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Costa Rica: Wide Victory Margin Gives First Woman President Clear Mandate

by LADB Staff
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By George Rodriguez Laura Chinchilla won the Feb. 7 presidential vote in Costa Rica's elections and became the first woman in this Central American nation to accomplish the feat (see NotiCen, 2009-12-10). Her wide-margin victory gives Chinchilla a clear popular mandate, which the president-elect told her followers and the country on election night is not a blank check to do as she may please but a mandate to do specific things that the people expect her to deliver. However, what the vote has not given Chinchilla is a legislative majority, a crucial factor, which according to local political analysts is going to put to the test her announced willingness to start a dialogue with different sectors and keep it going. With 95% percent of the vote counted, Chinchilla, who ran as the presidential candidate for the ruling and social-democratic Partido Liberacion Nacional (PLN), rounded up 46.8%. Second place went to Otton Solis, co-founder and head of the center-left Partido Accion Ciudadana (PAC), with 25.2%, closely followed by Otto Guevara of the right-wing Movimiento Libertario (ML). "Tonight we're not receiving a blank check," the country's next president told dozens of followers rallied in the parking lot of one of the capital city's luxury hotels. "On the contrary, very solemn obligations have been placed on our shoulders," the first of which is "to hold a serious and permanent dialogue with the political and social sectors of this country," she said as San Jose was dampened by drizzle. "My government will have its doors open to all Costa Ricans of good faith," Chinchilla told the cheering crowd. "That requires that we listen attentively to the voice of those who were with us this election and that we humbly ask for their help and cooperation...and it requires that we understand that no one in this country holds the ownership of truth, of common sense, of morality." "The second obligation is to fulfill what has been promised," Chinchilla said, and went on to explain that "today, the Costa Rican people have given me a mandate...the duty to do everything humanly possible to achieve certain things." Among those things, the president-elect mentioned strengthening the public-education and welfare systems and, above all, improving citizen safety--

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