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REPORT OF CANADIAN OBSERVERS TO THE SECOND ROUND OF THE GUATEMALA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, released today the attached report of the Canadian Observers to the second round of the Presidential Elections in Guatemala held on December 8. The observer team was headed by Mr. Gordon Fairweather, Chief Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission, and included Mr. Warren Bailie, Chief Election Officer of Ontario and Mr. Louis Lavoie, Director of Operations, Elections Canada.

The Minister thanked the team for their efforts in both rounds of the election which have provided him with a balanced and objective assessment of the process. Mr. Clark said he was pleased that the elections had been conducted in a fair and open manner and expressed the hope that this would strengthen the institutions of democratic life in Guatemala.

GUATEMALA PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF, DECEMBER 8, 1985

CANADIAN OBSERVERS REPORT

In response to the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Guatemala, the Secretary of State for External Affairs appointed three observers to the second and final round of the Presidential Elections on December 8. As in the case of the first round on November 3 (which was held in conjunction with the congressional and municipal elections), our role was to provide an independent evaluation of the integrity of the electoral process in the context of generally recognized democratic principles.

We were again able to draw on support facilities to assist in full verification of the electoral process and we had complete access to 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 Mr. Fred Spoke (Counsellor), M. Pierre Giroux (First Secretary) and Mr. Neil Brockenshire (First Secretary).

Our group separated into several sections and visited polling stations in the capital and elsewhere in the country including Amatitlan, Antigua, Barberena, Chimaltenango, Chiquimula, Cuilapa, El Tejar, Escuintla, Fraijanes, Mixco, Oratorio, Palin, Puerto Barrios, San Jose Pinula, San Lucas Sacatepequez, Villa Canales, and Zacapa. We observed a total of approximately 280 polls which the Canadian team considers to be a representative number.

We were impressed by the openness and efficiency of the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Tribunal and our opinion was endorsed on many occasions by party representatives and voters at the polls. We found the Tribunal members at the national level and their departmental (provincial) representatives to be most candid and knowledgeable in responding to our queries and cooperative in assisting us in fulfilling our mandate.

We observed no instances of faulty organization or technical difficulties at the polls. In fact, quite the opposite was true and the voting was speedier than at the first round. Polling station officials and voters appeared familiar with the procedures involved and officials handled any potential problems with a welcome degree of flexibility. The public were provided with clear directions as to where to cast their ballots.

There was no evidence of the military at or near polling stations. Everywhere we visited an air of calm and good humour prevailed. Voters talked freely with us about their hopes for the future of their country and demonstrated by their participation a genuine appreciation for the fundamentals of democracy.

It is the unanimous opinion of the observer team that the Presidential run-off of December 8 provided a free and unhindered opportunity for the voters of Guatemala to choose their political leaders. The Canadian team considers it a privilege to have been invited to participate in what is a significant historical event for the Guatemalan people.