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Contadora Ministers Meet In Rio: Strategy Outlined For Deescalating Conflict, Scope Extended Beyond Cenam,

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Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers convened in a beachfront hotel in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil Dec. 17-18 to formulate plans for the resumption of peace negotiations in Central America, and also expanded the Contadora agenda beyond the Central American conflict. Release of a full account of conference deliberations was expected late on Dec. 18. The Contadora Group was formed in 1983 by the governments of Colombia, Panama, Mexico and Venezuela. Its Support Group Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay was created last year. Before arriving at the meeting on Dec. 17, Argentine Foreign Minister Dante Caputo said, "War in [Central America] is spreading because the principal actors are not interested in peace." His Peruvian counterpart, Allan Wagner, warned that a "conflagration" was imminent in the region. Wagner said a formula for peace he may support would be a pledge by Central American nations to prohibit the use of their territories by irregular forces intent on destabilizing a neighboring country. Such pledge would prevent US-supported contras from fighting the Nicaraguan government from bases in Honduras. It could also be monitored by a commission along the frontier as a first step toward a multinational peacekeeping force. On the first day of the meeting, the ministers reportedly agreed to request that the United States terminate aid to the contras. Brazilian Foreign Minister Roberto de Abreu Sodre said Contadora and its Support Group were motivated to make the request because support for such groups which prolong the war effort serves to undermine possibilities for a political solution. The ministers also discussed an Argentine proposal for dispatching peace missions to the Central American nations. According to this proposal, Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers would visit San Jose, Managua, Tegucigalpa, San Salvador and Guatemala City in January in an attempt to lay the groundwork for resumption of peace talks. The Sandinista government has filed complaints against the Honduran and Costa Rican governments before the International Court of Justice. Both have protested by refusing to participate in Contadora negotiations. Contadora nation diplomats told reporters Dec. 18 that Managua had confirmed it would withdraw its charges against Costa Rica before the World Court if the latter prohibits the use of its territory by counter-revolutionaries. In May Managua must formalize or withdraw its charges against San Jose. If Nicaragua proceeds with the suit, the Costa Rican government would have nine months in which to respond to the charges. During discussion Dec. 18 of a document called the "Rio de Janeiro Declaration," the eight ministers reportedly agreed to create a new organisation (the "Group of Eight") which would be responsible for a permanent consultation on major questions of mutual concern in the region, such as foreign debt problems and regional trade integration. The consultation organization may eventually become a coordinating body for negotiations with the United States and the European Economic Community (EEC) on trade and foreign debt issues. According to Colombian Foreign Minister Julio Londono Paredes, "The idea is not to seek a replacement to any of the region's existing grps, such as the OAS (Organization of American States), of which all eight countries are members." It was understood that expansion of Contadora's agenda would not occur at the expense of its primary purpose to study the Central American problem, and to create ways for defusing tensions. Diplomatic sources said in the future presidents of the member countries of the new organisation could meet regularly.
to discuss several matters of interest to the region. They added that eventually the organisation
could consider making contacts with other countries, including those which are members of the
European Community (EC). Representatives of other nations in the region will be included in the
organization upon invitation by the original eight. Brazil was appointed provisional secretary of
the group until its next meeting. Shortly before the conference closed, demonstrators gathered
around the Cesar Park Hotel carrying placards expressing support for Nicaragua and condemning
US intervention in Central America. Nicaraguan Ambassador to Brazil, Jorge Jenkins, told reporters
in Rio that his government supports the idea of seeing a UN-sponsored commission in place
along the Honduran–Nicaraguan border to monitor activities there. Jenkins was in Rio to follow
deliberations of the Contadora and Support Group ministers. Jenkins asserted that the greatest
obstacles toward realizing a permanent peace in Central America are Washington's rejection of
Nicaraguan peacemaking efforts, and the Reagan Administration's pressures on Honduras, Costa
Rica and El Salvador. (Various reports, PRENSA LATINA, REUTERS, UPI)

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