

MEXICO 2000

DEMOCRACY IN CHALLENGE

REPORT OF A PRE-ELECTORAL INVESTIGATION

**by
international visitors**

**sponsored by
CANADIAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS**

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Background

INTRODUCTION

This report originates in a one-week investigative trip in Mexico by two experienced Canadian observers. Its essential purpose is as part of a Canadian non-governmental initiative of international participation in the citizen observation of the 2000 Federal Election by Mexican civil society organizations, principally the Alianza Civica. The examinations of this report will complement the findings of a Canadian team accompanying the July 2nd election day.

The authors of the report combine extensive experience in election observation in a variety of countries in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere, and a history of participation as "international visitor" in the Mexican Federal elections of 1994 and 1997 and in the Civic Plebiscite in the Federal District in 1993, as well as in the study of civil society organizations and democratization in Mexico and elsewhere.

While this report examines a number of essential elements in the pre-electoral context in Mexico, it is important to state a strong **caveat**. The report is based on a one week visit, to only three of 32 jurisdictions of the Mexican Republic. The report does not take up a number of significant areas, which are of no less concern for having been omitted, for example: the role of the army and other security forces, the situation of conflict (repeatedly mentioned to us) in a number of Mexican states, principally Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, the role of Mexico's powerful neighbour, the United States. While we visited three very different indigenous communities, this report does not adequately deal with the issues of the indigenous situations, government and party policy and the significance of this election for indigenous peoples.

Further, while a lengthy volume or series could be written on the pre-electoral context of 2000, we want this report to be read, by people who have limited time to prepare. We are forced to summarize complex processes, and to rub out a good deal of the colour and texture of one of the most dynamic, diverse and mysterious nations on earth.

At the same time, the obvious limitations of time, resources and personnel should not negate the importance and timeliness of **pre-electoral monitoring**. Precisely because of improvements in the administration of the election day machinery, the relative importance of fairness (or lack thereof) of the electoral campaign is much greater. This is particularly the case in a closely fought election, as the Federal Election of July 2, 2000 in Mexico obviously is.

COMPONENTS: THE MISSION AND THE TEAM

The mission to observe pre-election conditions in Mexico consisted of Professor Meyer Brownstone (supported by OXFAM-Canada), and Dr. John Foster (supported by Common Frontiers). Prof. Brownstone, a political scientist, has extensive experience in independent electoral observation in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Eritrea, Namibia and South Africa among other states. Dr. Foster has studied civil society organizations in Mexico and observed the March 21, 1993 Civic Plebiscite in the D.F., and was part of Canadian ngo missions in the 1994 (Nayarit) and 1997 (Iztapalapa, D.F.) Federal Elections.

Their work began on June 6 and was completed with a very well-attended press conference (June 13), a visit to the Embassy of Canada (June 14), and the completion of the report.

The team was supported by the **Alianza Civica** at the Federal and state level, and particularly by Mauricio Claudio of the Federal office and by executive, research and public relations staff. Regional Alianza officers (Manlio Cobos Orozco in Tabasco and Eurenio Barrios H. Ruiz in Estado de Mexico) were particularly helpful. Additional support was provided by Roch Tasse (Ottawa/Hull) and Jim Hodgson (Cuernavaca/D.F.) on behalf of the cooperating Canadian NGOs. Logistic and liaison support was remarkably efficient and supportive and the team wishes to convey its gratitude and solidarity with all those involved in providing it.

OBJECTIVES

The mission was preliminary and preparatory to the Canadian NGO-labour-ecumenical team of "international visitors" for the July 2nd election itself. Our pre-electoral investigation included **both an examination of pre-election conditions and a review of procedures for the voting process**. This meant understanding the formal electoral process and structure, the electoral laws and the campaign experience. The latter became more critical in the light of a general expectation that the outcome would be determined largely by the campaign process rather than by any manipulation of the registration, voting and counting process. However, as became clear on the ground, a close result is expected (at least in the Presidential contest) heightening the need for careful monitoring the voting process. Because of this turn of events attention needs to be paid to the post-voting and counting process in terms of potential non-acceptance of results and vote challenges.

AGENDA

Our agenda included, firstly, an understanding of the provisions of the electoral law and the institutions involved. This includes the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), at the federal, Federal District and state levels. We were received with great courtesy by the International Relations sections of the major political parties (and in the case of the PAN by their NGO Relations personnel). We met with a number of national of civil society groups engaged in civic education and observation. We presented a summary of our findings (see **Annex I**) to an extensive array of Mexican, Canadian and international media.

We undertook interviews and conversations in the field, in the State of Tabasco and the State of Mexico, adjoining the Federal District (Mexico City). We also held a special interview with electoral officials in the Federal District as a unique and highly significant case in democratic evolution. (see **Annex II**)

In addition to materials prepared by the Canadian academics and NGOs and by the Alianza Civica, we were presented with an extensive array of studies, dossiers of clippings and pamphlets, bulletins and commentaries by the parties, analysts and civic groups. (a list is presented in **Annex III**)

SUMMARY

Mexico has made remarkable changes in the federal election system, particularly since 1996 and notably in the preparation of the electoral machinery. Mexican citizens have pressed for and won important improvements implemented during the administration of the current President.

However, the Canadian team found significant areas of concern in their official interviews and field visits:

The extent of coverage and of funds involved in the distribution of more than 170 Mexican Federal social, agricultural and emergency programmes gives them great potential influence in conditioning voting behavior. The nexus between the granting programme benefits and an obligation to vote for the "official party" is represented in the use of the voting credential as an information source in accessing those programmes. The number of potential voters whose families are beneficiaries is enough to have significant influence on the result of a close election, as the 2000 election gives every evidence of being.

Access for citizens to electoral, parliamentary or penal channels of recourse in the case of alleged infraction or illegality remains limited and for many, quite obscure. The ability of the electoral authorities to assure sanction in cases of proved infractions appears quite limited.

The ability of the Federal Electoral Institute to assure transparency and full audit of party finances, in a timely way and with effective sanctions is limited by the current law. Considerable imbalances are present, the provision of secure supervision and review is incomplete.

The ability of the Federal Electoral Institute in assuring media access and fairness, to do anything more than monitor and report its findings is limited by its current mandate. Significant imbalances can and do occur. The proprietors of the major electronic media and *Gobernacion* have effectively delayed the provision of educational programming on a free and clean vote.

Mexican election machinery is significantly advanced over previous years – the voters list, credential provision, poll operations and counting provisions. However significant limitations in assuring full application of law, regulation and procedures remain in the vast expanse of Mexico.

Further reforms of the Mexican election law are required. Far-reaching changes in the behavior of governments and parties in power are also required.

The urgency of massive civic education, undertaken by independent civic groups is a fundamental imperative requiring significant further investment of resources.

Poverty, in its massive extent, continues to impede the full exercise of democratic choice and the full enjoyment of the results of that exercise. The solution of the fundamental social predicament of Mexico and the achievement of democracy are intertwined.

THE ELECTION OF 2000

SOME PARAMETERS

Of some **60 million** potential voters in Mexico, some 58 millions have received new voting credentials and appear on the definitive voters list. To manage and safeguard the rights of this universe of voters 115,000 polling stations, each staffed by a President, a Secretary and a Scrutineer. As IFE counselor Juan Molinar said "Imagine, 500,000 Mexicans doing the same thing, orderly and on time."

In addition to IFE selected poll personnel, each party (there could be six or more represented) has the right to appoint two poll representatives (what, in Canadian terms, we call scrutineers).

The **Federal** elections include:

Presidential election- held every six years. The office has extensive executive powers. Although a President may not succeed him/herself, the office has been held by one party (PRI) since its formation in 1929 (for 71 years) and by direct ancestors of the party for a decade or more earlier. The "official party" as it has come to be called is being challenged seriously in this election.

The **Chamber of Deputies** election- held every three years, representing a complete turnover (consecutive terms are prohibited) of the 500 seats in Congress, 300 to be elected by simple majority in individual seats and 200 by proportional representation (plurinominal lists) based on five regions. The latter deputies will be chosen by votes per party and priority lists determined by each party or by party alliances.

Senate elections- representing a complete turnover of the 128 Senate seats. 96 of these will be elected by a process of 2 senators from the leading party in each national electoral district, and one from the leading second party as well as 32 elected by proportional representation drawn from national (rather than regional) priority lists.

The elections are being contested by 11 **parties** but two alliances have been formed incorporating in total 7 parties-2 in the *Allianza por Cambio* (Led by the PAN) and 5 in *Alianza Por Mexico* (led by the PRD).

The **Federal District** (DF) elections are the held the same day to elect:

- *Jefe de Gobierno*, head of government
- *Diputados a la Asamblea Legislativa del DF* (Legislative Assembly) by local districts (40 deputies), or direct election
- *Diputados a la Asamblea Legislativa del DF* on plurinominal lists (proportional representation for all parties getting more than 2% of the overall vote) 26 deputies.
- *Jefes de delegaciones*, 16 heads of the administrative "boroughs" or "*delegaciones*" of Mexico City.

This is first time that the delegational *jefes* (formerly appointed) will be elected, and only the second time that the overall *Jefe de Gobierno* and *Asamblea* are being popularly elected.

In addition to the Federal and Federal District elections, three **states** (including Guanajuato, where PAN Presidential Candidate Fox has been governor) and hundreds of **local** (*municipio*) representatives and mayors are at play. .

For all these electoral processes it is imperative to recognize the relatively rapid progress Mexico has made in adapting the electoral aspects of democratization. The Mexican Ambassador to the United States has written that "no other president in recent history has the democratic record of Zedillo." It is also important to recognize that these changes are in good part the result of persistent popular pressure, in which the reaction to flagrant scandal (the 1988 Federal Presidential election) and the sacrifice of several hundred lives (on the part of the PRD, principally), and the growth of organized pacific civil society pressure for democratization have all played a roll. The governing party has responded slowly but deliberately with reforms, however, even those of 1996 which led to significant improvements, have also left continuing inadequacies in the system.

CURRENTS

The election of 2000 is held in a nation in which:

- A prosperous and powerful economic class continues to benefit from neo-liberal and "free trade" policies instituted by the last two administrations.
- Chronic poverty continues to affect 40-60% of Mexicans.
- The illegal trade in drugs feeds billions into the political economy.
- Chronic "low-intensity" conflict continues in a number of states.
- Legal and economic (trade-led) changes continue to multiply insecurity and marginalization in the *campo*.
- Arbitrary detention, torture and assassinations with impunity continue and the judicial system is too weak to assure investigation and sanction.
- Chronic environmental degradation, pollution on a grand scale and the crises of floods, earthquakes and other disasters continue to plague the nation and its future.
- A deepening social crisis – poverty – continues, but is not central to electoral debate.

For the poor, in terms of our limited contact, there is little promise in recent electoral reforms. In fact their continued poverty and marginalization blocks the full realization of democracy in Mexico.

However, we encountered growing civic consciousness, spirited leaders among women in rural and indigenous communities and youth dedicated to election transparency, hard work with the Alianza and a fresh future for their society.

THE ADVANCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN MEXICO: SOME POSITIVE ASPECTS

We have noted important components of progress in democratization.

Effective party pluralism

A significant portion of the Mexican population is governed either by **state** or **municipal** governments in the control of the opposition. The PAN currently controls the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nuevo Leon; the PRD governs the Distrito Federal and Baja California Sur; a PRD/PT coalition holds power in the states of Tlaxcala and in Zacatecas, and a PRD/PAN coalition holds Nayarit.

We were told by IFE representatives that of the 30 largest *municipios* in Mexico, only three – Tecatepec, Toluca and Villahermosa – have not been ruled by the opposition. In 1988 some 38 of 2000 such localities had opposition governments, today 24% or 583 do.

The **Chamber of Deputies** (lower house) since 1997 has been controlled by an opposition majority.

The **Federal Presidential election** is being hotly contested among three principal parties and their allies.

A more democratic capital

Because of its central location and population, the special and increasingly democratic character of the *Distrito Federal* (**Federal District**) since 1997, deserves particular mention. The D.F. has its own IFE, with its own council of independent councilors, its own electoral code produced by its own Legislative Assembly. The Chief of Government, *Jefe* (currently Rosario Robles, a *Jefa de Gobierno*) is popularly elected as is a representative Legislative Assembly. This year the heads of the 16 *delegaciones* (the major urban boroughs) will be elected for the first time. In the Federal District there will be two poll tables, one for three federal urns and one for three D.F. urns. Voters, and poll officials, will have a good deal to do. While the devolution of powers to the Federal District remains restricted – in such areas as budget provision and appointment of police commander – the experience of an administration autonomous for the first time in generations, and of the new political structure which governs it, represents a victory for the civic forces which pressed for such democratization in the civic plebiscite of 1993 and by other means.

The Federal election system

A third component, and one which has received the most attention is the federal election system, itself, now largely the responsibility of the recently autonomous (since the reforms of 1996) Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) with jurisdiction over voters lists, credentials, operation of polling stations, voting, counting and reporting federal elections for President, Deputies and the Senate. Within this general responsibility IFE has jurisdiction over monitoring and auditing party election expenditures and revenues including contributions by the IFE itself; party access and use of media; limits to party expenditures and regulation of state financial support of parties. These are designed to both encourage a plural party system and ensuring equitable opportunities for parties, as well as secure poll operations for voters.

In comparative international terms, this represents, an impressive demonstration of public responsibility and development of party-based pluralism.

As to the electoral process including voter credentials, registration, the electoral rolls, provision for secrecy in voting and the counting/results process Mexico now has an enviable system. It is true that it may appear elaborate and expensive (the costs are in the neighborhood of U.S. \$2 billion) but this must be seen in the light of the pre-existing deplorable system which provided little certainty for credible elections

(Canadians should note the significant contribution of Elections Canada in its technical role in the development of the current Mexican system).

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRACY AND CONFIDENCE.

There should be no minimizing of the significant progress in Mexico but equally significant challenges remain.

MONEY

The rather large amounts of money spent in Mexican elections fall into several categories, legitimate and questionable, of greater or less transparency.

Principle streams include:

- state funds distributed to the political parties by the IFE for campaign expenditures
- private and corporate donations provided to political parties of choice
- the inappropriate use of public/state resources to coopt or "buy" votes

The first two are discussed in this section, the third in a further section of this report.

It may be hard to conceive of the **amounts** of money involved. In the Federal District, for example, we were told that the budget for this election process is around US \$126 million. Of this \$51 million is allocated directly to the parties, \$40 on election machinery and \$30 million on administration and education. The onset of sizeable **public** (IFE) funding for parties is illustrated in comparing 1994 and 1997 figures at the Federal level. In 1994 the PAN received 28.9 million pesos of public funding and 89.1 million pesos privately. In 1997 it received 519 million pesos of public support and 40.5 million pesos privately. The proportions for the PRI were 99.4/500.1 in 1994 and 874.0/103/6 in 1997. For the PRD the proportions were 20.7/7.3 in 1994 and 389.0/22.8 in 1997.

There are significant flaws related essentially to the campaign process. The law provides for public funding for all parties on the basis of electoral performance, limits on the quantity of private funds which can be received relative to public funds, expenditure limits on and provision of monitoring and auditing of party expenditures and revenues. However, on our examination, the auditing process of IFE depends on what the parties report, it occurs after the elections are over, and its ability to exact sanctions should irregularities be found is limited to fines. In general, we fear that the IFE may well be an agency with the appearance of control, but without teeth.

The current system auditing is essentially *post facto* the election and dependent on party submission of accounts. This limits the possibility of IFE intervening effectively in the campaign process where the major irregularities may well be occurring, at a time when intervention could matter. A submission and consideration of accounts after the election together with limited penalties as provided in the law will do little to provide equalized and acceptable financing of campaigns. Obviously this can have significant effects on the outcome of the election. We underline that these weaknesses lie not in the personell of the General Council of the IFE but in the underlying legal provisions and the mandate of the IFE. A conscientious Congress would undertake further advances in the law.

Our brief study did not permit adequate attention to the complex issue of private funding of parties. Two of the parties receive significant private support, and the issue of the sources of that support is a "football" in the current campaign, for example, the issue of transnational corporate donations and "foreign" funds. The history of gargantuan private donations garnered by President Salinas, the sizeable US\$70 million or more spent by one party in on one election in a relatively small state (Tabasco), and the considerable interests involved in the result of the current election lead to the hypothesis that this area continues to be of great significance.

MEDIA

As one of our IFE interviews told us, two of the chief concerns of the election are money and media, and media *is* money. We were told by IFE officials that they estimate that approximately 70% of party expenditures go to media and that the true beneficiaries of the current system are the media moghuls, principally the proprietors of the two main TV channels, TV Azteca and Televisa. Consider that the *Alianza*

por Mexico is considered to be spending US \$70 million on ads and the competing *Alianza por Cambio* almost as much. The vast bulk of this money goes directly to national television, in paid ads. This represents an immense subsidy from the state, via the hands of three or more parties, into a private industry which exercises great power over what people see, who they see and how they understand what they see. While Mexico has a diverse national and often less diverse regional press, the circulation of even the most prominent newspapers is quite limited in a country of almost 100 million. Radio plays a significant role, but virtually every interviewee who touched on it, spoke of the dominance of television.

The role of the media in the current election is central:

- its potential for educating voters as to their rights and responsibilities is great, but has been retarded and limited by indirect government connivance.
- Fairness and balance in coverage, in news, commentary and relative advertising access is a chronic challenge, which pre-occupies the Federal IFE, but about which it has very limited powers
- Regional media continue to be characterized by significant imbalance

The conflict over a Federal IFE attempt to use television to **educate** voters about their rights and about a free and clean vote, was blocked for a significant time by the action of the CIRT (*Camara Nacional de la Industria de Radio y Television*), the media owners. The IFE claimed the right to utilize free time made available by radio and television channels for state use. The *camara* declared that they had no such right. The IFE expected *Gobernacion* (Ministry of the Interior) to back them up. However the director of media at the Ministry acted as an agent of the CIRT and refused to intervene, according to IFE counselor Juan Molinar Horcasitas. The result was that a valuable campaign against fraud was delayed for weeks.

The concern for monitoring **fairness** is not restricted to the IFE. In addition to its monitoring of the quantity of time/exposure for each party, the prominent daily *Reforma* publishes a day by day monitoring of mentions and exposure of key candidates. There are differences in purchased advertising time, mention on news and commentary shows and in the quality of coverage.

The IFE monitors and reports quantity of coverage, and also charts distribution of air time as "neutral", "negative" and "positive". The most recent figures (April 9-May 16) provided for combined radio and television news coverage were *Alianza por Cambio* (AC) 25%, PRI 40%, *Alianza por Mexico* (AM) 17.08%, and 5.9% or less for each of three other parties. Reporting for earlier periods noted that while from January 19 to March 11, coverage of the three main parties was within 7% of each other, in March and early April it jumped to 49.51% PRI, with AC getting 21.29% and AM 16.34%. Asking officials to explain the jump, we were told that there was no clear way to confirm the reason except that the PRI's early lead in polls was eroding and it was likely that essential phone calls to appropriate media folk had been made!

Continued imbalances in paid as distinct from IFE-provided advertising spots has been attributed to the PRD's lack of private contributions and the relatively richer exchequers of the PRI and the PAN.

When questioned about imbalance in coverage, the response of IFE councilors reiterated that press freedom is essential and that no body should be able to tell a medium of communication to support this or that party. However they did cite a priority concern for overall balance and fairness in quantity and quality. As one councilor noted, re imbalance of **quality** treatment, the sponsorship of nude dancers by one party (the PRI) at a rally, got little critical response, while the use of "salty" language by the candidate of another (Fox of the PAN) was roundly criticized in the press. The English language daily, *The News*, during our stay carried a special section in the same format as the rest of the paper but so entirely a "puff-piece" for the PRI that it must have been subsidized by the party. Each day one of their columnists, Juan Ruiz Healy of *Novedades*, takes another swipe at Vicente Fox. On June 13th in a column entitled "Discovery of a New Mental Illness: 'the Fox Syndrome'", he said of Fox "he has the exact profile of dictators such as Hitler or Mussolini..."

As to **quantity**, the IFE can and does monitor and report on quantity and tone of coverage, but as to expenditure on media it is constrained by law from auditing and controlling matters until after the election when it could examine and make public party expenditures for media.

This factor is crucial when it is considered that upwards of 70% of campaign expenditures is on media, predominantly television. A July 12 Reuters report appearing in *The News* illustrates this point and others.

" Jaime Cardenas of the Electoral Institute's nine board members, said greater air time given to the long ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has made the race as unbalanced as in 1994 when Ernest Zedillo beat his challengers easily after receiving the lion's share of media coverage.

" So long as IFE does not have the legal means to sanction the media with inequitable coverage, or the legal mean to prevent vote buying and vote pressure...the electoral system will have deficiencies."

The situation of the press at state level outside the capital is much worse. An IFE councilor said that it varies widely but is generally pro PRI, the state press and local power being less influenced by the "moral authority" of the PRI. In Zacatecas the press followed power, he said, from PRI and PRD. In Chihuahua, after some alternation PRI/PAN/PRI, the press was more balanced. In Guanajuato, despite PAN government the press was Priista, and in Tabasco and Quintana Roo extremely Priista.

While the Alianza Civica and its allies are able to undertake press/media analysis at the national level, we found that in Tabasco the local AC did not have the resources to undertake close monitoring in this election. There 9/10ths of press circulation favors the PRI as do the available TV channels. A small paper on the model of *La Jornada* carries opposition stories and the local civic and opposition groups use two widely-listened to radio channels to get their "word" out and to engage the public.

THE USE OF STATE RESOURCES, VOTE BUYING (*COMPRA*) AND VOTE PRESSURING (*COACCION*), A FOCUS ON THE RURAL POOR

A typical problem in elections-and certainly not confined to Mexico-is the use of state resources and communication for election purposes. As might occur in other jurisdictions the current Federal Presidency has been pumping out government expenditures at a rapid and increasing rate.

Mexico has a long history of direct **vote-buying**. The provision of material goods from machetes and corn through roofing materials, cement and other useful items has a long pedigree. The provision of breakfasts on voting day or other more incidental but traditional encouragements for mass PRI support, particularly in rural areas is customary in a number of areas. We heard repeated testimony that such practices continue to occur.

But the problem is much deeper, extending back through decades of government/official party spending and influence, and implicating a broad range of **ongoing social programmes**, some with a long history, others initiated or re-formed since the mid-term elections of 1997.

The use of World Bank and other loan/aid funds for the provision of some of these programmes implies that governments, like Canada, providing funds and direction to the World Bank, should have a more than passing interest in the destination and use of the funds.

We thought it essential to test and evaluate what we learned through interviews with the various national with the various national institutions-as well as through their publications and data, by visiting communities living in poverty. This part of the population is the most critical is assessing the democratic character of the political process. It is generally marginalized, relatively uneducated, dependent on state social and security development projects and living constantly on the edge of insecurity. The rural community in Mexico includes most of the communities of indigenous peoples.

Of prime importance in terms of a government/party nexus is the extensive set of more than 170 social programmes directed to the alleviation of poverty, rural production, emergency disaster relief, education, health and other concerns. Within these there are special programmes for women and children of school and pre-school age. It is estimated that the major social programmes involve upwards of 25% of the voting population. In the communities we visited the level ranged between 50% and 100%.

In one basic programme, *Progresa*, the scale has risen from 400,000 families in 1997 to 2.6 million families (14 million people) in 2000. It costs approximately U.S.\$ 1.6 billions at current levels.

It is around this programme and others that we found evidence of the learned experienced of identifying, literally as one the state and the "official party"-PRI. In fact a leading member of the PRI campaign, former Puebla governor and Federal cabinet member, Manuel Bartlett, asserted publicly what many recipients take for granted, that it was not really the government but PRI which was responsible for PROGRESA

We received studies and analysis from independent, from IFE officials and from opposition sources, as well as from the press, detailing the mechanisms by which votes are conditioned or influenced through the administration of the programmes.

The *promotoras* (promoters) in the case of *Progresa*, although formally elected by meetings of beneficiaries, are in most cases perceived to be agents of the official party as well as of the government. The *maestros*(teachers) who hold power over the granting of student *becas* (scholarships) are members (some are clearly identified with an opposition tendency within the union) of a national union (SNTE) associated with the governing party and form a network of monitors in the service of that party.

A variety of denunciations were heard: the promoter of the programme at the local level takes election credentials and birth certificants, takes note of all the data and this can be used for party purposes; the promoter asks for a payback of 5 pesos for adding a family to the programme; documents are taken and not promptly returned; the use of the credential is understood as having a partisan meaning and not as a neutral state instrument; the granting of access to the programme is understood as part of a commitment ("compromiso") to vote for the "official party"; supporters of one party who may not deserve support (lack of flood damage, relative family wealth) may receive support while others of an opposition party in dire need may not, etc.

The overall conclusion from the testimony we heard is that there remains little effective distinction between official programmes from party obligation. The programmes are large, the beneficiaries are many and among the most dependent and vulnerable to fear. For people for whom such supports represent day to day survival, the power of that fear can be overwhelming. In some cases these pressures have in the past been reinforced by the action of party representatives on election day at local polls. Many testimonies confirmed that this combination of factors affects votes.

These forms of perceived and experienced intimidation, pressure and coercion was cited everywhere and their effectiveness was not too difficult to imagine given the seriously marginal condition of the poor involved- what was their option? They were not easily persuaded that voting for another party would improve their objective condition-it would most likely threaten it.

The shameless way in which these practices occur and are occasionally spoken about by agents of the "official party", have led to a number of critical studies. We were provided with several detailed examinations of the relationship between programme benefits and voting behaviour in earlier elections, state as well as federal.

Civic groups, like Alianza Civica, are attempting, with very limited resources to take testimony and nail down specific cases of irregularity or law-breaking to detail in denunciations to the appropriate electoral or penal authorities. A first report on these submissions at the Federal level was issued jointly with our press conference, June 14.

In Mexico a special commission of 30 deputies has been struck by the Congress-**Commission 2000**-with a mandate to monitor irregularities in the use of public funds. This initiative, the result of combined opposition majority in the Chamber of Deputies, has been resisted and delayed by the party in power since it began, holding up the implementation of plans to establish offices, monitor practices and receive complaints in all 32 states. Although the regional and district entities of the Commission appeared as yet inactive or unknown by citizens, we received a press notice indicating that some 80 allegations were being brought to the Attorney General by the Commission-signaling allegations of infractions of the Penal Code. This type of recourse is potentially more effective than the various mechanisms and powers vested in IFE as indicated above. These allegations are not surprising given the frequent statements which we heard in the field on the misuse of government funds and irregular electoral behaviour of public servants including as recently reported, members of the armed forces.

The team recognizes that these practices are the current forms of deeply ingrained traditions and have encouraged expectations and habits which are hard to change.

We spent a late afternoon with more than 100 citizens of the community of San Simon de la Laguna, in the rural reaches of Estado de Mexico, approximately 3 hours west of Mexico City. They were mostly women many with babies in shoulder carriers. We talked until the rain ended our meeting. These people were angry. They were tired of the exercise of power by *promotoras*, by attempts to buy their vote, by broken promises. Not only were they angry and not only would they provide details of who had done what and when, but they had taken action. They had taken their protest and bags of questionable cement promised by a local official who was running for another office on behalf of the PRI, to the towns of Nuevo Santo Tomas de los Platinos and to Valle de Bravo. Their anger and their emerging consciousness that no one should be able to pressure or buy their vote was among the most hopeful signs we encountered. No law or regulation will change the system as effectively as a conscious and vigilant citizenry. But this process is only beginning to emerge.

IMPERFECTIONS IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Today's system is new in the context of a long history of a system of complex and far-reaching methods of control, corruption and fraud which led the Mexico under the PRI to be typified as "the perfect dictatorship". The burden and habit of historic experience is not easily cast aside despite serious efforts to do so.

We experienced in our field interviews continued distrust, suspicion and disbelief or lack of confidence in the electoral machinery, although in very uneven amount. This persists in the face of objectively and carefully designed change and great public expense. This was strongly expressed with reference to the autonomy of the IFE, and the persistent association of it with government and with the "official party".

Elements contributing to these perceptions, in addition to force of custom and previous experience include:

- Examples where the selection of poll officials is seen to give precedence to PRI supporters despite rules regarding educational level and random alphabetical choice.
- Poll officials are inadequately trained or supported despite IFE pledges of a new era.
- The ongoing permanent professional staff of the IFE, a number of whom remain from an earlier and much less autonomous era, is, in a number of cases, viewed with mistrust.
- "official party" personnel behave in a way which reinforces the impression that "nothing has changed" and undermines attempts to do things in a new way.

Mexico and the IFE in particular faces mammoth task of identifying and training poll officials (800,000 in total). The danger is both lack of confidence in the process and excessive intervention by party representatives in the polls. It is probably likely that in the unbiased process used by IFE to select officials, the historic prominence of the PRI would result in the selection of party supporters. But a response which would reduce suspicion and create avoidance of distrust would be a more deliberate attempt at balance.

Training by all parties of their representatives and balanced presence of party representatives in the polls should lead to a reduction in the "sway" of any one tendency

There is a lingering concern with the issue of **secrecy**, in spite of the current provisions for ensuring it. At the fringe this is expressed in suspicion that given all the personal data collected by social program representatives and official party figures, a person's vote can be identified by the IFE computers. More centrally, and particularly in smaller rural communities where everyone knows everyone, it focuses on the taking of list by social program personnel, and the presence of lists on the part of party representatives at the polls, as well as, in some cases, the direct demand by party representatives either to see ballots before they are inserted in the urns or to be told how a person has voted.

The process of civic education has been assumed by IFE, by the parties and by voluntary groups such as the Civic Alliance. Given IFE's limited resources for this purpose and its alleged lack of credibility noted previously, and an obvious lack of confidence in a party role given their focus on partisanship, the most trusted of these three institutions is clearly the civil society movements. However they are by the far worst equipped in terms of resources or the vast task of public education in a nation of 100 million. This suggests an urgent need for substantial resource support for civil society groups in order that they major responsibility for civic education, ensuring their independence and autonomy and their continued role as monitors and in providing constructive critique of the system..

AFTER ELECTION DAY

There is considerable public and media speculation about the conditions in Mexico around and after the announcement of the result. Quick-counts will be done by several groups. Several opposition leaders have made agreements regarding respect of the vote. But nervousness continues.

The count and reporting of the count

We hope that the count, the machinery for reporting the count and the reporting itself go smoothly and in a timely fashion. It may be useful for the delegation to have a fail-safe strategic (while people are dispersed or traveling) regarding reaction to any "events", comment to the press etc., in the unlikely event that something untoward occurs.

Civic reaction

We heard various opinions about party reaction and civic response following a result which could be viewed as questionable. Some say that party leader X might react strongly but that his party base might not follow. Other say that the base of party Y might react and take to the streets, but it might not be in the interests of the leadership, etc. In any case it bears attention.

Two key contests

The race for governor of **Chiapas** later this summer, and the gubernatorial election in **Tabasco** in October are both significant events for different reasons. The combined opposition support for a candidate in Chiapas gives great chance for change, but people are very apprehensive about the period between the Federal result and the Chiapas vote. The history of gross electoral corruption and one-party control in Tabasco could mean a very dirty contest in that state. The opposition, and possibly the "official party" have both severe internal tensions.

Our delegation and coalition might consider how we can best accompany our Mexican colleagues in these two dashes.

The long transition

While the election occurs in July, the transfer of power does not occur until almost six months later. The possibility that there will be another peso crisis is much on the minds of many Mexicans. This offers a period in which a great many things can happen. Our coalition and its members should consider how we are going to continue a measure of vigilance in this period.

CONCLUSION

The monitoring of pre-electoral conditions is not only worthwhile but indispensable. The electoral machinery, the IFE and its systems, remain an important and incomplete project, but one which has considerable promise for a future democratic Mexico at all levels. The battle for change and the direction for change in a nation governed by one party/state system for several generations, is occurring daily, not only on July 2nd, and particularly through the visible and more obscure elements of a prolonged, massive and complex political campaign.

Our findings are represented in this brief report, in the press statement of June 13 and in the dossiers of studies, pamphlets and clippings which we are providing to the Canadian team for July 2nd.

We reiterate our gratitude to the organizations – Common Frontiers and OXFAM-Canada – who have provided resources for the visit, to the Canadian ngo-labour-church-human rights consortium who are organizing the overall project and to our Mexican hosts, the Alianza Civica.

ANNEX I: PRESS STATEMENT,

HOTEL FIESTA AMERICANA, MEXICO CITY, TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2000 12 NOON.

"Mexican of democracy advances, but faces big challenges",

Canadian NGO Pre-Electoral Team Concludes.

The Canadian team of international visitors – Prof. Meyer Brownstone and Dr. John Foster – today concludes a week-long study of the pre-electoral conditions in Mexico, conducted with the assistance of the Alianza Civica. They have been welcomed by IFE representatives at the Federal, Federal District and local and district levels, by representatives of four political parties and of community and civic organizations in the states of Mexico, Tabasco (including several indigenous communities) and the Federal District. They wish to express their warm gratitude to all the Mexican organizations and individuals who have contributed to making this investigative visit remarkably informative.

"Mexico has made remarkable changes in the federal electoral system, particularly since 1996, and notably in the preparation of the electoral machinery – voters lists, credentials and the actual poll and count operations", comments Prof. Brownstone. "Mexican citizens have pressed for and won important improvements implemented during the administration of the current president."

However, the Canadian team found significant areas of concern in their official and field visits:

- the IFE (at all levels) while establishing considerable autonomy and efficiency has an immense task. Its authority, under the current law, remains weak in three principle areas: the ability to do more to assure media fairness than monitor and report its findings; its ability to achieve transparency and accountability in matters of party finance during as well as after an election campaign; the power to take timely and effective corrective action in cases where fraud is alleged.
- in a number of communities visited there was considerable testimony regarding the pressuring of votes, as well as some specific evidence which is in the hands of the Alianza Civica. The focus of concern is with the widespread perception that social programmes, like Progreso -- but also other programmes (Fonden and Procampo, for example) in specific regions -- are used to ensure support for what is often termed the "official party", the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). A variety of denunciations were heard: the promoter of the programme at the local level takes election credentials and birth certifiants, takes note of all the data and this can be used for party purposes; the promoter asks for a payback of 5 pesos for adding a family to the programme; documents are taken and not promptly returned; the use of the credential is understood as having a partisan meaning and not as a neutral state instrument; the granting of access to the programme is understood as part of a commitment ("compromiso") to vote for the "official party"; supporters of one party who may not deserve support (lack of flood damage, relative family wealth) may receive support while others of an opposition party in dire need may not, etc. The overall conclusion from the testimony we heard is that there remains little effective distinction between official programmes from party obligation. The programmes are large, the beneficiaries are many and among the most dependent and vulnerable to fear. In some cases these pressures have in the past been reinforced by the action of party representatives on election day at local polls. Many testimonies confirmed that this combination of factors affects votes.
- The team also heard evidence of direct attempts to buy votes, and in one case, at least of forceful community response in the face of these persistent attempts. We heard testimony in a number of communities about visits of party officials, distribution of material (machetes, roofing and other construction materials, food) by party officials, taking of lists understood to mean commitment to vote, etc..
- The team also heard evidence that despite the overall changes in the law and the energetic attempts by IFE counselors at a number of levels, that the ability to confidently assure non-partisan and well-trained leadership at the polls has some way to go. The team heard evidence of particular efforts to improve the electoral machinery in the Federal District.

We recognize that the combination of these factors could contribute to increased frustration or cynicism among the public, precisely the opposite effect to that intended by the electoral reforms and many civic groups. It could also contribute to doubt about the certainty of results in a very close election.

The team recognizes the power of tradition and custom in the persistence of undemocratic or illegal practices which were common before the most recent electoral reforms.

The team found virtual agreement among all sources that civic education is a continuing and urgent reaching all citizens, but particularly those most economically and socially marginalized. It also found recognition that this is best done by independent authorities like the IFE and by civic associations dedicated to transparent and open democracy like the Alianza Civica. Neither have adequate resources at this time for such an immense task, and the cooperation and support of the next government and all parties is essential if the task is to be begun.

"We believe that the democratic transition in Mexico has certainly taken hold," concludes Dr. Foster, " but that considerable change remains. The best insurance is an alert, active and well-resourced civil society."

The Canadian pre-electoral visitor team is composed of Prof. Meyer Brownstone, of Toronto, Ontario, representing OXFAM-Canada, a well-know Canadian international development NGO and Dr. John W. Foster of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, representing Common Frontiers, a coalition of trade union, ecumenical, environmental and human rights organizations. The team will report to a delegation of NGO-labour-church and human rights figures who will observe the July 2nd election as international visitors assisting Mexico's Alianza Civica. Prof. Brownstone has monitored elections in Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Namibia, South Africa and a number of other states. Dr. Foster has observed the 1993 Civic Plebiscite in the D.F., and the 1994 and 1997 federal elections in Mexico.

Communities visited

Distrito Federal

Estado de Tabasco

Estado de Mexico

Interviews and conversations

Electoral Process

Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE): Federal General Council

IFE del Distrito Federal

IFE: Tabasco Local (State) Council

Political Parties

Partido de Accion Nacional (PAN)

Partido de la Revolucion Institucional (PRI)

Partido de Revolucion Democratica (PRD)

Partido de Centro Democratica

Parliamentary bodies

Comision 2000

Civil Organizations

Alianza Civica

Alianza Civica: Estado de Tabasco

Alianza Vallesana (Centro para la Formacion Ciudadana Municipalista)

Centro de Derechos Humanos, Miguel Augustin Pro Juarez (PRODH)

Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia

Poder Ciudadano

Field Visits

Tabasco

Estado de Mexico

- Nuevo Santo Tomas de los Platanos

- San Simon de la Laguna

Diplomatic

Canadian Embassy

James Lambert, Minister Counsellor

Claudia Vega, Political Advisor

Note: due to unforeseen circumstances planned meetings with media representatives and were cancelled.

ANNEX III: documents and articles

Note: the majority of the following items were presented by civil groups or by political parties. A few were assembled from the press by team members.

Dossiers and studies presented to the team

Alianza por Mexico, *Statement of Principles and Program of Action*, (109 pp. en.) The Alianza por Mexico comprises an electoral coalition at the Federal Level of the PRD, Partidos de los Trabajadores (PT), Convergencia pro la Democracia, de la Sociedad Nacionalista (PSN) and de la Alianza Social (PAS)

Alianza Civica, *Boletin de Prensa*, "Alianza Civica presenta las primeras mediciones de la compra y la coaccion del voto a nivel nacional" (26 pp. sp.)

Dip. Fed. Armando Aguirre Hervis, *Focalizacion: Estrategia Electoral de Estado en Marcha*,

IFE, *The Answer to 25 Essential Questions*, (13pp. en.)

IFE, *Guia para la observacion electoral*, CD. Sp.

IFE, *Los Delitos Electorales? No Los Permitas, Denuncialos*. Pamphlet. (sp)

IFE del DF, *Guia para el funcionario de Mesa Directiva de Casilla*, (48 pp. sp.) and related illustrated pamphlets and dossiers.

IFE del DF, *Codigo Electoral del Distrito Federal*. (220 pp. sp.).

Alonso Lujambio, President of the International Affairs Commission, IFE, *Mexico Towards the Federal Elections in 2000*. Paris, France, May 2000. (24 pp. en.)

Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and Vicente Fox Campaign

-Position papers (9 pp. en.)

-*Manual de representates de casilla* (24 pp. sp.)

-Vicente Fox Quesada, *Me comprometo contigo*, (32 pp. sp.)

Note: the PAN is part of the Alianza por el cambio, comprised of itself and the PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico).

Partido de Centro Democratico

-Candidate leaflet, Sergio Aguayo Quezada

-Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *En Mexico siguen violandose los derechos humanos*

Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)

- Dossier of materials in English including an illustrated presentation of the "PRI and the Strengthening of Mexican Democracy"

- "Por el futuro de Mexico", *Examen: una publicacion por la democracia*, No. 127, Junio, 2000. (104 pp. sp.)

Articles, bulletins, pamphlets presented to or gathered by the team

Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, A.C. "Observacion de gastos de los actores politicos en las elecciones del 2000 en la television. Reporte inicial" Junio, 2000. (7 pp. sp.)

John Ward Anderson, "Mexico's 'Dinosaurs' Resurgent", *Washington Post*, (May 22, 2000) (3 pp. en.)

Alejandro Almazan, "El miedo de que se les acabe el Progreso lo resuelven votando por el PRI" *Milenio*, No. 123, (17 de Enero) (6 pp. sp.)

Alejandro Almazan, "Fuera mascarar en el Pri", *Milenio* No. 142 (Mayo 29, 2000) (6 pp. sp.)

Guillermo Correa, "El PRI va por el voto pobre: operan a su servicio 173 programas sociales", *Proceso*, No. 1228. (Mayo 14, 2000) (3 pp. sp.)

Guillermo Correa, "Coletazos del Corporativismo", *Proceso*, No. 1229. (21 de mayo) (4 pp. sp.)

Guillermo Correa, "En march, la coaccion del voto pobre a favor del PRI", *Proceso*, No. 1230 (28 de Mayo) (3 pp. sp.)

Sam Dillon and Julia Preston, "Old Ways Die Hard in Mexican Election Despite the Pledges" *New York Times* (May 9, 2000) (5pp.en.)

"El *Correcaminos* llega a Chiapas para burlar la voluntad popular con el Progreso" Advertisement by Alianza por Chiapas, *La Jornada*, (31 de Mayo, 2000) (1 p. sp.)

Carlos Fuentes, "Nueva PRI, viejo PRI, eterno PRI?" *Reforma*, (<http://reforma.infosel.com/editoriales/articulo/007444/>) (2pp. sp.)

Jacinto R. Munguia, "La maquinaria priista esta en pie de Guerra" *Milenio*, No. 142 (Mayo 29, 2000) (3 pp. sp.)

Ignacio Rodriguez Reyna, "La perfecta armonia entre el Progreso y los votos del PRI",

Milenio, No. 123, (Enero 27, 2000) (4 pp. sp.)

Poder Ciudadano, *Agenda nacional de la sociedad civil*, (18 pp. sp.)

Georgina Saldierna y David Aponte, "Compra y coaccion del voto, preocupacion de observadores", *La Jornada*, (29 Mayo, 2000) (2 pp. sp.)

"Silencing Environmental Activists in Mexico" Centro Pro. (pamphlet, 8 pp. engl)

Jose Woldenberg K., "The Election of the Year 2000: Mexico's Democratic Opportunity", IFE, March, 2000. (Bilingual, en/sp. 8 pp).

Various articles on a range of pre-electoral and contextual subjects in *Proceso* (No. 1231, No. 1232) and *Mileneo*, No. 143, No.144 and from the daily press including *The News*, *Excelsior*, *La Jornada*, *Reforma*, *El Financiero* and others.

Background

Roderic Ai Camp, "Mexico's Armed Forces, Marching to a Democratic Tune?" *Enfoque*, Fall/Winter 2000, (2 pp. en.)

Maria Amparo Casar, "Mexico's 2000 Presidential Election" *Enfoque*, Fall/Winter 2000, (3 pp. en.)

Focus: human rights in Mexico (Issue 3, Spring, 2000) Centro Pro. (12 pp. en.)

Nivaldo Garregillos, *Electoral Changes and Transition to Democracy: An Evaluation of the Mexican Experience*. (37 pp., en.)

Jim Hodgson, *Mexico and the July 2, 2000 elections*. June 3, 2000. Common Frontiers and the Red Mexicana de Accion frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC).

Movimiento Ciudadano por la Democracia, *De Ciudadano a Ciudadano*, Boletín informativo. Nos. 21, 23.

WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America), *Mexico Election Monitor 2000*, various articles in various issues. (www.wola.org)