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## **Nicaragua: Contras Kidnap Two Clerics Working With Peace Commission In Waslala**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Oct. 16, Nicaraguan media sources and US volunteers pertaining to the Witness for Peace organization reported that two Nicaraguan clerics, Catholic priest Enrique Blandon and Adventist minister Gustavo Tiffel had been kidnapped by contras in the Waslala area, north-central Nicaragua. The two had reportedly left Waslala on Oct. 10 to meet with local contra field commanders about the Nicaraguan government's amnesty program, as part of a national effort to implement the Guatemala peace accord. Last week, the Honduran-based contra radio station "15 de septiembre" reportedly announced plans to kill the clerics at 6 a.m. on Oct. 17. A representative of the Washington office of the contras responded to inquiries about this kidnapping by saying, "Anyone who participates in a peace commission is taking their lives into their hands." According to Stephen Kinzer of the NEW YORK TIMES (10/17/87), the contras kidnapped the two clerics in an attack near Waslala "apparently in an effort to show their military strength..." On Oct. 19, Witness for Peace volunteers in Waslala reported that local residents had seen the two clerics with the contras on Oct. 15. Oct. 20: At a press briefing in Washington, State Department spokesperson Phyllis Oakley said the two clerics were reported over the weekend to be "in no danger." She said the contras have informed the State Department that they "would be released when circumstances made clear that they could be returned in safety." Later the same day, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) told reporters that he had been informed by the State Department that Witness for Peace volunteer Paul Fisher, kidnapped by contras on Oct. 17 (see story below), was being held with Blandon and Tiffel. Stokes said he was assured that all the three would be released together as soon as a responsible third party can be found. [Witness for Peace is a church-sponsored research group with offices in Washington and Managua. WFP volunteers, many of whom are members of religious groups in the US, are posted in communities throughout Nicaragua. Their activities are concentrated on traveling to the sites of contra attacks and clashes between the Sandinista army and contras, where they interview survivors. Witness for Peace can be contacted at P.O. Box 29497, Washington, D.C. 20017.]

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