

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A bipartisan delegation sponsored by the National Republican and Democratic Institutes for International Affairs visited the Philippines January 5-11. The purpose of the visit was to assess the feasibility of sending an international group to observe the February 7 election and to review steps being taken to safeguard the integrity of that election. Meetings were held with the key official and non-official organizations that will administer and monitor the election.

Of particular importance to the delegation were: (1) preparations being made by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC); (2) the administration of the electoral code in the pre-election period; (3) the registration of voters; and (4) the willingness of the government, the military, the contesting parties and various citizens' groups to cooperate with an international observer team.

Our summary conclusions about these matters are as follows:

-- The electoral processes established by laws and regulations for the conduct of balloting and for the tabulation of votes provide a comprehensive framework for the administration of a procedurally correct election. The laws and regulations also contain provisions encouraging a fair electoral campaign. Taken as a whole, these laws and

regulations compare favorably with those of other democratic countries. The actual implementation of the electoral procedures by local, provincial and national election officials on election day and during the counting phase is a key factor in the conduct of a "free and fair" election. Wholesale vote buying, intimidation, and fraud in the balloting and counting phases can be detected by accredited monitoring groups. It, therefore, should be possible for an international group working with Filipino authorities and accredited citizens' groups to evaluate the fairness of this phase of the electoral process.

-- The registration of voters which occurred on December 28 and 29, 1985, produced a number of "statistical improbabilities" according to COMELEC, and these were being investigated. All voter lists were to have been purged of illegal registrants by January 15, "Revision Day." Because we departed Manila on January 11, we were not able to evaluate fully COMELEC's actions to ensure the integrity of the registration process. We note, however, that other election procedures are in place which could be used to detect double voting, "ghost" precincts, "flying voters" and other irregularities stemming from fraudulent registration practices.

-- Only a few complaints of specific campaign-related incidents were related to the delegation prior to its departure. We have noted reports of what appear to be an

increase of such incidents in the week since we left. An international observer delegation should interview individuals affected by alleged pre-election intimidation and vote-buying, seek to determine whether complaints are being presented to the responsible authorities and whether these complaints are being investigated and adjudicated promptly and effectively. If an obvious and discernable pattern emerges, this could greatly influence an evaluation of the conduct of the electoral process, even if the balloting and counting phases are conducted in accordance with the law.

-- According to many accounts and our own less than scientific observation, access to radio and television is not being equally divided between the two major parties. This is a controversial issue in the campaign and could impact on the outcome. An unequal distribution of television coverage appears attributable to stations refusing to sell time "to either party," but then providing extensive coverage of President Marcos' campaign during news segments. However, at the time of our departure, the opposition had filed only one complaint with COMELEC involving two specific cases of one-sided television coverage. A more aggressive posture by the opposition in seeking redress through COMELEC and by COMELEC in administering the "equal time" provisions in the electoral code during the last weeks of the campaign could ameliorate

some of the unfair allocation of overall media time in favor of President Marcos' KBL Party.

-- Free election time -- "COMELEC Time" -- began on television January 8, and a published listing of the schedule for the week of January 13, indicated that this "free" time would be allocated equally to the two major parties. The limited amount of time thus far acquired by COMELEC for partisan activity by the two major candidates is unlikely to overcome imbalances which may exist in media coverage.

Typically the power of incumbency can influence the amount of space print journalists give to one party or the other. It should be noted that the Philippine press is strongly partisan in nature and that coverage is often reflective of editorial policy rather than considerations of newsworthiness. Some concern exists in the Philippines about the influence used to prejudice print media coverage of the campaign. It was beyond the competence of this delegation to determine the pervasiveness of that influence or its impact on the campaign.

-- The delegation was encouraged to organize an international observer effort by the two major parties and leading Filipino citizens' groups. Despite some expressions of concern regarding the "intervention" of foreigners in the

Filipino electoral process, the delegation received adequate assurances from all sides that an international observer group would receive the cooperation it would need to monitor and evaluate the February 7 election.

Given the above considerations, our Institutes have decided to assemble a forty-member joint delegation of international observers for the February 7 election. This delegation would be comprised of high-level party leaders from many of the world's democratic nations. It is our belief that such a delegation can contribute to the conduct of a free and fair election, will be instrumental in determining international opinion about such an election, and will serve to underscore the vital role a credible electoral process can play in bringing about political stability in the Philippines.