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NDI STAFF MEMBER HELD ILLEGALLY FOR SIX DAYS IS RELEASED BY ZIMBABWE AUTHORITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Dileepan Sivapathasundaram, a U.S. citizen and senior program officer with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), was released by Zimbabwean authorities today after being detained illegally for six days. He is now safely out of the country.

“NDI is thankful that Mr. Sivapathasundaram has been released unharmed and wishes to thank those around the world who worked to secure his freedom,” said former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, chairman of the NDI board of directors. “His illegal detention was another indication of the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, where the government has yet to release results from the presidential election held more than 10 days ago.”

NDI also calls on the government to release all others who have been detained for purely political reasons.

Mr. Sivapathasundaram was taken by authorities last Thursday from the Harare airport as he was attempting to leave the country and underwent days of intensive questioning by Zimbabwe authorities, who had confiscated his passport and computer. For the first 22 hours of his detention there was no word from him, and police in the capital denied any knowledge of his whereabouts despite efforts by U.S. diplomats and Zimbabwean human rights lawyers to determine his location and status.

He was in Zimbabwe as part of NDI's work over the past several years to support the efforts of non-partisan civic groups to monitor the Zimbabwean election process. This assistance provided by NDI was in accordance with Zimbabwean law and international standards that recognize the right of non-partisan civic organizations to observe and monitor election processes. NDI has worked in Zimbabwe since 1999.

“It is time for the government of Zimbabwe to provide an honest accounting of the results of the March 29 presidential election,” Dr. Albright said. “Its citizens made a choice at the polls and they have a right to have those reported without manipulation. The delaying tactics now being employed by Robert Mugabe’s government underscore once again his seeming intention to retain power at any cost.”

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

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