

Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government

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The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government/Carter Center of Emory University 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 25. Joining them on the mission will be former First Lady Rosalynn Carter; Robert Pastor, Council executive secretary; Curt Cutter, NDI senior consultant; Santiago Canton, NDI director of Latin America and the Caribbean; Becky Castle, Carter Center program coordinator of the Latin America and Caribbean program; and Kate Kelsch, NDI program officer for Latin America 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 major political parties to observe the upcoming Dominican elections. "We were pleased to receive all the invitations," said President Carter. "It 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 assessment mission is to assess the current political and electoral environment and demonstrate the international community's support for democracy in the Dominican Republic. 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. NDI also organized an international delegation to observe the 1994 elections. 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 run-off election, should no candidate win a majority of the votes.

"This election represents a real turning point on the road to democracy by the Dominican Republic," said Dr. Robert Pastor, "and we hope that the international observers will be viewed by Dominicans as a helpful force for consolidating democracy."

"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."

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