

Nicaragua

***Ad Hoc* Voter Registration
Observation Report
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Nicaragua □ **s**
1996 *Ad Hoc* Registration

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Introduction

The October 20, 1996 elections mark the first time since the 1990 elections that Nicaraguan citizens will have a chance to vote at the national, as well as local level. Nicaragua will be electing a new president, vice president, deputies to the National Assembly, deputies to the Central American Parliament, mayors and vice mayors, and members of the municipal councils. In all, more than 400 positions will be contested. This election will be an important test for Nicaraguans. It will demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful, democratic transition of power and their ability to manage such a transition.

Nicaragua faces a charged pre-election atmosphere due to intense political maneuvering and a myriad of challenges to the integrity of the electoral process. Security concerns may affect the mobility of political campaigns, the registration process and voter confidence. Currently, one of the most important challenges confronting the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), political parties, and Nicaraguan citizens is voter registration.

In 1993, the CSE initiated a national drive to provide identification cards to all Nicaraguan citizens. The identification card program (called *cedulación* in Spanish), among other purposes, was designed to facilitate the voter registration process nationwide. In the past year, however, less than half the population has received their identification cards. For a variety of reasons, 26 municipalities (which correspond most closely to counties in the United States) in the northern and central mountainous zones were not included in the *cedulación* process. (See Appendix I)

Significantly, these zones where the *cedulación* process did not take place are home to perhaps as many as 400,000 voters. Historically, this area was the nucleus of contra activity during the civil war against the Sandinistas and remains heavily populated by former contra resistance members. Surveys suggest that up to 80 percent of the voting population in this region would not vote for a Sandinista candidate in the upcoming elections.

In an effort to register voters in these zones, the CSE conducted an *ad-hoc* voter registration over four weekends in June and July to allow all citizens in the 26 affected municipalities the opportunity to register. The total *ad hoc* registration reached approximately 350,000 voters, far surpassing the CSE's expectation of 292,655, a number based on the 1995 census. Present during all weekends, IRI delegates observed many citizens traveling long distances and waiting in long lines. In several cases, many citizens were not able to register due to a lack of materials at the registration tables (*Junta Receptora de Voto* or *JRV*'s). The *ad-hoc* registration was originally planned for two weekends in June, but by extending the weekends, many more citizens were granted the opportunity to register. The most impressive aspect of the entire process was the Nicaraguans' extraordinary dedication, perseverance and patience.

The 1996 Nicaraguan general elections represent the first transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another. If the pre-electoral process and environment remain credible and transparent, the 1996 elections should encourage Nicaraguan citizens to choose leaders who best represent their interests and needs.

Historical and Social Background on the 26 Municipalities

The 26 municipalities affected by the *ad hoc* registration are located in the northern and central mountainous regions of Nicaragua. In general, these regions share many characteristics with other parts of Nicaragua, but numerous others distinguish them. These characteristics contribute to the definition of the historical and social setting of these two areas in Nicaragua.

Area of Conflict

The region where the 26 municipalities lie coincides greatly with the battleground for the war between the Nicaraguan Resistance and the Sandinistas from 1980-1989. From this region emerged the majority of the peasant movements that opposed Sandinismo. Only two departments (similar to US states) that experienced battles are not in this region (Nueva Segovia and Rio San Juan). During the six years of current President Violeta Chamorro's administration, a number of the municipalities have experienced additional conflicts involving re-armed resistance fighters (*recontras*), groups of demobilized Sandinista army soldiers (*recompas*), groups of armed bandits, and other delinquent groups. Although estimates vary, between five and eight of these municipalities continue to register problems of armed violence.

A large portion of members of the demobilized resistance, as well as refugees who had fled to Honduras but returned in 1990, were born in this area. Since the 1989 peace accords, this returning population has come to comprise a substantial portion of the citizenry in the area. As such, most of the population in this region was directly or indirectly affected by the war.

Political Tendencies

According to the results of the 1990 elections, in these 26 municipalities the UNO coalition, which brought the Chamorro government to power, received approximately 110,000 votes to the Sandinistas' 50,000 votes. Of the 26 municipalities, UNO received majorities in 24, with the Sandinistas winning in only two, El Tumala Dalia and Wiwili.

In contemplating these figures, one must consider that these results preceded the demobilization and repatriation of the resistance fighters and refugees. One would presume that given the composition of the returning citizens, the strongly anti-Sandinista political tendencies of this region would be fortified.

Absence of the State

The presence of the state in these municipalities is minimal. Where there is a presence, it is mostly concentrated in the urban areas, leaving the vast rural areas with virtually no state presence at all. This phenomenon stems, in part, from the Nicaraguan state's historic characteristic of excessive centralization. The state's essential presence, and the services it provides, are concentrated in the Pacific regions, far overshadowing the rest of the country, particularly in the central corridor.

Although centralization and its direct consequence -- a capital-centered state -- are a common characteristic in almost all of Latin America, in Nicaragua this phenomenon appears in an excessive form. This corresponds to the historical development of the nation. First, the Spanish colonization came down from Mexico along the Pacific coast, and there developed the major urban centers. This led to the marginalization of the interior, which in turn generated a more direct response from this population -- the creation of peasant protest movements to resist this Managua based centralization. Because this region became so difficult to govern, the state ceased to work to extend its reach and became more centralized. Thus, the violence can be understood not only as an effect, but also a cause of the centralization and marginalization of the central zones of Nicaragua.

This absence of the state does not just refer to the lack of social services the state can offer to alleviate desperate poverty. It also refers to the greater, and more dangerous, absence of state institutions that administer justice and impose the rule of law. These basic state functions -- judge and police -- barely exist in the urban zones, even less so in the vast rural areas.

When a citizen in these zones experiences a violation of his rights, he generally does not have access to a state institution to present his complaint. The only governmental institution with a presence is the army. This then suggests that the peasants only know the corrective or coercive manifestation of the government. The regional military commander's authority in rural areas does not have a civilian equivalent, so his power tends to be uncontested. In effect, peasant movements grew as reactions to a state whose only presence in the area was military and coercive. This helps explain why the peasant movements in Nicaragua have tended to have an anti-statist, libertarian component. Additionally, a distinct tendency toward vigilante or "privatized" justice has developed.

To this existing negative predisposition, one must add that, during the Sandinista revolution, the state not only carried out repressive military actions, but it also sought to break the deeply religious population's system of beliefs and values through anticlerical dictates and actions. Although it made minimal progress in that regard, the Sandinista state did manage to asphyxiate the productive initiative through a system of centralized and collectivized economic control.

As a result, the experience of the peasants with the state in these municipalities is traumatic. The state neither arbitrates their disputes through the public and legitimate administration of justice, nor does it address their extreme poverty.

Difficult Conditions of Accessibility and Communications

In general, infrastructure is scarce in these areas. Those roads that do exist are extremely difficult to maneuver and are often in a very bad state of repair. Notwithstanding this inaccessibility, these areas have become heavily populated in recent years. As noted above,

substantial numbers of demobilized and repatriated Nicaraguans have resettled there. Additionally, campesinos (both war refugees and others from the western sectors of Nicaragua) have reclaimed much of the agricultural lands that were abandoned during the war. They continue to push the agricultural frontier farther and farther into the interior.

From the electoral point of view, this is an extremely important factor: a large portion of the population is located within areas difficult to access. In the 1990 elections, there was little electoral organization in many of these areas because they were still directly affected by the war. Now, however, governmental authorities must ensure that these areas are incorporated in to the overall organization and administration of the electoral mechanisms.

Social and Economic Indicators

This northern and central mountainous region is rich, particularly in agricultural potential, but is adversely affected by economic insecurity and legal instability (property rights), both of which discourage investment. As a result, campesinos tend to live and produce at subsistence levels. They farm to feed themselves, not for commerce. Living conditions are predictably poor and social indicators, such as electricity, potable water, health facilities, and schools, are highly unfavorable.

Primary Political and Other Institutions

In general, political parties have weak roots in this area. The Alianza Liberal (the alliance led by Arnaldo Alemán) is organized relatively well, and capitalizes on the social base of the former resistance fighters. The Sandinistas presence is limited to the urban areas. Contrary to what one might otherwise suspect, the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN) has relatively weak support in the area. Also with low levels of support, are Antonio Lacayo's PRONAL and the Conservative Party.

The two institutions with the greatest influence are the Catholic Church and the Army, although for very different reasons. The Church is virtually the only institution in this zone with any credibility. The peasant culture there is deeply religious and heavily Catholic, although one should note a recent advance by evangelical denominations, particularly in the center of Nicaragua.

The People's Sandinista Army has changed its name to the National Army, but is still comprised mostly of ex-Sandinista guerrillas, and many vehicles are still labeled *Ejército Popular*. There continue to be serious reports of human rights abuses by the army, particularly, but not exclusively, in those areas where the war was fought. Due to the distance from Managua, there is a greater tendency toward autonomy by mid-level commanders in those areas, as the central army command appears to lack the ability to control them. This reality contributes to the bad reputation the army retains among the peasants. A mutual perception of antagonism persists.

Rearmed Groups

The civil war of the last decade has had serious consequences in Nicaragua and left it with tremendous challenges. Estimates calculate that the conflict resulted in 60,000 dead, 85,000 orphaned and 10,000 maimed. The population directly affected by the war, more than 650,000 people, live primarily in the regions covered by the ad-hoc registration process.

Even with the disarmament and demobilization of the resistance (22,000 ex-resistance demobilized) and the significant reduction in the size of the army, there are still small armed groups in some areas of Nicaragua. In many cases, these groups were disarmed over the past six years, but due to the lack of adequate rehabilitation projects, they re-armed. Aside from the persistence of these armed groups, there is also an increase in common crime in the rural areas of the country. It is said that one in ten Nicaraguans lives in a conflict zone with little defense, mostly in conditions of impunity and extreme poverty. According to data provided by CIAV/OAS, in 1995, 79 percent of reports of human rights violations they received came from the departments of Matagalpa, Jinotega, Chontales, Estelí, Nueva Segovia and Boaco. 77 percent of murders took place in Matagalpa, Jinotega and Chontales.

According to the CIAV/OAS's conflict survey for 1994, 40 municipalities are high risk areas. This same source counts the strength of multiple armed groups at approximately 500 members. In 1995, the groups were involved in 80 battles.

This year, armed activities continue to occur in these so-called conflict zones. Although the election process is expected to be peaceful, there have been some events which, although small, could represent some serious challenges to the electoral process. During the first weekend of the ad-hoc registration, a rearmed commander known as *El Pajarillo* kidnaped an AID observer and demanded more registration tables (*JRVs*) because the existing ones were badly located. Before the third weekend of registration, Ciriaco Palacios, aka *El Charro*, the rearmed commander who operated in the Matagalpa and Jinotega areas, was killed. The incident caused a great deal of tension between the rearmed groups and resulted in the kidnaping of a group of Electoral Council (*CSE*) workers during the third weekend of registration. The band of rearmed men demanded support for social services and the withdrawal of the army. Fortunately, both kidnapings ended quietly and without further incident. Other, smaller, but no less intense, incidents have also occurred.

Peace Commissions

CIAV/OAS is almost the only institution, next to the Church, with a presence in a region where the only law is the weapons of the army and rearmed groups. Confronted with this institutional vacuum, there has been a push for the formation of Peace Commissions in the most conflict ridden areas. The Peace Commissions are expressions of civil society organizing for the defense of human rights and for the promotion of a reduction in violence. The organization of these commissions is taking place in conflict areas dominated by a culture of war and noted for the lack of public institutions capable of resolving conflicts and protecting human rights.

In the 32 municipalities with the highest levels of violence, CIAV/OAS units are transferring their functions to the Peace Commissions. These commissions are made up of peasant leaders, often tied to religious organizations, who understand the region and its people and are willing to assume the responsibility for promoting and defending human rights.

The primary objectives of the Peace Commissions include:

- Promoting and fostering respect for human rights;
- Receiving declarations and carrying out investigations;
- Mediating conflicts.

Among the main accomplishments of the Peace Commissions are:

- The negotiation with, and demobilization of, rearmed commanders;
- The liberation of hostages;
- The facilitation of state projects in areas of difficult access.

The Peace Commissions are carrying out an important role in the current electoral process by informing and educating inhabitants of their areas about the importance of their participation in the process and ensuring that each individual has the opportunity to register to vote. Many of the commissions denounced the lack of interest by officials in providing national identification cards (*cédulas*) in the 26 municipalities. They also complained about the insufficient number and/or inadequate location of JRVs.

The Ad Hoc Voter Registration Process

Background on the Process

The *ad hoc* registration system is the voter identification process that has been traditionally used in Nicaragua. For the elections in 1990, the government of Nicaragua successfully registered approximately 1,752,088 people on four consecutive Sundays. For the Atlantic Coast regional elections of 1994, voters registered using this same *ad hoc* process.

The *cedulación* process, begun in 1993, was intended to obviate the *ad hoc* registration by providing Nicaraguans with a multi-purpose national identity card that would serve, among other purposes, as a voting card. In September 1995, the CSE announced that the *cedulación* process would not be completed nationwide in time for the October 1996 elections. It then proposed a mixed system for voter identification that provided for the use of both the *cedulación* and the *ad hoc* processes. The National Assembly approved this mixed system in January 1996.

There remains a significant debate in Nicaragua and among the international community regarding the reasons, or motives, that led the CSE to adopt the mixed system and the criteria used for selecting municipalities to be *cedulized* or to be excluded from that process. In addition to administrative obstacles, such as the absence of birth, death, and other official certificates, the CSE stated that it could not complete the *cedulación* nationwide because of delays in obtaining sufficient financing, in passing the so-called Citizen Identification Law, and in reforming the Electoral Law. With specific regard to the 26 municipalities, the CSE contends that they were not included in the *cedulación* because of the inaccessibility of the region and the danger posed by the presence and actions of armed groups.

While it is certainly true that the CSE has had to confront a myriad of economic, technical, and administrative challenges in the implementation of the *cedulación* process, other nations in the region have faced these same challenges. Questions have arisen, however, regarding the criteria by which the CSE determined which areas to exclude from the *cedulación*. As discussed above, the 26 municipalities chosen by the CSE coincide with a region where repatriated and demobilized resistance fighters, their families, and supporters are the dominant population. Nicaraguan and international analysts have suggested the possibility that these municipalities may have been excluded from the *cedulación* because of their strongly anti-Sandinista credentials.

There also is no doubt that access to the 26 municipalities, particularly in their more rural areas, is especially difficult. Roads, where they exist at all, are often badly damaged and difficult to pass. Penetration into the most rural zones must be accomplished by boat, foot, or beasts of burden. Nevertheless, these characteristics certainly are not unique to the 26 *ad hoc* municipalities. In fact, other parts of the country that have been *cedulized*, such as the Atlantic Coast, Nueva Segovia, and Rio San Juan, are equally, if not more, inaccessible.

Much the same can be said regarding the dangers posed by the presence and actions of armed groups. Such dangers certainly exist, although according to the Nicaraguan Army, only five or six of the *ad hoc* municipalities pose any type of risk greater than that existing in other rural zones of the country. Other of these zones, such as Quilali, El Jicaro, Murra, La Cruz de Rio Grande, and El Tortugero have been *cedulized*.

As noted above, the region covered by the 26 *ad hoc* municipalities substantially coincides with areas of great conflict during Nicaragua's civil war. The resistance and other peasant movements opposed to Sandinista rule emerged largely from these areas. Many of the resistance fighters, their families, and supporters were born in this region, and have since been demobilized and repatriated there. In 1990, prior to the demobilization and repatriation, 24 of 26 municipalities voted for the anti-Sandinista UNO coalition; only two municipalities supported the Sandinistas. One presumes that after the demobilization and repatriation of the resistance fighters, their families, and other refugees, this trend not only would be reaffirmed but strengthened.

The 1996 *Ad Hoc* Voter Registration--Preliminary Preparations

According to the Electoral Law, Nicaraguans are to register to vote at the registration/voting site (*JRV*) in the area where they normally reside, even if they are temporarily living some place else. To identify oneself, the prospective registrant may present one of several forms of identification, such as a driver's license, social security card, or passport. Lacking these documents, one can present two witnesses who will attest to the registrant's identity, age, place of residence, and other pertinent information.

Although many Nicaraguans and international observers believed that the official 1995 population census substantially underestimated the population of the northern and central mountainous regions, the CSE designed an implementation plan based on statistical data from the census. The Electoral Law requires that there be no more than 400 voters assigned to each *JRV*. Based on the census figures, the CSE sought to establish 969 *JRVs* to accommodate the officially estimated 292,655 eligible voters and to determine the location for these *JRVs*. The number and location of *JRVs* became a serious issue during the first two weekends and led to several changes in subsequent rounds of registration (see below). Yet even with the problems of insufficient *JRVs* and insufficient related materials in some areas, an impressive number of citizens turned out to register.

The CSE originally planned to conduct the *ad hoc* registration during the first two weekends of June. Numerous Nicaraguan and international observers had suggested that more time would be necessary, given the challenges of conducting registration in these areas. The registration period eventually was extended to accommodate a higher than expected turnout and to compensate for logistical and administrative deficiencies experienced during the first weekends.

To train electoral workers and promote citizen participation in the registration process, the CSE created a training and civic education program. Both the training and education programs were initiated ten days prior to the registration, which diminished their potential effectiveness. In its preliminary visits to the *ad hoc* region, two weeks before the registration period opened, IRI observed that many people did not know where, when, or how to register. Although there were numerous delays and a degree of disorganization, the CSE, civic organizations, and some political parties made serious efforts to train and educate those involved in the process, either as workers or registrants. To promote the registration, the CSE used advertising posters, radio and television announcements, and house to house visits. Numerous registrants indicated to IRI observers that local teachers had informed their students, who then informed their parents of the registration.

The 1996 *Ad Hoc* Voter Registration--IRI Observations

First Weekend

For the June 1-2 round of the *ad hoc* registration, IRI's observer delegation deployed seven teams to critical regions covered by the *ad hoc* process. The teams visited close to 200 JRVs and spoke with scores of Nicaraguan citizens about their knowledge of, and experiences with, the registration. The IRI delegation submitted the following observations and recommendations:

IRI was impressed by the dedication and desire of the many citizens who sought to register during this weekend. In many cases, citizens walked two to four hours to arrive at their designated JRV and waited in line all day Saturday and well into Sunday for the opportunity to register. IRI recognized the many dedicated JRV workers and party poll watchers who persisted and persevered through a laborious process, made all the more difficult by the lack of pay, provisions, and in some cases materials. Preparation and training in most cases appeared to have been, at best, adequate. JRV personnel demonstrated a genuine commitment to process as many registration applications as they reasonably could.

The delegation found that JRVs in some areas did not open or opened with inadequate materials, thereby depriving citizens in these areas the opportunity to register. Such was the case in the municipality of Bocana de Paiwas, where virtually no JRVs opened the first weekend. The delegation was also concerned about the lack of information and confusion in some regions about the proper location to register. IRI delegates encountered numerous examples of citizens going to the wrong JRVs and not being able to determine the proper location of the assigned JRV.

To ensure that the greatest possible number of citizens would have the opportunity to register, IRI submitted the following preliminary recommendations to the CSE and the people of Nicaragua:

- * The CSE should extend the number of weekends during which citizens can register. No less than two additional weekends would appear to be adequate.
- * The CSE should expand the number of JRVs available for registration. This would help to reduce the distance citizens must travel and the time they must wait in line.
- * To inform citizens about the *ad hoc* registration, the CSE should expand its civic education and promotional efforts. Emphasis should be placed on reaching more remote regions and on helping citizens identify the proper JRV location.
- * The CSE should conscientiously work to improve the JRVs' level of preparation to accommodate larger numbers of registrants. In particular, the CSE should continue training its workers, including practical exercises. In many JRVs, poll workers informed IRI observers that they had only been given manuals to read and that they had never actually seen examples of official forms and documents that they are responsible for processing.
- * The CSE must ensure that workers receive their pay to guarantee their attendance on subsequent weekends. Further emphasis on adequate distribution of personnel and materials, especially to the more remote locations, is critical to expanding the opportunities for citizens to register.

According to official CSE data, a total of 147,753 citizens registered during the first weekend.

Second Weekend

For the June 8-9 round, IRI's observer delegation deployed four teams to several important regions covered by the *ad hoc* process. In order to evaluate progress made following the first weekend's registration, teams visited some of the same regions and JRVs observed June 1-2. The teams observed the registration process at approximately 100 JRVs. Based on the second weekend's observations, the IRI delegation submitted the following observations and recommendations:

As they did during the first weekend, IRI delegates observed many Nicaraguans traveling long distances and waiting in long lines for the opportunity to register to vote. IRI observers congratulated those citizens who overcame the obstacles of time, distance, and lingering confusion about the registration process and successfully registered.

IRI also commended the many JRV poll workers and party pollwatchers who returned to their posts for the second weekend, despite the uncertainty about pay and provisions that carried over from the previous weekend. In most cases, they performed admirably, laboring through a lengthy and cumbersome process with perseverance and persistence. IRI observers were deeply impressed by the high level of commitment, dedication, and desire of the many citizens who participated in this exercise in democracy.

It is clear to IRI observers that Nicaraguan citizens want to register to vote and that many have been registered. It is also clear, however, that in many places, the opportunity to register was restricted due to lack of supplies, which caused JRVs to suspend operations and leave potential registrants waiting in line; and by the lack of sufficient JRVs, particularly in the more rural areas.

The IRI delegation also expressed concern that rural women, in particular, were not registering. IRI observers witnessed some JRVs where almost no women had registered. Some saw waiting lines where few or no women were present. Voters and poll workers told IRI observers that it was because women, especially those with children, were unable to travel the long distances to the JRVs. Unless the registration period were to be extended and logistical challenges solved, large numbers of Nicaraguan women would not have the opportunity to register to vote.

To ensure that the greatest possible number of citizens have that opportunity, IRI submitted the following preliminary recommendations to the CSE and the people of Nicaragua:

- * IRI reiterated its call to the CSE to add at least two additional weekends for the *ad hoc* registration. Although there was an encouragingly high turnout, there is no doubt that many more Nicaraguans in all 26 municipalities remain unregistered. IRI reminded the Nicaraguan and international communities that the official turnout percentages were based on 1995 census statistics, which many Nicaraguans believe substantially underestimated the region's true population. IRI understands that the census did not reach to all areas of the 26 municipalities, making it virtually certain that considerably less than the officially estimated percentage actually had registered.
- * The extension of the registration should cover all of the 26 municipalities and not be limited to only certain areas or specific JRVs. While special efforts must be made to expand registration opportunities to those areas that have presented particularly difficult challenges, IRI observers concluded that potential voters in all municipalities would

benefit from additional registration opportunities. Furthermore, extending the registration to the entire *ad hoc* region would eliminate the potential for voter confusion about which areas are being covered and which are not.

- * To take full advantage of the positive momentum from the first two weekends, the CSE should conduct the additional registration weekends immediately, without any interruption. This sequential implementation would be absolutely essential to avoid voter confusion.
- * Similarly, the CSE should announce without delay its decision to extend the *ad hoc* registration. An immediate announcement would provide sufficient time for the CSE to mount a vigorous effort to inform the citizens in the *ad hoc* areas about the additional opportunities to register. Such a timely announcement would be consistent with the CSE's stated objective of registering as many citizens as possible. Any delay would reduce the amount of time available to spread the message and make the necessary preparations, thereby risking a lower turnout.
- * The CSE should continue to expand the number of JRVs available for registration and relocate those that have been shown to be poorly placed. IRI observers concluded that this was still necessary, especially in the more rural zones, to reduce the distance citizens must travel and the time they must wait in line. Additionally, the CSE should put further emphasis on distributing adequate supplies and materials to all JRVs.

Every member of IRI's delegation was impressed with the extraordinary dedication, perseverance, and patience of the Nicaraguan people in their efforts to register. IRI applauded the progress made during the first two weekends of the *ad hoc* registration, but noted with a sense of urgency that much work remained to be done. According to official CSE data, a total of 164,260 citizens registered during the second weekend.

Third Weekend

For the June 15-16 round, IRI deployed a two-team staff delegation to the Departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega, areas considered to have had the most significant difficulties the previous two weekends.

IRI observed noted that, mainly in the urban areas of the affected municipalities, the third weekend of registration proceeded satisfactorily. In the more rural areas, however, the situation was substantially different. In some cases, citizens did not know that the registration process had been extended, and in other areas, citizens were turned away for lack of registration materials. JRVs had opened late, others closed early, and some did not open at all mainly due to the lack of voter cards, called *libreta cívicas*. In Jinotega, in the areas neighboring San José de Bocay and Ayapal, the situation was particularly serious, as many people had to stand in a slow

line after a long walk. Transportation for election workers continued to be problematic, as did the adequate distribution of materials.

According to official CSE data, a total of 42,856 citizens registered during the third weekend.

IRI made the following recommendations at the conclusion of the third weekend:

- * Extend for an additional weekend the registrations in those JRVs that presented problems during the third weekend. That is to say, extend the *ad hoc* registration process partially, according to the observations of the CSE and the international observers.
- * Because the CSE required time to study and analyze the data gathered, the extension should occur after several weeks to permit sufficient opportunity to properly organize a fourth weekend. The CSE should avail itself of this additional time to intensify its efforts to inform citizens in the affected areas about the additional opportunities to register.
- * The CSE should ensure the adequate distribution of registration materials to allow all those wishing to register to do so. Based on IRI discussions with citizens in the affected areas and other observations, it is clear that there remains an appreciable number of unregistered citizens.

Fourth Weekend

For the fourth and final weekend, July 6-7, the CSE conducted *ad hoc* registration at 48 JRVs -- although two did not open (Blis and Wina Central) -- representing those areas that experienced particular difficulties during the previous three weekends. IRI staff visited 12 JRVs in the Ayapal and San José de Bocay region. Although official statistics still have not been released, overall the turnout for this partial registration weekend was disappointingly low. Among the JRVs visited by IRI staff, an average of 37 citizens had registered.

The JRV election workers and citizens with whom IRI spoke attributed this situation to the inadequate informational campaign conducted by the CSE. The CSE announced the additional registration opportunities by radio (in a region where many citizens apparently cannot afford radios), and then only beginning Wednesday of the week of registration. According to the citizens and CSE workers with whom IRI spoke, this was the only method of dissemination. The JRV workers indicated that they anticipated a greater number of registrants, given the quantity of people that remained unregistered in their areas. The workers suggested that the citizens simply did not know about the additional possibility to register.

In contrast to previous weekends, there appeared to be sufficient registration materials; regrettably, there were few citizens present to take advantage of the material abundance. JRVs

visited were fully staffed. There were fewer party pollwatchers than in previous weekends, but there was always at least some presence.

As of this report's release, the CSE has not issued official results for the fourth weekend of registration. Of the officially estimated 292,655 eligible voters in the 26 municipalities, it appears that approximately 350,000 actually registered, confirming concerns about the inaccuracy of the official census.

Conclusions

The *ad hoc* registration process in the 26 municipalities was burdened from its inception with numerous obstacles and deficiencies, which, to a considerable degree, the Nicaraguan people overcame with patience, dedication, and a determination to make democracy succeed. While it is true that many of the deficiencies and obstacles could have been avoided if better and more advanced preparations had been made, it is also true that the process was characterized by a substantial level of cooperation and effort among election officials, party pollwatchers, citizens, and others involved in the process.

IRI believes that the *ad hoc* registration offers valuable experiences from which Nicaragua can draw important lessons that will assist in preparing for a just and transparent election in October. It is imperative that the CSE plan and coordinate well in advance the effort that must be executed to be successful on election day.

- X Among other actions, the CSE must increase the number of JRVs to ensure that there are sufficient locations to comply with the Electoral Law's requirement that each JRV accommodate no more than 400 citizens. Data from the *ad hoc* registration indicate that in many JRVs, as many as twice this maximum number actually registered. Also, according to the law, Nicaraguans are to walk no more than four kilometers to reach the nearest JRV. It is reasonable to suggest that this same concern about an insufficient number of JRVs also could exist in other regions of the country, especially the rural areas, where the 1995 census apparently has the greatest inaccuracies.
- X The CSE should analyze very carefully all available population and socio-economic information, including that from CIAV/OAS and the Catholic Church's Peace and Justice Commissions, to help ensure that the highest possible number of Nicaraguans have the opportunity to vote in October.
- X On election day, there will be six different ballots. The CSE should take measures to expedite voter processing. Given the evident enthusiasm, at least in the *ad hoc* region, for participating in the democratic process, there could be a very high turnout on October 20. Given the number of offices being contested, the CSE should anticipate that it will take a certain amount of time for voters to complete the ballot.
- X Sufficient materials also must be provided. With adequate preparations, the CSE should be able to minimize the long lines and length of waiting time that characterized the *ad hoc* registration.

- X To promote the greatest possible citizen participation in the election, the CSE should design and implement an intensive and appropriate civic education program. Included in this civic education program should be the location of new JRV sites.

- X This program should be initiated well in advance of the election and continued throughout the pre-electoral period. The objective must be to encourage as many Nicaraguans as possible to participate in their country's democratic process. The same recommendation is equally valid for the training of the JRV workers and political party pollwatchers.

IRI will continue observing the Nicaraguan election process in all its phases until its conclusion. It is imperative that the pre-electoral process and the electoral environment leading up to the October 1996 elections remain credible and transparent. A sense of national security, an effective registration process and transparent campaigning will prove the value of Nicaragua's investment in democracy and in the upcoming elections. In closing, IRI acknowledges the outstanding cooperation received by the CSE, USAID, and the CIAV/OAS mission in Nicaragua.