**National Lawyers Guild (USA) Commends the People of Bolivia on Their Robust Participation in the Democratic Electoral Process**

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Twelve members of the National Lawyers Guild (USA) spent one week prior to the election learning about the electoral process in Bolivia. On election day, we observed at the polls from setting up the voting tables until the end of the vote count. We broke into three groups and visited nine polling centers: three centers in Achicachi, two centers in El Alto, and four polling centers in La Paz. In total, we observed voting centers that had 238 voting tables serving 54,623 voters.

We commend the people of Bolivia on their robust participation in the democratic electoral process. We were impressed by the participation of Bolivian citizens who were chosen randomly to work in the polling centers, and by the equal participation of women and people from all economic and cultural backgrounds. We were struck by the cooperation of citizens at all steps in the voting process from setting up the polling tables, the conduct of the voting process throughout the day - including a very user-friendly ballot - and the transparent process of counting of the votes after the polls closed. We watched an election workers training in Cochabamba and therefore appreciated the level of knowledge and understanding of a somewhat complicated voting process and its rules by the workers at the voting tables.

Coming from the United States where voting participation is extremely low, we admired the procedures here that encouraged all citizens to vote as informed citizens, including:

1. Voting on Sunday;
2. Mandatory voting;
3. The ban on campaigning prior to the election;
4. Permitting voting by citizens outside of the country;
5. The requirements of equal participation of women at all levels of the voting process; and
6. Nearly universal voter registration.

Our concerns about the voting process included the following:

1. The unequal distribution of resources to parties and candidates. We recommend the implementation of public financing of campaigns (we note that this is also a major problem in the US);
2. The lack of informed voter assistance at the polling centers: many voters could not read the list of names to locate their voting tables because the voter lists were not posted when polls opened and were difficult to locate, although some notaries set up small tables to answer questions and direct people to their voting tables, they were insufficient in number; the notaries could not be identified as most did not wear vests and their vests were not distinct from those of observers and other participants. We recommend improved prior notification to voters of their voting location.
3. The lack of assistance to older people and people with disabilities. Although there are procedures in writing to assist people, there were insufficient resources to carry them out, and we observed many older people and voters with disabilities who were discouraged from instead of assisted in voting, including various voting centers with numerous voting tables on the second and third floors. It was impossible for many people to reach these tables, and because of the long lines, only twice did we observe the members of a table coming down to the first floor so that an elderly voter could vote.
4. The lack of resources to deal with the sizable volume of people who came to the voting centers and could not vote because they did not appear on the voter registration list, either through no fault of their own, or because they appeared at the wrong center, or for other reasons.
5. Inadequate education about options and resources for people who are seeking “certificados de impedimiento” (certification of excuse from voting).
6. The inconsistent provision and allocation of resources with regard to the voting centers.

*The National Lawyers Guild was formed in 1937 as the nation’s first racially integrated bar association to advocate for the protection of constitutional, human and civil rights.*