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## **Peruvian Congress Gives President Fujimori Expanded Powers to Fight Crime**

by LADB Staff

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On May 10, the Peruvian Congress granted sweeping powers to President Alberto Fujimori to fight crime. This is the latest action described by opponents as the administration's threats to the democratic process. The president's plans could give even more power to the de facto head of military intelligence, Vladimiro Montesinos, who recently came under fire from US drug czar Barry McCaffrey.

In early April, the dean of the Lima Bar Association (Colegio de Abogados de Lima, CAL), Delia Revoredo, described Fujimori as "a prisoner of the military," and said the president would be a candidate for re-election in 2000 only if it served the purposes of the military leadership. Revoredo is one of three justices of the Tribunal Constitucional fired by the Fujimori-controlled Congress in May 1997 for ruling unconstitutional a law to permit Fujimori to run again (see NotiSur, 06/06/97). She recalled Fujimori's "self-coup" in 1992 and said, "We gave up much power to the president of the Republic and to the armed forces and now we cannot get it back."

In mid-April Revoredo sought political asylum in the Costa Rican embassy, saying she feared for her life. She said she was being threatened by Montesinos because of her opposition to Fujimori's attempts to tighten control over the judiciary and pave the way for his re-election in 2000. Revoredo and her husband, Jaime Mur, went to Costa Rica, where the government granted her request for asylum on May 7. Revoredo's much publicized departure further damaged the image of Peruvian democracy under Fujimori (see NotiSur, 01/09/98).

### ***Administration capitalizes on street crime***

As Revoredo's request for asylum spotlighted Fujimori's attacks against critics, the president announced plans to use the intelligence service (Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional, SIN) to crack down on out-of-control street crime, particularly kidnapping and armed robbery. The SIN is run by Montesinos, the shadowy presidential advisor implicated in torture, killings, and electronic surveillance against opposition press and political figures (see NotiSur, 04/04/98). Montesinos is one of the most unpopular figures in Peru and is widely believed to be more powerful than Fujimori.

The head of the Catholic Church in Peru joined the voices of critics opposing involving the SIN in police work. Cardinal Augusto Vargas Alzamora said it would be better to leave the job to the Policia Nacional. He said the participation of the SIN "does not build the confidence of the people, because they know that the SIN has been accused of torture and human rights violations."

Earlier this year, the government ordered an investigation into alleged abuses by the SIN, including charges that Montesinos supervised the wiretapping of administration critics. Few, however, expect the investigation to be more than a whitewash of the intelligence services. Fujimori originally said

he would send a bill to Congress to authorize the new anti-crime efforts. Later, he said the expected political debate would take too long, and instead asked for the power to implement his program by decree. "We have to corner crime as we have cornered terrorism, and as we are cornering drug trafficking," said Fujimori.

On May 12, by a 57-24 majority, Congress gave Fujimori 15 days in which he can put in place whatever anti-crime measures he sees fit. Fujimori said he would use similar measures to those used against Sendero Luminoso. "Crimes committed by gangs, crimes committed with the use of explosives or with military uniforms, or by people who provide information about people's wealth or how to get to victims are going to be classified as aggravated terrorism," Fujimori told reporters. "Some laws are meant to punish and some are meant to prevent. What I have just described is a law that is meant to punish."

People suspected of terrorism can be detained up to 15 days without charges, tried by military courts, and sentenced to life in maximum-security prisons. Crime and threats to personal security are a major concern of Peruvians, especially in Lima. In the past few weeks, 12 moneychangers working on the streets were killed by armed assailants dressed in clothing resembling police uniforms. Criminal gangs, thought to include some of the 300 police fired since January 1997 for misdemeanors or corruption, have kidnapped dozens of executives, some of whom have paid ransom without reporting the matter to authorities.

The National Business Confederation, representing 43,000 Peruvian businesses, said that since January an average of four executives per day have been kidnapped. In April, prominent Chilean-born mining executive Luis Hochschild was killed and his son Eduardo kidnapped. Opposition has little power. The opposition reacted negatively to approval of the expanded powers for Fujimori but was unable to stop it. "The government has been given a blank check," said Antero Flores of the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC). Opposition Deputy Javier Diez Canseco said the role of the SIN and Montesinos is very dangerous. "This is like giving Al Capone the job of fighting delinquency, when he headed the Mafia," said Diez Canseco.

Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade, Fujimori's strongest political rival, describes Peru's government as a civilian-military triumvirate of Fujimori, Montesinos, and military chief Gen. Nicolas de Bari Hermoza Rios. Andrade said state terrorism exists. He said delinquency is directly related to unemployment, which must be addressed if crime is to be reduced.

### ***Barry McCaffrey says he was used by Montesinos***

Despite the persistent allegations about Montesinos, he has retained his behind-the-scenes influence in the administration. Since he never speaks in public and never has his picture in the press, Peruvians were surprised on May 10 to see local Channel Panamericana broadcast coverage of an April 21 meeting showing Montesinos with Barry McCaffrey, head of US anti-drug efforts. The broadcast set off an international incident when McCaffrey accused Montesinos of editing the video tapes to improve his image.

At a news conference in Washington, McCaffrey said the doctored videotape combined images from different meetings he attended in Lima to give the impression that Montesinos had been chairing

the proceedings. "I am offended at Montesinos using my visit to attempt to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the Peruvian people," McCaffrey said, adding he was seriously concerned by allegations that Montesinos is involved in human rights abuses. Pro-government deputies in Congress quickly defended Montesinos and attacked what they said was biased reporting by international news agencies. "I don't care what Mr. McCaffrey says," said Martha Chavez, one of Fujimori's staunchest supporters in Congress. "Peru is sovereign and not a satellite country of the United States."

Later, Fujimori said McCaffrey needed to understand that, "with total freedom of the press" in Peru, the television station was free to edit the tape any way it chose. Fujimori's remarks came amid allegations of press repression in Peru, including the recent murders of two radio journalists in northern Peru. [Sources: CNN, 04/13/98; The Miami Herald, 04/15/98; Associated Press, 04/10/98, 04/13/98, 05/04/98; Spanish news service EFE, 04/05/98, 04/14/98, 04/27/98, 05/13/98; Inter Press Service, 05/14/98; Notimex, 04/24/98, 04/26/98, 05/11/98, 05/18/98; El Nuevo Herald (Miami), 05/18/98; Reuters, 05/10/98, 05/12/98, 05/15/98, 05/21/98]

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