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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AD HOC VOTER REGISTRATION ASSESSMENT

NORTHERN AND CENTRAL NICARAGUA

May - June 1996

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Background

During the seven-week period May 6 to June 24, we were engaged by the USAID/Nicaragua Mission to carry out a field assessment of the ad hoc registration process conducted by the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) in 26 of Nicaragua's northern and central municipalities in preparation for the October 20, 1996 national elections. The objective was to determine whether all sectors of the region's voting-age population (including the former Nicaraguan Resistance, its supporters, and rural farm families in general) were equitably informed, mobilized and provided access to the registration process; and conversely, to detect evidence of practices or obstacles which would tend to exclude any such sector from maximum participation. While it was not intended to comprehensively evaluate the ad hoc process, the team was to advise the Mission of problems and opportunities it detected which could affect or enhance registration and to recommend whether one or more additional registration periods were advisable.

A May 31 progress report conveyed to the Mission the information we had gathered in field trips to 31 villages in four municipalities before the first registration weekend. We visited Wiwilí and El Cua-Bocay (which present some security problems) in northern Nicaragua, and Nueva Guinea and El Almendro in southcentral Nicaragua. These four municipalities among them accounted for 28% of all registrants.

The observations we had planned for the first registration weekend of June 1 - 2 were disrupted by a security incident in Somotina, Wiwilí. Second weekend (June 8 - 9) observations in Nueva Guinea and El Almendro were documented in our June 14 report. On June 10 the CSE announced that it would conduct a third consecutive registration weekend, which took place on June 15 - 16.

The present report sets forth our final conclusions concerning the ad hoc process, particularly for the rural areas in which we concentrated, based upon information available at this writing. It assumes that quantitative data provided by the CSE from its initial reports concerning the number of registrants is accurate and will be verified by the CSE's routine internal reviews. It is based on our observations and takes into account consultations with other international observers.

Executive Summary and General Conclusions

The three-weekend ad hoc registration program conducted by the CSE was effective, successful and inclusive, judged both by the number of voters registered (close to 350,000) and its level of effort to insure that all local residents, including former Resistance members, their supporters and rural farm families in general, were – with a few exceptions which may still be remedied – provided a reasonable opportunity to participate. The addition of a third weekend successfully increased participation by 11%. Registration table locations were equitably distributed, sufficient in number and well-selected, except for a small proportion of critical omissions in some municipalities. After the second registration weekend, the CSE added a number of these critically needed registration tables in remote locations but did so later and less comprehensively than necessary to offer their local citizens a reasonable opportunity to register. These and other problems, affecting about 10% of the nearly 1,000 CSE registration tables (known as *Juntas Receptoras de Votos*, or "JRVs"), can be easily remedied and are the subject of one of this report's recommendations.

The overwhelming majority of residents of even the most remote rural areas of the 26 target municipalities appeared to be fully informed about the registration process. This was the result of a progressively intensifying civic education campaign mainly during May; the mobilization of 10,000 local registration table workers (almost 3% of the voting-age population) drawn from a dozen political parties in nearly 1,000 prominent locations throughout the region; and word-of-mouth communication among a population highly motivated to obtain the *Libreta Cívica* voting card.

Neither we nor other observers of whom we are aware detected significant irregularities or abuses reflecting on the integrity of the registration system. JRV presidents, members and staff appeared to be trained, efficient, conscientious and unusually dedicated. Poll watchers representing a dozen political parties added a useful dimension of transparency and served as an additional safeguard against irregularities. The efficiency of about 15% of all tables, predominantly in the rural areas, was constrained by problems of supply and re-supply of printed materials, the result of planning and operational problems. Operations appeared to become progressively more efficient from weekend to weekend. Some registration tables failed to place the CSE stamp on or mistakenly invalidated several thousand voting cards, or failed to maintain sufficient registration catalogues (simple errors probably attributable to deficiencies in their training), which CSE regional technicians indicated would be rectified without prejudice to the registrants. The effectiveness of the third weekend would have been enhanced if it had been announced in May, as had been advocated by some international observers.

The CSE registered close to 350,000 persons, over 18% more than the admittedly undercounted April 1995 census figures.* In the areas we visited, up to 98% of rural residents used two witnesses to identify themselves. The widespread assertion during May that Nicaraguans would wait until the last day to register is disputed by the registration data, which suggests that close to 50% of all registrants used the first of the two scheduled weekends to do so.

While no security problems were reported in the southcentral municipalities of Nueva Guinea/El Almendro, security remained a concern in both Wiwili and El Cua-Bocay, where four serious incidents have occurred since late May. Nonetheless, the CSE continued a full registration process and, in fact, added new locations where some of these incidents had occurred, apparently judging the risks manageable. Some 53,000 persons (about 70% more than the April 1995 census estimates) were registered in Wiwili and El Cua-Bocay. This suggested that security, while a concern in some specific villages, did not unduly constrain registration operations in these two municipalities, whose security problems are among the most serious in the 26 municipalities.

The ad hoc system proved to be a practical, well-known, and easily understood system which provided a full inclusive opportunity for voter registration among the rural *campesino* population, including the former Resistance and its supporters. It offered the advantages of speed, simplicity and the immediate receipt of the *Libreta Cívica* voting card over what in practice was a longer and more complex cedulization process.

Under cedulization, each registrant is issued a national identity card, a valuable multi-purpose document which includes a photograph and is valid for ten years. These cards are being produced and issued in all of the other 119 municipalities of Nicaragua, a process from which the 26 ad hoc municipalities have thus far been excluded. Acceptance of the ad hoc process in these 26 municipalities was universally premised on the fulfillment of the CSE's public assurances that cedulization would be carried out beginning in 1997.

Because they were excluded from cedulization, but also for many other reasons which precede the registration issue, local leaders of a variety of political inclinations complained that they were overlooked, discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens by Managua. Some alleged that their exclusion from cedulization was attributable to partisan political motives. Their exclusion from the cedulization system can be remedied through the conduct of an effective cedulization campaign beginning in 1997.

* This report uses the September 1995 INEC preliminary estimate of 292,675 persons of voting age as its census reference figure.

Some international observers have expressed concern about the cedulization system's ability to produce and deliver cedula identity cards in an equitable and inclusive manner in time for the elections. This is no longer a concern in the 26 ad hoc municipalities, where all registrants have in their possession the *Libreta Cívica* voting card required to participate in the October 1996 elections. A final judgment about the advantages of each system will have to await the completion of both.

CSE data indicates that 50% of all registrants were processed on the Saturdays of the three weekends, suggesting that Saturday was a fully viable day for both urban and rural registration.

At times it appeared that international observers, more than the Managua-based political parties, were addressing with greater attention civic issues such as the number of weekends allotted to registrations and the "critical omissions" in remote areas, which should have been of equal or greater concern to the parties. The presence of a significant number of international observers from the Organization of American States, the Carter Center, the Center for Democracy, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, as well as one newly-formed Nicaraguan observer group which they supported, and several diplomatic missions, appeared to be welcome and effective. The OAS Observation Mission, which was the largest, was fully operational and highly effective in all the 26 municipalities throughout the period of our visit, and included a number of experienced and dedicated fulltime professional staff.

Early U.S. Congressional interest in the ad hoc registration process spotlighted some of its problems and opportunities, with positive results for USAID's on-going electoral support operations and for the CSE's effectiveness.

The USAID Mission, in close collaboration with the U.S. Mission as a whole, was fully mobilized and operational in a manner normally reserved for disaster operations, and played an important role in the success of ad hoc registrations. Civic education activities helped generate their crucial demand-driven dimension; USAID advocated repeatedly for the inclusion of the poorest and most remote areas identified as "critical omissions" from registration table locations. The Mission's mixture of support, partnership and advocacy in its relations with the CSE and senior Government of Nicaragua officials struck a realistic balance which seemed to achieve positive results.

To insure that all communities of the 26 municipalities are treated equitably and inclusively, this report proposes for the CSE's consideration that it permit additional registration days for about 100 locations, including a small number never served by registration tables, the new and relocated tables added for the third weekend, those which were affected during the first three weekends by serious material supply

problems, and those which registered more than 120 persons during the third weekend – triple the weekend average. It also recommends that during the October 20 elections, voters not be penalized because of JRV administrative errors during the registration process.

Plans for USAID support for the civic education dimension of voter mobilization for election day, October 20, should be reviewed with the ad hoc registration experience as a reference.

It is essential that the CSE conduct a full, vigorous cedulization campaign -- equal in effectiveness to the ad hoc registration process -- beginning in 1997 in the 26 municipalities. The JRV outreach model which has facilitated their initial incorporation into the system should be considered as a model for cedulization operations in this region.

The cedulization process for these 26 municipalities presents USAID with an excellent opportunity to remain actively engaged in support of the CSE's goal of incorporating the citizens of some of the poorest and most remote areas of Nicaragua into the democratic process. To be successful, it will require the type of civic education and CSE outreach operations which were financed by USAID and its implementing partners for the ad hoc process. USAID and the U.S. Mission should encourage and financially support CSE efforts to carry out an effective cedulization campaign in these municipalities, should remain actively engaged in this follow-up effort with the same level of advocacy and, if and when needed, direct assistance with which they so successfully supported ad hoc registrations.

CSE/International Observer/Registrant Synergy

The successful ad hoc registration process thus far appears to have been the result of a synergy among the CSE, the international community and the registrants themselves. The CSE established the overall ad hoc system and nearly 1,000 registration locations (many in remote rural areas). It selected, trained, mobilized and paid more than 10,000 local citizens from different political parties who worked conscientiously and with unusual dedication in the JRVs to make the system operational and transparent. The international community assisted the CSE with financial -- and in some cases operational -- support. International observers helped to assure the transparency and integrity of the process and provided balanced and timely reports and suggestions.

The voters, particularly in the rural areas we observed, responded with a high level of motivation. They were willing to compensate, to the degree they could, for the system's avoidable and unavoidable shortcomings. In some remote areas, voters walked six hours to their assigned JRV, waited on line for most of the day in the hot sun, and sometimes slept in the line overnight to assure their place the next day.

When after long walks to distant JRV locations they found that the lines exceeded the tables' registration capacity, or when the JRVs were forced to close because their materials were depleted, the voters returned home and came back again the next day or the next weekend, exhausting every means at their disposal to participate. When they learned that their JRV had inadvertently failed to place an official seal in their voting card, they came back again to have it properly stamped. This demand-driven dimension of the registration process played a significant role in its success. It is one of the reasons why this report advocates that the CSE exhaust every reasonable measure at its disposal to assure that additional days are provided to the estimated one hundred locations which still require them.

Field-Based Preventive Diplomacy

The ad hoc registration process was a crucial and successful step toward incorporating many of Nicaragua's poorest citizens in its most remote communities into the democratic electoral system. It will permit these citizens to exercise their right to vote and thereby durably enhance their political role and relevance in Nicaraguan society as well as promote post-conflict national reconciliation. It will diminish pretexts for the unwelcome emergence or continued belligerence of armed groups that further detract from their chances for development. These are durable results which fully warranted and continue to merit the unusual operational and advocacy role which USAID adopted in this bottom-up field-based, preventive diplomacy effort.

The balance of this report sets forth in more detail its findings and recommendations.

Voter Awareness

During our first field visit to Wiwilí and El Cua-Bocay during May 15 - 21, we found that about 23% of a sample of 190 households knew the dates of the upcoming registrations and the type of identification required. By May 27, 60% of a sample of northern Nueva Guinea and El Almendro households were aware of this information.

Based on our observations and the views of some other observers, it appears that at least 90%/95% of potential registrants in the 26 municipalities became aware in a timely manner of the registration process. Interviews with a small number of residents of the most remote off-road communities suggest that even in these distant areas 80% or more of their neighbors were aware of and desired to participate in the process.

Public Information/Civic Education

Our May 31 report described what appeared to be a progressively intensifying civic education campaign. Over 80% of 150 interviewees who knew about the registration process had learned of it from either radio announcements (36%), PLC political party grass roots activities (26%) or a Ministry of Education campaign supported by the USAID-financed Center for Education and Democracy (20%). Among these, radio was the most widespread and increasing source. The balance of the informed population (18%) had learned of the registration process from a variety of sources such as the FSLN, PRN and MRS and from Catholic and Evangelical churches.

Moreover, beginning on Saturday, June 1 the CSE established nearly 1,000 registration tables (known as *Juntas Receptoras de Votos*, or "JRVs") in 26 municipalities – an average of nearly 40 per municipality, distributed in well-marked prominent locations mainly in the rural areas. More than 10,000 citizens from the 26 municipalities – almost 3% of its voting-age population and representing about a dozen political parties – were trained, mobilized and paid by the CSE as direct participants at the local registration tables. Prominent leaders of at least two political parties canvassed the areas during the first two registration weekends. These factors, together with high voter motivation to obtain the *Libreta Cívica* voting card, and multiplied by word-of-mouth communication, combined to saturate the population with voter registration information.

Voter Confusion

Prior to May 31, the main confusion among rural voters who were aware of the registration process was about the means of identification which would be required, specifically: whether the birth certificate was permitted or required as a means of identification; age requirements for witnesses; and the number of persons which a single witness could identify. Based on our observations, this confusion appeared to resolve itself in implementation and did not affect voter registration.

The final CSE lists of JRV locations, to be used to inform voters of the table to which they were assigned, were published and available in Managua only on May 29. Before that date, civic and political leaders had been permitted by the CSE to review and comment upon a list of tentative JRV locations. These leaders suggested the relocation of some of the tentatively planned tables and the addition in unserved areas of a small number of additional tables. In the four municipalities we visited, these proposals represented about 9% of all tables. Uncertainty about the CSE's decision concerning these requests was prolonged by the late publication of the final JRV lists and caused some confusion in a small proportion of the rural areas. It appears that most of this confusion was overcome.

Number and Location of Registration Tables

Most of the political parties consulted before and during the registrations in these four municipalities indicated that the number of tables was a significant improvement over their initial expectations, on the assumption that the number of persons which could be registered at each was not limited and that the tables would work efficiently. In general, the locations – with the exception of a small proportion of critical omissions described elsewhere – were considered to be equitably distributed, sufficient in number and well-selected. Our observations, in general, supported this view. In two municipalities we visited, the *Comisiones de Paz*, supported by the CIAV/OAS Mission, had taken the initiative several months earlier to assist CSE technicians in identifying many of these locations.

Wiwilí, El Cua-Bocay, Nueva Guinea and El Almendro, the four municipalities visited by our team, were among them assigned 232 registration tables. This number was double the 112 which had been established for the 1990 elections and properly reflected significant post-conflict returnees including former refugees, displaced families and demobilized combatants. About 77% of these locations were outside the municipal capitals, i.e., in rural areas – an appropriate proportion, since 83% of the population resides in rural areas.

The April 1995 census estimated the combined voting-age population of these four municipalities at 66,000. Most local officials and others asserted that the census in the 26 municipalities, and particularly in El Cua-Bocay, undercounted the population by 20% to 50%, suggesting that the voting-age population was actually between 80,000 and 99,000.

Based on a planning estimate of 400/440 registrations per table, the 232 tables could, in principle, have registered about 93,000/102,000 persons. [The actual number of registrants in the first three weekends was about 97,000.]

The ability of the tables to absorb this number of registrants depended on an adequate supply of printed materials. Re-supply in rural areas of such materials was foreseen in our May 31 report as a likely problem. CSE had asserted since as early as April 1996 that it would provide materials sufficient to register 440 voters for each table and that a table could register whatever number of voters it could administratively process, without limit. In practice, the time consumed in registering voters who used two witnesses to identify themselves (in our observations in Nueva Guinea/El Almendro, about 10 individuals per hour could be registered) effectively limited the number of voters who could be processed at each table.

CSE had also asserted that it would be able to efficiently re-supply materials as required by registration turnout. However, as of May 28, some CSE local officials advised that they remained unaware of procedures to provide for such resupply in rural areas. As described later, supply and re-supply problems affected the efficiency of registrations.

Critical JRV Omissions

A small proportion of critical omissions in the number and location of JRVs in some municipalities which would tend to exclude rural voters were identified by civic and political leaders in each of the four municipalities. The leaders conveyed them directly to the CSE and indirectly through observer organizations.

For example, in Nueva Guinea and El Almendro, parties across the political spectrum (including the FSLN and MRS) asserted that ten off-road rural locations (about 8% of total tables) comprising mainly demobilized Resistance members and their supporters had been excluded. While a table was nominally available for each of the ten locations, it was said to be eight to 20 kilometers' walking distance, rather than the CSE target distance of five kilometers. The parties indicated that it was unlikely that most of the population -- including especially women and the elderly -- would be able to make the long journey to participate. None of the ten proposed additional locations in Nueva Guinea and El Almendro presented security problems.

Civic and political leaders indicated that they had brought their suggestions to the attention of the CSE Departmental Coordinator in mid-May. All parties -- including those with few likely supporters in the excluded areas -- expressed concern that their omission was inconsistent with local reconciliation efforts which had contributed to Nueva Guinea/El Almendro's secure, stable and progressive environment.

A similar proportion of critical omissions was reported by civic and political leaders in Wiwilí and El Cua-Bocay, who asserted that they affected some predominantly former Resistance areas and other areas of mixed political inclinations. Unlike Nueva Guinea and El Almendro, some (but not all) of the unserved areas in these two municipalities suffer from the presence of armed groups and the sporadic security incidents they occasion. Local leaders hoped the registration outreach process would help to stabilize these remote areas. They stated that their suggestions had been conveyed to the CSE in March and again on May 11.

The locations suggested by these leaders were, in our view, more important than their proportion of all tables in the four municipalities (about 9%) would suggest. Tables were omitted from remote but well-populated communities which appeared to be eager to participate in the electoral system. These are mainly newly developed farming and livestock areas settled for the first time or traditional villages re-settled by former residents after nearly a decade of civil conflict. They receive few health, educational or other government services. Exclusion from the voter registration system – and thereby from voting in national elections – would increase alienation and create pretexts for the unwelcome emergence or continued belligerence of armed groups that further detract from their chances for development. The former refugee and Resistance families of these areas, and their *campesino* populations in general, should be high priorities for inclusion in the democratic electoral system. [To insure that all of these populations were equitably served, on May 20, June 10 and June 20 the USAID Director and staff conveyed to the CSE lists of potential locations for additional JRVs.]

None of the additional locations and tables suggested by the four municipalities we visited were accepted by the CSE for the two originally scheduled weekends. This generated assertions by some that the consultative process had not been useful. The exclusion of the proposed tables was criticized by some of the local leaders who had suggested them as unjust and bad public policy. In Wiwilí, a serious security incident during the first registration weekend was provoked in part by the absence of a table.

During June 8 - 9, we visited four registration tables at the three eastern-most locations of Nueva Guinea closest to the areas which local leaders asserted were "critical omissions." Our observations indicated these assertions were correct. At each of these locations, on both Saturday and Sunday, we observed between 100 and 150 persons waiting on line in the hot sun. At one table, most persons waiting on line indicated that they had walked 3 - 6 hours from areas which had no JRVs to reach this location. Most reported joining the line the previous day and sleeping on the line the previous night or joining it for the first time before dawn. On both Saturday and Sunday, hundreds more who had arrived at dawn or later were standing around uncertain of what to do, or were reported to have already returned to their homes many hours' walk away. Those waiting said that many of the people from their eastern Nueva Guinea communities could not make the walk to these nearest JRV locations and would therefore be unable to register.

The lines remained long through the afternoon. Given the rate at which people were being registered, and the shortage of witness forms, *Libretas Cívicas* and, in one case, catalogues, some JRV presidents advised most of those in the line that they would not be able to be registered that day and they departed for home.

The timing of the proposals for additional tables, the CSE's state of operational readiness and the remote location of most of the proposed sites may have combined to preclude a positive initial CSE response. Another test of the CSE's responsiveness resided in whether it would add such locations during additional registration weekends which might be scheduled. During their widespread field observation of the first two weekends, USAID and OAS observers, among others, verified the need for the establishment of additional JRVs in locations which had been described as critical omissions in Wiwilí, El Cua-Bocay, Nueva Guinea, El Almendro, El Rama and Muelle de los Bueyes, among others. [Similar though proportionately fewer and possibly less acute omissions were reported in some of the other 20 municipalities.]

In part as a result, in order to accommodate these suggestions, on June 12 the CSE announced that it would add 16 and relocate 44 JRVs within the 26 municipalities during a third weekend, including some of the remote locations suggested by the observers. Most of these were reported to be operational during at least a part of the third weekend. The addition of these JRVs enabled thousands of voters, including many former Resistance families and their supporters who would otherwise have been excluded, to participate in the electoral process. Although implemented later and less comprehensively than would have been desirable, it demonstrated a CSE effort to reach out to at least some of the region's most remote communities -- including a number in unstable and insecure areas -- in order to include their populations in the electoral system.

Unfortunately, between the CSE's June 12 decision to add and relocate many of the 60 tables and its implementation on June 15, only a few days were available for mobilization. These were adequate to initiate this worthwhile effort, but not to insure proper management and effective notification to all of the target communities. These and a few related defects can be easily remedied and are the subject of one of this report's recommendations.

CSE Operational Effectiveness

Observations reflected in our May 18 and May 22 oral reports and in our May 31 progress report suggested that CSE operational preparations were behind schedule. Preparations for material supply and re-supply were particularly inadequate. Nonetheless, it appears that about 85% of the JRVs were mobilized and operated efficiently during the three weekends of registration. Two problems we observed and which were reflected in the reports of others were:

– inadequate anticipation of the predictable proportion of rural residents who would rely on two witnesses to identify themselves. Registration materials provided to rural JRVs contained an inadequate number of the required witness forms. Therefore, almost from the beginning, these forms were in short supply.

– inadequate provision and re-supply of CSE materials to rural JRVs.

About 15% of the JRVs in the four municipalities, predominantly in the rural areas, were forced to temporarily suspend operations during the registration weekends because of shortages of materials. We estimate that a similar proportion were not open and operational throughout the first weekend because of the state of the CSE's operational readiness. Operations appeared to become progressively more efficient from weekend to weekend.

Functioning and Integrity of CSE Registration Tables

Neither we nor other observers of whom we are aware detected significant irregularities or abuses reflecting on the overall integrity of the registration system. In general, the JRV presidents and members and staff appeared to be trained, efficient, conscientious and unusually dedicated, sometimes working throughout the day in sweltering heat and continuing by lantern light until 11PM to serve their highly motivated registrants. [In Nueva Guinea and El Almendro, most rural JRV officers and staff we met were residents of the municipal capitals.] The JRVs appeared to be doing their best to inform and assist the registrants to achieve as broad and inclusive a registration process as possible.

The presence of the poll watchers (*fiscales*) representing the political parties provided a useful dimension of transparency and served as an additional safeguard against irregularities. In Nueva Guinea and El Almendro during the second weekend, we observed in 21 rural JRVs a total of 95 poll watchers from eleven different political parties and alliances, an average of 4 - 5 poll watchers per JRV. The FSLN, PLC/Alianza Liberal, PRONAL and PRN (former Resistance party) were represented in 100%, 90%, 85% and 76% of these JRVs, respectively. Their technical training did not, in the JRVs we visited, appear to enable them to detect administrative errors committed by JRV officers and staff.

JRV Administrative Errors

In terms of JRV errors and problems, we noted the following, a number of which appeared to be attributable to deficiencies in the training of their officers and staff:

— On the first Saturday, June 1, most of the JRVs in northern and eastern Nueva Guinea and some others did not affix the CSE stamp to the *Libreta Cívica* voting card before handing it to the registrant.* JRV officers throughout the area indicated that they had not instructed to do so during their training. The error was detected on Saturday evening. Beginning 7AM Sunday, the JRVs affixed the stamp correctly to *Libretas* which they issued.

To rectify the initial error, the CSE and local JRVs put out a call through radio and word-of-mouth to Saturday registrants to return to have their *Libretas* stamped. We observed people doing so during both days of the second weekend. It seems probable that those who lived at great distances would not be properly informed or would be unable to return to have their *Libretas* stamped.

According to officers in several JRVs, the CSE area technician instructed that when people whose *Libretas* were not stamped came to vote on October 20, the stamp would be affixed at that time and they would be permitted to vote.

— A similar solution was said to have been given to one Nueva Guinea JRV which recorded the registrations -- and the signatures and fingerprints of the registrants -- in only one catalogue, instead of the required number, on that first Saturday. The error was detected, and beginning on Sunday the correct number of catalogues was recorded. To rectify the error, the JRV president reported that the CSE technician instructed that duplicate catalogues for Saturday be prepared. When people came to vote on October 20, they would sign and fingerprint their respective entries in the additional catalogues and would be permitted to vote.

— Any individual who will reach the age of 16 by election day, October 20, 1996, is eligible under the electoral law to register at this time. We noted two types of problems in this respect:

(a) In San Rafael del Norte on Saturday, June 1, we were informed that a municipal-wide policy had been adopted which required all persons under the age of 21 to present a birth or baptismal certificate to verify their age -- the statement of two witnesses was not considered adequate. The San Rafael del Norte JRVs as a group would not accept as substitute documents certifications of age from municipal authorities.

* A similar problem -- the inadvertent invalidation of 1,600 *Libretas* in Matiguás town -- was reported by other observers.

A review of four JRV voter catalogues revealed that the number of individuals in the 16 - 21 age group who had registered was negligible. This observation, which was also randomly noted in El Rama, Muelle de los Bueyes and other municipalities, was reportedly conveyed to the CSE at departmental levels and in Managua by USAID.

(b) In Nueva Guinea on June 8 and 9, we noted a few cases in which youths who were evidently below the age of 14 attempted to register. We received one complaint from a poll watcher that this had occurred. On June 15 and 16, two other USAID observers made similar observations.

A review on June 8 and 9 of fourteen catalogues in rural Nueva Guinea revealed that 25% of registrants were in the 16 - 21 year age group. In the JRV (8270/Providencia), where the complaint was received from a poll watcher, the proportion of registrants aged 16 - 21 was 43%.

CSE Scheduling of Third Weekend

On June 10, the day after the conclusion of the second registration weekend, the CSE announced that it would hold a third full weekend of registrations throughout the 26 municipalities. The addition of a third weekend for all registration tables was a wise and essential measure. It resulted in the registration of more than 37,000 additional citizens, about 11% of all registrants and seemed to exhaust the supply of would-be registrants in most – but not all – locations. More important, it signified a serious effort by the CSE to insure maximum participation of the population, including a large segment of former Resistance families and their supporters.

The effectiveness of the third weekend and of the overall process would have been enhanced if it had been announced in May, as had been advocated by the Center for Democracy* and other organizations. The CSE determined instead to await the results of the first two weekends before deciding if a third was necessary. It argued that, even if it were inclined to agree in advance that a third weekend were required, Nicaraguans always wait until the last day to register; as a result, early announcement of the third weekend would defeat its purpose. Registration data presented later in this report disputes this assertion. Because the third weekend was not announced earlier, some avoidable public information and organizational problems occurred. Following the first two weekends, once the CSE decided to schedule a third weekend, observers differed about the best timing for its implementation:

* See *Report & Recommendations, Assessment of the Nicaraguan Consejo Supremo Electoral Voter Registration Process*, The Center for Democracy, 15 April 1996, page 38.

– Some advocated scheduling the third weekend in an uninterrupted, consecutive manner on June 15 - 16. Consecutive scheduling would maintain the political registration momentum. A system comprising nearly 10,000 individuals at 1,000 different locations, and its back-up support, would not have to be dismantled and then mobilized anew. Such scheduling assisted the CSE to adhere more closely to its electoral calendar.

– Others asserted that the organizational problems of the first two weekends – for example, the logistical resupply system – would not be resolved in a timely manner for the third weekend. Lead time was insufficient to inform the public about the additional weekend. It would be more effective, they suggested, to allow a number of weeks – some said up to a month – to elapse before the next weekend.

The CSE decided to schedule the third weekend in a consecutive manner, resulting in the registration of a full additional 11% of registrants – a highly positive result – in an effective manner for the great majority of the locations. In our view, its decision for the consecutive scheduling was, on balance, correct. [Additional days for about 10% of the locations, arising out of a number of problems, are still required.]

Quantitative Registration Results

CSE registration data* indicates the following results:

Weekend #1	June 1 - 2	147,668 registrants (43%)
Weekend #2	June 8 - 9	161,542 registrants (46%)
<u>Weekend #3</u>	<u>June 15 - 16</u>	<u>37,548 registrants (11%)</u>
TOTAL	3 weekends	346,758 registrants (100%)

The CSE successfully registered over 18% more individuals than the total number of voting-age persons projected by the admittedly undercounted April 1995 census, a substantial accomplishment. The census undercount seems particularly acute in El Cua-Bocay, where nearly double the projected voting-age population registered. Based on consultations with other observers, we believe that between 85% and 95% of the potential voting-age population may have registered. Data was not yet available on the breakdown between urban and rural registrants. It would have been useful to examine this information, although given the aggregate number of registrants it seems unlikely to affect a judgment on the success of ad hoc operations.

* Registration estimates in this report are based on provisional CSE Registration Data, 21 June 1996 5:30PM edition.

According to a catalogue review of nearly 1,100 rural registrants in 19 Nueva Guinea and El Almendro JRVs, 98% of the registrants used two witnesses as their means of identification. The witness system was practical and well understood by potential registrants. In the few cases where a witness was not accepted by a registration table, the registrant seemed to quickly find a replacement. Witnesses seemed readily available from among people who were standing on line or who were available in the immediate vicinity.

As described earlier, several international missions had urged the CSE to announce to the public well in advance a three-weekend registration schedule. The CSE decided not to do so, in part asserting that the Nicaraguan public typically waits until the last minute to register. The CSE's view was widely echoed in the four municipal capitals we visited prior to May 31 by local civic and political leaders.

The widespread assertion that Nicaraguans wait until the last day is disputed by the CSE registration data. Some 15% of registration tables, predominantly in the rural areas, were not fully operational throughout the first weekend. Nonetheless, 48% of those who registered during the first two weekends did so on the first two days. Close to 20% of all participants registered just on the first day, despite the CSE's initial operational difficulties.

Despite the CSE's problems with operational readiness, the three-weekend schedule for about 85% of the registration tables provided an adequate opportunity for voters to register. About 15% of the JRVs, predominantly in the rural areas, were somewhat handicapped because:

- the operation of their tables was temporarily suspended once or more due to materials shortages and logistical problems; and
- because the tables added for the third weekend did not offer the same number of registration days as other tables; because some were not operational in a timely manner during the third weekend; or because potential registrants were unaware of their existence.

The CSE Magistrates and staff and their technical advisors will undoubtedly evaluate in a timely manner the successes and problems of the ad hoc process in the 26 municipalities in order to strengthen its operations and detect and resolve in advance problems which may surface on election day, October 20.

Security

No security problems were reported in the two southcentral municipalities, Nueva Guinea and El Almendro, before or during the registration process. All parties reported that they were free to travel and campaign without fear. They described their municipalities as models of reconciliation and peace. No army units were observed, nor did there appear to be a need for their presence.

Security remains a serious concern in both northern municipalities which we visited, Wiwilí and El Cua-Bocay. Before May 31, some "re-armed" groups (headed by but not necessarily comprised of former Resistance members) in these municipalities publicly committed themselves to permit the peaceful implementation of the registration process. From the outset, the reliability of this commitment, and the degree to which it represented the views of all re-armed groups or would be respected by various of them, was not clear. The conduct of criminal bands along the Coco and Bocay rivers, in some cases close to army outposts, as well as along the roads, is unpredictable and affects the ability of all parties to conduct their activities.

Most of the serious security incidents which occurred just before and during registration took place in these two municipalities:

- on May 28, eight Miskito *campesino* leaders were kidnapped by armed elements of *Comandante Pajarillo's* group in Boca de Wina village, located along the Bocay River in El Cua-Bocay (contrary to some press reports, all of the hostages were safely released);
- on May 29, a CSE vehicle with armed police escorts delivering registration materials was fired upon by armed persons near La Marañosa, Wiwilí;
- on May 31, an international election observer, one of the authors of this report, was kidnapped in Somotine village, along the Coco River in Wiwilí, by *Comandante Pajarillo*; and
- on June 19, 28 CSE and 3 Ministry of Agriculture workers along the Coco River in Wiwilí were kidnapped by *Comandante Licenciado* and his brother *Comandante Pajarillo*.

By May 31, new army and police units said to comprise between four and twenty persons each -- were reported to have recently been stationed in Wamblán, Plan de Grama, El Cua, San José de Bocay, Ayapal, La Pita and Banacito. While recognizing the need for order, concern over the potential conduct of these forces, generated by past army performance, was expressed by many.

At the time of our visits to El Cua-Bocay and Wiwilí, no specific complaints about army conduct were received from peace commissions, political parties or others. But an attitude of wariness prevailed among most of those interviewed concerning the future conduct of such forces. There was also concern about the results of possible encounters between the army and local re-armed groups in which civilians would be caught in the crossfire.

FSLN representatives in both municipalities expressed concern for the safety of their political activists should they venture into rural areas where re-armed groups are present. Until May 31, they indicated they had not attempted to do so. The FSLN/Wiwilí representative indicated his dismay that instead of the 39 tables originally contemplated for that municipality, the CSE had added 19 (for a total of 58), mainly in areas where he alleged his partisans could not move freely.

Following the first three security incidents listed above, the CSE continued a full registration process and added new tables in locations where these incidents had specifically occurred, apparently judging the risks manageable. Some 53,000 persons – 70% more than the April 1995 voting-age census estimate – were registered in Wiwilí and El Cua-Bocay municipalities. This suggested that security, while a concern in a few specific villages of the Coco and Bocay rivers, did not unduly constrain registration operations in these two municipalities, whose security problems are among the most serious in the 26 municipalities.

Effectiveness of Ad Hoc Registration System

As conveyed in our May 31 report, scores of civic, religious and political leaders interviewed during May universally assessed the ad hoc system as practical and well-known among the public. For the narrow purpose of registering voters in the short-term, a small number indicated that they actually preferred the ad hoc system over cedulization. The immediate receipt of the *Libreta Cívica* voting card was a frequently mentioned advantage.

Based on our observations and the reports of others, it appears that the ad hoc process functioned as a practical, well-known, easily understood system which, in general, effectively provided a full, inclusive opportunity for voter registration in these 26 municipalities. In fact, for the short-term purpose of registering voters in time for the 1996 elections, the ad hoc system may have offered the advantages of speed and simplicity over the cedulization system, which is viewed as complex and cumbersome by many in the 26 municipalities. Immediate delivery at the registration table of the *Libreta Cívica* voting card, valid only for voting in the October 20 elections, has now assured all registrants of the right to vote in the elections which will take place in less than 120 days.

Under cedulization, each registrant is issued a national identity card, a valuable multi-purpose document which includes a photograph and is valid for ten years. These cards are being produced and issued in all of the other 119 municipalities of Nicaragua, a process from which the 26 ad hoc municipalities (which comprise 18% of Nicaragua's 145 municipalities) have thus far been excluded. Acceptance in the 26 municipalities of the ad hoc system was universally premised on the fulfillment of the CSE President's public assurances that cedulization would be implemented in their areas beginning in 1997.

Many local leaders suspected the motives of the National Assembly and the CSE for excluding them from the cedulization process. Reasons for this exclusion, according to the CSE, included budget constraints, logistical problems and security risks. Some areas of the 26 municipalities present such difficulties.

Nonetheless, questions were raised about the exclusion of some of the 26 municipalities. For example, of the four which we visited, two of them (Nueva Guinea and El Almendro), with over 12% of all ad hoc registrants, offer no unusual security problems and their logistical challenges are no greater than those of other municipalities where cedulization is being conducted. El Almendro is the only one of six municipalities in Río San Juan Department excluded from cedulization.

Their leaders resented their exclusion from cedulization. For this, but also for many reasons which precede the registration issue, local leaders of a variety of political inclinations complained that they were generally overlooked, discriminated against, and treated as second-class citizens by Managua. Some asserted that their exclusion from cedulization was attributable to partisan political motives.

The exclusion of the 26 municipalities from the more valuable cedulization currently offered to 119 others – whatever the cause or intent – can be remedied through the conduct of an effective cedulization campaign there in 1997.

Now that they have had an opportunity to observe it in practice, some international observers have expressed concern about the cedulization system's ability to produce and deliver to voters in an equitable, inclusive manner the number of cédulas or substitute documents which will be required within the next few months if full participation in the elections is to be achieved. This is no longer a concern in the 26 ad hoc registration areas, where an inclusive process has been almost completed and all registrants have in their possession the *Libreta Cívica* voting card required to participate in the October 20 elections. A final judgment of the advantages and disadvantages of each system will have to await the completion of both.

Saturday versus Sunday Registration

During our pre-May 31 inquiries, opinions about the desirability of registrations scheduled over two weekends instead of the traditional four Sundays varied among the four municipalities, even among officials of the same political parties. Saturdays were generally viewed as positive days by a great number who dedicate Sunday to religion or sports or who thought lines would be shorter. Few rural people are salaried, so pay days would not interfere with Saturday registrations. Few places in the four municipalities we visited have fixed market days, and their schedules did not conflict with (and in some cases supported) weekend registration. Most civic and political leaders welcomed Saturday as an optional registration day. But it was not clear before May 31 whether rural people accustomed to Sunday registrations would take advantage of it.

In fact, although a fair number of JRVs were not fully functional on the first Saturday, CSE data indicates that 50% of the voters in the four municipalities we visited and in the 26 municipalities as a whole registered on Saturday, suggesting that it was a fully viable day for both urban and rural populations.

Nonetheless, a number of those interviewed before May 31 suggested that four Sundays – i.e., a registration activity that continued over the period of a month – offered a comparative advantage for those whose homes are more distant from social and commercial centers. Over the longer period, the "cascade" effect of word-of-mouth information dissemination would lead to fuller participation of these potential voters.

In practice, the CSE determined that the two weekends it had scheduled were inadequate to register all those desiring to participate. It added a third, consecutive weekend and may add additional days targeted for remote areas.

Role of National Political Parties and International Observers

In the municipalities we visited, one particular national political party, the PLC, appeared to be particularly active in the dissemination of registration information and in mobilization of potential registrants. In our informal survey of rural households alluded to earlier in this report, of those who learned about registrations from political parties, 80% said they had been informed by the PLC. Local leaders of a number of parties in the municipalities we visited, many of whom were candidates for local offices, appeared to be fully engaged, although their activities were not as widespread.

However, the effectiveness of local party communications with regional and national party offices, and the responsiveness of Managua party leaders to the concerns of the local leaders was unclear. At times, it appeared that international observers were addressing with greater attention civic issues such as the number of registration days and the "critical omissions" in registration tables in remote areas which should have been of equal or greater concern to the parties' national offices. The presence of international observers from the Organization of American States, the Carter Center, Center for Democracy, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute (all of which received financial support from USAID), as well as a number of Nicaraguan observer groups which they in turn assisted and several diplomatic missions, appeared to be both welcome and effective. The OAS Observation Mission, which was the largest, was fully operational and highly effective in all the 26 municipalities throughout the period of our visit, and included a number of experienced and dedicated fulltime professional staff.

Role of the U.S. Government

Early U. S. Congressional interest in the ad hoc registration process spotlighted some of its problems and opportunities, with positive results for on-going USAID electoral support operations and for the CSE's effectiveness.

Our observations, and those of several other U.S. and other international observers, attested to the critical role which the USAID Mission (in close collaboration with the overall U.S. Mission) played in the success of the ad hoc registration process. We and others observed the Mission, including not only its Democratic Initiatives experts but almost all of its offices, fully mobilized and operational in a manner normally reserved for disaster operations. This was noted, for example:

- in the public information and civic education sector, which generated the crucial demand-driven dimension of the registration process;
- in repeated advocacy for the inclusion of the poorest and most remote rural areas identified as "critical omissions" from JRV locations;
- in its role as a catalyst for emergency mobilization of critical transport support for the CSE immediately before and during registration weekends; and
- in its country-wide observation of the registration weekends, including travel by river, horseback and day-long hikes through the most difficult terrain to reach the least accessible areas.

The Mission's mixture of support, partnership and advocacy in its relations with the CSE and senior Government of Nicaragua officials struck a realistic balance which seemed to achieve positive results.

Recommendations

To complete its efforts to insure that all communities of the 26 municipalities are treated equitably and inclusively, we would propose the following recommendations for the CSE's consideration:

1. Permit additional registration time for the following targeted locations:

(a) a small number of remote areas never served by registration tables where the population has not had the opportunity to register;

(b) the 60 new and relocated JRVs established for the third weekend;

(c) the JRVs whose operations were seriously affected by material supply problems; and

(c) the JRVs which registered 120 or more persons during the third weekend, triple the weekend average.

About 100 JRVs (10% of all JRVs) require four additional well-planned and managed registration days in order to assure their citizens the access to the registration process equal to the other ad hoc areas. To achieve speed, economy and efficiency, these days could be scheduled consecutively. Following are **examples** of 36 locations in five of a greater number of municipalities which require additional days.

Based on consultations with the June 15 - 16 USAID and OAS observation teams and our own observations, we believe the following existing JRV location in eastern Nueva Guinea require additional registration time:

8020	San Martín
8021	San José
8025	El Progreso
8110	Las Milpas
8111	Nuevo Horizonte
8112	Puerto Principe
8115	Chompipe
8122	Naciones Unidas
8371	Nueva Holanda
8402	Otilio Arguello
8404	San Isidro
8420	La Unión
8405	La Reforma

In addition, we recommend that during additional days one table each be added in the following three Nueva Guinea locations:

- in Las Milpas, to be co-located with JRV 8110;
- in Dirjangen (new location)
- in Punta Gorda (new location)

In El Almendro, we recommend that during additional days one table each be added to the following two locations:

- Comarca Monteverde (new location)
- Caño Blanco (new location)

In El Rama, in addition to JRVs whose operations were handicapped because of materials shortages, the following four locations require additional days:

8083	El Corozo
8220	Las Magnolias
8221	Cooperativa Julio Buitrago
8230	Las Iguanas

In the specific case of Muelle de los Bueyes three locations require additional days:

8011	Comarca La Patriota
8012	Comarca El Pital (al norte)
8170	Lugar Las Pavas

In El Cua-Bocay 11 locations require additional days:

0010	El Cua
8000	El Cua
8150	Abisinia
8250	Ayapal
8260	Ayapal
8270	Luz de Bocay
8280	Yakalwas
8300	Kininiwas
8360	Yakalwas
8370	Yakalwas
8380	Sabawas

[On June 21, the CSE announced that it would conduct a fourth registration weekend (July 6 and 7) targeted for 20 JRV locations, said to include some of those suggested above. International observers have provided to the CSE a longer, more comprehensive list (including the 36 examples listed above) of registration locations which require additional days. At this writing, the CSE's final decision on these matters is pending.]

2. Implement a policy for the October 20 elections that voters not be penalized because of JRV administrative errors during the registration process. Many of these errors were due to deficiencies in aspects of the training of JRV personnel. The CSE should honor assurances by CSE technicians that *Libreta Cívica* voting cards will be honored even though several JRVs failed to put the CSE stamp on them or inadvertently invalidated them, and that registrants will be permitted to vote although the JRV recorded only one catalogue. In the Managua processing of JRV data for the preparation of electoral lists, the CSE should make allowances for minor JRV administrative errors and include the voters they registered.

3. Conduct a vigorous cedulization program in the 26 municipalities beginning in 1997. This will be an essential next step in incorporating especially the most remote and disenfranchised sectors of the population into the national electoral system.

The CSE should consider incorporating the experiences of its successful ad hoc registration campaign in planning for the cedulization process. The remoteness of many of the communities, the way in which information can most effectively reach them, and the JRV registration outreach model which has facilitated their access and incorporation into the system should be considered as models for this region's cedulization process.

We would propose for USAID's consideration that:

4. Plans for USAID support for the civic education dimension of voter mobilization for election day, October 20, should be reviewed with the ad hoc registration experience as a reference. Each voter will be presented with six ballots which will have to be marked in a limited time, a challenge for which an effective civic education campaign can help rural voters to prepare. USAID may wish to review its institutional options in terms of local organizations which have demonstrated the best ability to mobilize a civic action campaign. In preparing civic education materials, USAID grantees should:

- assess lessons learned from the ad hoc registration campaign, including the clarity and effectiveness of the language and content of radio and printed messages;
- conduct thorough advance visits to *campesino* families in rural areas to consult directly with them about the information they require, their most common questions, and the best way to convey the answers; and then
- prepare for and conduct a saturation civic education campaign.

5. The cedulization process for these 26 municipalities presents USAID with an excellent opportunity to remain actively engaged in the mid-term in support of the CSE's goal of incorporating the citizens of some of the poorest and most remote areas of Nicaragua into the democratic process. To be successful, it will require the type of civic education and CSE outreach operations which were financed by USAID and its implementing partners for the ad hoc process. USAID and the U.S. Mission should encourage and financially support CSE efforts to carry out the civic education and outreach elements of an effective cedulization campaign in these municipalities, should remain actively engaged in this follow-up effort with the same level of advocacy and, if and when needed, direct support with which they so successfully supported ad hoc registrations.

USAID's efforts could be supplemented by an NGO with demonstrated effective experience in some of the grass roots civic education campaigns conducted during preparations for this ad hoc registration process. Such an NGO should follow the same process of consultation with the intended *campesino* beneficiaries outlined under the previous recommendation.