

## Guyana Moves Closer to Democracy

*First Free and Fair Election in 28 Years Held as Carter, Council Observe*

**O**n Oct. 5, the people of Guyana took a large step toward democracy when they chose a new president in the first free and fair election in nearly 30 years. Despite violence on election day, the voting went forth as planned, thanks largely to the presence of an international observation delegation of The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, based at The Carter Center of Emory University (CCEU).

Former President Jimmy Carter, Belize's Prime Minister George Price, and former Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo led the Council delegation to observe the elections. The

mission culminated two years of work with all Guyanese political parties to construct electoral reforms, including instituting a count at each polling site, creating a new registration list, and encouraging an expanded, impartial, and empowered Elections Commission.

Guyana has been ruled by a single party, the People's National Congress (PNC), since before independence in 1966. PNC President Desmond Hoyte, who was defeated in the election, cooperated with the Council in setting the stage for the elections that helped put Guyana on its democratic course.

Elections in Guyana were originally planned for last year. However,

because of recommendations by Council members who traveled to Guyana on numerous occasions to observe preparations, the elections were postponed to allow time for correcting the registration list. Once the list was finalized late this summer, elections were set for early October.

The Council delegation visited about two-thirds of the voting sites on election day, filling in detailed observation forms. Conditions at all but 2 percent of the polling sites visited were found to be satisfactory. The most widespread problems were the long lines and the slow speed at which the meticulous election officials worked.

On the afternoon of election day, the Elections Commission headquarters was attacked, and most of its staff fled the building. Violence and looting broke out throughout the capital of Georgetown, and there were reports of stolen or burned ballot boxes and fighting among ethnic groups throughout the country. Despite the danger, the Council delegation went to polling

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Ken Moore

*Voters endure long lines to cast their votes in Guyana's first free and fair election in nearly 30 years.*

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