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FM TEBUCICALPA 312145Z MAR 82
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 102 OF 31 MARCH
AND TO IMMEDIATE MEXICO CITY (FOR MR LUCE)

YOUR TELNO RE. EL SALVADOR ELECTIONS.

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF SUMMARY OF OBSERVERS REPORT.

BEGINS

FOLLOWING FOR SECRETARY OF STATE,
FROM SIR JOHN GALSWORTHY AND PROFESSOR BOWETT.

1. IN THE TALK WE HAD WITH YOU ON 4 MARCH FOLLOWING OUR NOMINATION AS BRITISH OBSERVERS OF THE ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR, IT WAS AGREED THAT WE WOULD SEND YOU, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE EVENT, A SUMMARY OF OUR MAIN IMPRESSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS WHICH WILL BE SET OUT IN DETAIL IN OUR SUBSEQUENT REPORT. THEY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

2. GENERAL COMMENTS.

(A) THE SALVADOREAN AUTHORITIES PROVIDED US WITH VERY ADEQUATE FACILITIES TO SEE WHAT WE WANTED. THE ONLY LIMITING FACTORS WERE THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE SECURITY SITUATION WHICH EVOLVED FROM DAY TO DAY, THE AVAILABILITY OF REASONABLY SECURE MEANS OF TRANSPORT, AND TIME:

(B) THE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE SALVADOREAN AUTHORITIES FOR OUR PERSONAL SAFETY WERE EFFECTIVE WITHOUT BEING OPPRESSIVE. NO ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO DEAR-LEAD US OR TO SUBJECT US TO OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA. WE WERE GIVEN ACCESS TO THOSE INVOLVED IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AT ALL LEVELS:

(C) THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO SEND OBSERVERS IN AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH THE OBJECTIVE FACTS OF THE SITUATION WAS DEEPLY APPRECIATED BY OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ALIKE.

3. THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND CAMPAIGN.

(A) THOUGH WE HAVE SOME RESERVATIONS, THE TRANSITIONAL ELECTORAL LAW CONTAINED NO OPPORTUNITIES FOR EASY FRAUD AND EMBODIED A FAIRLY SOPHISTICATED SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES:

(B) THE RIGHT TO VOTE WAS BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A VALID PERSONAL IDENTITY CARD. WE DID NOT FEEL THAT THE ABSENCE OF ELECTORAL ROLLS (AS UNDERSTOOD IN THE UK) DETRACTED IN ANY WAY FROM THE VALIDITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. ON PAST OCCASIONS THEY HAVE OFTEN BEEN AN ACTUAL MEANS OF FRAUD (EG THE USE OF OUT-OF-DATE ROLLS), AND, GIVEN THE SUBSTANTIAL MOVEMENTS OF POPULATION

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WHICH HAVE RESULTED FROM GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, INSISTENCE ON THIS OCCASION ON A PERSON VOTING ONLY WHERE HE OR SHE HAPPENED TO HAVE BEEN DOMICILED ON REACHING VOTING AGE WOULD HAVE DEPRIVED LARGE NUMBERS OF THE ELECTORATE OF THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO VOTE. THERE WERE RUMOURS THAT UNSPECIFIED NUMBERS OF FALSE IDENTITY CARDS WERE BEING ISSUED, BUT WE COULD FIND NO EVIDENCE TO SUBSTANTIATE THIS ALLEGATION AND WE DO NOT IN ANY CASE CONSIDER THAT IT COULD HAVE BEEN PRACTISED ON A SCALE SUFFICIENT TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE WAS UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE OF A SUSTAINED AND WIDE-SPREAD CAMPAIGN BY THE LEFT TO STEAL AND DESTROY AUTHENTIC IDENTITY CARDS:

(C) THE PROCEDURE ADOPTED (FOR THE FIRST TIME) OF THE INVISIBLE MARKING OF PERSON'S FINGER AND IDENTITY CARD TO PREVENT MULTIPLE VOTING PROVIDED IN OUR VIEW AND ADEQUATE SAFEGUARD AGAINST THIS TYPE OF FRAUD:

(D) IN ADDITION TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF POLITICAL PARTIES PRESENT AT EACH POLLING STATION, MANY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS (SUCH AS DOCTORS, TEACHERS, AGRICULTURISTS ETC.) WITH NO APPARENT POLITICAL OR GOVERNMENTAL CONNECTION WERE COOPTED TO PARTICIPATE IN OPERATING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AT ALL LEVELS. THEIR COLLUSION WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ESSENTIAL PRE-REQUISITE FOR ANY LARGE SCALE ATTEMPT AT FRAUD:

(E) WHILST THE INTENSITY OF PARTY POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING VARIED ACROSS THE COUNTRY, NO SINGLE PARTY HAD A MONOPOLY OF MEDIA SPACE OR TIME, AND WE SAW NO INHERENT REASON WHY ANY GIVEN PARTY SHOULD NOT GET ITS MESSAGE ACROSS IF IT WISHED. WE HEARD OF NO REPORTS OF DISORDER AT PUBLIC MEETINGS, AND ONLY ONE OF THE CONTENDING PARTIES WAS DESCRIBED TO US AS HAVING USED IN TWO PLACES COERCIVE CAMPAIGNING METHODS. ON THE OTHER HAND WE HEARD NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS OF WIDESPREAD INTIMIDATION BY LEFT-WING GROUPS:

(F) THE DECISION OF THE ARMED FORCES NOT TO VOTE AND TO CONFINE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS TO THE PHYSICAL PROTECTION, SO FAR AS POSSIBLE, OF VOTING BOOTHS AND RETURNS, UNDOUBTEDLY LENT ENHANCED CREDIBILITY TO THE WHOLE EXERCISE IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC.

4. THE ELECTIONS

(A) THE TURNOUT OF VOTERS WAS UNPRECEDENTED AND VASTLY EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS. THE FINAL TOTAL IS LIKELY TO BE ABOUT 1.2 MILLION OR 75% OF THE ELECTORATE. THERE COULD HAVE BEEN NO CLEARER DEMONSTRATION OF THE SALVADOREAN PEOPLE'S OVERWHELMING PREFERENCE FOR A SETTLEMENT BY THE BALLOT RATHER THAN THE BULLET:

(B) THE LEFT DID THEIR BEST TO DISRUPT THE VOTING BY ATTACKS ON POLLING BOOTHS IN THE CAPITAL AND THE TEMPORARY OCCUPATION OF CERTAIN TOWNS AND VILLAGES, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE COUNTRY (USULUTAN). THE IMPACT WAS MINIMAL AND THE STOICISM OF THE VOTERS MOST IMPRESSIVE:

(C) THERE WAS SOME CONFUSION AT THE VOTING BOOTHS OWING TO DISORGANISATION, THE NON-DELIVERY OF BALLOT PAPERS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS DELAY IN DISTRIBUTING FURTHER SUPPLIES OF

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VOTING PAPERS TO MEET THE TOTALLY UNEXPECTED DEMAND. BUT THESE DEFICIENCIES WERE MOSTLY REMEDIED AND ARE UNLIKELY, IN OUR VIEW, TO HAVE HAD MUCH EFFECT ON THE ULTIMATE RESULTS, THOUGH UNDOUBTEDLY NUMBERS OF VOTERS WERE UNABLE TO CAST THEIR VOTE BEFORE THE BOOTHS CLOSED:

(D) THE VOTING STATIONS WE VISITED, BOTH IN THE COUNTRY AND IN THE CAPITAL PROVIDED ADEQUATE CONDITIONS OF PRIVACY FOR THE VOTER, AND THE COUNTS WHICH WE PERSONALLY WATCHED WERE PROPERLY AND CAREFULLY CONDUCTED. WE HEARD OF NO COMPLAINTS BY PARTY WATCHDOGS WHO WERE PRESENT IN STRENGTH:

(E) THE ARMY AND SECURITY FORCES WERE USED TO REPEL GUERRILLA ATTACKS, TO PATROL THE SMALLER ROADS CONNECTING OUTLYING VILLAGES WITH POLLING CENTRES, AND TO ASSIST WITH ORDERLY CROWD CONTROL AT SOME OF THE LATTER. WE SAW NO EVIDENCE WHATEVER OF ANY ATTEMPT TO INTIMIDATE OR COERCE PEOPLE INTO VOTING:

(F) THE RETURNS FROM THE POLLING STATIONS, EXCEPT THOSE IN OR CLOSE TO THE CAPITAL, WERE SLOW TO COME IN AND THE FINAL DEFINITIVE COUNT HAD NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED BY THE TIME WE LEFT ON 31 MARCH. FROM THE ENQUIRIES WE MADE, WE ARE SATISFIED THAT THIS DELAY WAS DUE TO THREE CAUSES:

(I) THE SHEER SIZE OF THE VOTE WHICH EXCEEDED ALL FORECASTS:

(II) THE COMPLICATED SYSTEM OF COUNTING THE VOTES AND PREPARING THE FINAL REPORTS OF RETURNING OFFICERS. THE SYSTEM, DESIGNED TO MINIMIZE FRAUD, WAS OVER-SOPHISTICATED FOR MANY OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN OPERATING IT, AND THIS NECESSITATED A GOOD DEAL OF RE-CHECKING TO RECONCILE ARITHMETICAL DISCREPANCIES:

(III) THE INADEQUACY OF THE TELECOMMUNICATION SYSTEM WHICH WAS HEAVILY OVERLOADED:

(G) DESPITE THIS DELAY THERE WAS NO CREDIBLE REPORT OF FRAUD AND NO REQUESTS FOR THE NULLIFICATION OF ELECTIONS. NOR HAD ANY OTHER COMPLAINTS BEEN LODGED BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES BY THE TIME WE LEFT:

(H) OUR VIEW (AND THE CONSENSUS OF OTHER OBSERVERS WITH WHOM WE COMPARED IMPRESSIONS) IS THEREFORE THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE FREE AND FAIR, AND THAT THEY REPRESENTED A MASSIVE AND SPONTANEOUS REJECTION OF THE CONFRONTATION ADVOCATED BY THE LEFT.

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5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

(A) WE WERE NOT OF THE OPINION THAT CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE (STILL LESS IN THE MAIN CENTRES OF POPULATION) WERE SUCH AS TO MAKE THE ELECTIONS IRRELEVANT AND THEIR OUTCOME INVALID. WE ENCOUNTERED A WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT, DESPITE THE DIFFICULT SITUATION IN WHICH THEY WERE BEING HELD, ELECTIONS OFFERED NOT THE SOLUTION, BUT THE FIRST AND ONLY PRACTICABLE STEP TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO VIOLENCE:

(B) MOST PEOPLE ATTRIBUTED THE NON-PARTICIPATION OF THE LEFT PRIMARILY TO FEAR ON THE LATTER'S PART THAT THEY WOULD BE SHOWN TO ENJOY VERY LITTLE POPULAR SUPPORT, AND SECONDLY TO THEIR DOCTRINAL CONTEMPT FOR ELECTIONS AS A FUNCTION OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE FEAR OF THE LEFT FOR THE PHYSICAL SAFETY OF LEFT-WING CANDIDATES, HAD THERE BEEN ANY, WAS NOT WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION.

6. D FINAL COMMENT

WE WORKED THROUGHOUT AS A TEAM AND THE ABOVE REPRESENTS OUR JOINT VIEW, NOT A COMPROMISE BETWEEN DIVERGENT IMPRESSIONS.

SIGNED: DEPEK DOWETT

JOHN GALSWORDY

ENDE

SHARKEY

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