has only a limited suspension veto, and parliament can withhold confidence in the government upon its installation. Parliament must approve the government's annual budget, and controls its own internal funds. Yet, a large gap exists between the constitutional power of the parliament and its exercise of that power - a gap attributable to a lack of knowledge, inadequate resources and the dominance of the executive branch over parliament. Members of parliament (MPs) complain that they possess only limited (or no) staff, office space and equipment with which to conduct research and carry out committee responsibilities. Committee staff is chosen by the parliamentary leadership and few have the professional qualifications necessary to serve

committees effectively.

The leadership of parliament has shown little interest in developing parliament as a professional, independent institution. Although the speaker of the parliament is from the opposition party, *Islah*, he rarely stands in opposition to the executive. Ruling party MPs generally fall in line with the party leadership while opposition MPs are only weakly connected to their parties and have generally failed to offer alternatives to government legislation¹.

Despite these challenges, the parliament can represent an important institution of change in Yemen if supported and strengthened. Many of the newly elected members are younger and better educated than their predecessors, and have a greater awareness of the benefits of good governance. In addition, there exists a core group of democratically reform-minded MPs from the ruling and opposition parties who have expressed their desire to play an active role in encouraging organized and inclusive political dialogue. The active and very public objection of parliament to the announcement of the government plan to sell stock in the country's petroleum sector illustrates the Members' growing willingness to challenge the *status quo*.

Parliament continued to exert its power in December 2004, when it delayed passage of the government proposed budget for 2005. The budget faced difficulty in approval by parliament for the first time in the parliamentary history of Yemen. Approval was delayed because of parliamentary opposition to government proposals for lifting subsidies on fuel products; diesel prices would more than double as a result, compounding problems of poverty and unemployment. The organizers of the parliamentary opposition, which included MPs from all parties, demanded that the government first prove it was serious about reform and fighting corruption before parliament would allow fuel prices to be raised. In the end, the government agreed to begin its proposed plan of reform as set out by MPs as a condition to raising fuel prices; a timetable was written that sets out reform steps towards better governance which will be included in the parliament report.

In its current session, parliament is discussing two important items that may further strengthen its ability to exercise powers of oversight: a proposal to reform house rules and procedures, and a proposal to reform civil service wages as demanded by parliament in their conditions to pass the budget. Also on Parliament's agenda is the questioning of several ministers including Minister of Health, Minister of Roads, and Minister of Justice on issues of possible corruption within their ministries. Parliament's power of executive oversight allows for members to question and interrogate Ministers in front of Parliament. Parliamentarians then have the right to hold a vote of confidence in the matter.

Equally encouraging, President Saleh has publicly committed the government to leading democratic development in the region, a claim reiterated at the Conference on Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in January 2003. One plank of the Sana'a Declaration issued by participants during the Inter-Governmental Regional Conference on Democracy, Human

¹ NDI's political party program will provide training and skill building on policy and caucus development. Recent trainings have built upon the opposition of parliament to proposed changes in oil subsidies, focused on the relationship between parties and parliament, and developed conflict mitigation and negotiation skills.

Rights and the Role of the International Criminal Court in January 2004 commits the participating governments to “strengthen democracy and pluralism and the establishment of elected legislative bodies to represent popular will and assuring the fair representation of all sectors of society.” There are democratically reform-minded persons in all sectors of society in Yemen; in civil society, political parties, media, as well as in parliament. Reform-minded MPs can play a leadership role in fostering, organizing, and framing debate around policy choices facing the nation.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Parliamentary Development - Meetings and Consultations

NDI has continued its engagement with MPs, members of the Parliamentary Secretariat and political party leaders to strengthen the core skills of parliamentarians and develop the capacities of parliamentary committees. With the Institute’s support, these meetings have resulted in the increased involvement of parliamentarians in developing a strong parliamentary system.

As part of efforts to ensure active support for reforms, the Institute held regular meetings with MPs, members of the Parliamentary Secretariat and political party leaders to gain a detailed understanding of the functioning of parliament; to develop a strategic plan of activities to strengthen processes of sound decision and policy making by parliament and committees; and to build capacity and recruitment efforts among committee staff. These meetings enabled NDI to further identify those MPs committed to strengthening democracy.

Several parliamentarians expressed an interest in forming a Yemen Chapter of Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) and requested NDI assistance in its organization. The Institute facilitated a discussion for sixteen MPs about how to become an incorporated chapter as well as provided participants with resources on how to move the process forward. The meeting resulted in an interim board being ratified, NDI being selected as interim secretariat, a resolution to petition GOPAC for Formative Chapter status (the first step to full chapter status) and direction to the board to develop proposed organization by-laws to be presented to a membership meeting in one month for discussion and ratification. Initial responses from GOPAC Headquarters in Ottawa, Canada, and the Regional Chapter in Lebanon have been encouraging.



Additionally, NDI established a Parliamentary Advisory Group to provide support and expertise to program activities; facilitate the identification of standing committees with whom to initiate capacity building projects; and engage parliamentary caucus activity amongst their respective party members. The advisory group is comprised of members and politicians from each party. The advisory group identified the standing committees on Health, Agriculture and Fisheries, Finance, Trade and Investment, Labour, and Petroleum Development as initial partners for the Institute to assist in standardizing the work of the committee to include routine stakeholder consultation, public hearings, reporting, information management, codes of ethics

and accountability. These committees were chosen because of the importance of their work, the commitment of their chairs to improve their work, and the cross party representation of chairs of these committees.

Democracy Development Center

NDI inaugurated the Democracy Development Center on March 3rd, with an event that was attended by approximately 150 guests representing Government, Parliament, civil society and the media. Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmer, Speaker of the Parliament and President of the *Islah* Party, gave the key note speech in which he urged the Institute to activate communication with the parliament and organize activities that help promote Members of Parliament's understanding of parliamentary work, to further bolster democracy. Additional remarks were made by NDI Country Director, Robin Madrid and Carlo Binda, NDI Resident Parliamentary Expert. The inaugural event and opening of the center has received widespread media attention (see Appendix).

The DDC will provide technical skills training and research support for MPs, parliamentary committees and staff. It will also be a venue for lectures, forums and discussions with MPs, civil society, constituents, and the media. Of particular importance, it will provide a neutral space in which reform-minded MPs can connect across party lines and with other members of Yemeni society including political parties, the media and civil society.

Since the inaugural event, the DDC has been used to host ongoing meetings with MPs and parliamentarians, parliamentary forums, bridging dialogues and conflict resolution trainings with political party leaders. NDI is also working with the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs office and Sana'a University's Department of Technology to develop computer training modules and a training of trainers for political parties, parliamentarians, and standing committee staff. The trainings will focus on teaching basic computer skills, computer file management, and internet research techniques.

Bridging Dialogue Series

During its initial meetings with parliamentarians, NDI identified the need to create an informal, respectful, and neutral forum to discuss important issues facing Yemen policy makers and civil society. In March, the Institute initiated a series of dialogue sessions aimed at assisting participants to gain an appreciation of other views, understand policy issues, and explore possible options and strategies. Topics for discussion will consist primarily of current legislation being considered by Parliament.

The first bridging dialogue session brought together representatives of different parties in Parliament including the presidium, members of the Doctors' Syndicates, academics, and committee members to discuss *The Draft National Strategy on Wages and Salaries* and *the Draft Law on the Regulation of employment, wages and salaries*. As the title suggests this government proposal is a two piece package. The first element is a "strategy" paper, outlining problems, objectives, and solutions. The second is the law which would, in effect, codify the various elements of the strategy. The proposed strategy and law has come under criticism from

professional syndicates including teachers and university professors, medical workers and judges. They object that the strategy and the drafted law of civil service payroll-system do not address the problem of low wages paid to civil servants and attempt to erode the privileges and rights already achieved by civil servants.

The Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Labour and Social affairs presented a summary of the committee views, work and direction towards greater stakeholder consultation in considering the proposals. Participants were able to raise concerns and discuss options for improving the proposed strategy and law; participants found agreement in many areas and the Committee Chair agreed to share this input with the full committee.

Parliamentary Forum Series

As part of its training program to strengthen the core skills of MPs, NDI initiated a series of fora for MPs and governance experts. The first forum series will focus on good governance and its key pillars; accountability and transparency, rule of law and the division of powers, and decentralization and popular participation. Additional fora will tackle global issues with detailed discussion and actions to follow. The governance series will consist of four parts, beginning with an overview forum with panelists answering the questions, “What is good governance?” and, “Why is good governance important for Yemen?” Panelists include representatives from the UNDP and the Yemen Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. From these discussions, NDI aims to identify participants willing to pursue good governance practices and work to strengthen democracy in Parliament. They will participate in the follow-up detailed workshops delving into the specifics of good governance. Regional MPs will be invited to participate in the follow-up sessions to build networks with their Yemeni colleagues.

Complementary Activities

NDI president, Ken Wollack traveled to Yemen in late February to provide support to the DDC and Parliamentary Program, further publicizing the program as regional in scope. During his visit, Mr. Wollack discussed the progress of Yemen’s democracy with President Saleh and Dr. Al-Qirby, the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as MPs, other government officials, political party and tribal leaders, U.S. Ambassador Krajewski, the Ambassadors of Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Italy and Britain and the resident representative of the UNDP. The meetings reinforced support for NDI’s partnerships in Yemen and encouraged the continuation of active democratic reform in Yemen.

IV. RESULTS

Result 1: MPs came together to identify areas for skill building within parliament, its functions, responsibilities and committee actions.

Indicators:

- The Parliamentary Advisory Group was formed; and
- The Parliamentary Advisory Group developed recommendations for improving committee staff capacity on initial, targeted committees.

Result 2: MPs came together to strengthen parliamentary efforts for combating systemic corruption.

Indicator:

- MPs initiated the formation and application process for a Yemen chapter of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC).

Result 3: The Democracy Development Center was established for parliamentarians and stakeholder discussions.

Indicators:

- NDI has held all parliamentary activities at the DDC;
- DDC client groups have used the facility for their own meetings;
- A series of computer training courses for parliamentarians, committee staff, party members and civil society groups has been developed.

Result 4: MPs took part in open dialogues with stakeholders about policy issues.

Indicators:

- The Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Labor and Social Affairs received feedback on the *Draft National Strategy on Wages and Salaries* and the *Draft Law on the Regulation of employment, wages and salaries* being considered by parliament;
- The Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Labor and Social Affairs presented this feedback to committee members; and
- The Committee is developing a framework for a broad consultative workshop process by which to receive additional feedback from stakeholders on policy issues.

V. EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

The honesty that has been expressed by MPs and members of the Secretariat during meetings with NDI and the interest in taking part in activities indicates a continuing momentum for reform amongst parliamentarians. The initiative taken by MPs to form a GOPAC chapter in Yemen shows solid support for efforts to curb corruption that Parliament has displayed over the last year, most recently in the compromises made in passing the annual budget. NDI is very optimistic and hopeful about this development. The idea of forming a GOPAC chapter has circulated amongst members since summer 2003; the Middle East Chapter has only recently met and established its chair. Especially encouraging was the high attendance at the formative meeting and the caliber of the MPs who came. Attendees and the agreed upon board represent four political parties, lending broad-based support for the effort. Other members are very eager to join. Once recognized and declared, an MP led GOPAC chapter in Yemen could have a serious impact on the work of parliament and empowerment of the anti-corruption front.

Building the capacity of committee staff will be a challenging undertaking, both for NDI and parliamentarians. The members of NDI's Parliamentary Advisory Group express similar

frustration that the current parliament is too constrained by its leaders. The capabilities and capacities of parliamentary staff is as much a function of improper recruitment as it is a general ignorance of parliamentary procedures. However, both the MPs and the Director General of the Presidium's office have indicated their willingness to work towards a standard recruitment process which follows the rules as part of the overall reform of parliamentary systems. Many of the MPs and Director's General may be relying on NDI to be the catalyst for reforms. It will be important to draw in and work with staff who demonstrates a willingness to build a strong parliamentary institution based on rule of law, and devolution of authority to the appropriate elements within parliament.

The initial Bridging Dialogue discussion provided for people from different parties in Parliament including the presidium, members of the Doctors' Syndicates, academics, and committee members an opportunity to discuss a policy matter of some significance to Yemen. Given the ongoing strikes and criticism of the proposed strategy and law, the opportunity for this group to share its opinions and look for compromises was very important. Several of the academics, who are members of the syndicate, began discussions with some parliamentarians. Most importantly, it allowed participants to learn about the Parliamentary Committee's plan to consult stakeholders.

This plan for committee consultation with stakeholders is an important point as NDI Yemen's Parliamentary Program team will invest considerable efforts with some select standing committees to regularize their consultative processes. Obviously, this presents NDI with an early opportunity. It is encouraging that this particular committee is engaging in widespread discussion. NDI has offered to assist the consultation process in any reasonable way and will work with various stakeholders in developing their submissions and interventions in the public events to take place.

Securing the attendance of MPs at dialogue sessions and in the forum series will continue to be a challenge, despite their stated commitments. Though the scheduled times are based on NDI's consultations with MPs and take into consideration the timing of house and committee sittings, the demands of their positions may frequently cut into the time reserved. NDI will continue to monitor the situation but for now will adhere to the schedule previously arranged.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

During the upcoming quarter, NDI will continue to work collaboratively with the MPs interested in forming a GOPAC chapter in Yemen and the Parliamentary Advisory Group. It is hoped that progress will be made in drafting by-laws for the proposed GOPAC chapter, submitting an application for chapter status and recruiting additional interest from MPs committed to fighting corruption. The Parliamentary Advisory Group will take steps to encourage the development of committee staff with which members are associated as well as maintain pressure on MPs to remain committed and involved with reform-oriented activities.

NDI will continue the process of writing to all parliamentarians to advise them of NDI program activities in parliament and at the NDI offices. This communication will include an invitation to all to attend a session on the comparative role of the parliamentarian. This session

will initiate outreach work to identify those MPs interested in on-going participation in Parliamentary programs. NDI will make use of MPs already involved to recruit additional interest and ascertain true commitment.

In April, NDI will host the first computer literacy session at the DDC. It will be a beginner's course accommodating ten participants. It will be repeated to meet demand. NDI is also scheduling additional modules for file and data management, and internet research techniques. So far, the initial interest has been encouraging. Amal Hakimi, DDC Resource Librarian will lead the computer training activities in cooperation with the US Embassy's Public Affairs group who provide the training. From these trainings, NDI expects to see increase use of DDC research facilities by participants and see evidence of improved research techniques in press statements, legislative reporting and policy formation.

Appendix

NDI IN THE MEDIA

THE DAILY CHEW - NDI to open regional center in Yemen By Observer Staff - Feb 22, 2005, 12:41

SANA'A (Saba) - Chairman of the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) Kenneth Walk will arrive in Sana'a this Thursday on a several-day official visit to launch the NDI's regional bureau in Yemen.

Chairman of the Shura Council sub-committee on rights and civil societies Mohammad Al-Tayeb said the center would help support issues related to the democratic, human rights and civil societies associations in the region.

"Choosing Yemen to host the regional center for the NDI is a recognition of its democratic experience and achievements in democratic practice, political pluralism and respecting human rights as well as the successful experiences in presidential, parliamentary and local elections," Al-Tayeb said.

The NDI chairman will hold talks with senior government officials to discuss joint relations between Yemen and the institute.

Yemen NDI discuss arrangement for democratic training center – Saba News

SANA'A, Feb 24 - Yemen and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) discussed on Thursday arrangements for opening a regional center for training MPs on democratic practices.

In a session of talks, President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the President of the NDI Kenneth D. Wollack also discussed a broad range of issues related to Yemeni-American relations.

The NDI President highlighted the interest of the NDI to continue to support Yemen and qualify it for the assistance of the Millennium Fund.

Yemen, NDI review democratic cooperation 2005-02-26 Source: SABA

SANA'A, Feb 26- Yemen and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) discussed last week arrangements for opening a regional center for training MPs on democratic practices.

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New NDI headquarters opened - Yemen Times Staff

Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmer, Speaker of the Parliament and President of the Islah Party, inaugurated, the new headquarters of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and one of its new branches, the Democracy Promotion Center, on March 3.

The centre which is devoted to educating members of parliament on the principles of parliamentary work.

In his speech, Sheikh al-Ahmer urged the institute to activate communication with the parliament and organize activities that help promote MPs' understanding of parliamentary work, to further bolster democracy.

Meanwhile, Robin Madrid, NDI director, welcomed Sheikh al-Ahmer and all the participants in the inauguration of the institute, pointing out the challenges before Yemen in different areas.

She explained the pressing need to know mechanisms of joint work, and exchange opinions among democratic institutions, within the community and among NGOs. That illustrates the importance of the parliament as a national establishment fostering democratic existence in the society.

Madrid briefed the attendants on the service to be provided by NDI and the DPC for MPs and political parties in terms of research capacities, library and digital literature, the Internet, all to add a significant contribution into democracy-enhancing studies.

Yemen News Agency (SABA) & Thawra news paper

SANA'A, March 3 (Saba)- Speaker of the parliament Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmer Attended on Thursday opening ceremony of American Democracy Institute in Sana'a.

In the ceremony, al-Ahmer delivered a speech in which he pointed out to the importance of communication between the parliament and the institute to spread awareness among the members of the parliament regarding the parliamentary work.

He indicated to the activities that aim at strengthening democracy in the country.

The institute director Robian Madrad indicated to the role of dialogue and democratic work for facing the current challenges. He pointed out to the need for finding a joint mechanism and exchanging viewpoints among the democratic corporations and civil society organizations.

Carlo Binda the Resident Expert of Parliament Program, explained the role of the Democratic Development Center in offering the resources for parliament members, political parties and NGOs to achieve democracy promotion and development.

And he indicated that the center will be a partner to PMs and NGOs to develop search skills and abilities to support the political and democracy organizations by offering all support to exchange the experience in the region.

