

Saturday, Nov. 3, 2001

Kay Torrance
In Managua, 077-71228

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

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