



National Lawyers Guild Delegation Observes Changes in the Electoral Process in El Salvador

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PRESS RELEASE

The National Lawyers Guild (“NLG”) is an association of attorneys, law students, and legal workers that has worked to defend human rights since its founding seventy-five years ago as an alternative to the then racially discriminatory American Bar Association. The NLG has previously sent official observers to elections in Asia, Europe, and throughout the Americas.

The NLG has previously observed elections in El Salvador in 2004 and 2009. In the eight day period preceding the March 11 election, our delegation of attorneys, law students, and academic experts, met with Salvadoran constitutional attorneys, judges, government officials and non-governmental organizations. We also participated in a full-day training conducted by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (“TSE”).

On election day, the NLG delegation observed the election process at multiple voting centers in San Salvador, Santa Ana, and La Union, as election observers accredited by the TSE. We had complete and unrestricted access to all areas of the voting centers. We were freely able to speak to voters, election workers, and representatives of the political parties.

El Salvador has adopted numerous changes to the electoral process since 2009. We were impressed with the ability of the TSE to respond to numerous and contradictory mandates imposed shortly before the elections by both the Supreme Court and the Assembly. In particular, the move towards residential voting appears to hold the promise of expanding access of people to the voting process. However, we are concerned that the numerous and late changes to voting procedures had the potential to confuse voters and reduce voter participation. The election processes we observed appeared to be in accordance with the electoral law and the procedures established by the TSE. We also commend the election workers that we observed for their work and civic contributions. Voters were able to exercise a secret ballot and the integrity of the vote count was ensured by the participation of the political parties and the procedures developed by the TSE.

Whether an election can be considered fully free and fair must involve considerations beyond the immediate processes conducted on election day. As is also true in the United States and other countries, a fully democratic process should provide all parties equal access to media and advertising and not be characterized by immense disparity in campaign funding. These issues, however, were beyond the immediate scope of our delegation.

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