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Deborah Tyroler

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Sen. Dodd Says U.S. Aid To Contras Counterproductive; Nicaraguan Visit Results In Pardon For Hasenfus

by Deborah Tyroler
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At a Dec. 13 press conference in San Jose, Costa Rica Democrat Sen. Christopher Dodd said US aid to the Nicaraguan contras was a mistake, pointing out that the recent $100 million aid package approved by Congress escalates tensions in Central America rather than promoting dialogue. Dodd will assume the chairmanship of the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January. During the press conference, which took place at the El Zapote presidential residence, the senator was accompanied by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, Security Minister Hernan Garron and US Ambassador Lewis Tambs. Dodd stated that the region's serious political and economic problems must be resolved via diplomatic and political channels. For this reason, he said, support for the Contadora Group is paramount. Next, he stated that Nicaragua should be given a time period one, two or more years to channel the revolution towards democracy. The Senator concluded a brief visit to San Jose on Dec. 13, and departed for Honduras on the same day. Prior to visiting Costa Rica, Dodd met with government officials in Guatemala and El Salvador. On Dec. 15 the senator arrived in Managua to meet with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and other government officials. Dodd reportedly requested on Dec. 16 that Ortega grant an official pardon for US citizen Eugene Hasenfus. Hasenfus was recently sentenced to 30 years in prison for participation in providing supplies to the contras inside Nicaragua. Ortega reportedly agreed to deliver a request for official pardon to the National Assembly. The Assembly approved the request, and Hasenfus was turned over to Dodd. The Sandinista government's decision was proclaimed as a goodwill gesture toward the United States.

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