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Former President Carter: Nicaraguan Insistence On Direct Negotiations With U.S. Guarantees Negotiations Will Not Occur

by Deborah Tyroler

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During a discussion on the "definitions of democracy" Nov. 17 in Atlanta, Ga., former President Jimmy Carter told Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramirez that the Sandinista government's insistence on negotiating only with the United States, instead of its political opposition, "guarantees" there will be no negotiations. Carter's remarks followed statements by Ramirez during a panel discussion inaugurating a two-day conference on democracy in the hemisphere at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta. More than 20 former and current heads of state from countries throughout the hemisphere were participating in the conference, co-sponsored by Carter and former President Gerald Ford. Carter pointed out that President Reagan is not willing to negotiate directly with Nicaragua, while insisting that Nicaragua negotiate with what Administration considers to be its "legitimate political opposition." During the discussion, Ramirez attacked US policy toward Nicaragua, and insisted that his government was willing at any time to engage in dialogue with the United States. He said the United States refuses to leave Nicaragua in peace to develop its own form of democracy, adding that his country has never known democracy, and is now trying consolidate it. Next, Ramirez asserted that other countries are not immune from US hostility, simply because they do not emulate the constitution of the United States. Carter, who dealt with Ramirez extensively during a trip to Nicaragua this year and said he had been impressed by the vice president, did not refrain from criticizing Nicaraguan policy. The former president declared there is great concern in the hemisphere, not only in the United States, about Nicaraguan tendencies. He informed the panel that during his visit to the Central American country he spoke with many who politically oppose the Sandinista regime. Most of them, he said, refuse to participate in Nicaraguan politics because they do not have adequate freedom to do so without being intimidated. Carter said Nicaragua must justify itself in terms of establishing pluralist government, free and open elections, liberty of the press and expression, and the strict fulfillment of human rights principles. In referring to Ramirez's description of the new Nicaraguan constitution which is scheduled for implementation in January 1987, Carter said it remains to be seen whether its principles will actually be put into practice. Carter indicated that he believed the Nicaraguan conflict could yet be resolved by "peaceful means." Towards this end, he said he would like to see US military aid to the contras discontinued, and for Nicaragua to adopt Contadora principles, and restore the civil liberties suspended in October 1985 by the state of emergency.

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