



1101 15<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Floor 3 | Washington, DC 20009 | 202.828.8507 tel | 202.452-0804 fax | [www.ifes.org](http://www.ifes.org)

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For Further Information, please contact:  
Ched Flego, Country Director, IFES-Liberia  
(231)077.565.663 / [chedflego@gmail.com](mailto:chedflego@gmail.com)  
Marguerite Colston, IFES, Washington, DC  
(1)202.828.8507 / [mcolston@ifes.org](mailto:mcolston@ifes.org)

### **Civil Society Organizations Prepare to Serve as Campaign Finance “Watchdogs”**

**Monday, July 4, 2005, Monrovia.** On the eve of the release by the National Elections Commission of the Campaign Finance Regulations for the October elections, thirty-three representatives of fifteen civil society organizations met in Monrovia on Friday, July 1, and Saturday, July 2, to discuss how to monitor funding and spending by candidates and political parties. The training workshop was convened by IFES, in coordination with two Liberian NGOs (the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia, CENTAL; and the Liberian Institute of Public Opinion, LIPO) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a US-based NGO working in Liberia. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the workshop and is funding IFES’ activities in the area of campaign finance.

For the first time in Liberia’s history, political parties and those candidates contesting the October 11<sup>th</sup> elections will be required to report their sources of funding and their expenditures to the National Elections Commission (NEC). Although Liberia’s 1986 Constitution mandates campaign finance reporting, no campaign finance regime had previously existed. In its effort to reform Liberia’s electoral system, the NEC has developed Campaign Finance Regulations which provide detailed guidelines to parties and candidates on reporting requirements. By releasing the parties’ and candidates’ reports to the public, the NEC will facilitate the work of civil society and the media in monitoring campaign finance and examining the role of money in politics in Liberia.

Participants in the July 1-2 workshop for civil society heard presentations on how to monitor income and expenditure by parties and candidates by Dr. Marcin Walecki, IFES, and Jasper Cummeh, CENTAL. Mr. Konrad Huber, USAID, discussed how to monitor the abuse of state resources by parties and candidates. Philip Saa Tali and Sidi Diawara of NDI examined the relationship between CSOs and political parties in campaign monitoring. Cllr. Joseph Blidi of the NEC presented the legal requirements with regard to campaign finance and urged civil society to assist NEC with monitoring campaign finance.

In his presentation, Dr. Walecki, IFES, noted, “civil society organizations have become increasingly active in addressing issues related to political finance and political corruption. Pressure from civil society is necessary in order to create an atmosphere which promotes anti-corruptive initiatives, as civil society can serve as a reliable ‘watchdog’ of party and campaign finance in contemporary democracies”.

At the conclusion of the seminar, Mr. Cummeh, of CENTAL, announced, “We are forming a coalition that will monitor political parties’ campaign finance to ensure a level playing field for all and are optimistic that with the requisite support and political will, this initiative is going to set the basis for responsive governance in Liberia.”

The training workshop was the second in IFES' series of three workshops for Liberian stakeholders on campaign finance. Representatives of Liberia's media participated in a training on Wednesday, June 29, and on Thursday, July 7, the National Elections Commission (NEC) and IFES will train political parties on the campaign finance regulations.

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*IFES is an international, nonprofit organization that supports the building of democratic societies.*