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CIA funding reportedly aids Duarte campaign

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SAN SALVADOR. El Salvador — A Venezuelan public relations firm based in San Salvador, which is aiding the presidential campaign of Jose Napoleon Duarte, currently receives funds from the CIA, according to a source familiar with the operation.

The firm, the Venezuelan Institute for Popular Education (IVEPO), provided television studio time to Duarte's Christian Democratic Party to produce campaign propaganda and contracted for a voter opinion poll the results of which were made available to the moderate conservative party.

Other groups, which are funded openly by the United States, have also been extensively involved in the preparations for the May 6 presidential election as well as in Duarte's campaign.

The role of US-financed organizations has expanded significantly since the first round March 25. Duarte is expected to win Sunday's runoff by a sizable margin. His opponent, rightist Roberto D'Aubuisson of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) has long been privately criticized by US officials here, though the embassy has maintained a strict public stance of neutrality.

This week, as the prospects for its defeat become clearer, ARENA began to protest what it calls "gross interference" by the United States. The party has warned it may challenge Sunday's vote if it determines that the US influence has tilted the outcome.

The US involvement has included the following:

- The covertly funded Venezuelan public relations firm signed a contract in early April with the Salvadoran government to provide at least \$100,000 to pay for 300 workers for the Central Elections Council, the

government commission charged with organizing the May 6 vote.

- A private Washington-based auditing firm on a legal contract to the US Agency for International Development (AID), at the request of Salvadoran elections officials, took over the planning for delivering voter registers, ballot boxes and other equipment to polling places nationwide.

- A farm labor organization which is heavily funded by AID committed 400 of its peasant leaders to campaign full-time in April for the Christian Democrats, in violation of Salvadoran law.

The knowledgeable source said that the CIA funds are channeled to the public relations firm through the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a group which dispenses international assistance to the Christian Democratic Party of West Germany.

The source said that a "big part" of the firm's funds are from the CIA, but did not specify an exact figure. The source did not say when the funding began, but indicated it had continued throughout the presidential campaign.

Jose Miguel Fritis, a Chilean in charge of the firm in El Salvador, denied yesterday that his group receives any money from the American government. He said he would not make his budget available until Monday, after the election.

Employees paid for by the firm have provided the bulk of the council's manpower, doing countless odd jobs such as stamping ballots and moving boxes. They are staffing a 12-telephone bank where voters can call to find out which polling place they must go to on election day.

On May 6, they will serve as polling place guides to lead citizens to the right ballot boxes, and will staff about 60 elections information booths around the country.

"IVEPO just pays the bill," said Jorge Rochac, the elections council's chief planner. "They haven't said no to anything I've asked for. The beauty of it is, IVEPO can give help in 10 minutes that would take 10 years if I had to go through the government."

Officials of the firm repeatedly declined to name the source of their financing, saying that it would discourage its backers from continuing their support. "I stay up late at night sometimes wondering who writes the checks," said council planner Rochac. "Sometimes it's better not to know things in this country."

The firm's facilities include the most sophisticated television studio in the country, as well as advertising layout equipment. Several times in April, the firm provided studio time to the Christian Democrats to produce campaign propaganda.

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