



communiqué

N°:
No.: 77

May 9, 1984.

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF CANADIAN OBSERVERS
TO THE SECOND ROUND OF THE EL SALVADOR
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, released today the attached report of the Canadian Observers to the second round of the Presidential elections in El Salvador held on May 6.

The Minister thanked the team for their efforts in both rounds of the election which had provided him with a very clear and objective assessment of the process. Mr. MacEachen said he looked forward to receiving the team's final report in the near future.

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San Salvador, 8 May 1984

INTRODUCTION:

In response to the invitation of the Government of El Salvador, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs appointed observers to the second and final round of the presidential election, which took place on May 6, 1984. As in the case of the first round, the role of the observers was to report on the integrity of the electoral process and as to whether it was conducted responsibly and in a manner consistent with generally recognized democratic principles.

The mandate of the Canadian team was to observe and report on the elections themselves, not make assessments or judgements on the political situation in the country. There was a change in the composition of the team as compared with the first round. Mr. Gordon Fairweather remained as the head of the team, but on this occasion stayed in Ottawa where he co-ordinated the team's reporting effort. His place in El Salvador was taken by Mr. Warren Bailie, Chief Election Officer of Ontario. R.A. Gould, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer for Canada and F.M. Filleul, Canadian Ambassador to El Salvador returned as the other members of the observer group. They were assisted by Miss Susan Howell of the Canadian embassy.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE PREVIOUS SYSTEM:

As reported by the observer group, following the March 25th election, the major problem was one of administrative chaos caused by a number of factors. On our arrival in San Salvador on May 2nd, our activities focussed on meetings with election officials to determine what changes had been made to attempt to

reduce or eliminate the previous major administrative problem.

Although there had been a majority opinion at the political level in El Salvador that the use of the voters' list was a principal cause of the long lineups and confusion, the fact that President Magaña had vetoed the bill in late April to eliminate the voters' list, meant that the same system as previously would be used. However, the voters' list had been updated -- 85,000 additions, corrections and deletions having been made to the March 25 list.

One of the most serious problems which delayed the opening of the polls and caused serious confusion at the previous election was the delivery of supplies -- including ballots -- to the polling officials and the polls themselves. This time, the election officials had drastically changed the system. Delivery was under the direct control of the Council and the Operations Centre. Ballot boxes, ballots, signs, ink and other supplies were packaged in clearly marked and sealed boxes and delivered to the departmental (provincial) polling places several days before the election, placed under lock and key and guarded. On the morning of May 6th, all boxes were distributed from the departmental location to the nearby municipal polls starting at 5:00 a.m. This system resolved the major supply problem which had adversely affected the previous election.

The election officials were of the opinion that because there were only two parties instead of eight, some of the past difficulties and confusion would be reduced. Once again, the list of the polling stations was published in the

newspapers, but, in addition, a telephone bank had been set up to answer questions -- especially with respect to polling locations. This "hot line" continued right through election day with approximately three to four thousand calls having been received by the day before polling day. Of the approximate 7,000 polling stations, 58 of which were too remote or otherwise inconvenient were relocated, and this information was published separately in the newspapers.

Other changes included clearly numbering the ballot boxes, changing the chemical composition of the finger-marking ink to make it more rapid in appearing and more difficult to remove, and increasing the space between the two parties on the ballot paper to reduce the possibility of spoiled ballots. At the computer centre, an emergency power source had been installed to offset delays in computing official results as happened in March when the power went off in the evening of polling day and stayed off most of the following day.

Subsequent to our discussions with the election officials, we visited a number of large and small centres in San Salvador and in other parts of the country. We found that in all cases the boxes with the balloting supplies had arrived and were secured and guarded. Prior to polling day our observations confirmed that all aspects of the pre-election preparations were greatly superior -- officials and party workers were calmer and more confident of a better organized and more smoothly running electoral process.

OBSERVER TEAM ITINERARY

The observers visited a large number of voting locations prior to and during election day. Specifically, on May 3rd, the team visited both the

headquarters and computer centre of the Central Electoral Council. On May 4th, we visited the international fair building which was a major distribution centre as well as the location of the San Salvador national poll, i.e. the poll with a national voters' list for people in San Salvador who are normally resident elsewhere, including displaced persons. On the same day, team members drove to the town of Izalco and Sonsonate, in the west of the country, and were informed by municipal and departmental officials there that the voting materials had been received and had been placed under guard, ready for further distribution to individual voting locations. On Saturday, May 5th, observers visited the Central American Technological Institute in Santa Tecla, just outside of San Salvador, and a nearby camp for displaced persons. At the camp, we were informed that about half the residents had identity documents and most of these could be expected to vote. On the same day, part of the team joined a government organized tour of selected voting locations in San Salvador, one of four different itineraries which was available for international observers. It should be noted that the tour showed no sign of orchestration to influence observers opinions; officials at the locations visited had not been informed that the observers were coming. Also on May 5th, the other members of the team independently visited a number of other polling locations not on the official tour. On election day itself, the observers visited voting locations in San Salvador and in the northern and eastern parts of the country, specifically Chalatenango (in Chalatenango department), Sensuntepeque (in Cabanas department), San Miguel (in San Miguel department) and San Francisco Gotera (in Morazán department). In short, the team had complete access and freedom of movement, both prior to and on polling day.

ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS:

In the March 25th election, all teams noticed there were difficulties with the following: (a) many polls failed to open on time due to supplies not being delivered; (b) many polls were late in opening because poll officials failed to arrive on time or there were misunderstandings as to who was to authorize the opening of the poll; (c) the poll organization, in order to discourage fraud of any type, was overly complex and inflexible. These three factors combined to reduce the total potential vote. At the May election, most of these shortcomings were overcome. The polls opened on time. There may have been some polls that for one reason or another opened late, but they were comparatively few. Poll officials generally arrived at their polls at 6:00 a.m., one hour prior to opening time, and many poll officials arrived at 5 a.m. From all reports, supplies were on hand. Lines of electors started forming as early as 6:00 a.m., but as polls opened on time the lines were never as long as the March election. In fact, by late morning most polls had small line ups or none at all. Election officials, poll officials and voters seemed to have learned from the experience of the March election. They appeared to be both more efficient and at ease, and voting proceeded much more smoothly. Specifically, party workers assisted voters outside the polls by directing them to the appropriate ballot box, eliminating much of the congestion and confusion. In the rural areas there seemed to be almost a carnival-like atmosphere. The Central Electoral Council had made special arrangements for displaced persons and people away from their voting area for whatever reason. In all large centres there were polls set up that had the list for that department (province). In the capital and the large towns there were polls that had a national list for the entire country. In this way displaced persons or people away from their

normal place of residence could still cast their votes.

However, this system had a major defect. Some of the 144 polls that were set up to handle the national lists at the fairgrounds in San Salvador, were allocated the same number of ballots per box (500) as were the regular polls and they ran out of ballots by the middle of the afternoon. Voters coming to these polls had to be redirected to two other polls in different locations that had the national lists in the capital area, because of the inconvenience or the lateness of the hour many may have missed the opportunity to vote at all. Other than this difficulty, voting day proceeded well, with few serious problems. The Canadian team, by splitting into groups, was able to visit a large variety of polling locations, involving numerous polling stations (ballot boxes). Although the team observed a number of minor irregularities, in our opinion these incidents were not such that they would have effected the outcome of the election.

CONCLUSION:

The findings of the team may then be summarized as follows: As a result of strenuous and determined efforts by the Central Electoral Council many of the shortcomings noted in our report on the first round of the elections had been overcome by the time voting took place on May 6. The improvements undoubtedly permitted a greater proportion of the potential voters to exercise their franchise than on the previous occasion, though, as noted above, miscalculation on the allocation of ballots reduced the number of voters amongst displaced persons. Scattered instances of some pressure on voters by party workers were reported, though not witnessed by Canadian team members at any of the polls visited. However, the consensus is that voting and counting generally took place in an atmosphere of freedom, patience, good will and even good-humour.

The armed forces was once again restricted to providing physical security to the voters and voting materials.

Guerrilla activity was not great, despite one or two reported attacks on voting day in the San Miguel Department of eastern El Salvador. Two team members who spent much of the day in San Miguel and Morazán were able to confirm that, even in these conflict zones, guerrilla action did not have much, if any, effect in reducing the turnout or on the voting process. On March 25 a total of 58 towns with a combined population of about 100,000 were estimated to have been under guerrilla control. On May 6 indications were that the number of towns deprived of the vote was 41. It is therefore our view that voting was not disrupted as a result of guerrilla activity even to the extent of the last election.

Voter turnout appeared to be high, perhaps in the 1.3 - 1.4 million range; this despite fears in advance of apathy as a result of having to repeat the process as soon after the first round. Official figures on the number of votes cast are not yet available, so a final judgement on how representative the election was will have to await the submission of our final report. As in the case of the team's report on the first round, and given the absence of observed fraud or coercion, if the number of votes once again exceeds the one million mark it will be the conclusion of the Canadian observers that the results broadly reflect the will of the Salvadoran people.

W.R. Bailie

R.A. Gould

F.M. Filleul

I agree with this Report based on the information contained herein and from my first-hand observations of the March 25 election.

R.G.L. Fairweather