

**Council of Freely-Elected
Heads of Government**

Carter Center of
Emory University
One Copenhill
Atlanta, Georgia 30307
(404) 420-5175

**National Democratic Institute
for International Affairs**

1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Suite 503
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 328-3136
(202) 939-3166 (Fax)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, April 11, 1996

Contact: Darren Nance
NDI Representative in the
Dominican Republic
Hotel Santo Domingo, 221-1511

Deanna Congileo, The Carter Center
404-420-5108

PRE-ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION HEADS FOR DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government based at The Carter Center in Atlanta, Ga., and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) announced that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former Colombian President Belisario Betancur will lead a pre-election mission to the Dominican Republic on April 24 to 26. Joining them on the mission will be former First Lady Rosalynn Carter; Robert Pastor, Council executive secretary; Santiago Canton, NDI director of Latin America and the Caribbean; Jose O. Bordon, former presidential candidate from Argentina; Curt Cutter, NDI senior consultant; Becky Castle, program coordinator for The Carter Center's Latin American and Caribbean program; and Kate Kelsch, NDI program officer for Latin American and the Caribbean.

The mission is being organized jointly by The Carter Center and NDI in response to invitations from the Central Election Board (Junta Central Electoral) and the leaders of the three major political parties to observe the May 16 Dominican presidential elections. "We were pleased to receive all the invitations," said President Carter, who plans to meet with President Joaquín Balaguer, party leaders, and members of the electoral commission. "It

(MORE)



demonstrates a high degree of interest in trying to keep the elections as free and fair as possible."

The purpose of the April pre-election mission is to assess the current political and electoral environment. The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government/Carter Center and NDI jointly observed the 1990 elections in the Dominican Republic, which resulted in a contentious post-election environment and a narrow victory by President Joaquín Balaguer. Although there were many questions raised about the 1990 election and the count, the observer mission did not receive adequate evidence that would have changed the result. NDI also organized an international delegation to observe the 1994 elections. In this case, the NDI delegation noted that the irregularities observed in the electoral process could have affected the outcome. Opposition parties, including the PRD and PLD, claimed that a disproportionate number of their supporters were disenfranchised. Following a succession of negotiations, President Balaguer and opposition parties signed the "Pact for Democracy" which called for a new voting procedure, new presidential elections in two years, and a runoff election, should no candidate win a majority of the votes.

"The election in 1996 represents an important step in the consolidation of democracy in the Dominican Republic," said Dr. Robert Pastor. "As independent international observers, we want to learn about the process from Dominican leaders and reinforce local efforts to ensure the election is acceptable to all."

"The international community strongly supports efforts in the Dominican Republic to increase public confidence in the electoral process," said Santiago Canton of the National Democratic Institute. "We believe that the presence of observers -- both international and Dominican -- will contribute to enhancing the transparency of the process."

###