

Canada has announced greatly increased aid levels, over one-half billion dollars, for the Caribbean Basin countries. This reflects our conviction that the answer to tension there is social and economic development rather than the force of arms. This was the basis for Canadian association with the Caribbean Basin Initiative. Within a greatly expanded Canadian aid program for Central America, Canada will consider restoring bilateral aid to El Salvador if conditions there permit. With regard to aid to Nicaragua, we have clearly announced our readiness to give aid to that country. But we have also expressed to the Nicaraguans our concern at what may be a growing tendency by them to depart from their own stated principles of political pluralism and non-intervention in the affairs of other countries.

Why did we support the elections in El Salvador? Most simply, because Canadians favour democratic government. President Duarte appeared determined to establish such a government despite violent opposition from the left and right. He was putting his position, policies and life on the line, as he did in the 1972 elections and their aftermath, as were all those who stood as candidates.

However, the FMLN/FDR rejected the elections in favour of what they termed a "comprehensive political settlement" under which they would form a government, presumably with Christian Democrats and others initially. The FMLN/FDR was extremely vague on when this new government would itself submit to elections.

I should also point out that the vast majority of members of the Organization of American States supported the elections. I might also note that Costa Rica in 1948 and Venezuela in 1960 emerged from civil war through elections. I should add in this regard that it would be tragic and unacceptable if Costa Rica - the only state in the region with a history of democracy - should be destabilized as a result of the spreading violence. Costa Rica, which has invested its capital in social programs rather than weapons and armies.

The elections held last Sunday in El Salvador saw a very large voter turnout. It is clear that the people of that country above all wish peace, and saw the ballot box as the best hope in that regard. The election took place, notwithstanding the efforts of the guerilla forces to disrupt it and by all reports the balloting was honest. There undoubtedly were some flaws in the electoral process, but then the elections were not conducted under ideal circumstances. But, the elections will turn out to have little meaning unless the new Government now places the needs of the people of El Salvador in the forefront of their programs.