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Nicaraguan Constitutional Debates Enter Sixth Week; 42% Of All Articles Approved

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On Oct. 28 deputies of the Nicaraguan National Assembly initiated the sixth week of debates on the country’s new constitution scheduled to become effective in January 1987. Discussions by the seven political parties represented in the assembly the largest number of parties in any single Latin American legislature have so far produced approval of 42% of the constitutional articles. Most have passed by a consensus vote. Articles pertaining to political pluralism; non-alignment; economic structure; and rights to health, education, food, housing, religion and work, have been approved. The new constitution also formally recognizes the social and political autonomy of national minorities unprecedented in Central American constitutions. Meanwhile, the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) called on opposition parties to resume parallel talks with FSLN deputies to promote national unity. This appeal was made by Carlos Nunez, member of the FSLN directorate and president of the national assembly. In a document received by leaders of the Conservative Democrat, Independent Liberal, Communist, Socialist, and Social Christian Peoples parties, Nunez said that while parallel talks involving all parties had thus far failed, this did not exclude the possibility of encountering other alternatives for dialogue. As a result, the FSLN is seeking to coordinate a series of bilateral talks. After talks with all parties over a month ago, the FSLN argued that conditions were ripe to begin multilateral negotiations. However, only two meetings took place at the political parties national council. Conservative Democrat representatives announced their withdrawal from the talks on Oct. 21 after their motion for government financing of political parties was rejected by delegates from other parties. Differences between the Independent Liberals and Communists were also apparent. The Socialists then announced that the multi-party talks had no future. Debate on Oct. 23 ended with the approval of Article 65 which provides guarantees to citizens regarding access to uncensored information. The article does not mention government censorship.

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