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## **President Morales Wins Majority Though Not Super Majority**

by LADB Staff

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Bolivian President Evo Morales' push to "refound" Bolivia through an Asamblea Constituyente to rewrite the Constitution is underway with the socialist president holding a majority in the assembly. Elections on July 2 did not go as much in Morales' favor as he had hoped, however, with the final tally handing his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party 137 of 255 assembly seats, short of the two-thirds majority the party would need to control the group.

Initial assembly sessions have begun in the historic capital city of Sucre, 425 km south of the present capital La Paz, with the full inauguration of the assembly set for Aug. 6. MAS wins almost 54% of seats. The Corte Nacional Electoral (CNE) released official results for the July 2 vote for the Asamblea Constituyente on July 11, confirming that MAS received 50.7% of the vote. That result handed 137 seats to Morales' party, giving it 53.7% of the total seats. Fifteen other political groups won at least one representative in the assembly. Assembly delegates represent different districts, meaning there is not an exact proportional equivalence between the number of votes won and the number of representatives.

The CNE reported that MAS got 1,322,656 votes, more than triple the votes won by the conservative alliance Poder Democratico y Social (Podemos), the party of former President Jorge Quiroga Ramirez (2001-2002). Podemos came in second with 399,668 votes, representing 15.3% of the total and winning 60 assembly seats, 23.5% of the total. In third place was Unidad Nacional (UN), the party of cement magnate Samuel Doria Medina, with 187,706 votes, or 7.2%. The UN will have eight seats in the assembly. The numbers closely resembled the outcome of the 2005 presidential election, where Morales trounced Quiroga and Doria Medina by a similar margin (see NotiSur, 2006-01-06).

Three other political organizations will also each have eight assembly delegates. Although they received fewer votes than the UN, they will have the same number of representatives since they won in small districts. Those three forces are the formerly all-powerful Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), the alliance between the MNR and the Frente Revolucionario de Izquierda (FRI), and the Movimiento Bolivia Libre (MBL).

The citizens' group representing evangelical churches, Concertacion Nacional, won six assembly seats with 93,248 votes, or 3.5% of the total. The vote count left MAS and Podemos looking for alliances with the smaller groups. The MAS wants to control voting in the assembly while Podemos hopes to block the ruling party's hegemony over the process. It will require 170 votes, a two-thirds majority, to approve a new Constitution.

*The MAS win was far below the "70% to 80%"*

Morales had predicted he would gain, and it even fell beneath the prediction of 60% that he made the night voting ended. Nonetheless, MAS officials portrayed the results as a second win for the president or a "re-election" nearly six months into his term. Speaking about the voting process, Morales praised the CNE's performance as "honest and responsible" a switch from his criticisms of the court during his 2005 presidential campaign but he said, "The big problem was absenteeism. That affects everybody."

The CNE said the abstention rate was a 15.61%. Of 2.79 million votes, the CNE said 2.35 million were valid and the rest were either nullified or blank. MAS: New Constitution to be pro-indigenous, anti-colonial Indigenous, union, and campesino representatives will have a significant presence in the assembly with the victory of the MAS, heralding the resurgence of the Andean indigenist movement and its intellectuals, along with allied social organizations.

Morales wants to "refound Bolivia" with the constitutional rewrite. The indigenous president says he seeks to "end the colonialism and neoliberalism" that he says have held Bolivia back. He said during the campaign prior to the vote that the people should join the constituent assembly to "find a true independence." Morales said that Indian peoples participated in the independence from Spain in 1825, "but they did not found Bolivia." He says they should now "end the discrimination, the disregard that they have been subjected to." The MAS initiative establishes "a communal social economy with private initiative" and accepts rights to private property with conditions.

In the days leading to the vote, Morales said that he also wanted to "guarantee" the nationalization of the country's natural resources by making it a part of the country's Magna Carta. Podemos spokesperson Jose Antonio Aruquipa said his opposition bloc would seek allies to "recovery the state of law and leave behind the state of caprice" that he said MAS was fomenting. He said his group in the assembly would present "a position of reconciliation, consensus, of mutual rediscovery between Bolivians, respecting the rules of democracy that imply taking into account respect for majorities but also listening to what the minorities say."

On Aug. 1, the Asamblea held a preparatory session in Sucre, as the historic capital city strained under the arrival of thousands of visitors. Four regional presidents are slated to attend the Aug. 6 official opening session: Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Nicanor Duarte of Paraguay, Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil.

### *Indigenous woman Silvia Lazarte nominated as assembly head*

MAS approved the candidacy of Silvia Lazarte to be president of the Asamblea Constituyente at the end of July, fulfilling Morales' statements that he would seek an indigenous woman to hold the post. He said the consensus-based process to name her took place during a broad deliberation in the MAS and among sectors allied to the group. Podemos and UN spokespeople, however, objected to MAS naming her, arguing that the president did not have the right to choose the assembly's chief.

Morales described 46-year-old Lazarte as a "companera" who "has been in many mobilizations, she was repressed, detained, and processed" for being a leader of coca producers in Chapare. She will, according to press reports, almost certainly preside over the assembly for the next year. There was

not full gender equity in the assembly, however, with only 80 seats going to women, even though Bolivian law called for gender equality in the candidacies.

### *Autonomy referendum defeated*

Also on the ballot was a referendum on autonomy for the country's nine regional departments. At the national level, 57.59% of voters rejected departmental autonomy. In the four eastern departments of Beni, Santa Cruz, Pando, and Tarija, however, the "Yes" vote won. The country's natural-gas-rich east is the heartland for the movement that seeks greater political, administrative, and economic autonomy from the central government (see NotiSur, 2004-11-12, 2005-02-11, and 2005-11-11). Five western and Andean departments rejected the referendum.

Morales and his allies hailed the July 2 vote as a "triple victory," with the autonomy referendum failing, the absolute majority for the MAS in the assembly, and the president's popularity holding steady after almost six months in office. "Generally, at five months [after taking power] in government, governments wear themselves out, but here there is total strength," said Morales the night of the vote. He said his victory "totally consolidates the nationalization of the hydrocarbons [resources] and the change from the neoliberal model that has done so much damage to our country in the last years."

-- End --