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**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and International Organizations**  
**“Democracy Support Strategies In Africa”**  
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Mr. Chairman, ranking member Bass, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to address pressing questions concerning effective preparations for and engagements in elections in Africa and their importance for effective democracy and governance support on the Continent. Please allow me to begin by acknowledging your leadership and the critical contributions of this Subcommittee in expressing the concerns and support of the United States on these issues.

Mr. Chairman: Democratic elections in any country are to serve two essential, inter-related functions, to:

- Resolve peacefully the competition for government office and their associated powers; and
- Provide the vehicle through which citizens express their will as to who is to have the authority to occupy those offices.

Each of those functions presents complex and difficult undertakings. This is particularly true where traditions for democratic political processes are not long-established and where there are high risks of competitors employing violence to obtain political goals. Both of these factors are frequently present in African elections and elsewhere around the globe.

When the electorate makes a free and informed choice among those given a fair chance to compete for votes, citizens not only have the opportunity to choose those whom they believe will best improve living conditions – to “make democracy deliver” – they also establish public confidence in government, which stabilizes political conflict. Support for democratic elections therefore is both a matter of respect for the political rights of sovereign people and a matter of international peace and stability. Both are vital to the interests of the American people and everyone around the world. This highlights the importance of today’s hearing.

An additional overarching point is important when looking at Africa or any region. Elections are a barometer of the general political climate. We often hear that elections are essential but an insufficient condition of democracy, which is unquestionably true. The converse is also important; elections must be viewed as an essential part of broader political dynamics, not isolated from them.

To paraphrase a recent verbal exchange between former Nigerian President Obasanjo and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan: It is not so much that poor elections give democracy a bad name as it is that political violence and undemocratic processes give elections a bad name. Put simply, the context is crucial. To be effective, assistance must address contextual factors that subvert peaceful, credible elections.

My colleagues and I have frequently spoken to you of the advantages of taking an “electoral cycle approach” when looking at democracy support. This is an important perspective. It takes us beyond seeing elections as a one-day “event” and highlights the multiple, long-term processes that begin far before election day, continue after it, and even connect up to subsequent elections. Indeed, the pre- and post-elections are critical and merit increased attention.

Democratic elections, however, cannot be adequately considered in two-dimensional representations with arrows moving around a circle. Elections are part of multi-dimensional political dynamics, drawing from them and contributing to them. All election processes therefore need to be infused with essential elements of democratic political culture.

To ensure that elections can resolve peacefully the competition for governmental office and ensure that the will of the people provides the authority and legitimacy for government, at least three principles need to be reinforced in all electoral assistance.

- **Inclusiveness:** To be democratic, political systems and electoral processes must be inclusive - guaranteeing universal and equal suffrage - and political systems must be moved beyond winner-take-all affairs so the opposition gets a meaningful stake in building effective governance.
- **Transparency:** People have a right to genuine elections and a right to know that they are genuine, and citizens and electoral contestants therefore must be allowed to see for themselves that elections are credible – which requires access to both relevant electoral processes and data for independent verification, and the political space necessary to freely disseminate the findings of such verifications without fear of persecution.
- **Accountability:** For elections to be credible, accountability must be established in electoral administration, political competition and electoral justice systems so that those with electoral grievances see the advantages of seeking peaceful redress over potentially violent action.

No electoral or political process can be perfect, but the degree that these principles are present and strengthened reinforces potentials for sustained and positive democratic progress. These principles should be our signposts for engagement, and strengthening them should be a means of evaluating success.

Kenya provides an example where these principles were applied in assisting a broad array of programs in the reform efforts from the 2008 electoral calamity through the 2010 constitutional referendum, reconstitution of the electoral commission, reconfiguration of the courts, building an

anti-political violence environment, and systematic citizen election monitoring around the largely peaceful and credible 2013 elections.

Longer-term electoral related assistance was woven into strengthening the broader democratic political fabric leading to Cote d'Ivoire's positive 2015 presidential electoral process, which followed its tragic 2011 electoral conflict. Longer-term, multi-dimensional assistance was also central to engagement in Nigeria's successful 2015 elections, which built from the discredited 2007 elections and advanced from the post-election violence of 2011. In each of these examples United States government assistance was complemented by assistance efforts of other countries and other electoral-related actors.

Not all countries receive adequate funding for needed preparations or support for engagement on pressing electoral issues. Democracy and governance funding has faced several years of cutbacks, particularly in Africa, which was reduced by more than 40 percent last year. Those cuts have impacted the ability to respond to requests to monitor elections, develop civil society, and strengthen fragile parliaments. Hopefully, these cuts can be restored for fiscal year 2016 and beyond as Congress has sought to do through the Omnibus appropriations bill.

African countries and their elections merit greater attention due to medium and longer term economic and security interests as well as established commitments to democracy and human rights. Moreover, citizens across the continent are putting themselves on the line by demanding honest elections and responsive governance, and they are requesting assistance. Experience in Africa confirms the urgent need for electoral support, while a number of cost-effective means of engagement have proven effective in promoting credible, peaceful elections.

Following are 10 such forms of engagement based on NDI's programs in over 40 Sub-Saharan countries and scores of African elections:

- Supporting the efforts of citizen groups, electoral authorities and legislatures to remove barriers to electoral participation of women, young women and men, people with disabilities, and other population groups.
- Helping nonpartisan civil society organizations develop sustained efforts in systematically monitoring the broad range of electoral and related political processes. Independent statistically-based monitoring of election-day processes and election results verification – commonly referred to as “parallel vote tabulations or PVTs” – decrease political volatility and potentials for violence, while they increase public confidence in elections. Credible independent audits of voter registries and other processes are of growing importance.
- Building cohorts of citizen election monitoring experts and networks of monitoring organizations across borders, regions and globally for solidarity and mutual assistance.
- Advancing norms and standards through networks of citizen election monitors, election administrators, and international observers and assistance providers, as well as through

intergovernmental organizations (including the UN, AU, regional organizations, and Open Government Partnership).

- Developing principles for election observation and credible election administration and specific tools and campaigns, such as the Open Electoral Data Initiative (OEDI), and building capacities for citizen observers, parties, election administrators and tech activists to analyze and advocate based on electoral data.
- Facilitating dialogue among electoral contestants and assisting them in developing means to curtail politically motivated violence, including its specific impact on women's participation as candidates, voters, election officials and election monitors.
- Helping political parties develop capacities to analyze legal frameworks for elections, build networks to monitor their implementation, gather fact-based information and use complaint mechanisms to redress grievances, as well as engage constructively in political party liaison committees with election commissions.
- Facilitating youth engagement programs, including young women, with political parties, civil society groups, the African Union and other entities – aimed at bringing young people and their leaders into political and electoral processes to promote citizen-centered governance and peaceful political competition.
- Developing bridges between organizations focused on peace-building, citizen election monitoring and enhancing the roles of women, election commissions, and public safety sectors to better cooperate in preventing or mitigating potentials for electoral-related violence.
- Safeguarding the free flow of electoral-related information, including accurate information about contestants' issue positions and matters concerning electoral integrity, via traditional and social media, and internet access for election monitors, contestants and media, and organizing debates and other forums that focus on quality of life issues and violence/intimidation-free elections. .

Constitutional issues relating to how many terms one person may remain in office – particularly as head of state – and issues relating to disbursing powers among branches and levels of government also merit support, as does establishing fairness and transparency in political finance and other rules of the game. All of these issues are related to circumstances where power is abused, decks are stacked and corruption subverts the ability of government to improve the lives of citizens. That dynamic turns citizens away from government, while international assistance – when properly targeted – can help homegrown reformers to address those problems. It is in our common interests to take on that challenge.

While there are numerous elections on the African horizon, several where United States electoral assistance is a factor deserve particular mention at this juncture.

- Zambia: With the August 11 elections and constitutional referendum quickly approaching, political tensions are sharply rising from last year's closely decided snap presidential election. Incidents of ethnic related violence and ritualistic murders are

adding to concerns of electoral violence as the economy is stressed and electoral contestants expect the outcome to be very close.

- Cote d'Ivoire: November's legislative elections will test the political environment after 2015's largely positive presidential electoral process. Considerable political polarization remains following the country's 2011 conflict and long-standing ethnic and political divisions.
- Ghana: Political tensions have endured since the razor-thin 2012 presidential election and protracted court challenge. The Election Commission and courts have lost their traditional high levels of public confidence, particularly among some sectors of the population. Controversy over the voter registry is raising tensions, causing concerns that electoral crisis and violence could mar the November 7 elections.
- Kenya: Though the 2013 elections were largely peaceful and credible, the election commission's presidential result and Supreme Court's decision to uphold it remain a subject of controversy. There is an active campaign to remove the commission in advance of the March 9, 2017 elections, and political tensions are high. Many observers express concern that the 2017 elections face a higher risk of violence than the 2013 polls.
- Democratic Republic of Congo: The announcement that a voter registry cannot be produced and therefore elections cannot be organized before the incumbent president's term of office expires in November, and the Constitutional Court's ruling that he may remain in power until elections are held and a successor put in place, escalates political crisis and the potentials for violence.

Engagement with electoral authorities, political contestants and civil society in Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Kenya contributed significantly to the positive nature of the immediate past elections in each of those countries. Ongoing relationships that span nearly three decades in those places provide foundations for effective engagement as the next elections approach.

Ghana provides an example where international attention to help promote credible, peaceful elections should be increased. The country is rightly held out as a positive political development example, but actors across the electoral spectrum there are calling for international engagement. It is an example where focused attention can help maintain a stable anchor in an important region. That opportunity was missed in the lead-up to Kenya's 2007 elections.

A similar case can be made for attention needed for the upcoming elections in Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya. The DRC presents a particularly difficult set of circumstances in light of its lack of positive electoral precedent, its risk of political violence and the complexities of its situation. In all of these countries, developing a democratic political process is the key to achieving credible, peaceful elections. Engagements that promote inclusiveness, transparency and accountability must be tailored to their contexts, though the principles are central for successful democracy support strategies in Africa.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.