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CHILE: DECEMBER 14, 1989 ELECTIONS

NDI International Delegation
Preliminary Report Submitted
to AID

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This preliminary report describes the activities and findings of a 25-member international delegation that observed the December 14, 1989 elections in Chile. The delegation was sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI or the Institute), and was funded in part by USAID. The Institute will be publishing a final, more comprehensive report in the near future.

I. BACKGROUND

The December 14 elections were the first national elections in Chile since the 1973 coup. They occurred 14 months after the October 5, 1988 plebiscite in which Augusto Pinochet, who led the 1973 coup and who has served as president of the country since 1980, was defeated in his bid to retain power for another eight years. Following the plebiscite, significant modifications were made in the 1980 constitution so as to provide Chile with a more democratic system of government; these changes were approved in a July 1989 referendum.

The elections for president, for 38 of the 47 Senate seats and for the 120-member Chamber of Deputies were conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner, with the results reported expeditiously and accurately. Patricio Aylwin, candidate of the Concertacion por la Democracia (a coalition of 17 political parties which, under the name "Command for the No" led the opposition to Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite), was elected president with 55 percent of the vote. While the Concertacion also won a majority of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, it will be deprived of a majority in the Senate due to the fact that nine senators are designated by institutions loyal to Pinochet.

President-elect Aylwin will assume office on March 14, 1990. This will mark the end of 17 years of nondemocratic rule in Chile, a country with a longstanding

tradition of democratic government.

II. THE NDI DELEGATION

NDI's objectives in organizing this international delegation were to demonstrate support for the Chilean transition process, to observe the elections in a credible manner and to provide an opportunity for individuals from countries involved in transitions to be exposed to the Chilean experience. The delegation included nationals of 15 countries; many of the countries represented have recently experienced transitions to a more democratic form of government or are seeking to initiate such transitions (Appendix I contains the names and affiliations of the delegates). Delegates were chosen based on the perceived importance in exposing the individual (and, subsequently, others in the delegate's home country) to the Chilean transition process.

Six of the delegates were from Latin American and Caribbean countries, four were from Eastern European countries, five from African countries, one from an Asian country and nine from the United States. The participation of the Eastern European delegates was secured by an additional grant from the German Marshall Fund. The United States component of the delegation was bipartisan. NDI president J. Brian Atwood served as delegation leader.

III. DELEGATION ACTIVITIES

Prior to their arrival in Chile, the delegates received a briefing book containing: the terms of reference for the delegation (see Appendix II); a report prepared by the NDI staff on the elections process; articles and other materials pertaining to the current situation in Chile; and logistical information concerning the delegates' stay in Chile. The delegates began arriving in Chile on Saturday, December 9, although

the official delegation program did not commence until Monday, December 11 (see Appendix III). Those arriving early had an opportunity to attend the closing rallies of the different parties and to hear a presentation on Chilean political attitudes based on a public opinion survey conducted by one of Chile's most respected research organizations.

The Monday program began with a briefing by the NDI staff. This was followed by the presentations of Genaro Arriagada, a vice president of the Christian Democratic Party and the coordinator of the Command for the No during the 1988 plebiscite campaign, and Monica Jimenez, director of Participa (formerly known as Civitas), an independent, non-partisan organization which developed an extensive civic education program for the elections, as it did so successfully during the plebiscite.

Arriagada described the challenges he faced in keeping a diverse coalition unified during the plebiscite campaign. He also explained the significance of the financial and technical assistance the Command for the No received from outside sources, including NDI, and how he convinced his colleagues to accept such open funding despite their concerns that it would somehow compromise their campaign. In response to a question, Arriagada acknowledged that the matter of handling human rights abuses committed during the Pinochet era would provide the new government with a major challenge. Arriagada expected the new government to balance successfully the values of truth and justice on the one hand, and political stability and reconciliation on the other. For her part, Jimenez described the role civic education played in encouraging voter registration during the plebiscite campaign, overcoming the population's initial reluctance to participate in a plebiscite

being organized by the Pinochet regime. She then recounted how Participa had emerged as a nonpartisan, nondenominational organization, educating the citizenry not only about the mechanics of voting but also about their rights as citizens.

Tuesday, the delegation heard from Ricardo Rivadeneira and Francisco Cumplido, lawyers involved in the constitutional negotiations for the National Renewal and Christian Democratic parties respectively. They described the negotiations on constitutional reforms between the regime, the parties that supported Pinochet in the plebiscite, and the Concertacion (the coalition of parties that supported the candidacy of Patricio Aylwin in the presidential election). Through negotiations, a consensus was reached on 54 changes in the constitution, including several of major import. Both speakers acknowledged that additional changes were necessary, but conceded that obtaining approval for further modifications would pose a major challenge for the new government.

Three Chilean journalists -- Abraham Santibanez, Director of the prestigious democratic opposition weekly magazine "HOY", Fernando Paulsen, Director of the weekly magazine "Analisis", and Gloria Stanley, a reporter with Channel 13 -- then described the role that the media has played in the Chilean transition process. The print journalists recounted the hurdles that all journalists had to overcome. These included arrests and acts of physical intimidation, in the years preceding the plebiscite and, to a lesser extent, in the months preceding the December elections. Stanley reported on the role that television played in ensuring that the true results of the plebiscite were presented to the Chilean people in an expeditious and responsible manner, notwithstanding the regime's attempt to delay announcement of the results.

The next speaker was Juan Ignacio Garcia, the Director of the Electoral Service. Garcia reviewed the steps taken during the past three years to reestablish the Chilean electoral system, including the development of a computerized voter roll and the registration of political parties. Garcia then explained how the Chilean election system would operate on election day, noting that Chilean electoral procedures, like those of other countries, are the result of history and cultural traditions (e.g., in Chile, men and women vote at separate polling sites). Garcia then highlighted some of the administrative changes that had been implemented since the plebiscite in an effort to make the process more efficient. Appreciating the unique mission of the delegation, Garcia agreed to arrange for the delegation to have access to the site where the Ministry of Interior would be tabulating the results on election night.

Later that afternoon, the delegation heard from Jaime Robinette, a campaign organizer for the Concertacion, and Andres Allamand, secretary-general of the National Renewal party. They recounted the tactics their respective campaigns had used, and the difficulties they faced in keeping diverse coalitions united.

Tuesday's program closed with a presentation by Sergio Molina, organizer of the National Accord in 1985 and leader of the Committee for Free Elections during the plebiscite campaign. Molina described how the political parties and other activist groups were convinced that the plebiscite offered the best opportunity to reestablish democracy in Chile. He also commented on the critical role played by other sectors of Chilean society, including the Church and the business community.

Wednesday the delegation divided into six teams. Five teams left Santiago for the provincial capitals of Antofagasta, Concepcion, Puerto Montt, Temuco and

Valparaiso. Upon arrival, the teams met with Electoral Service officials, representatives of the Aylwin, Buchi and Errazuriz campaigns, church leaders and representatives of Chile's human rights groups (see Appendix IV). The purpose of these meetings was to acquire a greater understanding of the campaign and the actors' plans for election day. Teams also inquired about areas of special interest such as the role of women and youth in the political process.

IV. ELECTION DAY

On Thursday, delegation members observed the voting process in the six aforementioned cities and their surrounding areas. More than 50 polling stations, most of which contained between 20 and 60 voting tables, were visited during the course of the day. In virtually all instances, delegation members were welcomed to observe the voting and counting processes without any hindrances.

The delegation observed an orderly and peaceful election process. As was true during the plebiscite, there were long lines at the polling sites in the morning. Apparently these were the result of most people wishing to fulfill their civic obligation as early as possible. By the afternoon, the lines had disappeared, with all Chileans desiring to vote having been afforded the opportunity to do so. According to the official results, more than 95 percent of the registered voters went to the polls on election day.

At all voting tables observed, the polls closed in accordance with Chilean law nine hours after they opened. The delegation members, meanwhile, returned to Santiago that evening. Unlike during the plebiscite, the Ministry of Interior released the election results quickly and accurately, and the results were publicized throughout the country by the television and radio networks. By 9:30 p.m., Messrs.

Buchi and Errazuriz had issued statements acknowledging Mr. Aylwin's victory; they subsequently visited Mr. Aylwin to congratulate him personally.

To avoid violating Chilean law which proscribes campaigning on election day, Mr. Aylwin waited until midnight before addressing the crowd that had gathered in front of the hotel which served as the Aylwin campaign headquarters election night. The delegation, which was staying at the same hotel, had an exquisite view of Mr. Aylwin addressing his proud and joyous supporters.

V. POST-ELECTION DEBRIEFING

The delegation met Friday morning for a debriefing session and to prepare a statement for release to the press. Each team presented an oral report, describing its activities and observations. Overall, delegation members were impressed with the manner in which the election had been administered, although several noted specific matters that concerned them.

Among the subjects provoking debate were the presence of armed military at most polling sites and the fact that voting is compulsory in Chile. Regarding the former, some members of the delegation indicated that a military presence at polling sites was commonplace in their countries, and would not be viewed as inherently intimidating; indeed, several delegation members believed that the Chilean military deserved to be congratulated for the professional manner in which they conducted themselves on election day. In a similar vein, the debate regarding the appropriateness of mandatory voting reflected a philosophical diversity among individuals from different political cultures.

A draft statement was then reviewed by the delegation. Following a brief debate, a consensus was reached. The statement was released at a press

conference Friday afternoon (see Appendix V).

VI. POST-ELECTION SEMINAR

A major goal in organizing this international observer delegation was to afford the delegates an opportunity to learn from the Chilean transition experience. To this end, NDI organized a series of workshops following the elections. Chileans with whom NDI had worked during the past three years were invited to make presentations regarding their activities. The program closed with a round-table discussion which highlighted key elements that have contributed to successful democratic transitions.

The opening session featured a discussion on public opinion surveys. Pollsters Angel Flischfish, Marta Lagos and Eugenia Weinstein made presentations on the significance of public opinion surveys in determining the strategy of the democratic opposition. As they explained, the basic function of polls was to make the political leaders more attuned to the opinions of the population. For example, the commonly-held opinion among the political leadership was that the human rights abuses of the Pinochet regime was the dominant concern among the public at-large. This was the result of the persuasion of small activist groups. Survey research demonstrated a more complex picture; the mass public was more concerned about health, education and employment.

The second session focused on the topic of independent vote-monitoring operations. Gonzalo Martner, who coordinated the Command for the No effort during the plebiscite, explained how he recruited and trained the personnel necessary to monitor the vote and to collect the data necessary for a tabulation of results from all the polling sites in Chile. He described how the system worked on

the night of the plebiscite in expeditiously transmitting the data to Santiago. He closed by emphasizing the critical role that the information gathered by the Command played in convincing those supporting Pinochet that the "No" had obtained a majority in the plebiscite; their acknowledgement of defeat made it impossible for the regime to manipulate or to seek nullification of the plebiscite results.

Edgardo Mimica followed with an explanation of the parallel tabulation system used by the Committee for Free Elections during the plebiscite. To project the overall result, the Committee relied on the results from a 10 percent random sample of all polling sites in Chile. Mimica related that the system worked to perfection; within three hours of the polls closing, the Committee released its projection, which was within .1 percent of the officially announced results. Mimica also emphasized the political importance of the parallel count in ensuring that the regime recognized the true results of the plebiscite, and did not attempt to manipulate the results or cancel the elections.

The third session featured Enrique Correa, who played a key role in developing a political strategy for the opposition during the plebiscite and election campaigns. Correa, the architect of the Aylwin campaign's political strategy, explained that the challenge was to open the way for a tradition-breaking political coalition in Chile. In the plebiscite and election campaigns, the enemy for the opposition was invisible --- it was fear and hopelessness. Polling analysis showed that the opposition would lose more votes to fear than to Pinochet. Thus, the responsibility of the opposition was to transform the plebiscite victory into a transition, and then later the transition into a democracy. To implement this, there was a three-part coalition strategy: 1)

a common policy platform; 2) an agreement on parliamentary candidate slating; and 3) a common presidential candidate. The success of the strategy was reflected in the election results.

The fourth session focused on campaign advertising and political message, and featured Juan Gabriel Valdes, who played a critical role in the creative design and presentation of the opposition media efforts in the plebiscite and Aylwin campaigns. He explained that the sophistication of the political advertising resulted from the contributions of many people who, living in exile, experienced the revolution in the role of television in political campaigns. In the plebiscite, the opposition's message was happiness, hope and stability. In the Aylwin campaign, the objective was not to raise expectations, but to present a man who was above politics, and who could reunite the Chilean family and build peace and democracy.

Valdes was followed by Heraldo Munoz, a member of the PPD Central Committee and the campaign manager for senate aspirant and PPD leader Ricardo Lagos. Munoz discussed the tactics used by the Chilean opposition in mobilizing grass roots support during the plebiscite campaign. He also commented on the effect that the election system had on the results of the election at the legislative level.

The delegation then heard from Juan Somavia, the international secretary for the Concertacion. Somavia related what he expects will be the major themes of Chilean foreign policy during the Aylwin regime. He recognized the debt that Chile owes to the international community, which for many years has pressured the Chilean government to respect human rights and to initiate a democratic transition. During lunch, Somavia had an opportunity to discuss with members of the

delegation specific aspects of their countries' relationship with the new Chilean government.

The first part of the round-table featured presentations by four members of the delegation: Eddie Nuque, secretary-general of NAMFREL in the Philippines; Aurelio Barria, founder of the National Civic Crusade in Panama; Henryk Sienkiewicz, deputy parliamentary leader for Solidarity in Poland; and Brian O'Linn, supreme court justice and Chair of the Commission on the Prevention of Intimidation and Election Malpractices in Namibia. After providing the historical context for the transition process in their countries, each speaker described the debate concerning participation in a flawed election process, the struggle for opposition unity, and the role of nonpartisan organizations, the press, the military and international observers in the election process.

Following these presentations, Ignacio Walker, a researcher with CEPLAN, and Claudio Grossman, professor of international law at American University in Washington, D.C., offered Chilean perspectives on the issues of promoting a democratic transition and overcoming the hurdles that inevitably arise once a freely-elected government assumes office. Each of the delegation members then made brief, sometimes emotional, remarks on what they had learned from the Chilean experience. They hoped to apply the many lessons in their respective national contexts.

VII. DELEGATION REPORT

The delegation plans to issue a comprehensive report on the election process. In addition, members of the delegation have been encouraged to prepare articles for publication in newspapers and journals in their respective countries. Between

coverage of the delegation while it was in Chile (see Appendix VI), the delegation report and the articles prepared by members of the delegation, the perspectives of the delegation should be disseminated to a broad international audience.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The December 14 Chilean elections represented another major step for Chile as it seeks to reestablish a democratic system of government as well as respect for the rule of law in Chile. For those who observed the plebiscite, it was not surprising that the elections themselves were conducted in an orderly and efficient manner, although the lack of tension in these elections was noteworthy. Indeed, the fact that the Ministry of Interior fulfilled its responsibility in releasing the election results in a credible and expeditious manner highlighted the regime's commitment to respecting the results regardless of who won and, more generally, to the transition process.

Notwithstanding the major challenges that face the new government, the elections have resulted in a sense of optimism and hope. The challenges include: meeting the expectations of the many Chileans who have not benefited from Chile's economic successes of the past few years; and responding to the demands of those who seek to hold accountable the individuals responsible for the grave human rights violations that occurred during the period of military rule.

NDI is convinced that exposing individuals from other countries to the Chilean transition process provided an invaluable learning experience, especially those from nations involved in or seeking to initiate a transition. The delegates learned about the electoral successes of the past two years and the methods through which they were achieved. They also became aware of the challenges that face the new

Chilean government, challenges that other regimes in transition also face. While the democratic forces in each country must decide upon an appropriate manner in which to meet these challenges given their particular historical circumstances, sharing experiences can only help in encouraging informed decisions.