

**Statement of the National Democratic Institute (NDI)
Pre-Election Delegation to the
Dominican Republic's 2000 Presidential Election**

Santo Domingo, April 14, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

This statement is offered by an international pre-election delegation to the Dominican Republic organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The delegation visited the Dominican Republic from April 9 to April 14, 2000. The Institute conducted pre-election and international election observation delegations for the 1990, 1994 and 1996 Dominican elections. NDI's 1990 and 1996 delegations were organized jointly with The Carter Center. In addition to this pre-election delegation, NDI and The Carter Center will organize an international delegation to observe the May 16 election and the June 30 presidential run-off election, should one occur. NDI and The Carter Center will open an office in Santo Domingo in mid-April to continuously monitor the electoral process until its conclusion.

The purposes of this delegation were to express the support of the international community for a democratic election process in the Dominican Republic, to assess the evolving political environment surrounding the upcoming elections, as well as the state of electoral preparations, and to offer an accurate and impartial statement of its observations. The delegation conducted its activities according to international standards for nonpartisan international election observation and Dominican law. NDI does not seek to interfere in the election process or, at this juncture, to make a final assessment about the process. NDI recognizes that, ultimately, it will be the people of the Dominican Republic who will determine the legitimacy of the elections and of the resulting government.

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

This year's presidential election presents a critical opportunity for the Dominican Republic to significantly advance its democratic process. Successful elections in 1996 and 1998 represented breaks from the country's troubled electoral history. Public confidence in elections has increased markedly, but it is likely that several more successful elections will be needed before Dominican citizens are fully confident about the process and the political parties and candidates do not immediately allege that fraud is likely.

The gains of the last four years in the Dominican Republic's electoral processes are encouraging; although, the present mix of political polarization and lingering distrust create a sensitive environment in which to address apparent technical problems in the electoral process. The possibilities for yet another closely contested Dominican presidential election heighten the sensitivity of the electoral environment and the urgency for reaching broad-based agreements about how to address the problems. An active, good-faith dialogue among political parties and electoral authorities, with the continued support of religious, civic and business sectors, is required to reach necessary agreements.

It appears that, if the needed agreements by the electoral actors are reached, conditions exist to organize a successful election; however, time is of the essence, and resolution of the approach to problems, particularly but not exclusively related to the voter registry (padron) and voter identification cards (cedulas), must be agreed upon promptly. Given the history of dialogue over the last several years concerning political and electoral reforms – and given the desires of the political parties, electoral authorities and other important actors expressed to the delegation – such agreements should be attainable.

At the same time, concerted and forceful efforts by the Junta Central Electoral (Central Electoral Board – JCE) are required if the major technical problems are to be effectively addressed before the May 16 election. In addition, challenges of organizing and adequately supervising the elections, and issues relating to a fair campaign in the remaining days before the election, as well as for the possible run-off, are significant. A clear demonstration – by all concerned – of the requisite political will, and a clear demonstration of the administrative capacity to address the problems and challenges, are required if the Dominican electorate is to fulfill its desires for democratic elections again this year.

Mindful of the progress that has been made over the last four years in the Dominican election process and of the strong desire of Dominicans for genuine democratic elections, the delegation offers its observations as well as recommendations, which appear in the last section of this statement.

II. THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK

The delegation was warmly welcomed by the *Junta Central Electoral* (Central Electoral Board – JCE) and leaders from Dominican political, civic, business and religious sectors. The members of the delegation included: Felix Ulloa, former Magistrate of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador and President of the *Instituto de Estudios Juridicos de El Salvador*; Aracely Conde de Paiz, former candidate for Vice President of Guatemala for the *Partido Social Demócrata/Alianza Popular-5* and current President of the citizen participation group, *Amanecer Sakarik* in Guatemala; Curt Cutter, Senior Advisor to NDI, Chairman of Interworld Consultants and former U.S. diplomat; Patrick Merloe, NDI Senior Associate and Director of Programs on Election and Political Processes; and Matt Dippell, NDI Deputy Director for Latin America and the Caribbean. The delegation was joined by Geneva Ferrando, NDI Regional Assistant for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The delegation's observations are based upon extensive meetings with: presidential and vice presidential candidates and political party campaign leaders and representatives to the JCE, including the *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* (PLD), *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (PRSC), *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD) and others; the Members of the *Junta Central Electoral* (JCE); members of the *Comision de Seguimiento* (Follow-Up Commission) and the *Comision de Asesores de informatica de la JCE* (*Comision de Asesores*); leaders of nongovernmental organizations, including *Participación Ciudadana*; representatives of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra*; representatives of the news media; local experts in public opinion research and political analysis; and representatives of the international community. The delegation was also informed by the work of earlier delegations organized by the Organization of American States (OAS), the International Foundation for

Election Systems (IFES) and The Carter Center. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to everyone with whom it met for sharing their time and views.

An accurate and complete assessment of any election must take into account all aspects of the electoral process. These include: 1) conditions set up by the legal framework for the elections; 2) the pre-election period before and during the campaign; 3) the voting process; 4) the counting process at the voting tables; 5) the tabulation of results; 6) the investigation and resolution of complaints; and 7) the conditions surrounding the formation of a new government. At the same time, no election can be viewed in isolation of the political context in which it takes place. The pre-election period is central to this context and must be given considerable weight when evaluating the democratic nature of elections, because it is the time when citizens become aware of their power to provide the mandate for those who are to govern, and political contestants mobilize support in a test of political pluralism as they compete for votes.

III. ELECTION CONTEXT

NDI has had the privilege of witnessing three Dominican elections, in 1990, 1994 and 1996. The delegation noted that the 1996 and 1998 elections, which were accepted by the citizens and political contestants alike as democratic and well-administered, stand in profound contrast to the troubled elections of 1990 – and particularly to the 1994 elections in which tens of thousands of voters were denied their right to vote due to fraudulent practices.

The current elections provide an important opportunity to continue the consolidation of the democratic advances of recent elections. The delegation was struck by the continued high degree of interest and participation of Dominican citizens in elections and complemented political, civic, business and religious leaders for their ongoing engagement in electoral and political processes. The delegation was reassured by the impartial role played in the election process by the Dominican civic organization *Participación Ciudadana* (Citizen Participation), which is mobilizing thousands of nonpartisan election monitors for the upcoming election, as it did in the 1996 and 1998 elections.

Election Administration. For the 1996 elections, the JCE was selected through political consensus between the parties and civil society. For the 2000 elections, however, the five-member JCE was named by the Dominican Senate without the broad consultation that was a hallmark of the 1996 elections. This led to political struggles aimed to overcome concerns that the JCE would favor the PRD. These struggles resulted in a compromise that expanded the JCE to include one additional member representing the PRSC and one representing the PLD. This arrangement also established a Follow-Up Committee (*Comision de Seguimiento*), which includes respected figures from the religious, business and civic sectors, to monitor the compromise and foster communication between the parties and the JCE.

Distribution of Voter Identification Cards. Dominican citizens are in the process of receiving new multiple-use identity cards (*cedulas*), which are used for voting and creation of the voter registry (*padron*). At present, it is estimated that approximately 250,000 persons of the country's more than 4 million voters have yet to receive their *cedulas*. Citizens have complained of long lines and the need to return repeatedly to apply for these cards and to collect them. The JCE has said that virtually all of the *cedulas* are now printed and will be distributed by election day through vigorous efforts. Dominican law

requires that prospective voters present their *cedulas* at polling stations and that they be listed on the *padron*, or they will not be allowed to vote. Political parties and others are concerned, however, that the JCE's efforts could continue to lag behind (particularly if the deadline for distributing *cedulas* remains April 16), which could potentially disenfranchise thousands of voters.

Electoral Registry and Verification Exercise. Concerns have also been raised about the accuracy of the *padron*. To help respond to these concerns, the JCE organized an unprecedented effort to have citizens visit their assigned polling sites on March 25 and 26 and confirm that they are correctly registered on the *padron*. Some 40 percent of registered voters took part in this verification or "pre-identification" exercise. The effort was praised by party leaders as a welcome response by the JCE to their concerns about inaccuracies in the voter registry.

The verification exercise provided an important assessment of election preparations to date. A variety of problems were detected including: lack of training and supervision of polling site officials; poor citizen awareness of procedures; mismatched, illegible or missing voter photos in the *padron*; voters whose names appeared on the *padron* for a different site than that listed on their *cedula*; polling sites in different locations than those described on citizens' *cedulas*; citizens who had changed polling sites but their *cedula* indicated their old location; citizens whose gender had been changed in the *padron*; voters whose names did not appear on the registry despite having voted at the same site in past elections; and voters with a new *cedula* but who are not on the *padron*.

A report on the verification process issued by the *Comision de Seguimiento, Comision de Asesores* and *Participación Ciudadana* recommended: 1) having the parties help citizens verify their information on the *padron* by using the copies of the *padron* that parties received from the JCE; 2) giving copies of the *padron* to all political parties recognized by the JCE and interested civic groups to do outreach to citizens to verify their data in the *padron*; 3) putting key information from the registry on the Internet; 4) setting up an interactive phone system so voters can verify the polling center and table where they should go to vote; 5) providing public access to a list at each voting center on election day so that prospective voters can verify how they are listed on the *padron*, including *cedula* numbers, municipality, voting center, voting table and gender; and 6) using data from the previous *padron* to provide personal information for individuals who registered for their new *cedula* but whose information does not appear on the *padron*.

The report also called, among other things, for: 1) establishing or reinforcing the head of logistics at the JCE; 2) providing polling officials with a clear guide, which would be developed with the consensus of the political parties, to handle various contingencies; 3) providing training about the guide and distributing it to polling officials and the media; 4) providing additional training to polling place and municipal level election officials on electoral contingencies and preventing undue pressure on them by political party representatives; 5) organizing mobile supervisory groups of election officials at the municipal level to handle logistical problems; 6) conducting a JCE sponsored public education campaign to explain measures taken to ensure citizens who have their *cedulas* can vote; 7) organizing an election day operation to orient voters; and 8) continuing delivery of *cedulas*, while the JCE deals with other issues that surfaced in the verification exercise.

Use of State Resources. In March, the *Comision de Seguimiento por un Pacto Etica Electoral* (Follow-Up Commission for the Electoral Ethics Pact, an umbrella effort of more than 100 civic organizations that set benchmarks for transparent, peaceful elections) reported that there have been cases of public funds being used to promote all of the major parties. For example, the report noted that the PRD has reportedly displayed party propaganda on trucks from the National District Council (*Ayuntamiento del Distrito Nacional*), while the PRSC placed an enormous picture of their candidate in the Dominican Municipal League parking lot. Official government cars have been seen with propaganda supporting the PLD candidate clearly displayed, including trucks working for the public assistance program “Nutrition for Everyone.”

Campaign Environment. In general, this year’s campaign is much more peaceful than those of previous years, and Dominicans report that there is more respect for the exercise of electoral rights by opposing party activists. There has been a decline in politically motivated violence and no deaths to date. The political parties, however, have accused one another and the JCE of preparing and/or perpetrating election fraud, and some party leaders have made statements that threaten not to accept election defeat and threaten the possibility of using violent tactics if their party is defeated.

Election Monitors. The Dominican Republic benefits greatly from the presence of nonpartisan election observers, monitoring the campaign period and election day. The civic organization *Participación Ciudadana* is playing an important role in helping to increase confidence and participation in the election process. During the pre-election period, the group has reported on party primaries, conducted civic education campaigns and co-sponsored the Electoral Ethics Pact. *Participación Ciudadana* also mobilized 1,500 volunteers to assist with the voter registry verification exercise and made public service announcements in support of the event. The group is also developing biographies of political candidates and election officials. On election day, *Participación Ciudadana* will monitor the quality of the voting process with an observer network with thousands of volunteers. In addition, the group will conduct an independent verification of the polling results based on a random statistical sample of polling sites (a parallel vote tabulation or PVT).

In 1996, *Participación Ciudadana* recruited over 4,000 domestic nonpartisan election monitors. However, the former JCE limited to 1,140 the number of domestic observers it would accredit. Although it still deployed the remaining 3,000 recruits as “observing voters,” that ruling limited to some extent the coverage of the monitoring effort. In the 1998 municipal and legislative elections, the JCE did not limit the number of accreditations, and *Participación Ciudadana* was able to deploy over 10,000 observers. Presently, the JCE is in the process of providing accreditation for *Participación*’s observers across the country. It is important that the JCE and local electoral authorities support the ability of *Participación* and other civic groups to organize comprehensive monitoring efforts of the entire election process.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The delegation was impressed with the progress that has been made in gaining public confidence in elections over the last four years and appreciated the active engagement of Dominican citizens, political leaders, election officials, and religious, civic and business leaders in discussing ways to approach issues affecting the election process. The delegation also commends the efforts of the JCE, political parties and

religious, business and civic sectors to resolve problems that have arisen in the election process. The delegation supports the recommendations set forth in the report of the *Comision de Seguimiento, Comision de Asesores* and *Participación Ciudadana* entitled “*Recomendaciones a la Junta Central Electoral Ante Los Resultados del Operativo de Preverification.*” The recommendations set forth below are intended to complement those offered by others concerned with advancing the Dominican election process.

With these factors in mind and in the spirit of international cooperation, the delegation respectfully offers the following recommendations, which it believes could help promote confidence and participation in the elections.

1) Political Dialogue and Agreement. A number of technical problems in the election process have been widely discussed in the Dominican Republic, especially the development of the voter registry (*padron*) and the process of issuing new identification cards to voters. Additional important issues have also been identified and others will inevitably emerge as the 2000 election process unfolds. While there are technical solutions to such problems and while there is a need for concerted administrative efforts to address them, broad-based political agreements on the accepted approach to such problems is essential to a peaceful, transparent and democratic election.

The delegation therefore urges the political parties and electoral authorities to continue and heighten dialogue and good-faith efforts at reaching immediate agreement on the specific ways to approach problems related to the *padron* and the *cedulas*. It is hoped that Dominican religious, business and civic sectors will continue their critical efforts to foster such dialogue and agreement. The delegation also urges the political parties to engage actively in good-faith dialogue concerning issues that emerge and to adhere to prior agreements concerning election and political processes. One important issue that needs to be clarified before May 16 is the legal requirements for possible changes in presidential and vice presidential candidates should there be a run-off on June 30. Uncertainty concerning such important rules of the game must be clear before the election or the process could be undermined.

2) Voter Registry (*Padron*) and Voter Identification (*Cedulas*). The government has an obligation to protect and promote the right to vote, which is recognized in the Constitution of the Dominican Republic. By creating a voter registry (*padron*), electoral authorities seek to provide the opportunity for all eligible citizens to vote and to protect against illegal voting, which undermines that right. A number of issues and problems have emerged concerning the *padron* and distribution of *cedulas* in the run-up to the presidential election. It is recommended that two guidelines be employed when approaching these issues: minimize to the greatest degree possible disenfranchisement of prospective voters and minimize to the extent possible the number of voters who must cast tendered ballots (*votos observados*).

The delegation also noted that the *colegio cerrado* (closed college system) used in the Dominican Republic has made a major contribution to addressing past electoral problems. This system, combined with the practice of placing indelible ink on the finger of persons who vote, greatly reduces the risk of “multiple voting.” This risk has been so reduced that – if it were not for restrictions in the election law – any person appearing at a polling station with satisfactory proof of Dominican citizenship and voting eligibility could

be allowed to vote without creating fear that he or she could cast a ballot elsewhere. This circumstance should reinforce the possibilities for flexible approaches for addressing problems with the *padron* and with *cedulas*, including the following.

- C Problems with photographs appearing on the *padron* that differ from the one on a person's *cedula*, such as no photo on the *padron* or an old photo of the person or even the photo of another person on the *padron*, should be resolved in favor of allowing the prospective voter to vote using the normal ballot process.
- C Problems with *cedulas* or the *padron* concerning information that is not vital to establishing a person's eligibility to vote (for example, information other than name and age and perhaps address) should be resolved in favor of allowing the perspective voter to vote using the normal ballot process.
- C A number of persons have been identified who possess their new *cedulas* but whose information does not appear on the *padron*. The information for such people that appears on the old *padron* could be imported to the new one. The information for such persons who are new voters could be entered into the *padron* afresh if their *cedula* is valid.
- C A large number of *cedulas* have not been distributed to the electorate, and this problem may affect disproportionately persons who have obtained voting age since the last election. Extraordinary efforts should be used to distribute *cedulas* to all of those remaining in the electorate who applied for them, including a massive public education campaign about the immediate availability and place of pick up for *cedulas*, maximum possible extension of hours of operation for distribution centers, and extending the deadline for distribution of *cedulas* as far as possible. The delegation urges that consideration be given to all options for distributing *cedulas*, even for their distribution on election day at separate administrative tables set up in a manner that would not disrupt processes at the polling sites (*colegios electorales*).
- C Given the short time left before election day, the delegation believes that expanding the universe of voters to include those on the old *padron* who, for what ever reason, did not apply for their new *cedula* could cause confusion. The delegation recognizes, however, that the application process, just like the process for retrieving new *cedulas*, was often burdensome for citizens and recommends that a report on ways to simplify the process be developed and published for the benefit of future efforts.

3) Reclassification of Voters to New Polling Stations. The system of requiring voters to first sign in at their polling sites on election day and wait two hours or for all voters on the *padron* for that station to sign in, then to wait their turn to vote, requires a large commitment of time. The requirement of restricting the number of voters at any polling site to 600 persons is a reasonable way to limit the time needed to conduct election-day processes at each site. This restriction, however, has resulted in a significant number of persons being assigned on the *padron* to vote at polling sites that are different than the one indicated on their *cedula*. This creates a substantial risk of confusion and tensions on election day as well as the potential that a significant number of persons will not be able to find their polling station in time to be admitted to the obligatory sign-in process. The delegation therefore recommends that comprehensive efforts be taken to address this potential problem, including the following.

- C Agreement is required and clear instructions are needed for the training of polling station officials to allow all citizens to vote using the normal ballot process if they appear in the *padron* of a polling site, even if a different polling site is noted on their *cedula*.
- C Copies of the *padron* should be made readily available at easily accessible places so that citizens can check in advance to learn if they have been assigned to a polling site different from the one noted on their *cedula*.
- C The JCE should establish a voter telephone hotline, similar to the one set up by the PRSC, so that citizens can call in and easily verify the location of their assigned polling place, including whether it is different from the one noted on their *cedula*. The other political parties, as well as the civic, private and religious sectors, also should consider setting up such hotlines and other ways to assist prospective voters to verify the place they should vote. Groups from these sectors should be given electronic copies of the *padron* to conduct such activities. The JCE has established a web site (<http://www.jce.do>) that could be used by parties, groups and individuals to verify information on the *padron*.
- C A massive voter education campaign should be mounted in the remaining days before the election to encourage voter participation and to inform citizens of the possibility of their being assigned to a polling site that is different from the one noted on their *cedula* and the ways in which that they can verify their assigned polling site. Such education efforts should clearly note the approximate number of affected voters, so as not to discourage people from going to the polls because they may overestimate the scope of this problem. In addition, the location of all polling sites should be published in local newspapers that are readily accessible to prospective voters as soon as possible and again on May 15, so that voters can refer to the locations on election day if necessary.
- C Lists of voters for polling stations should be posted as early as possible outside polling stations on election day and security should be provided to maintain order around the lists so that voters may determine if they are in the right place to vote. Municipal information centers should operate on election day as well as the telephone hotlines so that voters can verify where they should go to vote. The JCE could also appoint “facilitators” to assist citizens with problems at polling stations and at municipal centers. In addition, the JCE and political parties should consider whether a person who goes to the polling station indicated on their *cedula* should be placed on a supplemental list at that station and be allowed to vote at the site. They should also consider whether such a person would use the normal process or a tendered ballot (*voto observado*).

4) Training of Polling Officials and Communications with the Public. A concern raised to the delegation by almost everyone with whom it met was the need for the JCE to take special steps to ensure that electoral officials are properly trained all the way down to the polling station level. The so-called “cascading” method of training trainers, who in turn train others at the level below, can be effective for training large numbers of people in short periods of time. There is a major challenge in this system, however, in ensuring that the quality of the training is maintained at a high level throughout the process. The JCE has assigned supervisors to check on each level, and it is hoped that concerted efforts will be exerted to be sure that training for polling station officials and others is thorough and of high quality.

In addition, as the election process unfolds in any country, the need for last minute instructions to electoral officials is inevitable, sometimes even on election day – as was witnessed in the 1994 Dominican elections. The delegation recommends that the JCE pay particular attention to developing and testing a

rapid communication system for relaying instructions to electoral officials all the way down to those at polling stations on election day. Such instructions, of course, should be provided promptly to party representatives and other interested persons to help increase transparency and public confidence.

As the time grows short before the election, the JCE also will find it necessary to communicate with the public, as noted in the recommendations above. Electoral experience in numerous countries, including the 1994 Dominican elections, demonstrates that such communications need to be accurate and timely and must reach the electorate at large. The delegation therefore recommends to the JCE that it consider reviewing its plan for responding rapidly to developments through public announcements in the mass media and for promptly posting them on its web site. The delegation also would recommend that members of the mass media review their procedures for promptly carrying messages from the JCE.

5) Election Day Supervision. A significant number of persons with whom the delegation met stressed that past experience in the Dominican Republic has demonstrated a need for enhanced supervision of election-day processes at the grassroots level. Supervisors for polling stations with multiple voting tables can play a crucial role in resolving election-day problems as can mobile teams of supervisors from the municipal or district election authorities. The delegation suggests that the JCE review its plans for election day supervision and take steps to expand supervision by responsible officials at polling stations and through mobile teams of electoral supervisors.

6) Access to All Aspects of Election Process by Party Agents and Observers. The Dominican electoral process has benefitted from the presence of political party representatives at all levels, including representatives of more than one party at many polling stations. Since 1996, the process has also benefitted from thousands of nonpartisan election monitors mobilized by *Participación Ciudadana*. As a consequence, transparency has increased, which has helped build confidence in the process. Party representatives and nonpartisan observers should be allowed to monitor all aspects of the election process, including at the municipal level. It is hoped that during the upcoming election, party representatives and nonpartisan monitors will be allowed to observe the technical processes at the municipal level – including the entry of data from the polling place tally sheets (*actas*) into the JCE’s computer system. A record of all electoral results transmitted from the municipal level to the JCE should be printed from the computer screen and given with a proper certification to the party representatives and to others who request it, as part of the official tally sheets (*actas*) from municipal electoral authorities. The delegation was encouraged by reports that no limitation will be placed on the number of observers deployed by *Participación Ciudadana* and that its observers will be given complete access to the process by electoral officials across the country, enabling the organization to conduct its parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and its broader observation efforts.

7) Use of State Resources for Electoral Advantage. State resources are the property of the citizenry and should be used for their general benefit rather than for the political advantage of any political party, whether at the national or municipal level. There are certain natural benefits of incumbency that exist in any country, but use of government vehicles, offices and government workers at any level for partisan election activity undermines public confidence and increases cynicism about electoral and political processes. Actions – such as “purchasing” or “renting” the *cedulas* of prospective voters in order to ensure that they do not go to the polls and intimidating voters – violate the law. The delegation urges the

parties to respect the provisions of the *Pacto de Etica Electoral* (Electoral Ethics Pact), concerning use of state resources and other matters.

8) Media Access and Coverage. While the delegation was unable to ascertain the conditions for candidate and political party access to the mass media or to measure the existence of bias in news coverage, a number of persons with whom it met raised concern over media bias. It is hoped that, in the days left in the election campaign, the representatives of the media will exercise their responsibilities to provide accurate, equitable and unbiased coverage of the candidates, political parties and issues of import to the electorate as they decide who to support at the ballot box. This responsibility extends to the publication in the mass media of results of accurate public opinion surveys. Government controlled media, of course, have an *obligation* to provide accurate and unbiased coverage, while privately owned media are *encouraged* to strive to meet their journalistic responsibilities.

V. CONCLUSION

As the 2000 presidential election approaches, the expectations of Dominican citizens for a democratic process are undoubtedly heightening. Electoral officials are faced with important but manageable challenges. Civic, business and religious sectors are monitoring and supporting the process. Political leaders are faced with the immediate need to mobilize voters in their parties' respective bids to win the presidency. Equally important, however, the Dominican political leadership must not let their drive for short-term political gains take them down a path that would undermine public confidence and the democratic gains of recent years. This challenge of "battling" to win elections while simultaneously protecting the long-term national interest is difficult. It is hoped that all political leaders will urge vigorous but peaceful campaigns and respect for the political rights of their competitors. The delegation hopes that such challenges will be met in the period ahead.