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**PRELIMINARY POST-ELECTION STATEMENT**

**INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION TO THE  
NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN PARAGUAY**

May 10, 1993  
Asuncion, Paraguay

We are pleased to offer this preliminary statement on behalf of the international observer delegation sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. The delegation, which consists of 31 members from 15 countries, yesterday witnessed Paraguay's national elections.

The delegation observed the balloting and counting in six major cities -- Asuncion, Colonel Oviedo, Ciudad del Este, Concepcion, Encarnacion and Pedro Juan Caballero -- as well as in smaller surrounding municipalities. This statement represents a consensus view of our observations.

The delegation has been here since Wednesday, May 5. On Thursday and Friday, the delegation met with a broad spectrum of government officials, political leaders, candidates, military officials, civic leaders and members of the Central Electoral Board. On Saturday, most of the delegates deployed to the interior of the country to meet with local candidates and electoral officials. On Sunday, we observed the balloting in 333 mesas (voting tables) at 44 sites polling sites covering roughly 22 percent of the electorate.

The delegation benefited from the experience of NDI and the Council. NDI, which organized observer delegations to the 1989 national and 1991 municipal elections, has supported civic education programs in Paraguay during the past four years and recently organized workshops to train local officials. The Council and NDI have had experience monitoring the electoral process in 11 countries in the Western Hemisphere.

NDI provided assistance to SAKA, the consortium of nongovernmental organizations, to conduct a quick count for the election. NDI also sponsored a visit by two Panamanian experts in voter registration to help the political parties review the registration lists. In March, NDI sent a five-person international team to study the electoral process. Last week, NDI published a report based on the teams findings and the observations and research conducted by NDI Program Officer Steve Griner, who has been in Paraguay for six weeks.

The delegation notes that the final tabulation of results has not been completed. Therefore, this statement reflects a preliminary assessment by the delegation. A more detailed final

report will be issued next month. Representatives of NDI and the Council will remain in Paraguay to await the announcement of the results and to investigate electoral challenges and complaints.

Since the coup in 1989, Paraguay has made impressive democratic progress. During this year's campaign, political parties and civic groups were largely allowed to organize unencumbered. Candidates freely debated the most contentious issues. Journalists freely investigated the candidates' backgrounds and analyzed their platforms. One independent newspaper editor, who had suffered repression in the past, told our delegation that the press has become free in the past four years.

Yesterday we witnessed an historic event. These elections, which provided the first opportunity for a transition from one elected government to another in the country's history, represent an important step toward the consolidation of Paraguay's nascent democracy. The Paraguayans who went to the polls in record numbers affirmed their deep and abiding commitment to the democratic process.

Throughout the country, the elections were generally conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner. Particularly in urban areas, the elections were administered properly, in contrast to the 1991 municipal elections, when thousands of voters were unable to locate their voting sites on election day. Despite the sometimes sluggish administration of the balloting, voters waited patiently to cast their ballots. There was no evidence on Sunday that the registration lists had been altered to hinder the ability of opposition supporters to find their voting sites, as opposition parties had feared.

Most disputes were resolved peacefully by the election officials and party pollwatchers at the mesas. The apoderados (polling site supervisors) offered assistance to voters and mesa officials, and pollwatchers from different political parties worked cooperatively.

As in all transitional elections, many of the parties raised deep concerns that certain election problems could result in fraud on election day. We decided to test the magnitude of these problems while seeking to determine any patterns to these irregularities in a questionnaire that our observers filled out at each of the mesas and sites visited.

Our observers covered 333 mesas and in addition surveyed 44 voting sites through discussions with apoderados that covered 1865 mesas or roughly 21 percent of all the mesas in the country. This did not represent a systematic sample, but rather an attempt to cover large areas of the country. The results of the survey indicate that these problems rarely occurred and were isolated.

.. While there was initially some concern that the election officials would not be representative, our survey found that there were three election officials, generally representing three different parties in 99.1% of the mesas and 99.7% of the sites with complete survey responses.

.. Pollwatchers play an invaluable role on election day, and as a rule, we have found that elections are more likely to be free if all the major parties have pollwatchers. Our survey found that pollwatchers representing at least two parties were present at 76.3% of the mesas and 93% of the responding sites. This, however, understates the coverage because of the representativeness of the polling officials and the presence of apoderados.

.. Some people were concerned that election materials would not be available in sufficient supply, but our survey found that they were at 96.8% of the mesas and 99.4% of the responding sites.

.. Despite concerns that the full list of polling procedures would not be followed, they were generally followed without significant problems at 94% of the mesas and 95% of the responding sites.

.. Significantly, given the concerns raised about the quality of the voters list, the survey found that voters were generally able to find the correct location and to vote without problems at 97.3% of the mesas and 98.6% of the responding sites.

.. Most importantly, the overall voting process was satisfactory at 92.5% of the mesas and 94.5% of the responding sites.

Irregularities were more common in the interior. Our delegates witnessed intimidation of voters by Colorado Party members and observed mesas where, in violation of the electoral code, all the electoral officials were members of the ruling party. There was also evidence that false identification cards had been issued. While these irregularities were isolated, the delegation takes these problems seriously and urges authorities to investigate promptly all election-related complaints.

We also condemn the actions deliberately taken to restrict the ability of Paraguayans to monitor their own electoral process. SAKA, which conducted independent vote tabulations to accurately project the election results, was unable to tabulate these results with sufficient speed because the telephone company blocked many of its lines. Explanations provided by the authorities, who attributed the problems to unavoidable technical difficulties, are not credible. Paraguayan authorities have the technical know-how to have restored seven of SAKA's phone lines, but, we believe, a decision was made to obstruct the organization's work.

Despite these efforts, the consortium completed the quick count that confirmed the tendency of the official results. We commend the thousands of SAKA volunteers for having accomplished this under difficult circumstances and with great enthusiasm, dedication and integrity. Their work attests to the emergence of a strong and active civil society in Paraguay.

We are also concerned about certain events that occurred during the campaign, as well as in the past several days. They detracted from the overall positive campaign environment. Although the holding of primaries to select candidates was a positive step toward the democratization of Paraguay's political parties, the disputed Colorado Party primaries created uncertainty among the electorate about the prospects for a fair general election. The allegations of fraud in the primaries were never satisfactorily resolved.

The generally festive atmosphere on election day was marred by news of two incidents: the attack on Channel 13 early Sunday morning and the closing of Paraguay's border at certain points. We urge the authorities to investigate the attack on the television station, and we trust that this attempt to intimidate the vigorous Paraguayan press will fail.

The judicial decision to close the border in many areas apparently denied some Paraguayans living outside the country the right to vote. Although it is not clear how many registered voters were among those who were not permitted to return to Paraguay, all the presidential candidates denounced this disenfranchisement of prospective voters and violation of Paraguayan's rights to enter the country. Ironically, while Paraguay welcomed hundreds of international observers, many Paraguayans who had hoped to participate in the elections were unable to do so.

Throughout the electoral process, optimism about the improved political environment and electoral administration was constantly tempered by uncertainty about the commitment to the democratic process of certain elements within the military. General Lino Oviedo's involvement in the electoral process was a blatant violation of the constitutional prohibition against the military from participating in partisan politics. His threat days before the election that the military and the Colorado Party would rule for centuries raised legitimate fears that a victory by the opposition would not be accepted.

Despite the above mentioned irregularities, the delegation has not received evidence that these were systematic or extensive enough to significantly alter the final results.

Looking to future elections, the delegation believes that steps should be taken to increase confidence in the electoral process. Political party representatives should be assured greater

access to any information handled by the National Electoral Board. The nine-member board should meet more frequently to allow opposition parties to participate in the decision-making process. The electoral board should provide the political parties with the voter registration lists on disks to facilitate verification of the lists. The delegation also recommends that the government and electoral board carry out greater civic education programs.

Reaching consensus on such reforms should be easier since yesterday's election has altered the political landscape in Paraguay, which was dominated for so many years by a single party. The composition of the next Congress and regional government bodies will reflect the more pluralistic nature of Paraguayan society.

The winner of the elections faces great opportunities and challenges. The next government can either be constrained by autocratic elements that may try to retard Paraguay's transition toward democracy or it can respond affirmatively to the Paraguayan people's desire to accelerate that transition. Yesterday's results have shown that most Paraguayans want the democratic opening here to continue and expand.

Because the next government is not likely to have a majority in Congress, cooperation among the political parties will be essential. That cooperation should begin as soon as possible. We encourage the president-elect to begin a dialogue with the other major parties, whose assistance will be needed to effectively govern.

We urge the ruling party to sever its ties with the military and to work toward the establishment of a professional nonpartisan force. Civilian control of the military must be enhanced by training members of Congress on military affairs and by strengthening the independence and capacity of the Ministry of Defense.

The delegation emphasizes that the holding of competitive elections, while essential, is but one aspect of a democratic society. It is apparent that many challenges remain in this regard in Paraguay. Among the tasks that remain are the creation of a strong legislative branch to oversee the executive and a greater role for local and regional governments. It will be the Paraguayan people and their elected representatives at all levels who must strive to meet these challenges. The international community remains committed to supporting their efforts.