

STATEMENT OF THE SECOND PRE-ELECTORAL DELEGATION
OF THE CARTER CENTER

October 3, 2001
Managua, Nicaragua

The Carter Center has been invited by the Supreme Electoral Council to observe the national elections in Nicaragua scheduled for November 4, 2001. It has organized an election observation mission, and in July sent a first delegation to Managua to undertake an initial evaluation of the electoral process. It published a statement making suggestions for improvements in the process, among them several that the Supreme Electoral Council chose to adopt. The Carter Center subsequently issued an Election Bulletin mentioning these changes and announcing the visit of a second pre-election delegation at the end of September.

In the following statement, the members of the second delegation wish to convey our conclusions after a visit of 6 days beginning September 27 and concluding today October 3. The delegation was headed by the noted ex-president of Peru, Valentin Paniagua, member of the Council of Presidents and Ministers of the Americas, a grouping of 35 hemispheric leaders headquartered in the Carter Center and whose goals are to promote inter-American relations and further democracy. It also received leadership from the former US Ambassador to Ecuador, Gwen Clare, and from the Deputy Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Program of the Carter Center, Dr. Shelley McConnell. The delegation was ably advised by David R. Dye, the Center's representative in Nicaragua, and its visit was undertaken with financial support from USAID in Managua.

During our visit, we had the pleasure of speaking with the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, Dr. Arnoldo Aleman; the president of the Supreme Electoral Council, Dr. Roberto Rivas; the three parties that are presenting candidates for the presidency, and directly with Enrique Bolanos, candidate of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, and with Dr. Alberto Saborio, candidate of the Conservative Party; the leaders of civic organizations that support the election process, including Ethics and Transparency, IPADE, the Violeta Chamorro Foundation, the National Unity Movement, CAPEL, and the Democratic Citizen Crusade; several representatives of the communications media; the US Ambassador, Oliver Garza; our colleagues in the international observation missions of the OAS and European Union, as well as with representatives of the United Nations and the National Democratic Institute.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Nicaraguans and foreigners who related their experiences and shared their information with us so as to assure the success of our mission.

As in every electoral process, transparency is fundamental. On this occasion, we wish to contribute to the process expressing certain considerations and recommendations, which we note in what follows and which may help build a relationship of trust between the political actors and the citizenry in regard to aspects of the administration of the elections that are still pending resolution.

1. With a month to go before the vote, the electoral authorities are concluding the printing of the ballots and have bought the indelible ink. The voting table documents have been designed. Everything

indicates that the election materials will be ready to be distributed in good time to have a successful election.

2. The Supreme Electoral Council has made an important effort to register citizens to vote, not only in the 33 municipalities identified as under-censused but in the whole country. In a special census program, they registered about 121,000 new voters and 21,000J

he sees merit in this proposal. In any event, we also urge the Council to issue a specifying regulation concerning the procedure for making a challenge.

6. The Supreme Electoral Council has held two trials of the system for transmitting the results of the elections between the Municipal Electoral Councils and the National Computing Center in the Olof Palme. In the two simulations, serious problems were encountered in transmitting the information. However, the Council's technical personnel have examined the nature of the problems presented in these trials, and have made changes to improve the situation before the third simulation is held October 7. The CSE should not fail to publish the plan for the third trial as well as for the fourth trial scheduled for October 21, indicating which municipalities and vote boards will participate in each, and whether they will use the same fax machines and telephone lines envisioned for the night of the voting. In addition, it should invite observation by the political parties, which have informed us they have serious concerns about the process. The Council should then publish a report about the results of the simulations. The level of transparency in regard to the system of vote transmission, and the information systems area in general, is insufficient to generate confidence in the election. We therefore recommend strongly that as soon as possible, the Supreme Electoral Council should offer the technical personnel of the political parties and observers a clear explanation of everything relating to the transmission and tallying of the vote, specifying the manner in which party pollwatchers may monitor the system the day of the elections.
7. We congratulate the Supreme Electoral Council for the prompt production of the credentials needed by the national and international observers, the members of the voting boards, and the party pollwatchers.
8. The matter of the three municipalities in Zelaya Central and their electoral location either as part of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) or the department of Chontales continues to be one of the difficult issues in these elections. We fervently desire that this issue, which solely concerns Nicaraguans, is resolved appropriately.

In regard to certain political issues, we offer the following reflections:

9. To the moment, the campaign climate has been good in spite of the obvious polarization between the two principal parties. However, we must note our concern about a series of frictions and minor incidents that have emerged in different areas of the country after the formal opening of the campaign on August 18 and that demonstrate a certain deterioration in quality campaign we all wish to see. We recommend that the contending parties observe maximum prudence and control over their campaign activities in order to minimize future frictions. We are entering the last month of campaigning, during which new opinion polls will appear. We know that the campaign may heat up. We have already seen the first signs of this in the destruction of party advertising and incidents of confrontation reported in the media. We urge the candidates to present their programs without recurring to negative campaigning, and we absolutely reject any violent attack against or threat to any Nicaraguan citizen due to his or her political opinions. Freedom of the press is one the most positive elements in Nicaragua's democracy, and we hope it will continue without variation. We would remind the parties that their public messages should not convert their adversaries into enemies.

10. We have spoken with representatives of various communications media in the country, both the print media and television stations. We are pleased that they report full liberty to practice their profession and publish news and political advertising. We have heard only one complaint concerning the way in which a given news medium has treated a political party, and that complaint has been registered as a formal denunciation before the Comptroller General of the Republic, indicating that the country's institutions offer legal recourse in the rare cases in which problems concerning the media become controversial.
11. We understand that the violence in the mining triangle has abated since our first visit in July of this year, and that the political parties are campaigning without harassment in communities formerly menaced by the Andres Castro United Front (FUAC). This news is welcome, although we lament the human suffering recorded in prior months. We hope the situation continues to improve so that the citizenry in this area does not have to worry about exercising its right to vote.
12. Voting should be informed, based on deep reflection about the programs of the different political parties competing in the elections. The Carter Center is therefore in favor of convoking public debates among the presidential candidates, as long as their representatives meet beforehand to agree on the rules for the debate. Debates may take a variety of forms, and may be sponsored by different civic organizations, but it is essential to agree on the form of the questions, the time limits for each candidate to speak, the role of the communications media, and other rules.
13. The quality of quick counts depends on their design and the methods used to collect the data, along with the neutrality of the personnel doing the collecting. Well done, a quick count can be an excellent tool for building confidence in an election process, but it does not substitute for the results issued by the electoral authorities, in Nicaragua's case by the Supreme Electoral Council. The results of quick counts should be divulged within a reasonably short period of time without sacrificing either precision and consistency.
14. The Carter Center wants to reiterate its full support for the participation of Nicaraguan civil society organizations as national observers of the 2001 elections. It is vitally important for the political future of the country that it develop a body of competent and neutral national observers. We urge the political parties to respect the right of these organizations to participate, at the same time as we exhort the groups themselves to maintain a neutral and non-partisan posture. We likewise call on election officials at all levels to extend full cooperation to any duly accredited national or international observer.