



communiqué

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PRELIMINARY REPORT OF CANADIAN OBSERVERS
TO EL SALVADOR ELECTIONS

The Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, released today the attached preliminary report of the Canadian Observers to the Presidential elections in El Salvador.

The Minister thanked the team for their efforts and indicated that he looked forward to receiving their final judgement when the overall results of the election have been released.

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San Salvador, 26 March 1984

INTRODUCTION

In response to the invitation by the Government of El Salvador, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs decided to appoint observers to the Presidential elections on March 25. The role of the observers was to report to him about the fairness of the elections and whether or not the elections were conducted responsibly within the context of generally recognized democratic suffrage.

Our mandate was to observe and report upon an electoral process and not to make assessments or judgements about the internal political situation in the country. Messrs Gould, Filleul and Fairweather, assisted by Miss Howell and Mr. Mayne of the Canadian Embassy in San José, Costa Rica, visited a representative number of polling stations in the Western and Eastern region of the country and also in the capital, both before and during election day. Without exception, our freedom of movement was unimpeded, including unscheduled last minute changes in plans to visit voting places in outlying communities. During a visit to the headquarters of the Central Electoral Council, the observers were briefed by officials about the process for conducting the vote and reconciling the results using a sophisticated computer system. The results are to be verified by Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, an internationally recognized firm of chartered accountants and management consultants.

THE VOTING SYSTEM

The foundation of the voting system for this election was a development of a new voters list of all persons 18 years of age and over. This was developed working with all available birth and death records from 1900 to February 27, 1984, and cross-checking these records with the 1982 voters list. In doing so, duplication of names of both living and dead persons was eliminated from the old register and the new list containing about 2.47 million names was arrived at. Each of these names had a registration number which was the number of the person's valid (cedula) or identification documents which contained his/her picture, fingerprints and places for placing a validation stamp at the time of voting.

Voters lists were prepared and arranged numerically in the three main voting categories. At the "municipal" level (261 locations), all cédula issued in the various municipalities were listed. At the departmental or provincial level (28 locations), the voters list comprised all the municipal list in that departmental area and at the national level (16 locations), complete voters list including all municipalities and departments were included. The concept was that if a person was not living in the municipality where his/her cédula was issued, he/she could vote at the departmental level, and if he/she was not

living in the same department -- such as a displaced person -- he/she could vote at the national level. In total, 7,000 voting tables with ballot boxes -- each box providing for a maximum of 500 ballots -- were to be provided in these 305 locations.

To avoid multiple voting, once a person had voted, his cedula was stamped accordingly and his finger dipped into ink which could not be removed for at least 72 hours.

Although the new voters list contained about 2.47 million names, this included persons who were not living in El Salvador (approximately 550,000), those living in areas of conflict where voting could not be carried out (approximately 100,000), and the armed forces (approximately 40,000), who were not permitted to vote. As a result, the forecast maximum number of voters was estimated at 1.8 million.

FOCUS

There was clear evidence of extensive effective motivation and commitment on the part of election officials to develop a "fool proof" voting system which would discourage and prevent fraud to the greatest degree. However, in attempting to achieve this objective, so many checks and balances were introduced in the system that its actual administration at the "grass roots" level became overly complex. This, combined with a serious lack of logistical administrative planning and of training and leadership at the polls, resulted in serious disorganization and confusion -- especially during the opening hours at the polls -- and in some cases throughout the day. At the "grass roots" level, the extensive effort of local officials to resolve the difficulties and the patience and commitment of the population -- some of whom stood in line in extremely hot and humid weather for hours on end (up to 10 - 11 hours) -- in order to exercise their right to vote, was clear evidence of the extent of the commitment to the electoral process of the greater part of the population. Few Canadian electors would have been so patient in similar circumstances. The atmosphere at the voting points, as assessed by the Canadian observers, was therefore positive in most respects and this impression was reinforced by the fact that no visible attempts were made to coerce or influence the choice of voters. This comment applies equally to voting officials, party representatives and military guards. The latter were stationed at the entrance to polling stations or immediately outside, but in no cases close to voting stands. Every vote we saw cast was done in such a way as to be impossible to see how the ballot was marked. Thus the integrity of the ballot appeared to be as total as had been intended. While organizational overkill described above undoubtedly hampered the voting process and reduced the number of ballots cast, it did produce the bonus of balloting which was largely or almost entirely protected from fraud. Scattered incidents of fraud of which we heard were not so extensive as to inhibit or prevent the people from exercising

their franchise. As we believe that most of the difficulties encountered so far were of an administrative nature, given our impression of the high level of commitment on the part of officials involved, we foresee it will be possible to adjust the system so as to resolve many of the more serious problems that arose.

We would not wish to minimize the very serious deficiencies which we observed and which were reported to us. These did have a significant impact on the smooth running of the election process and resulted in the disfranchisement of some thousands of voters. However, until final official figures on the result are available, we cannot provide a specific judgement on the extent to which these unfavourable factors affected or distorted the overall results. However, if the number of votes exceed one million, it will be our conclusion that the results of the election broadly reflect the wishes of the people of El Salvador. At the time of writing, it is generally anticipated that a second round will take place in 4 - 6 weeks time.

R. G. Fairweather

F. M. Filleul

R. H. Gould

With respect to this final paragraph, the observer team will report to the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs their final judgement when the overall results have been released.