

# 2006 Nicaraguan Elections and the US Government Role

Report of the Nicaragua Network Delegation to investigate US intervention in the Nicaraguan elections of November 2006

## Introduction

The Nicaragua Network sent a delegation of academics and representatives of human rights and solidarity groups to Nicaragua June 17-24, 2006 to investigate the role of the US government in Nicaragua's presidential election scheduled for November 5, 2006. The Nicaragua Network is a national network of local committees which has worked for 27 years to change US government policy toward Nicaragua.

In all we held formal meetings with 30 people representing the full spectrum of Nicaragua's politics. For a list of delegates and a list of those with whom we met in Nicaragua see Appendices 1 and 2.

One week after the delegation returned to the US, one of the four principal presidential candidates, Herty Lewites, died of a heart attack. While domestically his death had profound consequences, it had no effect on the findings of our delegation. The delegation had a narrow mission to investigate the US government role in the Nicaraguan election. The delegates encompassed a range of opinion about the appropriateness of US government involvement in Nicaragua's election ranging from no role is appropriate given the US government's history of invasions, occupations, and political/economic domination of Nicaragua, to a belief that providing nonpartisan technical support and training is an appropriate way to support the strengthening of democratic institutions.

While individual delegates may or may not have had preferences for particular candidates or parties in the election, the delegation maintained strict neutrality and the Nicaragua Network, while believing that Nicaraguans would likely be better off if one of the parties of the Left were to win, has not endorsed nor expressed a preference for any candidate or party in the 2006 election.

On Friday, June 23, the delegation held a press conference co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Committee of English-Speaking Persons Resident in Nicaragua (better known as Casa Ben Linder), Asociación Kairos para la Formación and the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights in order to present our findings and conclusions. The press conference was attended by journalists from six television stations, the two principal Managua daily newspapers, and 15 radio stations. The press conference received extensive coverage in the Nicaragua media.



Delegation members face the Nicaraguan media to report on their investigation into the interference of the US in the country's upcoming elections. Photo: Arnie Matlin

## **Conclusions/Executive Summary**

### **Following are the conclusions presented at the June 23 press conference:**

1. The Nicaraguan people are able to analyze and explain the current political situation and the country's history in a very sophisticated, informed and coherent manner.

2. With the exception of U.S. Ambassador Paul Trivelli and the International Republican Institute (IRI), all the persons interviewed believed that the government of the United States had gone beyond what was appropriate and correct in its involvement in the electoral process. Even the spokesperson for Eduardo Montealegre, the US-favored candidate of the National Liberal Alliance (ALN), said Trivelli's statements had probably hurt his candidate.

3. Nicaraguans expressed to us emphatically their desire for sovereignty, saying many times that they want to be able to resolve their affairs themselves and are capable of doing so.

4. We heard many times, including from all four campaigns, that the 20% of the national budget allowed for social spending (health, education, etc.) under IMF structural adjustment conditions is not enough to resolve the great social problems from which Nicaragua suffers.

5. We heard many times that the United States has intervened continuously in Nicaragua but that the current electoral interference is particularly heavy-handed. One person said that there is a thin line between cooperation and interference. While Nicaraguans differ on where that line is, everyone we met with believes that Ambassador Trivelli has crossed it.

### **Specifically we promised that we, as citizens of the United States, are:**

1. Committed to work to report to the people of the US the information we have gathered, presenting it in a way that will raise their awareness so that they will speak up to stop the intervention of the United States in the Nicaraguan electoral process.

2. Committed to work energetically, given all that we have heard and understood from the men and women of Nicaragua, to expose and oppose interventionist practices and the misuse of power by our government that impedes the proper functioning of Nicaragua's electoral process. We will do all in our power and we hope that this will help the Nicaraguan people to do the same, given that they have expressed the strong desire to live in a true democracy.

3. Committed to urge, and demand, as members of the civil society of the United States, that our government, represented especially by Ambassador Paul Trivelli, stop immediately its intervention and that it find a role that will truly help forge democracy in Nicaragua. This democracy faces great obstacles expressed in the powerful and interventionist policies that have formed the history between Nicaragua and the United States.

An interesting observation we made from our meetings is that the amount of money the US is spending on the election depends on who is talking. Trivelli's assistant told us the US is spending \$12 million. When Trivelli joined the meeting he said \$13 million. The IRI representative told us it is \$10 million divided equally between the IRI, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), IFES (a technical organization providing assistance to the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council), and the Organization of American States mission to observe the elections. But, the OAS representative told us their entire budget from all sources is under \$2 million from a number of sources.

So, there is a lot of unaccounted for money. Many Nicaraguans we met with are suspicious that money is being used covertly to support Montealegre, the candidate favored by the US. This and other unanswered questions seem to mandate a follow-up delegation before the November 5 election.

## Political Background – the Nicaraguan Parties

Historically Nicaragua has had two major political parties grounded, as in much of Latin America, in the landed oligarchy (Conservative Party) and the modernizing business sector (Liberals). Prior to 1990, in the entire history of Nicaragua, government control only changed hands between the parties through violence. In 1979 with the overthrow of the 45 year Liberal Party Somoza dictatorship, a Leftist revolutionary party, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) came to power and converted itself to an electoral party. Throughout Nicaragua's history there were a plethora of small parties and splinter parties of both the Liberals and Conservatives, but none of these small parties ever achieved a national constituency.

In 1984 Nicaragua held national elections declared by international election observers to be "free and fair" that were won by the FSLN with Daniel Ortega as president.

In 1990 the FSLN lost the election to a 14 party coalition, constructed by the US government, called the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) and headed by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of newspaper publisher Pedro Joaquin Chamorro whose 1978 assassination by Somoza accelerated the unification of the middle and business classes in opposition to the dictatorship. The passing of government power from Ortega to Chamorro was the first democratic and peaceful change of power from one party to another in Nicaraguan history.

Chamorro was succeeded in 1996 by Managua Mayor Arnoldo Aleman who unified the right-wing Liberal parties under his Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). His running mate, Enrique Bolaños, was from the Conservative party and this unification of right-wing parties has meant the eclipse of the Conservative party and an end to its projection as a national political force.

Bolaños succeeded Aleman in 2001 but soon lost the support of the great majority of PLC militants when he prosecuted Aleman for corruption. Aleman was found guilty of money laundering and sentenced to 20 years in prison. To date, he has mostly served his sentence under house arrest or "district" arrest which allows him some movement in Managua. Aleman is under threat of additional criminal proceeding in Nicaragua, Panama, and the US. Bolaños' efforts to build an alternative electoral option to Aleman's PLC have failed and he has ruled



Current President Enrique Bolaños prosecuted his predecessor, Arnoldo Aleman, for corruption. Photo: [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)

ineffectively without perceptible support in the National Assembly, Nicaragua's legislature.

Aleman's PLC and Ortega's FLSN concluded what many in Nicaragua call a "pact" to limit Nicaragua's political options to a two party state with all the branches of government and levers of power divided between the two dominant parties. While this "pact" is similar to the US system which is structured to impede third parties from contesting for state power with Democrats and Republicans, there has been fierce opposition to it from some political and civil society sectors which object to the "strong man" (caudillo) leadership of Aleman and Ortega. The US government has also spoken out strongly against the so-called parties of the pact, the PLC and FSLN.

As a result of both internal opposition and US government intervention, splinter parties from both the Left and the Right have broken off from the main parties and won access to the November ballot.

On the Right is the PLC with presidential candidate Jose Rizo, an Aleman loyalist who resigned the Vice-Presidency to run, and the National Liberal Alliance-Conservative Party (ALN-PC) led by banker Eduardo Montealegre who has headed numerous governmental ministries under both Aleman and Bolaños.

On the Left is the FSLN headed by former President Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) whose candidate is former Sandinista Managua Mayor Herty Lewites who was expelled from the FSLN for contesting with Ortega for the nomination. After Lewites' death the MRS replaced him with his vice-presidential running mate, Edmundo Jarquin. Jarquin was Minister of Foreign Cooperation from 1981-1984 after which he served as Ambassador to Spain and Mexico. Since the FLSN electoral defeat in 1990, he served two years as a deputy in the National Assembly and until recently he worked for the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC.

The final candidate on the ballot, former legendary Sandinista commander-turned-contra leader, Eden Pastora, for the Alternative for Change Party is not expected to be a factor in the election.

A candidate can win the presidency on the first ballot with 35% and a five point lead over the second place candidate. Failing this a second vote will be held limited to the two leading candidates. Slates for National Assembly and Central American Parliament seats are elected proportionally according to the first round voting so the four major parties are all expected to have some representation in the legislature no matter who is elected president.

## Geo-Political and Bilateral Context of the Election

Virtually all of the meetings we held with non-US funded civil society organizations referred to US government intervention as a force of nature or the all pervading "environment" within which Nicaraguan politics operates. Christian Base Community leader Rafael Valdez said, "Reality is very stubborn. Imperialism is alive and has a tail. The rationale used to be communism and now it's terrorism. So now, any of us who don't agree are 'terrorists.'" His wife, Carmen García de Valdez added, "I wish they (the US) would stop treating us like children."

Political Economist Carlos Pacheco put the elections in geo-political terms asserting that European unity and the emergence of China have prompted the US to try to take firmer control of Latin America. He said, "The US is using economic means to achieve political goals and vice versa. Both are used to consolidate power and control." Pacheco was pessimistic about the future of Central America. "It does not matter if the FSLN or the FMLN (El Salvador) win because the Central America Free Trade Agreement has structured things for the next 30 years."

Pacheco compared the US's Millennium Challenge Account (not to be confused with the UN's Millennium Development Goals) to the Alliance for Progress which he said put the brakes on social movements in the 1960's. The Millennium Challenge Account's board of directors includes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the US Trade Representative, the head of US Agency for International Development (USAID), political advisors from Freedom House and



Analyst Carlos Pacheco noted that Donald Rumsfeld will be in Nicaragua in November. Photo: Chuck Kaufman

the National Endowment for Democracy, and former CIA Director James Woolsey. "Nicaragua is immersed in that reality," he said. He also pointed out that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld will be in Nicaragua at the time of the elections attending a meeting of Latin American defense ministers and noted that that is quite a coincidence given the US history of military intervention in Nicaragua.

William Rodriguez from the Center for International Studies told us that there has never been an election in Nicaragua without interference from the US. He also pointed out the presence of US marines in Nicaragua since Hurricane Mitch devastated the nation in 1998. "They are doing things that no one is aware of. Their projects aren't even in the National Development Plan." Pacheco also talked about US military activities in the context of the Millennium Challenge Account projects all of which are in the departments of Leon and Chinandega, strongholds of the FSLN and site of the Consignina peninsula where the US is rumored to be planning to build a military base which will allow it military control of the Gulf of Fonseca between Nicaragua and El Salvador. The Salvadoran port of Cortez is the expected terminus of a high speed cross isthmus freight railroad to supplement the Panama Canal for carrying Asian goods to the Eastern US and Europe.



Our meetings with both Maria Lopez Vigil, editor-in-chief of the acclaimed

William Rodriguez (right) said there had never been an election in Nicaragua without US interference. Photo: Chuck Kaufman

political journal *envío*, and Gonzalo Salgado of the Consumer Defense Network put US intervention in a 200 year perspective. They referenced Cornelius Vanderbilt who in 1849 got an exclusive contract to build a canal across Nicaragua, to William Walker and his filibusters who ruled the country for a few years in the 1850's and re-instated slavery, to the occupation of Nicaragua by US marines from 1910-1933, to the imposition of the Somoza dictatorship, to the contra war and the US intervention in the 1990 presidential election.

Lopez Vigil said, "You know all that, but we feel it. Many people have internalized it. Even a lot of poor people accept that because the US is powerful it is right that it is in control. Because so many efforts in Nicaragua and Latin America have failed, many say 'let's not fight with them [US]'."

She reminded the delegation of the picture of Violeta Chamorro being hugged in Washington by Pres. George H. W. Bush during the 1990 election campaign and how in the 1996 election the US forced out of the race Noel Vidaurre, the Conservative Party candidate so that Arnoldo Aleman could gain all the anti-Sandinista votes and defeat FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega.

Lopez Vigil was among a number of people who prophesied that the US will try to force out the weaker of Montealegre or Rizo in mid-September so as to insure a united right-wing

candidacy.

Salgado of the Consumer Defense Network said, "US officials' statements have a great effect on the people's thinking about who they will vote for. The message they are receiving is that anyone in favor of the US will have its blessing. They believe that to be in opposition to the US hurts their country and to be in favor is to favor development."

Dr. Bayardo Izabá, director of the non-partisan Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) also spoke of the effect of US officials' statements. "Agents of corruption" pressure citizens to vote for the U.S. favorite. He recounted the U.S. government's threat two years ago to "restrict" remittances in El Salvador if the election did not go their way. "A declaration like that will distort Nicaragua's choices," he added.

Georgina Muñoz, president of the Civil Coordinator, a coalition of 600 civil society organizations formed to combat the Aleman government's failure to respond to the crisis of Hurricane Mitch, said that the US has intervened in every election including 1984. In that election the US forced leading opposition candidate Arturo Cruz out of the race after it became obvious that he would lose to Ortega.

"[US Ambassador Paul] Trivelli claims neutrality," she said. "He is very vulgar and forceful. Publicly he has declared for Montealegre. He is very interventionist and speaks as if he were a national citizen. So his positions are very up front. We feel trapped by the policies that come from the embassy and the US."

The delegation meeting with local officials and grassroots leaders in Esteli and Condega confirmed the same attitudes we heard in Managua. Mauricio Parata, director of an NGO that serves former combatants of both the army and resistance (contras) said, "US Ambassadors act as if they were officials of the Nicaraguan government. [Oliver] Garza, [Barbara] Moore, [Paul] Trivelli – many have passed through the US embassy, all with a mission. The US government goal is that no other party will win but the party of their own [US] interests. Sometimes people think because people are poor and have a low level of education they don't know what's going on."

## **Meetings with the US funded organizations**

### ***International Republican Institute (IRI)***

The IRI is one of four core groups of the National Endowment for Democracy, a quasi-private US organization that receives its budget from Congress but is not responsible to Congress for its activities and expenditures. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) is Chairman of the IRI. The in-country IRI office has its own programs and makes grants to other Nicaraguan organizations for "training and technical support."

The delegation met with Ivania M. Vega Rueda, Program Officer. Country Director Gilberto Valdes with whom we had requested a meeting was not present. Ms. Vega was a very enthusiastic young person who spoke excellent English and was quite open and proud of the role the IRI is playing in the elections. She presented a Power-point presentation with many charts and details. She told us that the IRI had been working there since 2004, that among its priorities are actively reaching out to the youth, women and minorities to promote political awareness and participation.

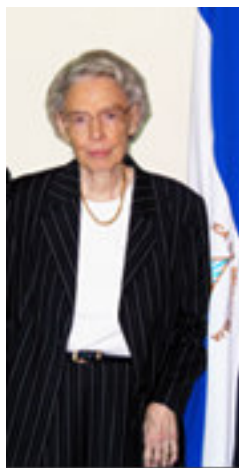
She was open about the IRI's effort to build opposition to the "pact parties" FSLN and PLC. "We created it," she said of the Movement for Nicaragua which she claimed organized several anti-pact marches. "We helped organize them," she said. (Her Power-point chart did acknowledge a role by the Civil Coordinator and other center and left organizations in organizing the

marches.)

She said that the IRI is working to strengthen the internal organization of political parties.” We tell them what we think they need and propose to the groups.” She said the IRI trained more than 1,000 candidates and leaders in political skills for the 2004 municipal elections. They work at coalition building and gave technical support for the creation of President Bolaños’ APRE party and have worked to consolidate the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN) which is split between support for the PLC and the US-backed ALN-PC. “We are trying to create a new generation of party leaders who care about people,” she said and expressed pride that that IRI had helped consolidate 34 political parties down to 19!

Vega said that the IRI is organizing national and departmental youth organizations for Montealegre’s ALN-PC party as they had previously for the Conservative Party. She also said the IRI had written a bill for the National Assembly to “create civil society organizations” and a bill that didn’t pass to require parties to hold primaries to choose candidates.

Vega said that one of the IRI’s main functions at this time is to train poll watchers; they train the trainers and so far have trained 320. They in turn will train 30,000 poll watchers. Each party has a total of 18,750 poll watchers on Election Day. (This figure doesn’t match with other NED-funded organizations which said there are 30,000 polling places. We have not confirmed which figure is correct.) They work with the Leadership Institute of the Colegio Americano to do training. They will not be training poll watchers for the FSLN or the PLC “because they don’t need the help,” she said.



IRI Board member Jeanne Kirkpatrick had visited Nicaragua in April to support so-called “democratic forces.” Photo: www.iri.org

They reach out to high schools and distribute political education manuals (8,000 so far). There will be 400,000 new voters (16 years old) and they are encouraged to get their voter identification cards before August 5. She said that youth

are 60% of the voters.

Vega said that the US was providing \$10 million distributed equally thru NED to IRI, National Democratic Institute (NDI), IFES (an organization providing funding and technical support to the Supreme Electoral Commission) and OAS election observation mission. This distribution of funding was not confirmed by Patricio Gajardo of the OAS mission who put its entire budget at under \$2 million from several sources.

Vega equated the relationship between Nicaragua and the US to that of a son to a father. “Children should not argue with their parents,” she said.

### ***Instituto Nicaragüense de Estudios Humanísticos (INEH)***

The delegation met with Yamileth Alguera and Fanor Avendaño. INEH is an organization that is dedicated to training and community participation with funding from the NED, AID, Konrad Adenauer, the United Nations Development Program, BIP from Spain and their own fundraising activities. It offers a masters in public administration with a relatively low tuition price (\$3500 or even \$100 for poor people), that has served politicians and civil society figures from a range of political positions. In Alguera’s words” our mission is to promote new culture, politics and economics of development, to strengthen education for both the popular sectors and the middle class.” Among their other programs is a labor rights program in the free trade zones in which they offer workshops bringing workers and managers together.

Through their citizen participation programs (at the time of the meeting, their work in the on-going voter registration list verification process), they clearly hope to help undermine the politics of the pact although their work is non-partisan and they have worked, as Avendaño said “with sectors such as the PLC, FSLN, Herty Lewites, Montealegre and those who don’t belong to a sector.” Additionally Avendaño noted that while he personally identifies with the international Christian Democracy movement, the INEH as a whole does not identify with any particular movement, pointing out that the young man who sat in on the meeting is running as a candidate with the MRS. Both Alguera and Avendaño have been involved in opposition politics since the 1980s when Alguera was active in the Club Estudiantil del Periódico and Avendaño was active in the Centro de Formación Juvenil, with funding from NED and the international Christian Democrats.

### ***Hagamos Democracia***

The delegation spoke to Yader Amiker Loza Jarquín and Sergio Narvaez. In addition, there are six other staff members. They have one office in Managua. They have interest in getting legal status in the United States so that they can collect tax deductible donations from US citizens.

Hagamos Democracia is an NGO, founded in '95 by an interested group of people. Narvaez said that they are non-partisan. Staff members come from different parties but have some agreement “on what democracy is.” Hagamos Democracia works in two main domains, civic education and the elections.

Civic education involves teaching the public about laws and how to make a law. They have a program for high school students where they take them to the National Assembly to see how a law is constituted.

They are mostly involved in the elections as electoral observers and trainers of electoral observers. They hold forums about elections for National Assembly deputies and mayors. This year both the MRS and ALN asked to have trainings.

Every five years they publish a Who’s Who in the National Assembly much like similar directories in the United States listing who is in Congress.

Hagamos Democracia receives money from IFES (an NGO within AID that is dedicated to electoral technical assistance), IRI, NED, Denmark, Finland, the World Bank, and Japan. However, their entire electoral budget comes from IRI and NED.

There are 10,000 voting places in Nicaragua. (Others used figures of 18,750 and 30,000. With a voter registration list of approximately 2.4 million and polling places limited to 400 voters, there should be approximately 6,000 polling sites.) Each party should train 6,000 observers- Hagamos Democracia trains the trainers who then will train 12,000 observers from the MRS (assisted by the Colegio Americano) and 30,000 observers from the ALN.

On actions of US Ambassador Trivelli, Narvaez said, “Trivelli is a high profile figure. There are others that say and do things but don’t get the same kind of press. Some of his declarations have been misinterpreted by the press.” The example he gave was when Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoelich visited Nicaragua and set off a firestorm when he called PLC leader and former president Arnoldo Alemán a criminal. In Spanish, “criminal” is a very strong word that is used for killers. Delinquent is the word they use for financial crimes.

Narvaez added “If the United States says ‘be careful,’ people are thinking that if we elect someone who is prone to conflicts with the United States we will have problems.”

Narvaez expressed his opinion of the candidates, being quite critical in his assessment of



Ortega. He said with Jose Rizo, candidate of the PLC “we would have more Arnoldism (referring to Aleman). Loza said Herty Lewites is a good option but Narvaez expressed reservations saying, “There is lots of Sandinismo around him, how can I trust that?” Narvaez said a Montealegre victory would guarantee stability and a good relationship with foreigners resulting in a good future for economic development and continued struggle against corruption.

## **Meetings with the political parties**

### ***Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), candidate: Herty Lewites (replaced by Edmundo Jarquin)***

The MRS was formed in 1995 when Social Democrats led by former Vice President Sergio Ramirez and FSLN guerrilla leader and Health Minister Dora Maria Tellez split from the FSLN. Because it already had a ballot position in the 2006 election, the Movement to Rescue Sandinismo (also MRS) formed by Herty Lewites and joined by some members of the “Democratic Left” after Lewites and FSLN National Directorate member Victor Hugo Tinoco were expelled from the party, chose to run under the MRS banner.

The delegation met with MRS vice president Enrique Saenz who is also an MRS candidate for the National Assembly from Managua. Saenz said, “Since 1990 the US has intervened in



MRS candidate Herty Lewites died one week after the delegation returned to the US. Photo: El Nuevo Diario.

Nicaragua with clear support for US interests. It has become more intense since 1996. The US wanted to polarize the population into two groups and has effectively pushed a large part of the population to be for or against the FSLN. But this policy has not been successful due to the formation of the Pact between Aleman and Ortega. The US did not see that two ideological adversaries would come together to share power. Due to this Pact the US alliance with Aleman was no longer functional so the US created the ALN-PC with Montealegre as the presidential candidate. The US Ambassador has made it clear that Montealegre represents the US interests.

Montealegre met with Cheney in DC. With clear support for only one candidate, the US distorts and harms the MRS and the political process in Nicaragua.” he said.

### ***Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), candidate: Daniel Ortega***

The delegation met with René Núñez, member of the FSLN National Directorate and former President of the National Assembly. Núñez noted that the FSLN organized Nicaragua’s first democratic election in 1984 and when it lost in 1990 became “the only political party that had taken power through arms and given it up through elections.”

He condemned US intervention in Nicaragua’s elections including those in 1996 and 2001. He quoted former and current Costa Rican President Oscar Arias as saying at the time of elections in Nicaragua, “For things less important than happened here, in any other country the election would be condemned. But you have to accept the result and move forward.”

Núñez said that in every election anti-democratic elements emerge that say the FSLN can participate but not win. He pointed to the Christmas 1989 US invasion of Panama as sending a message to Nicaraguans who were to vote two months later “to show what would happen here.”

He said that now for over a year there has been renewed intervention from the US. “We have tried for 15 years to erase the memory of war because that’s what the people fear most.” Núñez said that the US intention is to leave the impression that an FSLN victory would lead to a renewed war. “A peaceful electoral contest would benefit the FSLN,” he said.

### ***Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC), candidate: Jose Rizo***

The delegation met with Jose Alvarado who accepted the vice-presidential nomination for the PLC after failing himself to become the candidate of a unified Right. He said he was also offered the vice-presidency of Montealegre’s ALN-PC.

Alvarado identified a culture of US intervention in domestic elections in Latin America and Nicaragua in particular. He acknowledged that international cooperation is important but that there is a “thin line” between cooperation and intervention. Alvarado, who lived for several years in the United States said, “I love the United States. I think the US could do more for its own citizens. I know the US people and their values, and like them, but we don’t want anyone telling us how to do things.” He said that the US has made many foreign policy mistakes in Latin America because of crossing the line between assistance and intervention.

He said he has personal knowledge that the US is backing Montealegre because he talked with both him and the embassy while he was being offered the position of Montealegre’s running mate. He said that the IRI is practically the instrument of one candidate and that he has told IRI country director Gilberto Valdez, “Please, you are like the head of the campaign of Montealegre.”

About Trivelli’s statements on the election Alvarado said, “It’s a matter of how it’s said. To recommend is not the same as to impose. If there is intervention in local politics, even your friends will begin to see you as an adversary.”

When asked about the rumor that the US will force Rizo out of the race in September, Alvarado responded, “We have been trying to come together, but we can do it ourselves. We don’t need someone from outside forcing us to do so.”



The delegation met with the vice-presidential candidate of the PLC, Jose Alvarado. Photo: [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)

### ***National Liberal Alliance-Conservative Party (ALN-PC), candidate: Eduardo Montealegre***

The ALN-PC alliance was formed after US pressure failed to convince the PLC to dump Aleman as its leader. There is a unanimous opinion among civil society, the other parties, and the media that Montealegre is “the US candidate.”

The delegation met with Eduardo Urcuyo, official spokesman for the ALN-PC. He said, “Our candidate has a very good acceptance on the part of the US. He was just with Vice President Cheney and Condoleeza Rice last week.” He said it is true that they are trying to unite the

Right. "All people would prefer to unite with the PLC because that would guarantee victory," he said.

He said there are three dangers in the elections: 1) the Sandinistas win, 2) if "we win by a large margin but the Sandinistas control the streets," and, 3) if everyone gets 25% and there's deadlock.

Urcuyo claimed that the ALN-PC is "receiving very little help because of the system the US has. In order for the US to give us \$1 million would take a year."

About US involvement in the election he said, "People don't like US intervention in domestic affairs. In general people don't like to see America involved." He also said about Trivelli's strong statements, "Trivelli began getting too involved in our affairs, sticking his hand in every day. In fact, he's probably hurting us because people are saying we're the candidate of the gringos."

## Meetings with the US Embassy and OAS Election Mission

### US Embassy in Nicaragua

The delegation meeting was with Tim Smith, the Deputy Political Officer; he has been at the embassy for two years. "Nicaragua has been democratic since 1990. There have been two forces, left and right who have been sharing and competing for power. President Aleman stole money from international donors after Hurricane Mitch and President Bolaños made a deal with the FSLN to prosecute him. Aleman was found guilty and got 20 years and is currently in prison in his mansion in Managua and can't leave the country. Since that time there has been a split in the Right."

Smith said that the US is spending \$12 million to see that the election is free and fair. The OAS is here through January, he said, and they are funding the verification process. The US is encouraging voter observation.

Ambassador Trivelli joined the meeting unexpectedly and met with the delegation for 45 minutes. Regarding US policy, he said, "We want to see a democratic, prosperous and secure Nicaragua. The US has given over \$1.5 billion over the last 15 years to hurricane relief, health care and the judicial system. The US has better relations with the police and army since 1990. But we don't sell them weapons."



The group met with Ambassador Trivelli for 45 minutes. Photo: El Nuevo Diario

In his view there are some positive things: the free trade agreement, Millennium Challenge Account disbursement and reduction in debt. For security Nicaragua must get rid of 1000 surface-to-air missiles, Trivelli said.

He said, "The US will accept any democratically elected government but it must respect US concerns like terrorism and drugs." Trivelli is surprised at what he sees as the progress Nicaragua has made since he worked in the embassy here from 1992-1995. "There is better education, justice system, security, economic opportunities, infrastructure and export markets," he said, using what social and economic indicators to make that assessment he did not say.

His comments regarding the candidates: Ortega's platform is dangerous. He might reverse free trade and revert to a mixed economy...

Lewites is a Sandinista but is pragmatic and they can talk. "It would be like a Lula (in Brazil), you can talk to him, but it's difficult.

Jose Rizo would fall back into *caudillismo* and is connected to Aleman.

Montealegre has integrity, is pro private sector and is not corrupt.

Trivelli said that the US will be spending \$13 million on the Nicaraguan election, one million more than his deputy Smith had stated and \$3 million more than the IRI had reported. The delegation notes these differing figures with interest.

When asked if the US was funding political parties he said, "We don't directly fund political parties." The US funds organizations like: IRI, NDI, IFES & the OAS. "We do not fund parties but we may fund poll watchers, which are trained by the mentioned organizations."

Trivelli maintained that the US does not "embrace any candidate. We will accept the results." He went on to say that Nicaraguans "must reject the *caudillismo* of Daniel Ortega and Aleman." In a somewhat opaque statement Trivelli said that if Ortega were to win, the concept of governments recognizing governments wouldn't exist anymore and it was a 19th century concept anyway. "The relationship would depend on what his government put in place," Trivelli said.

Trivelli said that the US had taken away "17 or 18" visas from Aleman's family and close associates.

Trivelli also touted the Millennium Challenge Account work the US is funding in Leon and Chinandega, identifying property titling and infrastructure building as the major focus.

### ***OAS Accompaniment Mission of the Nicaragua 2006 Democratic and Electoral Process***

The delegation met with Patricio Gajardo, Technical Coordinator of the OAS Mission. The OAS mission monitored the Atlantic Coast Autonomous Regional Council elections in February and is preparing a report on the voter registration list verification process which ended during our delegation. Gajardo said that the OAS mission visited about one-fourth of the centers of verification during the process, and that they are now preparing their logistical plan for observing the November election.

The next phase of the OAS mission is to work with the Supreme Electoral Council to publicize the August 6 voter registration deadline and the distribution of *cedulas* (voter identification cards). Gajardo said that the OAS mission has a budget of under \$2 million which it is receiving from the US, Dutch, Japanese, Swedish, and several other governments. This raises questions about the amount the IRI claimed it was providing to the OAS since 25% of \$10 million would be more than the OAS mission's total budget.

Gajardo said that the OAS mission looks only at the internal conditions and processes of the election and that the US role or that of any other country is outside of its mission. He said he'd be happy to receive a copy of our report and invited us to meet with him again if we return before the election.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### ***Members of the delegation were:***

**Harvey Williams**, Stockton, CA, professor of Sociology (emeritus), University of the Pacific.

**Dale Sorensen**, Inverness, CA, director, Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas.

**Coleen Rose**, Novato, CA, Events Coordinator for the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the

Americas.

**Karen Kampwirth**, Galesburg, IL, associate professor of political science, Knox College.

**Roger Peace**, Tallahassee, FL, History instructor and doctoral student, Florida State University.

**William Parsons**, Brooklyn, NY, retired mathematics professor.

**Hector Perla**, Athens, OH, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Ohio University.

**Elizabeth Fussel**, student at Lewis and Clark University in Portland, OR.

**Chuck Kaufman**, national co-coordinator, Nicaragua Network.

Asociación Kairos para la Formación provided the in-country logistics and interview schedule.

This report was written by Nicaragua Network National Co-Coordinator Chuck Kaufman. The Nicaragua Network is responsible for its contents and any conclusions do not necessarily represent the personal opinion of individual members of the delegation. The Nicaragua Network can be contacted at:

Nicaragua Network

1247 E St., SE

Washington, DC 20003

202-544-9355

[nicanet@afgj.org](mailto:nicanet@afgj.org)

[www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org)

## **APPENDIX 2**

### ***Who We Met***

The delegation held meetings with four of the five political parties with candidates on the November ballot:

1. Enrique Saenz, Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS)
2. Rene Nuñez, Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN)
3. Jose Antonio Alvarado, Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC)
4. Eduardo Urcuyo, National Liberal Alliance-Conservative Party (ALN-PC)

The delegation met with US Ambassador to Nicaragua Paul Trivelli and Tim Smith, Deputy Political Officer as well as with Patricio Gajardo, Technical Coordinator, OAS Mission of Accompaniment of the Nicaragua 20006 Democratic and Electoral Process

The delegation met with three organizations which receive grants from the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED):

1. Ivania Vega, International Republican Institute (IRI)
2. Yamileth Alguera and Fanor Avendaño, Instituto Nicaraguense de Estudios Humanísticos
3. Sergio Narvaez and Yader Amiker Loza Jarquin, Asociación Hagamos Democracia

The delegation met in Managua with 8 individuals and organizations that do not receive US government money:

1. Carlos Pacheco, Nicaraguan political economist

2. William Rodriguez, Center for International Studies
3. Dr. Bayardo Izaba, Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH)
4. Maria Lopez Vigil, Envio
4. Gonzalo Salgado, Consumer Defense Network
5. Georgina Muñoz, Civil Coordinator
6. Ana Quiroz, Autonomous Women's Movement
7. Fr. Donald Mendoza
8. Rafael Valdez and Carmen García de Valdez, founders of Nicaragua's first Christian Base Community



The delegation traveled to Esteli to meet with grassroots leaders. Photo: Chuck Kaufman

The delegation met with 8 individuals, office holders, and grassroots organization in Esteli and in Condega, both in the Department of Esteli:

1. Leonel Calero, Esteli House of Culture
2. Julio Manuel Rodriguez, Mayor of Esteli
3. Mauricio Parata, NGO of ex-combatants of the army and the resistance
4. Armando Maltez, CAPRI
5. Francisco Ordoñez, Community Movement
6. Miriam Centeno, Theologian, APROROJ
7. Rosa Zavala, Women Municipal Officeholders
8. Francisco Moli, professor, Martin Luther University