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REPORT OF CANADIAN OBSERVERS TO THE COMBINED  
PRESIDENTIAL, CONGRESSIONAL AND MUNICIPAL  
ELECTIONS IN GUATEMALA

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 Guatemala held on November 3.

Mr. Clark thanked Mr. Gordon Fairweather, Chief Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission, who led the team, Mr. Warren Bailie, Chief Election Officer of Ontario, and Mr. Louis Lavoie, Director of Operations, Elections Canada for their effort which has provided the Canadian Government with an independent and objective assessment of the electoral process in Guatemala. Mr. Clark said that he looked forward to receiving the Observers' report on the second round of the presidential elections scheduled for December 8, and any additional insights they would wish to offer on the electoral process in Guatemala.

CANADIAN OBSERVERS REPORT

In response to the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Guatemala, the Secretary of State for External Affairs designated three observers to the combined presidential, congressional and municipal elections on November 3. Our mandate was to observe the electoral process as thoroughly as possible, to make an independent judgement on the quality of this process in the context of generally recognized democratic suffrage and to report back to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on our observations.

We were provided with support facilities to permit full verification of the electoral process and were able to observe the elections in the locations of our choosing. We were accompanied to Guatemala by Mr. Aharon Mayne, Deputy Director, Caribbean and Central America Relations Division, Department of External Affairs, and in Guatemala were also assisted by the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala, M. André Potvin, and members of his staff, including Fred Spoke (Counsellor), Pierre Giroux (First Secretary) and Neil Brockenshire (First Secretary). Our group divided into several sections and visited polling station in the capital and various parts of the country including: Panajachel, Solola, San Cristobal de Totonicapan, Totonicapan, Chichicastenango (Quiché), Chimaltenango, Escuintla, Palin, Amatitlan, Villacanales, Antigua, Mixco, San Pedro Sacatepequez, San Juan Sacatepequez and Raimundo.

At the time this report was issued, the full count of ballots cast was not complete, and we therefore cannot comment at this stage about the outcome of the election. However, there can be no doubt about the fairness and openness of the actual process. It is our unanimous view, shared by other observers and by representatives of political parties, that the preparations by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal for the vote were efficient and well understood by all participants. The few problems observed at polling stations were of a minor technical nature. Patience, orderly conduct and good humour prevailed on election day.

We noted with satisfaction that the members and staff of the Supreme Election Tribunal enjoyed the confidence and trust of the political parties and individual voters. Detailed, complex questions posed to members of the Election Tribunal were answered in a frank and knowledgable manner.

Our conversations with voters at dozens of polls demonstrated that they had no reservations about responding to questions about the process and the importance of the elections for the future of Guatemala. There was no evidence of the military at or near voting stations.

There appears to be consensus in Guatemala that the election is a significant first step in the move toward democratic civilian government. In this context, it is a matter of record that over 50 percent of the Guatemalan population is illiterate and therefore many of these individuals are absent from the national register. An unacceptable proportion of these persons are women. The low participation of women was particularly noted at some of the polls visited in the countryside. Part of the explanation for this may have to do with cultural tradition, lack of obligation to vote by illiterate people, long distances to voting centres compounded by inclement weather and lack of transport.

We were given no evidence that the candidates were restricted from conducting a vigorous election campaign, and the countryside was replete with political posters.

It is our conclusion that the process for the election on November 3 offered the Guatemalan people a fair, honest and open opportunity to express their political preference.