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## **Statement by Former US President Jimmy Carter**

**Managua, Nicaragua...**The Carter Center is here for the third time to observe national elections, and the Nicaraguan people have always welcomed us. We have witnessed the growth of democracy in this beautiful country.

Tomorrow the people of Nicaragua will exercise your sovereign right to choose your leaders. No matter how narrow the margin, the will of the people as determined by the vote count, and not by a negotiation process, will determine the next president of Nicaragua. The international community will respect this decision and will work to help Nicaragua prosper in coming years.

We have had an opportunity to meet with President Arnoldo Aleman, the Supreme Electoral Council, the presidential candidates from the FSLN, PLC, and Conservative parties, domestic and international observers, General Javier Carrion and Cardinal Obando y Bravo. Election authorities assured us that they have made great progress in meeting the technical challenges, and will guarantee access for domestic and international observers to monitor every step in the election process.

Nicaragua enjoys freedom of assembly and the press. The party representatives told me that they were able to convey their party programs to the citizens. The FSLN and PLC expect to have party pollwatchers (*fiscales*) in nearly all of the polling places, and the Conservatives also will achieve high coverage. Domestic and international observers will monitor the voting process to help assure that it is free and fair. Each candidate assured me that if voting is fair and if the count is honest, he will accept the results even if there is a narrow margin of victory. Further, each expressed a willingness to work with other political forces after the election to help build a brighter future for this country.

The Carter Center has fielded 50 observers, including two in each department and region, and specialists will observe at political party headquarters and the national counting center. Carter Center officials will watch through the night in the municipal facilities where the vote is being faxed into the national counting center. We also will observe the resolution of challenges in the following days.

These international efforts are small when compared to the extensive and sophisticated observation work of the citizens of Nicaragua. Domestic observer groups will field thousands of election observers. Ethics and Transparency will conduct a quick count with a very small margin of error, and this can help verify the official announcement that only the Supreme Electoral Council can make.

We urge every Nicaraguan to exercise the right to choose your leaders. No doubt there will be some minor irregularities, as in all elections, but these do not signify fraud. We have confidence in Nicaraguans and your ability to conduct an honest election that we can verify to the international community as a genuine expression of the will of the Nicaraguan people.

Counting and tabulating votes will be a slow process, and we must all be patient. It may be late at night before the first official announcement of partial results and Monday before a presidential winner can be announced.

Former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias will join me here tonight so that we can observe tomorrow's voting together. The Carter Center's election observation delegation includes citizens from New Zealand, Japan, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as democracies in the Americas, from Brazil to Canada. The world cares about democracy in Nicaragua.

Let me close by thanking all those who have met with our delegation. We are delighted to be back in Nicaragua once again to accompany you in this moment of decision. We have faith in the Nicaraguan people and your commitment to building a strong democracy.

Thank you.