

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI INTERNATIONAL
OBSERVER DELEGATION TO THE MAY 1996 PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

May 18, 1996

The international observer delegation sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, based at the Carter Center, is pleased to offer this Preliminary Statement on the May 16 presidential election in the Dominican Republic.

Our delegation, comprised of 27 members from 11 countries, was led by H.E. Belisario Betancur, former President of Colombia, and H.E. Ramiro de León Carpio, former President of Guatemala, and included parliamentarians and other elected officials, political party and civic leaders, election experts and regional specialists. The delegation was invited to observe the election by the Central Election Board (JCE) and the three major presidential candidates. We were also welcomed by civic and religious leaders. Our delegation came to witness the election. We did not seek to supervise or certify the election. Ultimately, it is the Dominican people who will judge the election process.

The primary purposes of the delegation were to demonstrate the international community's continued support for the democratic process in the Dominican Republic and to provide the international community with an objective assessment of the May 16 election. We also sought to learn from the Dominican people about the nature of the electoral process and its implications for the further development of the Dominican Republic's democratic institutions.

Our delegation was in close communication with other international delegations that observed the May 16 election process. In addition, members of the delegation will remain in the Dominican Republic to monitor post election-day developments, and staff from NDI will remain in the country to observe activities leading up to the second round run-off election on June 30. These developments will be important for informing the international community about the evolving character of the Dominican electoral process. NDI and the Council will send another international delegation to observe the June 30 constitutionally mandated second round election. That delegation will be joined by former President Jimmy Carter.

NDI and the Council sent a pre-election assessment delegation to the Dominican Republic in April 1996, which was led by former Presidents Carter and Betancur. The Council and NDI staff have been in the country since mid-April in order to observe the election process and to prepare for this delegation's activities. NDI sent an international observer delegation to the 1994 elections in the Dominican Republic, and the Carter Center and NDI sent a joint observer delegation to the 1990 elections as well.

This delegation's mandate included the examination of three distinct aspects of the election process: the campaign; election-day proceedings; and the tabulation of results to date. This statement is a preliminary assessment of these issues. A more detailed report will be

delegation and on information gathered during the entire pre-election period by the Carter Center and NDI.

The delegation arrived in the Dominican Republic on Sunday, May 12. During our stay we met with government and election officials, the three main presidential candidates and leaders of the major political parties, journalists, representatives of the Action Group for Democracy (a coalition of religious, labor, business and other Dominican leaders), Participación Ciudadana (the national election monitoring group) and others involved in the electoral process in Santo Domingo and in eleven other regions around the country. The delegation's leaders also met separately with President Joaquin Balaguer, the three main presidential candidates and with members of the JCE. On election day, members of the delegation visited more than 180 polling stations and municipal electoral boards (JMEs) in rural and urban areas throughout the nation.

THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

The delegation noted that several reforms were agreed upon formally after the controversial 1994 elections, including:

- a reconstituted JCE, with all board members approved by each of the major political parties;
- a reliable computer system that could guarantee the accuracy of voter lists and ensure it would be operated in a transparent manner;
- access to all stages of the electoral process for political parties as well as domestic and international observers; and
- new voter lists used by officials on election day to be posted publicly well in advance of election day and to remain posted for a reasonable time.

Most of these reforms were enacted. A new JCE was instated in early 1995, and a series of positive developments created an improved atmosphere for the May 16 election. The following are among these developments.

Political parties, the government, civic groups, the Catholic Church and other religious bodies expressed broad support for the JCE. The JCE consulted with the various political actors and made efforts to respond to their concerns about the electoral process.

The political parties, with an exception discussed below, stated that the updated electoral registry remedied many of the flaws of the previous lists. The JCE gave all political parties the opportunity to scrutinize and make recommendations to the JCE concerning the registry.

Civic organizations actively helped to ensure a more transparent electoral process. A broad-based civic group, Participación Ciudadana, conducted a civic education campaign and organized a large network of domestic monitors in order to observe the voting process and conduct a parallel vote tabulation (PVT). In addition, the Action Group for Democracy conducted civic education and worked to assure a peaceful electoral process.

The presidential candidates and political parties actively campaigned around the country and communicated with the electorate through the news media, rallies and other means. In addition, the media enjoyed

government resources to gain electoral advantage than has been the case in past elections.

A short time before the election, the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD) claimed there was a possibility that approximately 170,000 Haitians who were not eligible to vote could appear on the electoral registry. PLD representatives stated that the party intended to challenge prospective voters who it believed to be Haitians without voting rights. The delegation was pleased to note that the PLD later made important efforts to reduce tensions regarding this issue, particularly during the final week of the campaign and on election day, when its delegates did not challenge prospective voters on this basis.

ELECTION DAY

The delegation was impressed by a large number of positive developments on May 16, resulting from the dedicated efforts of Dominican voters and election officials. Election day was peaceful, except for isolated incidents. The credibility of the JCE, JMEs and other election officials was heightened as a result of the positive electoral process, and public confidence in the process leading to the June 30 second round is likely to increase as a consequence of these developments.

The delegation was struck by the enthusiasm with which Dominicans sought to exercise their right to vote on May 16. The turnout was impressive, especially given concerns raised about the new voting system. Many stood for hours in long lines waiting to sign in at their polling station and to vote. In addition, polling officials worked long hours and put forth great efforts to discharge their electoral duties. Of the 180 polling stations observed by the delegation, only four were found not to have performed satisfactorily. The delegation noted that voters and polling officials generally were well prepared for the voting process.

Political party delegates were present at the polling stations throughout the country. Party delegates received signed copies of the official tally sheets (actas) after counting was completed at the voting stations (colegios electorales) and were generally allowed to scrutinize the tabulation processes at the JMEs and at the JCE. In addition, international observers were welcomed by election officials, party delegates and prospective voters.

We were encouraged by the role played on election day by the national election monitoring network coordinated by Participación Ciudadana. This Dominican civic organization placed approximately 1,140 observers at the polling stations (the maximum allowed by the JCE) and trained many more to observe the process. In addition, Participación Ciudadana conducted a parallel vote tabulation to enhance confidence in the official election results.

The delegation also was encouraged by the JCE's hourly release of election results, as well as by the availability of news concerning the election that was broadcast by Dominican television outlets, within JCE guidelines, and by outside cable news channels. The availability of election-related information greatly contributed to public confidence in the orderly development of the election process.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The delegation recognizes that there is no perfect election system and notes the significant improvements in the Dominican electoral

In light of these positive factors and in the spirit of international cooperation, the delegation respectfully offers the following additional observations. In the six weeks leading to the second round, the JCE has an opportunity to fine tune the election process and to overcome problems encountered at some polling stations (colegios electorales), for example, by encouraging polling station officials to instruct voters to create more orderly lines that would help to relieve dangerous conditions at crowded locations.

Election Violence: While the pre-election environment and election day were relatively peaceful, the delegation deeply regrets the politically motivated deaths associated with the election and encourages Dominicans to participate in future political activities without resorting to violence.

Limit on Dominican Election Observers: The delegation also took note that the JCE limited the number of national observers from civic organizations to 1,140. The domestic civic group Participación Ciudadana trained more than 3,000 observers, but this restriction on the number of Dominican observers limited the group's ability to make full use of these individuals. It is natural for the JCE to take measures to maintain orderly processes at the voting stations. Placing a limit on domestic civic observers, however, seems unnecessary. The delegation hopes the restriction will be removed by the JCE in order to allow for the increased civic participation of Dominicans in monitoring election processes in the future.

Voters Erroneously Listed as Deceased: The delegation observed a number of prospective voters who arrived at polling stations to find out that they were not allowed to vote because they were listed as being deceased. While this did not affect large numbers of prospective voters, the delegation recommends that steps be taken to find a way to allow such persons to vote. One option would be to use the procedure employed by one JME observed by the delegation, which allowed such persons to cast "observed votes."

Added Transparency: The NDI/Council pre-election assessment delegation expressed concern because the political parties were not provided full access to the JCE's computer operations. While concerns have not arisen regarding these operations for the May 16 election, greater transparency in the computer facilities could significantly help to raise public confidence in the election process for the second round on June 30. Further consideration seems appropriate for allowing full access to the JCE's computer center for political party technical representatives as well as for such representatives of civic groups and international observers.

The delegation also notes that transparency varied regarding access given to political parties at JME computer centers. The practice at one JME observed by the delegation provided a positive example that could be employed by other JMEs. Political party delegates reviewed their copies of tally sheets (actas) from each polling station (colegio electoral) as JME officials read out the official copies. This allowed the party delegates to monitor the results before they were sent to the JME computer room. Party technical representatives were allowed in the computer room to observe the data entry and transmission to the JCE. This greatly increased the parties' confidence in the tabulation process.

CONCLUSION

delegation encourages the government, political parties, civic organizations and religious bodies to take further effective steps to assure the public that the election process will be carried out in a peaceful environment. The efforts of the Action Group for Democracy and others concerned with a peaceful election process are an important factor in this regard. The delegation hopes that government and political leaders will join the Action Group in making such public assurances.

The delegation would like to emphasize its appreciation for the positive work accomplished by the JCE, other electoral officials, the political parties, the Action Group for Democracy and Participación Ciudadana in this election. The cooperation among these entities contributed to public confidence and to a significantly improved election process. The delegation applauds their efforts and hopes that their diligent approach will continue for the second round on June 30.

The delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to government leaders, JCE members and other electoral officials, the presidential candidates and the Dominican people for their warm hospitality. NDI staff will remain in the Dominican Republic to follow post-election developments and to prepare for our joint international observer delegation to the second round run-off election on June 30.

Updated November 2, 1995