

Juan Carlos Varela Wins Presidential Elections in Panama



Panama City, May 5 (RHC) -- Juan Carlos Varela from the opposition Panamanian Party won the presidential election, Supreme Electoral Court President, Erasmo Pinilla, said on Sunday.

With 60 percent of the ballots counted, the 50-year-old Varela, an engineer and well-known politician whose family owns the country's biggest liquor producer, was seven points ahead of the 32% won by the governing party candidate, José Domingo Arias, a former housing minister and a political newcomer. A third major candidate, Juan Carlos Navarro, a former two-time mayor of Panama City, had 28%.

Varela, who takes office on July 1st for a five-year term, campaigned against growing fears of corruption and president's Martinelli's iron fist-style of leadership. He promised a more transparent government that will maintain growth and popular social programs, and fight inequality. Panama has enjoyed one of the fastest growing economies in the western hemisphere.

Some 2.4 million Panamanians went to the polls on Sunday to elect a new president and a vice-president, 71 members of the National Assembly, 77 mayors, 648 district representatives, seven councilors and 20 members of the Central American Parliament.

Varela's victory was a rebuke to President Martinelli, who oversaw years of rapid growth and defied

electoral law by campaigning openly for Arias on a ticket that included his wife, Marta Linares, as the vice presidential candidate. Opponents seized on the move as a thinly veiled attempt to hold on to and concentrate power.

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