OAS Electoral Observation Mission Congratulates Paraguay on its Elections

November 16, 2015

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM) in Paraguay, led by Ambassador Hugo de Zela, former Chief of Staff of the OAS General Secretariat, congratulates Paraguay’s citizens for their participation in the peaceful municipal elections on Sunday.

The OAS/EOM would like to point out that all actors in the electoral process recognize the work done by the Supreme Electoral Justice Tribunal. The Mission also particularly appreciates the openness and spirit of collaboration with which the electoral authorities and the different institutions that were part of the process welcomed this Mission.

The Mission deployed 24 international experts and observers, who visited 550 polling stations on election day. The observers found that the polling stations opened on time and had all the materials needed for ballots to be cast. It is also important to note that one of the strengths of this electoral process is the speed with which the preliminary electoral results were compiled and released.

The OAS/EOM highlights the effort made to move forward in guaranteeing the political rights of Paraguayans by implementing the “accessible vote” program, designed to facilitate voting by people with disabilities, pregnant women, and senior citizens. However, opportunities to improve the program’s implementation were observed. This effort has been the result of joint work between organized civil society and the electoral justice system.

Based on the Mission’s observations and the information it collected in meetings with electoral authorities, members of the government, political parties, and civil society representatives, the OAS/EOM presents the following observations and preliminary recommendations:
**Composition of Polling Stations**

The Mission received complaints from different political forces regarding the composition of polling stations. In this regard, the Mission recommends that the pluralism expressed by the diversity of political forces be reflected in polling station composition.

The OAS/EOM observed that sometimes political party observers and representatives carried out functions that belong to members of polling stations and civic boards. To avoid this, the Mission suggests that more training be provided to polling station members and to political parties and that the rules be applied more strictly.

**Political-Electoral Financing**

These elections marked the first time Law No. 4743/2012, regulating political-electoral financing, was applied. Having a legal mechanism of this type represents a step forward in transparency and fairness in an election. However, its design and implementation point to significant weaknesses.

The Mission received reports and complaints concerning the failure to turn over public funds. To verify the facts, the Mission held meetings with all the authorities involved. It also observed, on this same issue, that the political-electoral financing system does not have enough tools to ensure transparency in terms of the source and destination of political parties’ funds, or to verify and punish the improper use of state resources in campaigns.

In this context, the EOM welcomes the willingness of political forces to improve the system.

**Participation of Women**

The OAS/EOM observed with concern the low participation of women in these elections. Only 10.3 percent of candidates to mayoral positions and 36.8 percent of candidates to municipal councils were women. This situation can be attributed, to a large extent, to the fact that the 20 percent quota applies only to candidate lists for party primary elections. In order to ensure women’s greater access to publicly elected offices, the Mission recommends implementing progressively higher quotas toward parity, including alternation of candidates on the lists by gender and imposition of penalties to bar the registration of lists that fail to comply with these measures.
Exit Polls

With regard to the publication of exit poll results, the Mission observed the use of subterfuge to release preliminary data even though this is against the law. Considering that exit polls are unreliable mechanisms that are easy to manipulate and can be used to influence voters, the Mission firmly urges adherence to the regulations on this matter, which clearly prohibit these types of practices.

Finally, the Mission would like to draw attention to the professionalism of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the progress made on inclusive voting, and the respect for the secrecy of the ballot and for the popular will. The purpose of these recommendations is to contribute to the improvement of structural aspects of the electoral system. The Mission will delve more deeply into the issues and recommendations laid out above in its report to the OAS Permanent Council.

The OAS/EOM appreciates the financial contributions of Argentina, Colombia, Korea, the United States, Israel, Peru, Serbia, and Turkey, which made it possible for this Mission to be deployed.