5-10-1989

Panama: Pre-election Day Events & Statements, Part 1

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Panama: Pre-election Day Events & Statements, Part 1

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, May 10, 1989

May 5: The Democratic Civic Opposition Alliance (ADOC) presented claims of procedural "irregularities" before the National Electoral Tribunal. First vice presidency candidate and president of the Christian Democrat party, Ricardo Arias Calderon, described the irregularities in an interview with Notimex. He said that since 1984, 112,000 new voters were added to registration rolls, representing a 29% increase. Since then, Panama's population has grown by only 16%. Next, said Arias, more than 100,000 names on the rolls are duplications, and about 3,000 are of persons who have died. According to Arias, security forces will be able to engage in multiple voting. Notimex reported that the "most recent polls" predict that Carlos Duque, candidate of the National Liberation Coalition (COLINA), will receive 50% of the vote. AP reported that former president Gerald Ford arrived in Panama on the evening of May 4. Ford is a member of a delegation invited by the Panamanian government. The delegation, headed by former President Jimmy Carter, is to observe elections under the auspices of the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. Carter, who is also chairman of the private council, arrived in Panama Friday. ADOC spokespersons complained that the government closed an opposition-owned radio station. At a news conference, Arias Calderon said evidence of government intent to rig the May 7 election is mounting daily. ADOC has hinted it may call supporters into the streets or call a general strike if evidence of fraud -is apparent after the elections. President Bush announced that his government was sending an official delegation of 14 observers headed by Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) to monitor the elections. Panama extended invitations to numerous delegations from Latin American and Caribbean nations, the European Parliament, and Carter's group. No other delegations, said officials, would be welcome. At a news conference, COLINA candidate Carlos Duque denied that fraud was planned. Duque said Noriega should continue in command of the Defense Forces, but that this was up to the military institution. He said ADOC was preparing to use fraud in the sense of promoting "worldwide disinformation" to enable it to "go out onto the street to defend its...failure." US political leaders, he added, have also succumbed to the disinformation, issued and manipulated by the US Embassy in Panama. Duque reiterated that his Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), and the seven others within COLINA, do not seek confrontation with the US. But, he condemned Washington's announcement that it would not recognize disagreeable election results. Notimex reported that "two polls published in Panama" predict a victory for Duque. Notimex received a copy of results of one of the polls, conducted by "Panamanians based in New York." According to the poll, Duque would receive 447,037 votes and ADOC presidential candidate Guillermo Endara, 396,794. In a communique, COLINA asserted its "desire to govern with a nationalist, progressive and conciliatory spirit." The coalition said it was convinced of victory in Sunday's elections, based on an assessment of "irrefutable facts." An example is the fact that its eight parties represent most of the nation's "political tendencies and ideologies." COLINA declared that it would "never accept electoral fraud as a means to gain power," and reiterated its denunciation of domestic and foreign opposition groups which "fabricate fraud to cover up their own frustration." Duque said Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega should remain as head of the Panamanian Defense Forces "until -the year 2000" to assure that Panama gets control of the Panama Canal. Endara has said he will fire Noriega if the general won't retire. About 1.2 million of Panama's 2.2 million residents are registered...
to vote. The 4,255 ballot boxes in 1,940 voting places will open at 7 a.m., and close at 5 p.m. The
government has promised that results will be released within 24 hours after the polls close. Voting
is not mandatory. Panama's constitution specifies a five-year term for president and no re-election
until at least 10 years after leaving office. The 67 members of the National Assembly also serve five
years. Voters will also select 510 precinct representatives, who have minor administrative duties.

May 6: Representatives of unidentified political parties in Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina,
Honduras and Belize cited by Notimex denounced the "tendentious international campaign"
unleashed to delegitimize the Panamanian elections. The politicians were invited to observe the
elections. They charged the US with attempting to influence election results by means of public and
covert actions, and economic and political pressure. The Latin American politicians emphasized
that all parties and coalitions participating in the Panamanian elections had the opportunity to
campaign via the media, street demonstrations and other means of mobilizing support, without
harassment or repression. In a statement broadcast on national TV and radio, President Manuel
Solís Palma denounced systematic "disinformation and lies" that have led to hate and rancor in
the minds and hearts of not a few Panamanians. He asserted that examples of the disinformation
campaign led by the US State Department with the aim of negatively influencing international
public opinion against Panama appear in the US media on a daily basis. This campaign, said Solis
Palma, "is designed to prepare global public opinion to accept a possible direct intervention against
the territorial integrity of Panama... "Based on false and tendentious information that was sent to
its Embassy here, the president of the US wishes to delegitimize the Panamanian electoral process
to the point of requesting that other nations condemn the elections as fraudulent before they
have taken place." Solis Palma added that such action is equivalent to negatively influencing the
elections, and with this, to deny victory to one of the parties competing in the elections. He called
on the Panamanian electorate and opinion leaders to remain alert, and to avoid inciting violence
or confrontation. Nicaraguan Defense Minister Humberto Ortega announced that Nicaragua's
military reserves had been placed on maximum alert to respond to armed intervention in Panama.
At a press conference, he said the elections in Panama constituted a "great lesson for Nicaragua,"
and accused the US government of meddling in that country's elections "in an insolent, vulgar
and domineering" fashion. President of the US Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop John
L. May, announced that the conference supports the Panamanian bishops' rejection of foreign
intervention. May said foreign intervention in Panama "has only served to worsen the domestic
crisis and increase the suffering" of most Panamanians. May said US bishops are constantly urging
Washington to seek out and implement more realistic, broad-based and humanistic policies toward
Panama. May's message was forwarded to Jose Dímas Cedeno, head of the Panamanian Bishops
Conference. After arriving in Panama, Rep. Murtha, head of the official US delegation, said, "We
have come without preconceptions and will be influenced only by the facts." Republican Sen.
John McCain (Ariz.) said, "We condemn the evidence of what we have seen, but hope that these
elections are free and legitimate." Murtha said the delegation had obtained the "appropriate
documentation" from Panamanian authorities to enter the country and would have the opportunity
to observe voting places. He said they would deliver a report to Bush and to the Congress. The three
senators participating in the delegation Bob Graham, Connie Mack and McCain co-sponsored a
Senate resolution on May 4 that condemned "the efforts of the defacto government of Gen. Manuel
Antonio Noriega to rob the elections." In response to a communique from the Mexican government
received on May 4, Danilo Caballero, director of the National Information System (SNI), and
spokesperson for the Panamanian government, told Notimex that Mexico’s declaration of absolute
respect for the doctrine of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations did not come

©2011 The University of New Mexico,
Latin American & Iberian Institute.
All rights reserved.
as a surprise "because Mexico has always maintained respect in the non-intervention doctrine with regard to Panama and the rest of the world." [On May 3, diplomatic sources in Mexico said that the government had not specified in any way its policy toward Panama. The statements were in response to pressure by the Heritage Foundation on Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to withdraw "economic and rhetorical support" from the Panamanian government.] Approximately 800,000 of over 1.1 million registered voters are expected to go to the polls on Sunday. (Basic data from several reports by AP, Notimex and Xinhua, distributed on 05/05-06/89)

-- End --