



## **DJIBOUTI: 2005 PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT REPORT**

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 20 March – 3 April 2005, a four-person team from the International Republican Institute (IRI) and IFES conducted a pre-election assessment in the Republic of Djibouti, in advance of the presidential election scheduled for 8 April 2005. The team consisted of two IRI Consultants, Ambassador Lange Schermerhorn and Ann Wang, IRI Senior Program Officer Stanley Lucas, and IFES Consultant Gisele Poirier.

Under a grant funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the team sought to evaluate the election environment in Djibouti, meeting with representatives of political parties, civil society groups, media, other international organizations, and relevant government bodies. Through these interviews and observations, the team examined voter registration and election administration processes, as well as the presence and level of external electoral assistance. The team also assessed the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions and evaluated the election environment, including the occurrence of intimidation and harassment, evidence of political corruption or fraud, and issues of inclusion. In conducting this mission, the team held meetings and roundtables with six political parties, four Djiboutian “nongovernmental” organizations, members of the media, representatives of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the European Union (EU), the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), and various government ministries and agencies. The team also met several times with the U.S. Embassy and USAID.

The resulting report of the mission highlights the following:

- There are some structural changes that the government of Djibouti should undertake in order to improve its governance record and open the political system to other actors, in advance of any programmatic activities:
  - Implement provisions included in the 2001 Peace Accords.
  - Amend the Constitution to provide more balance amongst the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.
  - Draft a new Electoral Law to allow for proportional representation, equal financing of all political parties, and lowering of candidate registration fee (currently set at five million DFr, or approximately \$28,500).
  - Encourage creation of a climate in which an independent media can operate.
  - In the absence of opposition representation in the National Assembly, establish a forum for dialogue at the national level between majority and opposition coalitions, where both sides can air grievances and develop solutions.
  - Establish a forum for dialogue for all actors involved in political process – civil society organizations, private enterprise interests, women and youth groups, opposition parties, and government ministries – where continued discussion and collaboration can open the political system. The creation

of the office of the *Mediateur* (National Ombudsman) could fulfill this role.

- There existed little evidence that the government was deliberately subverting the electoral process, despite claims to the contrary by opposition parties.
- Flaws in the electoral process were due primarily to lack of technical expertise and financial resources rather than manipulation on the part of the majority coalition.
- The opposition parties did not appear organized enough to contest effectively the elections, even had they decided not to boycott.
- Civil society was very underdeveloped; some would argue it did not exist at all. The few associations that do function are constrained by the necessity of operating in a non-adversarial manner vis-à-vis the government.
- Observation of election day procedures is being undertaken by the same international observers who monitored the processes in 1999 and 2003. Given the short timeframe, it would not be feasible to send U.S. election observers for the 2005 election. Democracy and governance programming in Djibouti can focus instead on long-term strategy and the strengthening of existing institutions, once the above pre-conditions are met.

Given the above conditions and observations, immediate action steps that can be taken by the U.S. government include the following:

- **Strategic planning:** Despite government assurances that proportional representation and other changes will be enacted in the near future to ensure participation by all actors involved in the political process, there do not seem to be any concrete timelines or designs for implementation. The government is moving in the right direction and appears committed to further opening of political space but lacks both the resources and expertise for long-term strategic planning. Organizations such as Management Systems International (MSI) that consult specifically on such challenges could be of assistance to the government in planning for the political, economic, and social future of Djibouti.
- **Conflict resolution:** There still exists some discontent with the government's perceived failure to address all the provisions of the 2001 Peace Accord. In order for the opposition and majority parties to have fruitful dialogue concerning the political situation, conflict resolution mechanisms should be put in place. Search for Common Ground has conducted conflict resolution programs all over the world and could provide some assistance in Djibouti.
- **Assessment of Electoral Law:** Organizations such as IFES and Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) should conduct evaluations of the Electoral Law and provide the government of Djibouti with concrete suggestions for change. This technical assistance will be necessary in advance of any legal revisions, as the government is reportedly no longer receiving such assistance from the French

government or any other international organizations, and it does not currently have the capacity to do so on its own.

Given that poverty and the low level of economic and educational development are factors impacting on the development of strong democratic institutions, there are other longer-term actions which the U.S. government can take to complement the immediate steps outlined above directly relevant to the electoral process:

- **Economic development:** The low level of economic development in Djibouti is a constraint on the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions. Developing industry and commerce to create jobs and better support an independent press will also aid in creating the robust civil society which is a key element of the democratic process. In addition to its assistance directed toward the health and education sectors, the U.S. government should assist Djibouti in developing its industry and commerce, primarily through aggressive efforts to engage the American private sector in Djibouti's development plans.
- **Descriptive rhetoric:** The use of the "ruling party" and "government party," as descriptions of the incumbent coalition with the shorthand term "opposition" for any others inculcates the idea that only the incumbents are "legitimate." It further perpetuates the perception in the public's mind that the incumbents have a permanent lock on public office and can be a deterrent to active participation in the electoral process. (This identification with the People's Rally for Progress (RPP) as the "party of the government" occurs elsewhere as well.) The U.S. should avoid using such loaded nomenclature and should encourage political parties to identify themselves only by their party names.

## **II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The IRI team would like to take the opportunity to thank those whose assistance during this pre-electoral assessment mission was indispensable. First and foremost, we want to express our gratitude to U.S. Ambassador Marguerita Ragsdale, who made herself and her staff available to us and offered numerous insights into the current political and economic situation in Djibouti. Political Assistant Samir Hassan Cheikh's help with arranging meetings and other logistic matters was essential to the success of the assessment, and we very much appreciate all his efforts on our behalf.

USAID Resident Representative Janet Schulman was also a source of knowledge and expertise and helped facilitate our introduction to Djibouti, particularly concerning matters of development and international assistance. Stafford Baker served as initial USAID liaison between Washington D.C. and Djibouti, and his groundwork in Djibouti made our visit that much smoother.

Finally, many thanks to the Government of Djibouti, political parties, civil society organizations, media outlets, other international organizations, and foreign embassies for their willingness to meet with us and share information.

This report, coming as it does from independent organizations, does not necessarily reflect U.S. government views.

### III. BACKGROUND & POLITICAL/ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Djibouti is a relatively stable country. Its stability is nonetheless fragile, owing to the legacy of civil strife in the early 1990s, the absence of significant natural resources, and limited tolerance for varying views. President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who was elected for a first six-year mandate in April 1999, has a vision of where he wants to take the country, but his actions to date have fallen short of his professed commitment to democratic principles. With weak legislative and judicial branches, few civil society organizations, and no independent media, the executive branch remains the dominant force in Djiboutian politics. Observers, political leaders, and civic activists lament the absence of a dialogue between the government and its critics.

Formerly known as the French Somali Coast and then the French Territory of the Afars and Issas, Djibouti opted for independence from France in 1977. Its economy revolves almost entirely around the transit of goods and ships through its port. The rural population is largely nomadic, and most agricultural products are imported from Ethiopia, Somaliland (the self-proclaimed republic in northern Somalia) or France.

Since independence, Djibouti's government has been led by one party. The People's Rally for Progress (RPP) produced the country's first president, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who served three six-year terms. In the 1999 presidential election, the RPP's Ismail Omar Guelleh succeeded Aptidon. According to the State Department's most recent *Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, "internationally and locally based observers considered the [1999] election to be generally fair, and cited only minor technical difficulties." The RPP-led coalition also won all 65 National Assembly seats in the country's most recent January 2003 legislative elections.

Guelleh's election as President in April 1999 marked a turning point. Though closely associated with the previous government, his campaign and platform reflected his ideas for the country. By some accounts, he has not lived up to expectations because he reappointed virtually the same cabinet and has not been aggressive in promoting change. Although he has asserted a commitment to democratic principles, critics allege that his actions have fallen short of his words. The executive branch dominates the political system because the constitution gives it substantial powers and because alternative voices are too weak to check its authority. Opposition political parties, civil society, and the media are unable to counterbalance the state. The National Assembly is elected from a district party slate in which the party that gets the majority of votes gets all the seats in that district, effectively producing a winner-take-all system. Many expressed the view that Djibouti's nomad-based culture lacks the habits and experience of a democratic culture.

Despite such criticisms, government ministers and outsiders observed the president has made improvements in the area of economic development, had signed a peace agreement in 2001 with the remaining Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) party dissidents who had declined to join the 1994 peace accords, established a university, undertaken judicial reforms, and privatized the port. At the same time, despite

the approximate \$300 million in economic development estimated by the Chamber of Commerce being poured into the country, primarily from the Arab world, very little seems yet to have impacted the average citizen in terms of social indicators. Nevertheless, there are intimations that Guelleh is committed to further democratic development but is constrained by advisors who do not share the same vision. Some observed that a second mandate is the time when the President will have latitude to move forward on the parts of his published vision which have yet to be implemented.

Within the economic arena, aside from port activities, there is little in the way of private sector development in Djibouti. Very few industries are in operation, and the government remains the primary employer in the country. This situation is politically problematic, as the majority of the population is thus dependent on the government for its livelihood. According to the Chamber of Commerce, there are 2300 private enterprises registered with or otherwise known to the government but exact statistics are hard to come by. A large problem encountered by the Chamber is its financial support system. As is the case with other Chambers that are organized according to the French model, members of the Djiboutian Chamber are charged *cotisations*, or membership dues, by the Ministry of Finance, which then apportions that amount to the Chamber. In past years, however, the money had simply been kept in the Treasury and not given back to the Chamber, making it difficult for the organization to operate effectively. This linkage with the government also precludes the Chamber from political involvement, as was evidenced during our meeting with the vice president of the Chamber and other leaders, who did not offer any opinions on the current political situation. When asked about stability of the political environment, a necessary pre-condition for any kind of private investment, the vice president said he saw no scenarios that would threaten the current direction and positive impact of economic development undertaken by President Guelleh. He further emphasized that Djibouti is a free-market economy and that the government is very open to private enterprise.

The RPP's success may also result in part from an ineffective opposition. The 1999 elections were Djibouti's first that were not boycotted by an opposition party. This year, however, the opposition coalition announced on 13 February 2005 that it would not field a candidate for the April presidential election. The one opposition party outside the coalition, the Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD), tried to contest the election, but the would-be candidate, Mohamed Daoud Chehem, explained he was unable to raise enough funds for his campaign. The opposition parties also cited misuse of state resources for campaigning; lack of access to radio and newspapers during the two-week campaign season scheduled to begin on 25 March; partiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and the Ministry of Interior which oversee the electoral process; and expectations of wide-spread vote-rigging due to the alleged refusal to publicly post voter lists, among other factors.

On the other hand, critics of the opposition alluded to the inability of the opposition to identify a viable candidate with enough country-wide appeal to contest the election. The government recognized the potential criticism it would receive were it to regain the presidency unopposed, and allegedly appealed to the opposition to take part in the



election. With a one-candidate election and lack of choice for voters, President Guelleh faces a second term without the mandate that he received after the first election. As a result, the boycott of the election could be seen to be more a political tactic rather than the result of flaws in the electoral system. By refusing to take part, the opposition parties have also effectively limited their opportunities to counteract officially the majority coalition, whether in formal debates or through other activities during the campaign season.

In addition, the tensions resulting from a political environment dominated by one party have been exacerbated by ethnic strife. Because the RPP when created was predominantly Issa of the Mamassan sub-clan, that Somali ethnic group has dominated the government since independence. This situation bred resentment from the minority ethnic Afars who organized as the FRUD and staged an armed rebellion in the early 1990s. Some members of the FRUD signed a peace accord with the government in 1994 and were compensated with several cabinet portfolios among other emoluments, thus joining the RPP in coalition. A smaller group, the FRUD-Armé, remained outside the peace accord and continued to harass the government with decreasing effect through the 1990s. In February 2000, their leader in exile, Ahmed Dini Ahmed, returned to Djibouti and entered into prolonged negotiations with the government that concluded in the signing in May 2001 of a final peace accord formally ending a ten-year civil war.

Government structure is determined by the Constitution, which mandates the following procedures and stipulations regulating the division of powers:

### **Executive Branch**

The president is elected to a six-year term through universal suffrage, and is limited to two terms. If a candidate does not obtain a majority in the first round, the top two candidates proceed to a second round. The president wields extensive powers, serving as commander in chief of the armed forces and the national police. The president has the authority to appoint his cabinet, consisting of a prime minister and ministers, and is free to determine their number and function. The constitution does not give the prime minister any specific functions; by custom he is an Afar. Traditionally, the president has named a cabinet that balances ethnic and clan affiliation, but critics claim these efforts are just window-dressing.

### **Legislative Branch**

The National Assembly has 65 members and is elected every five years from five multi-seat constituencies that range in size from four to 37. For the 2005 election, a sixth district has been created, although the number of seats in the National Assembly has remained unchanged. Voters in each district cast ballots for a party slate, and the slate that wins a majority of votes receives all of the seats assigned to that district. The party that wins the district of Djibouti City receives 37 seats, and thus gains control of the Assembly. This winner-take-all system greatly reduces the opportunities the opposition has in playing a role in governing the country.

The powers of the National Assembly are limited. It does not have the right to approve the president's ministerial, diplomatic, or judicial appointments. Constitutionally, the National Assembly holds only two sessions per year, each one month long. The Finance Law, which regulates government expenditure and revenue, is examined in the second session. Currently, RPP legislative slates are balanced by ethnic and clan affiliation through the apportionment of seats weighted among Somalis, Afars, Arabs. The incumbent coalition won the December 1997 legislative elections with 79 percent of the vote and the 2003 legislative elections with 63 percent of the vote, thereby giving it all 65 seats in the National Assembly.

### **Judicial Branch**

The judiciary is almost entirely controlled by the executive branch, but occasionally decides against government prosecutors in politically sensitive cases. Almost half of the country's 33 judges are women, which is unusual in any country, especially a predominantly Islamic society. The Supreme Court is headed by a woman, widely respected by her peers, and three of its five members are female. Under the Constitution, the head of the Court becomes acting president in the event of the demise or resignation of a sitting president until an election is held. Reviews of several different cases before the court suggest two things. First, legal procedures are generally followed. Nonetheless, judges are susceptible to pressure from the executive branch, given their lack of tenure. Implementation of judicial decisions remains weak. Justice is dispensed centrally in Djibouti City, a major complaint of the opposition FRUD and others who are pressing for devolution to the districts of justice and social services.

#### IV. POLITICAL PARTIES

##### Majority Coalition (UMP)

In Djibouti, there is very little distinction between the “government” and the majority coalition, which are *de facto* one and the same. The coalition – called the Union for Presidential Majority (UMP) – comprises the RPP, one element of the FRUD, the Djiboutian National Party (PND), and the Popular and Social Democratic Party (PSD). The latter parties comprised two of the five parties that joined to form the Unified Opposition to contest the 1999 presidential election as a coalition. They were persuaded to join the majority coalition after rapprochement discussions initiated by the President in 2001.

##### *Leadership and Organization*

The leaders of the majority parties also occupy the top positions of the state. The president of the republic serves as president of the RPP, and the president of the National Assembly is the secretary general of the party. Leadership and organization of the incumbent parties can thus be said to mirror those of the government, with top cabinet ministers also directing party strategy and actions.

In a meeting with RPP candidate (and currently incumbent) Guelleh, he referred to IRI as the only organization that has worked on democracy and governance issues in Djibouti, both during election and non-election years, and expressed his appreciation for IRI efforts. With regard to the future, he expressed willingness to open up dialogue with the opposition political parties on national issues and to find a solution to the opposition complaints concerning their 2003 candidate reimbursements. Moreover, he seemed committed to changing the current winner-take-all system and modifying the Electoral Law, allowing at least fifty percent opposition representation in the National Assembly and regional councils. At the same time, he cautioned against rapid change and preferred progressive implementation in order to avoid instability.

##### *Communication*

The incumbent coalition conveys both internal and external messages through state-owned media channels, from radio and television to the printed press. Since there is no independent press in Djibouti, all government media outlets are used as means of communication, although the RPP is said to publish its own journal – *Le Progrès* – and another journal was to be created for the two-week campaign period.

##### *Finances*

Because the National Assembly is elected from a district party slate in which the party that receives the majority of votes gets all the seats in that district, the system is, in effect, a winner-take-all structure. As a result, the RPP – and now the majority coalition – having won both the 1999 and 2003 elections, enjoys a monopoly on state resources since

only those parties with representation in the National Assembly have access to state financing. Thus, this year the total amount of state funding of 20 million DFr was available to the majority coalition, and by the time of this assessment, President Guellah had reportedly spent 350 million DFr (\$2.1 million) total on his campaign.

### **Opposition Coalition (UAD)**

The opposition coalition – United Democratic Alliance (UAD) – is currently composed of three political parties: Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD), and Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD).

Since the 2001 peace agreement and the elections in 1999 and 2003, the opposition maintains its complaints about the electoral process and the government's indifference to compromises reached with FRUD, claiming that they have gone unanswered. Although opposition parties did participate and make gains in 1999 and 2003, the winner-take-all system in Djibouti specified that the party that obtained the majority of the vote gained all the seats in the National Assembly, a provision that effectively shut the opposition out of government following the legislative elections.

In advance of the 2005 presidential elections, the opposition decided not to take part and issued a press communiqué on 13 February 2005, outlining nine primary grievances they said had not been addressed since being brought to the President's attention on 9 October 2004:

- Electoral lists have not been revised to reflect the composition of eligible voters in the country.
- The electoral lists are not publicly posted in each voting station throughout the interior regions.
- Publication of the electoral lists has not been made available to all political parties.
- A truly Independent National Electoral Commission, composed equally of opposition and governing political parties, under the presidency of an independent person approved by both sides, has not been established.
- A joint commission comprising opposition and government representatives to work on the special status of the capital (Djibouti City) has yet to be formed.
- Modification of Articles 27 and 54 the Electoral Law, in relation to release of results, tally sheets, and accounting need to be undertaken, and for more transparency each party must have a copy of the PV and results proclaimed by CENI.
- In naming of electoral assessors in voting stations, the one-party system approach must be abandoned. The assessors must represent all the parties in competition.
- Free and equal access to the media by all political parties has not been granted.
- The 1992 Communication Law, allowing free and equal access to the media by all political parties, must be amended.

According to coalition leaders, the opposition will conduct an “active” boycott of this election, with peaceful demonstrations and calls for abstention planned, but it is unclear whether these efforts would be complemented by political party pollwatchers on election day or other such “watchdog” activities. Because reports and grievances documented after the 1999 and 2003 elections have allegedly been largely ignored, the opposition has decided this boycott tactic might work to bring the sentiments of the disaffected Djiboutian people to the surface. By doing so, the opposition – whether intentional or not – is exercising a political tactic that places the majority coalition in a delicate situation: if the government calls for postponement of the election, it will be a violation of the Constitution, which mandates that a presidential election be held every six years; but if the government goes ahead with an uncontested election, the president’s second term could be criticized as being “illegitimate.”

When asked about the outcome of the election – what would happen on 9 April and the next 18 months – a few members of the opposition did not rule out the possibility of civil conflict, although others pointed to the presence of French and American military forces as a preventive mechanism to the outbreak of violence. (Neither the French nor American forces in Djibouti have any role in internal security, and their presence would not necessarily quell any election-related disturbances.)

### *Leadership and Organization*

Organization of the opposition political parties is unclear, and when asked about membership, two of the three parties avoided specific numbers, talking instead about high attendance at meetings and the “fact” that if elections were open and transparent, the opposition would win, implying that it commands the allegiance of a majority of the population. The ARD responded by saying it was a young party and had not been in existence for very long, but it has a base of about 10,000 members.

Critics of the opposition claim they are based on clan and tribal identity and offer little of substance to the voters in the way of political programs or ideology. Some explain the boycott of the election by pointing to the absence within the opposition parties of solid and charismatic leaders with enough vision to appeal to the wider Djiboutian public; the lack of concrete platforms and agendas defining their political position, thereby offering no real alternative to voters; and the inability of the opposition to organize itself administratively and politically.

Both opposition and majority groups lamented the loss of FRUD leader Ahmed Dini Ahmed, a former Prime Minister in the early years after independence. Known as a consummate politician and the only leader who could have effectively united the opposition parties, he died in the latter half of 2004. Dini was the original president of FRUD, the rebel group that launched armed attacks against the government in 1991, sparking a civil conflict that lasted a decade. He remained outside the Accord of 1999, which brought some elements of the FRUD into the government. After Dini signed the 2001 peace accord with the government, he returned to Djibouti and continued the opposition movement against the government in the political arena. After the 2003

legislative elections, Dini protested against what he called “fraud” on the part of the government but stressed the use of legal channels to challenge the election results, urging the opposition not to “take to the streets.” Most interlocutors believe that there was no question Dini would have been the opposing candidate this year. His death has left a vacuum of leadership within the opposition coalition, which is often criticized for its lack of direction and vision.

### *Communication*

Communication within and outside the parties is carried out primarily through publication of party “journals”: *La Réalité* (ARD) and *Le Renouveau* (MRD). Because there is a strong tradition of oral communication in Djibouti, opposition leaders said the parties also rely heavily on word-of-mouth to deliver news down to the local level. In conversations with outside observers, whether the parties actually reflect the will of the people they claim to represent remains ambiguous, and the “consultation process” with constituents is *ad hoc* at best, with no evidence of party conventions or meetings about the planned boycott having taken place. While the outcome of the 2003 elections showed clearly that the opposition had some level of popular base, a clear and consistent explanation of the boycott does not seem to have been communicated to the larger population.

### *Finances*

Party funds are limited, as there is no public financing available to parties not represented in the National Assembly; the winner-take-all provision currently precludes opposition parties from receiving this assistance. The opposition parties thus contend they are effectively silenced by the government. They have no funds to disseminate their views or build their organizations, whereas the ruling party alliance has access to state financing for campaigning and other activities. In addition, one of the opposition’s biggest complaints against the government is the failure to return candidate “deposits” from the 2003 legislative elections, totaling 32 million DFr. Legislative candidates were each required to pay a *caution* of 500,000 DFr to register their candidacies, with the understanding that the sum would be returned if the candidates received at least 10 percent of the vote. While the opposition did garner the required amount of the vote, their money allegedly has yet to be returned, further constraining parties’ financial resources. The government dismissed this complaint, claiming the law stipulates reimbursements only within the context of presidential elections, not legislative elections, although President Guelleh did mention during his meeting with the assessment team that he would see if the matter could be resolved in some way.

### **Other Parties**

Two additional parties operate outside the majority and opposition coalitions: the Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD), on the opposition side, and Union for Reform Partisans (UPR), affiliated with the majority.

Although originally part of the opposition coalition, PDD was excluded after deciding it did not agree wholeheartedly with the opposition's decision to boycott the election. It fielded the only opposition contender for the election, Mohamed Daoud Chehem, who claimed he could not complete the candidate filing requirements because he lacked the five million DFr necessary to register as a presidential candidate. In advance of the elections, PDD has published a number of communiqués criticizing Guelleh's government and encouraging Djiboutians not to renew his mandate.

URP aligns itself with the majority coalition and was formed three months ago, by the putative PDD opposition candidate's nephew.

## V. CIVIL SOCIETY

Although a few institutions such as neighborhood associations and women and youth organizations exist, there is no real culture of civil society in Djibouti. Very few organizations effectively play a watchdog role, and there are no groups working to advance civic or voter education. Many associations are headed by community leaders who also happen to be civil servants and openly affiliated with the government and RPP.

One such association, Bender Djedid (BD), focuses primarily on fighting poverty, through implementation of community development projects such as provision of primary education, technical computer training, donation of goods for charitable purposes, and programs for training other NGOs. BD's President said that the organization receives no funding from the state; several foreign governments as well as international NGOs such as Oxfam Canada provide financial assistance. Other evidence the BD leaders presented of the organization's independence from the government is the freedom to approach foreign funding sources without having to go through the state. At the same time, while claiming the organization does not involve itself in the political arena, the leaders admit this particular electoral situation has put BD in a delicate position: on the one hand, as a community association it has the duty to uphold the Constitution and encourage people to exercise their civic duty by going to the polls; but on the other hand, such encouragement could be construed as endorsement of the government. By way of explanation, they explained that civil society in Djibouti treads very carefully in the area of politics in order to maintain neutrality. In their eyes, this unwillingness to get involved in the political sphere means there are very few civil society vehicles available for mediation efforts between the majority and opposition coalitions.

Despite these ministrations against political involvement, however, BD representatives were among a government delegation that visited Washington D.C. and Texas in November 2002, through a group visit under the auspices of the State Department's International Visitors' Program, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. government. The group held meetings with the Federal Election Commission, IFES, NDI, IRI, and U.S. political parties, including the Libertarians. Upon returning to Djibouti, one of the BD members wrote a trip report with recommendations for the government, which seems to have disappeared, as government representatives we met with say they never saw it.

The only "legitimate" civil society organization, the Djiboutian Human Rights League (LDDH), was formed in May 1999 by a respected former deputy, Jean-Paul Noel Abdi, and other activists. The League monitors human rights nationwide and investigates human rights abuses. Less than a month after the group's launch and a few days after the group met with European human rights representatives, Noel's home (and League office) was the target of a grenade attack. He and his family were detained for three weeks. The Ministry of Interior successfully delayed LDDH's registration process until January 2002, and since then the organization has published numerous reports on the human rights situation in certain areas, calling for the release of political prisoners, and commenting on questionable legal procedures against opposition politicians and



journalists. Due to the opposition's boycott of the current election, LDDH has called for deferment of the elections until a later date, in order to allow for increased dialogue between the governing and opposition parties, so a "legitimately contested" election can be held. Interestingly enough, Abdi was a member of CENI in 2003, charged with writing the post-election report, which was never published.

One of IRI's past partners, the Development of Cultural Action Association (ADAC) is still working to promote reconciliation, cultural activities, and the training of artists in Djibouti. Its flagship event, FestHorn, takes place annually, and in 2004 the organization was funded by various government ministries, foreign organizations (including USAID), "private" partners (including state institutions such as Djibouti Telecom and *La Nation*), and individual contributions. Its primary focus is on promotion of cultural activities – music, theater, and visual arts – although its street theater program, implemented in 2002 with funding from IRI, incorporated civic education and decentralization messages. Despite the success of that program and its promotion throughout the country, ADAC has not pursued further funding. ADAC is currently working on a new project to start a music radio program. In preparation for this initiative, it has held discussions with the government on increased independence of the media and expressed the opinion that the government is open to such movement.

Student groups do exist, most of which seem to be mouthpieces for the majority coalition. However, some students recently visited the EU Mission in Djibouti to air frustrations against the government, in particular the Ministry of the Interior, which has allegedly refused to grant them the registration necessary to operate as a civil society organization.

There is a healthy level of women's involvement in the political arena, especially as at least seven National Assembly seats go to women. The judicial branch also counts several women among its best and brightest, with the Supreme Court headed by a woman and half the country's 33 judges being women as well. During our stay in Djibouti, the assessment team observed two political rallies composed of about 300 women each, in support of the majority coalition's presidential candidate, sponsored by the candidate's wife, and women appear to be much more active in Djibouti when compared to other predominantly-Muslim countries.

#### *Women's Associations*

The only women's group with a significant presence and adequate financial support in Djibouti is the National Association of Women in Djibouti (UNFD). It has 4,000 members and countrywide representation, with the ability to mobilize through word-of-mouth and the use of telephone banks. It is funded by numerous official and non-governmental organizations, both domestic and foreign, including government of Djibouti, the World Bank, the French Coopération, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the African Development Bank.

Although headed by the First Lady, the Secretary General maintains the organization is not under the direction of the government and does not involve itself in politics. In fact,

although the president and his administration have been very supportive of advancement of women's rights – as evidenced by the creation at the beginning of his tenure of a ministerial post devoted exclusively to women's affairs – it was expressed that UNFD members have no problem disagreeing with the government on issues of importance to them, such as female genital mutilation. The presence of the First Lady has actually helped the organization gain a higher profile and to overcome obstacles within the government that would otherwise have blocked women's ability to implement change. Moreover, the Secretary General expressed willingness to discuss differences with women who may not necessarily agree with UNFD on social issues.

Some of the organization's primary objectives include the progression of education and health for women, increased access to micro-credit opportunities, and more representation in decision-making institutions such as the National Assembly and the Cabinet. While it does not specifically lobby the executive or legislature, it carries out activities such as letter-writing, public meetings, and other events designed to express its concerns to the government.

## VI. MEDIA

### Radio & Television

The media in Djibouti is not well-developed, and there is no independent press. The government owns and operates the only radio and television station, although the development of other radio and television stations is allowed by law. Country-wide FM coverage is available in several local languages, including Somali and Afar, although television access is not as widespread, due to lack of resources and electricity in outlying areas.

By law, presidential candidates are each allotted 60 minutes of both radio and television time during the two-week campaign period. In addition, Radio and Television of Djibouti (RTD) personnel said they were committed to providing additional coverage of both government and opposition political meetings and special events, such as party congresses. In providing its broadcast services, RTD said it also offers technical assistance during production.

Before the two-week campaign period, RTD claimed it was open to political content and seemed to take seriously the responsibility of informing the public. One example it gave of its willingness to engage all parts of the political spectrum was in coverage of a much-publicized effort on the part of the opposition to explain its reasons for boycotting the election. Opposition coalition leader Ismail Guedi Hared was scheduled to appear on RTD on 18 March to state the reasons for which the opposition decided to pull out of the election. RTD had made all the preparations and was ready to receive him, but Guedi never appeared. *La Nation* – the government-owned newspaper – carried the story, whose headline read “Chaise Vide” (“Empty Chair”). The producers expressed disappointment with the opposition for not using this effective medium to reach the population, to educate the people as to why it decided not to participate in the electoral process. On the part of the opposition, reasons given for the no-show include rumors that the broadcast was going to be carried on a delay (rather than live), thereby giving the editors time to tailor the opposition’s message. The opposition also said RTD had promised to publicize the show but never did, hence the decision not to show up.

Aside from preparing for the elections, RTD seemed very eager to assist in civic and voter education. While claiming inability to take on the task themselves, the producers were concerned that a large part of the uneducated population still needs to be reached and does not have a good understanding of the Electoral Law or voters’ rights and responsibilities. Moreover, such education efforts would have to be transmitted in several local languages, as the official languages of Djibouti are French and Arabic, and mother tongues are Somali and Afar. If competent civil society organizations existed to implement such activities, RTD stood ready to offer its resources and help carry out civic and voter education.

### Newspapers

The government-owned newspaper, *La Nation*, now publishes three times per week (it used to publish only two times per week) and is aiming for daily coverage by the end of 2005. It has been in existence since 1980 and began publishing online in 2000. It generally does not offer extensive coverage of controversial issues and serves as the government's preferred paper of record for public announcements and education efforts; it is also physically housed within the Ministry of Information. Civil society and political party leaders maintain that their messages are frequently ignored or refused. Furthermore, the newspaper is only widely available in the capital; regional distribution does not really exist. In any case, print media reaches only a small part of the population due to literacy and financial challenges.

Within the electoral context, however, the director of the newspaper remarked that the opposition's boycott was disappointing in that layout and space allotment had already been prepared for both sides to use during the campaign period. Although space was not prescribed by law as with radio and television broadcasts, the newspaper said it would be respectful and egalitarian in coverage for both majority and opposition articles; if one side had a certain amount of space for photos and text, the other would be provided the same. In addition, coverage supposedly existed for opposition activities outside of the election period, depending on level of importance or timing of events. At the request of the Ministry of Information, the newspaper also printed some "get out the vote" messages, reminding citizens of their right and duty to take part in the presidential election.

On the other hand, journalists as seasoned professionals who cover many sectors were not trained specifically to cover elections. When asked about their neutrality and ability to report facts without opinions, no credible response was given. Moreover, reporters in Djibouti are not recognized as "journalists" because they are actually part of the civil service. Thus, even international news wire agencies rely on "stringers" who sometimes take risks when they file stories and reports that could be construed as portraying the government in an unfavorable light. While the Constitution includes a single provision regarding the media – establishment of a National Communications Commission to regulate the industry, set guidelines, and professionalize the service – no action has yet been taken to create such a body.

Aside from the state-sanctioned press, unofficial "journals" also exist to air divergent views, as one of the foremost complaints of the opposition is its lack of access to the media. Two publications – *La Réalité* (ARD) and *Le Renouveau* (MRD) – are distributed several times per month, albeit inconsistently, to communicate opposition opinions, communiqués, and grievances to the public. The tracts often presented the opposition's side during the election period, in response to government reports or broadcasts through the official media. Periodically, these publications have come under varying degrees of pressure from the government.

## VII. ELECTORAL PROCESS

### Legal Framework

The legal framework for Djibouti's electoral process is established by the Constitution and the 1992 Electoral Law, Parts I and II. According to the Constitution, the president is elected to a six-year term through universal suffrage (reached at the age of 18), and is limited to two terms. If a candidate does not obtain a majority in the first round, the top two candidates proceed to a second round. The turnout was approximately 60 percent in the April 1999 elections, and candidate Guelleh won 73.9 percent of the vote nationwide.

The constitution does not limit the number of parties allowed, leaving those specifics to legislation. The Electoral Law stipulates only that political parties must constitute at least three founding members per district and include representation of every ethnic group. Founding members have to be Djiboutian nationals, not have been convicted of any criminal offenses, and maintain residency in Djibouti. There are currently seven political parties within the majority and opposition coalitions. Two other political parties, PDD and UPR, are respectively aligned with the opposition and majority coalitions.

### Administration of Electoral Process

The Constitution tasks the Constitutional Council with oversight for the elections. The Council sees to the legality of all elections and referenda, proclaims the results, and responds to and rules on legal complaints. The Council consists of six members, appointed for single eight-year terms. Half of the body is named every four years. The President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, and the *Conseil Superior de la Magistrature*, or Judicial Superior Council, each nominate two members. The President of the Republic names the Council's president from among its members.

The Constitution does not specify which institution must actually organize the elections, instead leaving that up to the National Assembly to determine through legislation. The 1992 Electoral Law assigns that task to a CENI constituted prior to each election, whose 92 members comprise government representatives, including members from the National Assembly, as well as civil society and political party representatives. By law, the CENI is constituted 45 days before the elections and is dissolved 15 days thereafter. CENI is tasked with the responsibility of the development of the electoral list, voter identity cards, and polling day procedures. CENI had apparently published a 30-page manual to train commission members, but the assessment team did not actually see such training take place, nor did it have a chance to view the training manual.

The Ministry of the Interior plays a logistical role including procuring election paraphernalia, deploying polling station materials and staff, public relations, and receiving candidate filings. The Ministry also issues the national identity cards that voters must present at the polling station.

### Preparations for 2005 Elections

### *Voter Registration*

Voter registration began 1 October and continued through 31 December 2004, and voter cards had been distributed since 26 February 2005. Voter lists have been computerized for the first time and are now said to be available upon request for public viewing in each district, although they are not publicly displayed. According to the president of CENI, electoral lists are revised every year, from 1 January to 31 March. During election years, however, voter lists are not revised, so the Ministry of the Interior opened the list up two times last year – from January to March, and again from October to December – in order to ensure people had the chance to register before the presidential election.

Contrary to Electoral Law provisions, however, for this election CENI provided no assistance in producing voter registration or electoral lists, which was carried out instead under the direction of the Ministry of the Interior. Rather, CENI certified the results of the voter registration process and was in the midst of distributing voter cards at the time of the assessment. Both domestic and international groups indicated that a complete overhaul of the lists is long overdue, in order to ensure removal of the deceased population, those who have moved, and those who are not actually Djiboutian citizens. There do not seem to be any linkages between the Ministry of the Interior and the National Registry, which is charged with keeping records of the deceased. The opposition claims there are about 100,000 Djiboutians who do not have national identity cards, a prerequisite to voter registration, and the presence of large nomadic populations that do not have permanent residences also poses problems in terms of voter registration. In addition, apparently the French technician tasked to assist the Ministry of the Interior with electoral list revision was among six recently declared *persona non grata* by the government and is no longer in the country.

### *Candidate Registration*

Presidential candidate registration was originally open until 24 February but was subsequently extended until 8 March due to lack of opposition candidates to register. The campaign season then officially started on 25 March, with rallies scheduled throughout the country over the two-week period. Along with billboard posters, banners were strung in the capital, reminding people of their right and responsibility to turn up at the polls on Election Day.

### *Pollworker Training*

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 199,000 voters were registered, and there are 274 polling stations in the country, plus four in overseas embassies for the expatriate population (Paris, Yemen, Jeddah, and Riyadh). As the institution charged with all technical preparations for elections, the Ministry was responsible for training members of CENI. It also published pollworker manuals for each polling station and provided training for all polling station chairmen on 24 March. The chairmen were then supposed to train the secretary and two assessors under their charge in the polling stations.

Pollworkers are required to read and write French. It was unclear how polling station workers were recruited or what their affiliations were.

### *Election Materials*

Election materials are produced in-house, from ballot papers to pollworker manuals. Polling station chairmen were instructed to be at the polling stations at least an hour before opening time to ensure the staff were prepared and all materials accounted for: registration lists, ballots, envelopes, indelible ink, and pollworker manuals. The chairman then opens the transparent ballot box and show there was nothing inside. Polling station procedures were described as follows:

1. Voters present their voter and national identity cards;
2. Their names are checked off the registration list;
3. They are given one envelope and one ballot card for each party contesting the election (each card is a different color);
4. They vote in a secure area;
5. They place the card corresponding to the color of their candidate of choice inside the envelope;
6. They throw the rest of the ballot cards away; and
7. They drop the sealed envelope into the ballot box.

### *Election Observation*

The government has invited the participation of international observers from the African Union (AU), the Arab League, La Francophonie, and the United States. In addition, opposition political parties requested the presence of the European Union (EU). It was unclear whether domestic observers would be allowed to monitor polling stations. According to the Electoral Law, political party pollwatchers have the right to observe the process, but the opposition was not very forthcoming with its Election Day plans. It was apparent that the government welcomes international scrutiny of the election, in order to confirm that the government can run a free and fair election. The presence of international observers and execution of a technically sound election could potentially undercut opposition criticism and undo the intended effect of the opposition boycott.

### *Civic and Voter Education*

No constitutional or legal requirements provide for the implementation of voter or civic education, and no nongovernmental institutions have the mandate to carry out such activities. Educational materials produced by the Constitutional Council to raise awareness about the Constitution are not suitable for a largely illiterate population, although “get out the vote” messages have been systematically disseminated through radio and newspaper announcements. There was also no mention of any educational materials available at polling stations and no picture displays on voting procedures have been produced.

### *Security environment*

Djibouti has its own armed forces, including a small army, which grew significantly during the civil war. Agreement to reduce the government payroll by downsizing the armed forces was one component of the stand-by agreement Djibouti signed with the International Monetary Fund in 1997. Since the signing of the peace accord with the FRUD in 2001, the armed forces are expected to continue downsizing. One of the largest French military bases outside France is in Djibouti, which hosts approximately 2,600 French troops, including a unit of the French Foreign Legion.

The U.S. has a military presence in Djibouti but does not have any responsibility for security within the country. The U.S. force numbers approximately 1,500 troops who are stationed for six-month rotations at the U.S. military camp in the capital. Less than 100 German troops in Djibouti conduct mostly civil affairs projects, although they do have an agreement with the Djiboutian government to train the National Police on radio communications and maintenance.

Djiboutian security forces are housed within the Ministry of the Interior (the Gendarmerie) and the Presidency (the National Police). Funds for security concerns currently represent 45 percent of the total Ministry budget, and it has the responsibility for security arrangements during the electoral period.

### *Foreign Assistance*

There was virtually no foreign assistance for election preparations this year, although organizations such as the UNDP do have funds to dispense for governance projects. Other than requesting the presence of international observers to monitor the polls, however, the government has not availed itself of these funds. In discussions with various actors, areas that can be improved in advance of the next parliamentary and presidential elections include the decentralization process and strengthening of local institutions; assisting with legislative and judicial reform; political party development, voter and civic education; and communications training.



## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Government of Djibouti

Before any democracy and governance assistance can be effective, there are some structural changes that the Djiboutian government should undertake in order to improve its governance record. In concert with consistent pressure from the international community, the following will assist in creation of a more politically open and tolerant environment in which international organizations can carry out activities. In particular, the upcoming regional elections – tentatively said to be scheduled for March 2006 – could provide an opportunity for the international community to engage the government concerning constitutional changes and political party dialogue.

- Implementation and enforcement of provisions included in the 2001 Peace Accords.
- Amendment of Constitution to provide more balance amongst the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.
- Drafting of new Electoral Law to allow for proportional representation, equal financing of all political parties, and lowering of candidate registration fee (currently set at five million DFr, or approximately \$28,500).
- Encourage creation of a climate in which an independent media can operate.
- Establishment of a forum for dialogue at the national level between majority and opposition coalitions, where both sides can air grievances and develop solutions.
- Establishment of a forum for dialogue for all actors involved in political process – civil society organizations, private enterprise interests, women and youth groups, opposition parties, and government ministries – where continued discussion and collaboration can open the political system.

### International Community

Given the above conditions and observations, immediate action steps that can be taken by the U.S. government and international community include the following:

- **Strategic planning:** Despite government assurances that proportional representation and other changes will be enacted in the near future to ensure participation by all actors involved in the political process, there do not seem to be any concrete timelines or designs for implementation. The government is moving in the right direction and appears committed to further opening of political space but lacks both the resources and expertise for long-term strategic planning. Organizations such as Management Systems International (MSI) that consult specifically on such challenges could be of assistance to the government in planning for the political, economic, and social future of Djibouti.
- **Conflict resolution:** There still exists some discontent with the government's perceived failure to address all the provisions of the 2001 Peace Accord. In order for the opposition and majority parties to have fruitful dialogue concerning the political situation, conflict resolution mechanisms should be put in place. Search

for Common Ground has conducted conflict resolution programs all over the world and could provide some assistance in Djibouti.

- **Assessment of Electoral Law:** Organizations such as IFES and ERIS can conduct evaluations of the Electoral Law and provide the government of Djibouti with concrete suggestions for change. This technical assistance will be necessary in advance of any legal revisions, as the government is no longer receiving such assistance from the French government or any other international organizations, and it does not currently have the capacity to do so on its own.

Given that poverty and the low level of economic and educational development are factors impacting on the development of strong democratic institutions, there are other longer-term actions which the U.S. government can take to complement the immediate steps outlined above directly relevant to the electoral process:

- **Economic development:** The low level of economic development in Djibouti is a constraint on the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions. Developing industry and commerce to create jobs and better support an independent press will also aid in creating the robust civil society which is a key element of the democratic process. In addition to its assistance directed toward the health and education sectors, the U.S. government should assist Djibouti in developing its industry and commerce, primarily through aggressive efforts to engage the American private sector in Djibouti's development plans.
- **Descriptive rhetoric:** The use of the "ruling party" and "government party," as descriptions of the incumbent coalition with the shorthand term "opposition" for any others inculcates the idea that only the incumbents are "legitimate." It furthermore perpetuates the perception in the public's mind that the incumbents have a permanent lock on public office and can be a deterrent to active participation in the electoral process. (This identification with the People's Rally for Progress (RPP) as the "party of the government" occurs elsewhere as well.) The U.S. should avoid using such loaded nomenclature and should encourage political parties to identify themselves only by their party names.

Once the above concerns are addressed, training of political parties, strengthening of civil society, support of an independent media, and assistance with the electoral process can serve to further democratization efforts.

### *Political Parties*

Political parties in Djibouti are hindered by lack of organization, purpose, and funding. As with other underdeveloped parties around the world, the opposition has no clear agenda, other than agitating against the current incumbents. When asked for platforms or aspects that differentiate them from the majority party, they are usually hard-pressed to find an answer. Similarly, they enunciate no concrete plans for the future, or the kinds of

programs they would implement or change were they to become the majority. In light of these issues, the following steps can be taken:

- *Provide training for political parties and candidates.*
  - Party and candidate training are needed. The parties need to be taught about candidate recruitment, membership recruitment, candidate training, etc. While the majority of the focus is on the Presidency, all parties need to recognize the importance of winning other races as well. A strong political party should attempt to field candidates from the top to the bottom of the ballot. This training should be made available to all political parties.
  - Another way the parties can be assisted is to develop an information outreach program for each organization and its candidates. A candidate manual could be address such issues as signature collection requirements; campaign finance regulations and reporting requirements; provisions for equal time/conditions for appearances on state media; a calendar of election-related deadlines; rights of access of candidate representatives in the polling place; sample forms; an index of all laws and regulations governing the election campaign; and contact information for the Ministry of the Interior and district commissioners.
  - A successful training program for party agents should include monitoring the voting and counting processes in the polling centers on Election Day, in order to build confidence among parties that the process is free and fair.
  - Another possible area of support is the funding of a “Party Resource Center,” which has been done in other countries such as Liberia and Angola. In such centers, international organizations provide a site where all parties have access to computers, phones, printers, copying, and similar resources that they could not financially provide for themselves. The establishment of a political party resource center would need to be carefully planned, wherever it is located. It would need the full support of all registered political parties, including the incumbent coalition parties, and clear guidelines with regard to the objectives and usage of such a center. The composition of the center’s governing board should be given careful consideration as well.
  - Another possibility is to help the parties develop a “Code of Conduct” for the next elections and receive training for their candidates and activists on appropriate conduct during future campaign periods.

### *Civil society*

Despite the presence of a handful of community associations and one prominent human rights group, civil society in Djibouti is virtually non-existent. During the assessment mission, the team determined that no significant civic or voter education had taken place prior to the elections, aside from government-sponsored public announcements in state

media. In a largely illiterate society, use of different mediums of communication in delivery of civic messages must be taken into account. While certain steps can be taken to strengthen civil society, there is only so much that can be done when such organizations do not exist. Within these constraints, the following recommendations are offered:

- *Build on already-existing efforts to implement civic, human rights, and voter education.*
  - IRI previously implemented a civic education program in Djibouti through the support of a local group, the Development of Cultural Action Association (ADAC). The use of oral tradition in this country lends itself well to the medium of street theater as a means of communication and could be developed to provide more targeted messages in outlying communities in the period leading up to future elections. Use of this medium could be integrated with the Ministries of Education and Health as a way to convey a variety of civic and social messages such as HIV/AIDS education.
  - Community-based groups such as neighborhood associations are an often overlooked part of Djiboutian civil society. USAID and other international donors can empower and build the capacity of community-based groups in an effort to build up a more vibrant civil society.
  - Donors could also consider funding a series of trainings and workshops to provide civil society groups and traditional leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct educational programs at the community level. Training workshops will also build the internal capacity of the community and neighborhood associations, which is crucially needed.
  - Financial support from the international community will also be essential to the implementation of these activities and would cover such basic necessities as the production of educational posters and other deliverables.
  - To the extent possible, the aforementioned educational activities should be linked to health, agriculture and basic development projects or activities as a way of leveraging resources and assuring the widest audiences possible will benefit. Such a linkage is a necessary recognition of the harsh reality of living conditions for the vast majority of Djiboutians.

### *Media*

RTD and *La Nation* are currently the only media outlets in Djibouti, and both are state-financed and largely controlled. Because journalists are considered civil servants, they do not enjoy the freedom to report on or cover the stories they choose, and although there did not seem to be any outright human rights abuses concerning the media, the government has been known to pressure journalists in certain ways. Opposing voices

often have no choice but to publish their own “manifestos” because they do not have access to the press. Without freedom of information, the democratic process in Djibouti will continue to be stunted. As such, we recommend the following:

- *Encourage and monitor freedom of the media.*
  - The international community should continually dialogue with and encourage the Djiboutian government to support strengthening of an independent media.
  - With regard to elections, training can be given to existing media outlets on the electoral process, as well as how to cover results in a neutral way. Journalists can be assisted in areas such as investigation techniques, equal coverage, and other such topics.
  - Government-owned media outlets should extend equal coverage for all political events in Djibouti, and not simply those of the majority coalition. The media should also expand coverage throughout the year and not simply during the election period.
  - As has been successful in other countries, the development of community-based radio stations can be encouraged. Equipment and training for such initiatives is minimal, and population groups such as women and student leaders can use this medium to facilitate public debate.
- *Broaden the listening public through the provision of radios.*
  - Many residents in Djibouti cannot afford radios, or the batteries to use them, since access to electricity is not guaranteed throughout the country. The international community should consider providing wind-up or solar-powered radios for Djiboutians so they can have access to radio broadcasts.

### *Electoral process*

The assessment team found that technical shortcomings and flaws within the electoral administration were due more to a lack of expertise and resources, rather than deliberate manipulation of the process. That said, critical improvements must be made before the next elections in order for them to be transparent and credible.

- *Revise voter registration lists.*
  - Due to unreliable census data and the lack of recent country statistics, the voter registration list is outdated and in urgent need of revision. There is a high number of deceased voters on the list, as well as Djiboutians who have changed residency.

- Nomadic groups should be encouraged to take part in the electoral process but present a particular challenge when it comes to voter registration. A mechanism should be put in place to ensure nomadic populations are registered to vote and educated about voting in one particular district or constituency.
- Those Djiboutian citizens of voting age who have not been issued national identity cards, a prerequisite to obtaining a voter card, should not be shut out of the process. A concerted effort must be made to ensure all eligible Djiboutians are added to the voter registration list.
- *Provide training for electoral officials.*
  - Currently the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for training of all electoral officials, which can be problematic due to conflicts of interest and lack of adherence to international standards. Such training should be carried out instead by independent and impartial organizations such as IFES, in order to ensure objectivity and consistency.
- *Allow for independent printing of campaign materials.*
  - Political parties should not be beholden to the Ministry of the Interior for publication of their campaign materials. Development of private printing presses or smaller operations should be encouraged to provide such services, as has been done by Freedom House in other countries.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

During the two-week pre-electoral assessment, the team conducted a thorough evaluation of the political environment leading up to the 8 April presidential election. While the electoral system does contain flaws, the team observed no systematic attempt on the part of the government to commit fraud or manipulate the election results, and majority coalition members often expressed disappointment with the opposition parties' decision to boycott the election. President Ismail Omar Guelleh appears committed to further democratization, beginning with the implementation of proportional representation in the regional councils and then moving to the national level. Close monitoring of the political situation in Djibouti after the election will determine whether his commitment is solidified through amendment of the Constitution; revision of the Electoral Law; and adherence to and application of the 2001 Peace Accord. Efforts must also be made to open up the media to different opinions and views, and to allow for the growth of an independent civil society.

At the same time, complaints raised by the opposition parties were not without merit. There is an urgent need to revise the voter registration lists to ensure removal of deceased voters and those who are no longer resident in Djibouti. Citizens of voting age who have not been issued national identity cards – a prerequisite to acquisition of a voter card – should be identified and supplied with them. In order to be a credible opposition, however, the parties have to offer alternative options to the larger population and coalesce around a common platform. Much training needs to be done in terms of organization, leadership, and campaign financing before the opposition parties can contest effectively the next round of elections, scheduled for 2006 (regional), 2008 (legislative), and 2011 (presidential).

What is most necessary following the April election is for the majority and opposition coalitions to begin dialogue concerning the future of Djibouti. Only after the two sides sit down and openly discuss their concerns and complaints can the process of democratization continue to move in a positive direction. The opposition must also be willing to reengage the government on issues of concern, including revision of electoral lists and establishment of an independent media. Only once that discourse has begun, in conjunction with international community involvement, can international organizations offer their expertise and training to complement efforts undertaken by the Djiboutians themselves.