



*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Togo Assessment Mission Releases Findings

Washington, DC – April 7, 2005 – IFES, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) released a pre-election assessment of Togo today. Teams from each of the organizations visited the country in March 2005 to evaluate the prospects for free and fair presidential elections scheduled for April. During its visit, the assessment team saw potentially encouraging signs of greater political openness, including:

- Participation by opposition parties and candidates in the presidential election;
- International engagement in the Togo transition process, especially on the part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS);
- Public political activities by opposition leaders;
- Coverage of opposition events by government controlled media outlets; and
- Significant public mobilization and interest in the upcoming presidential elections.

The team concluded, however, that while some positive steps are being taken and an election could be conducted by April 24, serious obstacles must be overcome for the elections to be considered credible and reflecting the will of the electorate. These include:

- Numerous deficiencies in the legal framework for elections;
- The short period of time for the election campaign;
- The imbalance in the composition of election commissions;
- Widespread questions regarding the accuracy of the voter registry;
- Deployment of 3,500 special security forces for the campaign and elections period, along with general concerns about the potential for violence; and
- Lack of public confidence in the independence of the judiciary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Togolese:

1. The electoral timetable should be closely examined. Sufficient time must be allocated for a thorough revision of the voter register and a meaningful electoral campaign period. Should it become impossible to implement noteworthy confidence-building measures, particularly publicly accepted revisions to the voter register in time for the elections, Togolese authorities should consider a revision of the electoral timetable.

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2. All political parties, candidates, the government and the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) should strive to immediately increase public confidence by announcing that steps will be taken to ensure democratic elections. Formal and regular dialogue between the CENI and political parties should be instituted to identify and redress grievances. All political parties and the CENI should agree to a code of conduct, and widespread civic and voter education efforts should be undertaken by the CENI.
3. The government should reiterate its commitment to enforcing the provision of the Togolese constitution requiring members of the armed forces to be politically neutral. This should include a clarification on the role to be played by the 3,500 special security forces deployed by the Ministry of Interior. Furthermore, the government should ensure that the military remains in the barracks on polling day, that police duties are undertaken without interference in election activities, and that the presence of ECOWAS military observers is welcomed.
4. Political parties and Togolese civil society organizations should be accredited to monitor polls. Togolese law recognizes the right of contesting parties/candidates to observe all aspects of the electoral process. However, it neither grants nor denies similar rights to civil society. Recognition of domestic groups' right to observe electoral processes would bring Togolese practice in line with standards observed throughout most of West Africa.
5. Materials and technologies to be used on election day should be improved. Ballot papers with numbered stubs, tamper-evident ballot box seals and tamper-evident bags for ballot transport would reduce opportunities for fraud. Improvements to the CENI's communications infrastructure allowing for the progressive reporting of preliminary results could also preempt misinformation and help reduce tension.

To the international community:

1. Support should be given to Togolese civil society organizations and ECOWAS observers in gaining access to the polls. Efforts should also be made to encourage the CENI and the Ministry of Interior to accredit both international and domestic observers.
2. Party pollwatchers should be supported in the development of monitoring methodologies and materials. Such materials already exist from the 2003 presidential election, which would require only minor adaptation.
3. Sustained support should be granted by the diplomatic community for the adoption of the above recommendations by the Government of Togo and the CENI.

The presidential election, while of vital importance in and of itself, also forms part of an enduring democratization process in Togo. For long-term democratic reform to take root, the Togolese government, election authorities, political parties and civil society must engage in dialogue on increasing participation in politics by political parties and civil society. Reforms should also be undertaken to strengthen the independence and mandate of the CENI.

The emergence of a more participatory system of governance should be complimented by a national civic awareness campaign to educate all Togolese about the rights of democratic citizenship. This should be complemented by targeted efforts to build the capacity of political parties, civil society organizations, election administrators and the judiciary to participate in the democratic process.