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## **President Ortega Proposes Peace Talks With Contras In Nicaragua Without Mediator**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On March 2, President Daniel Ortega announced that his government has proposed direct talks with the contras on March 9-12 in the Nicaraguan town of Sapoa near the Costa Rican border. His brother, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, would lead the government delegation. Next, Managua recommended that the talks be conducted without a mediator since past mediation efforts have produced few if any positive results. If the proposal is accepted by the contra leadership, the talks would be conducted by the highest-level Sandinista delegation ever to meet directly with the contras. On March 3, contra leaders said they would insist that mediator Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo continued to play a role in the talks. President Ortega was condemned for taking "a unilateral and dictatorial action" by withdrawing support for Obando's mediation. They said they would not insist that the Cardinal remain as mediator, but that he should attend future talks as "moderator, witness and guarantor." The contras reportedly want the Cardinal present because he shares their view that the cease-fire talks should cover political questions as well as technical military matters. The contras said dates and locations of future talks should be determined by both sides. Next, they said they were prepared to send Adolfo Calero to head their delegation at the next round of talks. On March 2, the Cardinal called on President Ortega to send a delegation to Guatemala for talks with the contras on March 9-11. Obando urged the government to come to the talks with fixed dates by which they would establish an agreement on how to verify "unrestricted freedom of expression" and offer "total and unconditional amnesty" for political prisoners. The Cardinal also called on the government to renew its dialogue with political parties and review the military conscription law. The Cardinal said the contras should be prepared to discuss the number and location of enclaves into which they would withdraw as part of a cease-fire, and dates by which they would enter the enclaves. According to the New York Times, diplomats and others in touch with the Cardinal said his decision to press for fixed dates grew from growing frustration with both sides. An unnamed foreign envoy who spoke with Obando last week said, "He told me that the Sandinistas were not really interested in democracy and that they would never accept a western-style system here...He also told me that the contras don't really want a cease-fire, as they say, but just want to keep fighting." (Basic data from several sources, including AP, 03/02/88; New York Times, 03/02/88, 03/03/88)

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