

The Carter Center
Electoral Bulletin
September 24, 2001

In this document, The Carter Center wishes to communicate to the Nicaraguan public its point of view about recent events in the 2001 electoral process, and signal some themes that our second pre-election delegations will explore with the election authorities and political parties during its visit beginning the 27th of this month.

1. The Carter Center congratulates the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) for their commitment on September 4 to maintain their quorum of seven members for the remainder of the 2001 electoral process. We are sure that this formal and solemn step will contribute to the successful conclusion of the electoral process, and the timely declaration of winners of the vote.
2. We are pleased that the CSE has announced dates for multiple simulations of the vote transmission during the months of September and October, as we recommended in our July report. Although the first test conducted on Sunday September 9th revealed weaknesses in the system of transmission, this exercise provided the Council with information on which to correct the weakness on-time and the CSE has moved forward to additional tests. We hope that the Supreme Electoral Council will spare no effort in dedicating itself to this process of testing all the necessary resources both in terms of training and equipment.
3. In addition, The Carter Center was happy to hear of the recent declaration made by the Minister for Housing and Public Credit, which states that he will do everything possible to guarantee to the Supreme Electoral Council the necessary resources to carry out the election process. In a visit to the various departments in the country, we have encountered concern among departmental and municipal electoral authorities. The shortage of material resources-- lack of vehicles and money to cover routine costs, and poorly maintained equipment-- could obstruct and even jeopardize a quality electoral process. The news that the police and military authorities still lack the resources to guarantee the security of elections is also worrying. We emphasize that the central government has an unavoidable responsibility to provide the electoral apparatus with the necessary resources such that it can fulfill its duties in a timely manner.
4. The Carter Center is encouraged by the fact that the CSE has assumed sole responsibility for training members of the Juntas Receptoras del Voto (JRV- voting boards), a task that was initially visualized as shared with the political parties, leading us to express concern in our first election report. We are hopeful that this measure will result in a high-quality and equitable training of those designated to work at the voting tables.

At the same time, we have noted with concern that various participating parties have tried to provide parallel training sessions to those individuals designated to work as pollworkers. This parallel training would be added to that already provided to the pollworkers by the CSE. Although the parties are within their rights to carry out this extra

training, our concern is that training directed towards the partisan defense of the vote could impede the proper functioning of the JRV, injecting unnecessary tension into the voting and counting processes. We urge that parties carrying out this additional pollworker training maintain a strict conceptual and functional distinction between the responsibilities of a member of the JRV and those of a party pollwatcher.

In addition, any training of the pollworkers and party pollwatchers must emphasize the proper use of challenges to the votes and results. With only weeks remaining before the beginning of official training, we are concerned that the CSE has yet to announce any regulations controlling challenges, which is crucial for a well-ordered and peaceful election day. We urge the magistrates to act upon this matter as quickly as possible.

5. The Carter Center notes with satisfaction the recent nomination of an Electoral Ombudsman (Procuradora Electoral), who is empowered to conduct oversight on rigorous compliance with Electoral law. It is hoped that the Electoral Ombudsman will act with the necessary energy to investigate and take measures against those electoral activities at odds with the Law. Taking into account the diverse electoral complaints that we have heard, it will be especially prudent and opportune for the Electoral Ombudsman to treat the mutual accusations made by parties in regard to the destruction of propaganda, in addition to repeated statements regarding the abuse of state resources in the party campaigns.