

STATEMENT OF THE NDI INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION TO MEXICO'S JULY 2, 2000 ELECTIONS

Mexico City, July 3, 2000

The July 2nd elections mark the beginning of a new era in Mexican history. For the first time the reins of national government will change hands democratically between two political parties. The opposition parties, civic organizations and others, including members of the federal government and the ruling party, deserve praise for their long, difficult and continuing efforts for electoral reforms.

Voter turnout on Sunday was large, and the elections took place in an orderly and peaceful manner. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Mexican citizens volunteered as polling officials, political party pollwatchers and nonpartisan election observers to ensure the integrity of the elections. While there were problems in the pre-election period and on election day, the political process crossed a democratic threshold by allowing an alternance of power. These watershed elections set a powerful example that encourages political progress. They will serve as a strong signal to those struggling for democracy in this hemisphere and beyond.

Following the controversial elections of 1988, the reform process in Mexico has taken extraordinary steps in several respects. They include: the establishment of a genuinely independent election authority, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE); the strengthening of citizen participation through domestic nonpartisan election monitoring; the growth of impartiality in the news media; the establishment of substantial, direct public funding for political parties; the provision of free broadcast time for political parties; and the holding of open presidential debates.

In countries where one party has dominated political life for many years, extraordinary steps are often required to build public confidence in elections. Therefore the efforts and resources committed to developing confidence in the impartiality and effectiveness of IFE have proven to be a sound investment in advancing the democratic process. The same is true of the resources provided to political parties and civic groups. At the same time, the process is not without problems, which cannot be overlooked. Challenges remain that should be addressed through future reforms. These include: 1) the need to improve voting procedures at special polling stations (casillas especiales); 2) the need for further and timely disclosure of political party financing; 3) elimination of bias in news coverage of political parties and candidates, particularly at the state and local levels; 4) the need to take steps to increase the effectiveness of the bodies responsible for adjudicating electoral complaints and electoral crimes; 5) enhancing coordination among electoral authorities at the national, state and local levels; and 6) addressing the use of state resources and authority as they relate to compra y coaccion del voto ("vote-buying and voter coercion").

On July 2nd, the Mexican people sent a clear message for democratic change. The delegation was impressed by their civic participation and enthusiasm. The challenge now facing their political leaders is to keep faith with the aspirations so powerfully expressed yesterday. Mexico has an unprecedented opportunity to maintain and accelerate momentum toward political pluralism and stronger democratic institutions. The statements made last night and today by President

Ernesto Zedillo as well as by Vicente Fox, Francisco Labastida and Cuauhtemoc Cardenas represent an important spirit of tolerance and cooperation. In this respect, the delegation recalls the visionary statement by one of Mexico's founding leaders, Benito Juarez, "Democracy is the destiny of humankind: freedom is its indestructible weapon; achieving perfection is its ultimate goal."

This statement on Mexico's July 2, 2000 elections is offered by the international delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The delegation visited Mexico from June 28-July 4 and was led by former Guatemalan President Ramiro de Leon Carpio, former Texas Governor Ann Richards and US Congressman Ed Pastor of Arizona.

The delegation, which included 42 members from 12 countries, was welcomed by the Mexican government and electoral authorities, the three major political parties and nonpartisan election monitoring organizations in the 15 federal entities it visited. NDI conducted pre-election assessment delegations to Mexico in May and June. The Institute will continue to respectfully observe post-election developments and will issue a more comprehensive report on the electoral process at a later date.

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