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Nicaraguans Discuss Ethics Of U.S. Aid Package

by Deborah Tyroler

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The \$47.9 million aid package approved by Congress last week earmarked for the contras, Nicaraguan children wounded in the war, and a verification commission to oversee compliance to an eventual cease-fire is reportedly the focus of serious debate among government officials and other Nicaraguans. The legislation stipulates that the aid is to be delivered in Nicaragua through private relief organizations rather than the government. This week, President Daniel Ortega reportedly called the aid package "another example of the interference and intervention practiced by the United States Congress...We cannot accept this type of package." On the evening of April 6 during a television news program, an announcer said it was "a ridiculous paradox" for the US Congress to approve aid for "children whose parents have been killed by weapons which the same Congress paid for." In an editorial published April 7, *El Nuevo Diario* described the aid program as "insulting and repugnant... The Nicaraguan government should not help American Congressmen in their hypocritical effort to soothe their consciences." An unnamed official cited by the *New York Times* said, "We are still looking into it, but in principle we have a positive attitude toward anything for wounded children...It depends on the terms." The aid package earmarks \$17.7 million "to make available prosthetic devices and rehabilitation, provide medicine and immunizations, assist burn victims, help children who have been orphaned and otherwise provide assistance for children who have been physically injured or displaced by the Nicaraguan strife." Rep. Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND), who proposed that the aid package include money to assist wounded children, said he recognized "some irony" in the congressional appropriation. He added: "This should be the first step in a new direction. We have a responsibility. If the cease-fire works out and we see the possibility of lasting peace, then Congress and the American people are going to confront that responsibility." The US Agency for International Development (AID) was named to oversee disbursement of the funds. AID spokesperson Roger Noriega, said relief agencies involved in the effort would probably include UNICEF, Catholic Relief Services, CARE and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The legislation requires that at least half the \$17.7 million appropriated to care for the children be spent inside Nicaragua, although a portion of the monies will also be directed at young victims who are living as refugees in Costa Rica and Honduras. The law does not establish an age limit for aid beneficiaries. Officials in Washington said they would consider anyone under 17 to be eligible. (Basic data from *New York Times*, 04/08/88)

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