

March 26, 1990

FINAL STATEMENT
INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION
TO HUNGARY'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

We are an international delegation composed of 59 individuals from 15 nations who have assembled in Hungary to witness the first free parliamentary elections held here in over 45 years. The delegation is sponsored by the National Democratic and National Republican Institutes for International Affairs which have extensive election monitoring experience. The Institutes have observed national and local elections in the Philippines, Haiti, Chile, Panama, Pakistan, Paraguay, Namibia, Honduras and most recently Nicaragua.

To obtain a national perspective on the electoral process our delegation divided into 17 teams and visited seven cities and their environs. During election day, members of the delegation witnessed the voting at more than 300 polling stations in ten counties, including several locations at military installations. Without exception, we were welcomed by the election officials, party representatives and voters.

The conclusions expressed today are based on the reports of these teams, and on the continuing analysis performed by the institutes during the past six months, beginning before the November referendum.

The objectives of our mission were to demonstrate international support for the Hungarian electoral process, to determine if the Hungarian elections could be characterized as free and fair, and to provide an opportunity for political leaders from other central and eastern European nations to observe and study the Hungarian democratic transition.

As most of you are aware, yesterday's elections were the first round in a process that will lead next month to the seating of a new democratic parliament. Thus, our judgements today must in some ways remain incomplete. The institutes will continue to monitor this process until its completion at which time we will issue a final report.

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What we can say now is that everything we have seen is consistent with Hungarian law and recognized international standards. If the tabulation process and second round of elections are conducted in a similar manner as we expect, then Hungary's new government will surely receive the internal and international legitimacy that derives from a free and fair election. In reaching this judgment, we take note of the following factors:

(1) The campaign period was characterized by an environment of openness and freedom of expression, and the voters appeared to be well aware of the various positions and attitudes of the political parties contesting the election. The political parties -- some newly-organized and others revived after suffering years of repression -- campaigned freely throughout the country. This is no small accomplishment in a country that has endured 45 years of dictatorship.

We did hear some concerns expressed regarding the allocation of and access to television time. This suggests a need to address in greater detail the establishment of an independent television system which can fairly represent the diverse views of a democratic society.

(2) Despite the fact that the electoral law appeared somewhat complicated, it is our judgement that the law provided a very effective and workable framework for the transition to democracy. The electoral law accommodates a diversity of views and participation, and ensures that the voters themselves play the critical role in determining which of the parties and individuals will be represented in Parliament.

(3) The diligence and competence of election officials at all levels was most impressive. We saw no serious irregularities, and certainly none which could have materially affected the outcome.

(4) Though the allocation of seats in parliament is somewhat complicated, it is our belief that the results reported to date are an accurate tally of the votes as they were cast.

In addition, several broader conclusions come to mind:

First, it would be a mistake for anyone to assume that Hungary's transition to democracy is complete. These historic elections are but a step on the longer road to democracy, and the people of Hungary deserve our full support as they continue this effort.

Second, the parliament and government which will result from these elections will face the enormous tasks of rebuilding a shattered economy, and of re-establishing the institutions of civil society. In this effort as well, they deserve the full support of the international community. The success of this democratic transition is intimately linked to the success of economic reform and the rejuvenation of the Hungarian spirit.

Third, we note that several of Hungary's neighbors are preparing for national elections this Spring. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the new government is creating favorable conditions for free and fair elections. In Romania and Bulgaria, the direction of change is far less clear, and serious concerns exist regarding the electoral environment and the quality of electoral preparations. We urge the authorities in these countries to take the necessary steps to ensure that their elections meet the essential conditions of freedom and fairness. Only truly free and fair elections can produce national reconciliation, economic prosperity, social well-being.

Our entire delegation has been impressed and deeply moved by what we have seen in Hungary. The people voted freely, with dignity, and they did so in large numbers. We observed many touching incidents which continually reminded us both of the historical sufferings of the Hungarian people, and of their courage in shaping a new democratic future. In the small town of Erd one of our teams met a tall, white-haired veteran of the 1956 revolution. He spoke eloquently about the courage and the sacrifice of the Hungarian people during the revolution. He also spoke of his subsequent imprisonment and death sentence and about the execution of his brother. With tears in his eyes, he said that he never believed he would live to see the day of a free election in Hungary. We want to congratulate that veteran and the people of Hungary on the arrival of this great day.