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Icaraguan 60-day Truce Begins; Contras Ostpone April 6 Peace Talks In Managua

by Deborah Tyroler

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* On April 1, the Nicaraguan army and the contras began observing a 60-day cease-fire. The Defense Ministry reported that the truce was apparently respected throughout the country. A temporary cease-fire had been in effect since March 21, when negotiators from both sides commenced talks which led to the cease-fire agreement on March 23. According to agreement, during the 60-day cease-fire, contra leaders are to meet with government representatives in Managua to negotiate terms for a final settlement. Contra forces in the field will meanwhile receive aid approved by Congress, and signed by President Reagan on April 1. * Late on April 2, the contras announced they would not arrive in Managua until April 12. The cease-fire agreement stipulates that high-level peace talks are to begin in the capital on April 6. * On April 3, a disagreement broke out on the terms of the contras' stay in Managua. The government offered the contra negotiating team space in the state-owned Las Mercedes hotel adjoining the airport, and apparently expected a small team that would spend nearly all its time negotiating. The contras say they plan to send 55 people, and insist that all be given freedom to travel and hold public and private meetings. [Last week, contra spokesperson Bosco Matamoros claimed that government troops had shelled areas in Jinotega and Nueva Segovia departments that may become parts of cease-fire zones. The government said its troops have not been engaged in offensive actions.] While peace talks are underway, contra soldiers are required to move into cease-fire zones. Discussions to fix the zones and determine how they will function have not been completed. The discussions, scheduled to resume April 5 at Sapoa, in southern Nicaragua, were also focused on methods for delivery of recently approved US aid for the contras. Several senior contras involved in the Sapoa discussions, including field commanders, are also scheduled to take part in the talks in Managua. For that reason, contras said, it would be impossible to hold the Managua meeting on April 6 as scheduled. In a letter to contra leader Aristides Sanchez, Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco said that any postponement would be counter-productive. "The government of Nicaragua is greatly concerned by the fact that the resistance is showing a tendency to fail systematically to comply with the calendar agreed upon." Contras are also planning to suggest an alternative site for the talks, perhaps in the office of the Roman Catholic Church. * On April 5, the contra leadership sent the Nicaraguan government a detailed proposal for the meetings on arranging a permanent cease-fire. According to the contras, the meetings would begin on April 12, and end April 15. The proposal calls for a 60-member contra delegation to hold six sessions with government negotiators, as well as sessions with the Nicaraguan bishops and several opposition groups in Managua. Contra leader Adolfo Calero said that while the agenda of the meetings with government representatives would be "open," his side would emphasize "democratization and eradication of causes which have originated the armed struggle." (Basic data from several reports, AP, AFP, New York Times)

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