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OAS Mission Hails High Voter Turnout in Guatemala

The Organization of American States' Electoral Observation Mission (OAS/EOM) to Guatemala, led by Juan Pablo Corlazzoli, congratulates the voters and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) on yesterday's elections. Citizens' commitment to strengthening democracy in the country was evidenced by the increase in voter participation.

The Mission notes the responsible way that members of the polling stations (JRVs), party poll watchers, and all TSE personnel carried out their work during the opening of the polls, the voting process, and the ballot count. Their active and enthusiastic cooperation, along with the inclusion of young people and women, made a significant contribution to the success of this stage of the electoral process.

The Mission recognizes the TSE for having overcome the challenges it faced in terms of logistics and electoral technology, despite the fact that it received a lower budget than it had requested and later than expected. The Mission also observed that the Tribunal was the subject of criticisms, many of them unfounded, which aimed to weaken it as an institution. In this context, the Mission believes it is important to strengthen the body that serves as a guarantor of democracy in the country in time for the second round of the presidential election, on October 25, and future elections.

The Mission's 76 experts and observers, who were deployed across Guatemala's 22 departments, went to more than 560 polling centers on Sunday. The polling stations that were observed opened on time and in almost all cases were composed of full members and equipped with the electoral materials needed for people to cast their votes. After the polls closed, preliminary results were sent out transparently and without interruption, which made it possible to keep the population informed.

The Mission team directly observed voters being transported to the polls and took note of complaints regarding this practice. It is important to make a distinction between political parties' legitimate capacity to mobilize their supporters to get to the polls, on the one hand, and possible incidents of vote buying or coercion, on the other.

The OAS/EOM regrets the isolated incidents of violence that took place both during the pre-electoral period and on the day of the elections. However, it would like to stress the inter-institutional cooperation among security forces, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the TSE, and

other government agencies. This coordination made it possible to prevent and, where necessary, address incidents.

In terms of campaign financing, the Mission received complaints from all political and civil sectors concerning the urgent need to modify the system of financing and oversight, to be able to determine with certainty the source and intended use of the funds. The Mission reiterates the recommendation it made in 2011, in which it suggested providing the TSE with the tools it needs for this purpose.

The Mission stresses the need to promote greater political and electoral inclusion of women and indigenous peoples. Despite their numbers in the population, their participation as candidates and their access to popularly elected offices continues to be a major challenge for Guatemala. The OAS/EOM recommends the adoption of affirmative action measures that will give them greater participation in the electoral process.

The Mission will be in the country until the final results are made official, and it will observe the various stages of the process before the second round of the presidential election. Taking into account that the final vote count begins today, it calls on the political forces to ensure that any appeals and challenges follow the procedure established by law.

The Mission would like to acknowledge the electoral authorities and all government institutions for their openness and generosity, which created the necessary conditions for the Mission to be able to work independently. It would also like to express its appreciation for the financial contributions made by Argentina, Canada, Chile, Spain, the United States, Serbia, and Switzerland, which made the Mission's deployment possible.

Following the second round, the Mission will present a report in which it will compile its observations concerning electoral organization and technology, campaign financing, electoral justice, gender, participation of indigenous peoples, security, and election-related crimes. The work of the Mission aims to contribute to the improvement of the electoral system and to the strengthening of democracy in Guatemala.