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REPORT OF CANADIAN OBSERVERS TO THE COMBINED
PRESIDENTIAL, CONGRESSIONAL AND MUNICIPAL
ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS, NOVEMBER 24, 1985

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, released today the attached report of the Canadian observers to the combined presidential, congressional and municipal elections in Honduras on November 24.

Mr. Clark thanked Mr. Ron Gould, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, for participating and for providing the Canadian government with an independent and objective assessment of the electoral process in Honduras.

HONDURAS ELECTIONS - 24 NOVEMBER 1985

CANADIAN OBSERVERS REPORT

In response to the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Honduras, the Secretary of State for External Affairs designated me as official observer to the combined presidential, congressional and municipal elections on November 24, 1985. My mandate was to observe the electoral process as thoroughly as possible, to make an independent judgement on the quality of the process in the context of generally recognized democratic suffrage, and to report back to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on my observations.

I was accompanied to Honduras by David Bickford, Caribbean and Central America Relations Division of the Department of External Affairs, and in Honduras I was also ably assisted by the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala, André Potvin and two members of his staff, namely Fred Spoke (Counsellor) and Pierre Giroux (First Secretary). This group divided into three sections and visited polling stations containing over 200 electoral polls in various parts of the country, including: Tegucigalpa, Danli, Santa Lucia, Valle de Angeles, San Pedro Sula, La Paz, Puerto Cortes, Choloma, Comayagua, Sabana Grande, Perspire and Choluteca. At all times we had full freedom to travel and to visit any location in any area of the country. I was provided with support and cooperation, including a guide, driver and car, in order to facilitate verification of the electoral process at the locations of my choosing.

At the official level, the electoral system as designated and developed was excellent and comprehensive including the entire registration process. The only exceptions were the ink and the ballot itself, noted later. The computerization of the results was professional and provided for the proper checks, balances and cross-verification. The system devised for providing results was by telex to the computing centre. However, following the close of the poll, in most cases this did not happen and has delayed the outcome.

At the time this report was issued the full count of ballots cast was not complete and I therefore cannot comment at this stage about the outcome of the election. However, there can be no doubt about the very high level of enthusiasm, patience, good humour and voter participation on election day

by both men and women (women and men voted in separate polling stations). The Federation of Women mounted a campaign to inform women about the voting process and to get out the female vote and clearly succeeded. These stations were well run and the women officials were well-prepared and highly committed to maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. This comment also applies to those polls conducted by men. In my opinion, this effort can stand as a model for other countries.

The grass-roots aspect of the election was extremely impressive, there was a high level of motivation of local election officials at the polls and intense concern for integrity of the system. These officials were well-trained, receiving several days training prior to the election. There was also active involvement of the political parties with respect to arrangements for transportation and provision of information for their scrutineers.

In my view, the National Electoral Tribunal's (TNE) role could have had more consequence, had it provided more assistance and guidance to the election officials on polling day, which would have avoided, among other things opening poll problems. Several polls opened one to one and one half hours late, due to this lack of guidance, as well as due to problems related to the non-immediate visibility of the indelible ink dye, designed to indicate that the individual had voted. Later, the TNE decided to extend the close of the poll by one hour to offset these problems. I and other international observers also had difficulty obtaining cooperation from the TNE the day before the elections as well as in receiving briefings and important documentation such as the electoral law. However, as a result of our own initiative and with the active cooperation of supervisory officials of the TNE, we succeeded in obtaining all of the information and answers to the questions we sought.

I also observed serious flaws which distorted an otherwise positive situation. The TNE refused to rule until the night before the elections on how the President would be elected: whether it would be by simple majority or whether it would be the candidate with the highest number of votes from the party receiving the majority vote. Also, the ballot contained the names and pictures of all the presidential candidates except one in whose stead there was the picture of a dead party leader whose picture had no name below it and also was the only one containing two party flags. In my opinion, this may well have constituted an unfair advantage for the candidate and the party.

I noted unrestricted freedom of movement at the polling stations for the voters as well as openness in terms of access for both observers and press. The military were not readily apparent at the polls. They were available to keep order and only assisted when requested. Their role also included transporting the ballot boxes to the polls and accompanying the poll officials with the boxes after poll closing as well as guarding these boxes prior to poll opening. Nowhere was the military perceived as a form of pressure.

In summary, it is my opinion that, with the exception of the problems created concerning the delay in deciding on how the President would be elected and the one aberration on the ballot paper, the quality of the Honduran election process, in the context of democratic suffrage, was excellent in all respects and even exceptional in some areas such as the concern at the grass roots for the integrity of the system and women's participation - all ingredients which would lead one to the conclusion that the existing democratic base has been strongly reinforced as a result of this election process.