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Nicaragua: Reports On Cease-fire Observance & Violations

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A ceasefire has been in place in Nicaragua since March 21, two days before the signing of the Sapoa accords by representatives of the Nicaraguan government and the contras. The ceasefire is regarded as temporary, pending the conclusion of a "permanent" truce, the subject of ongoing high-level talks in Managua. Reported incidents relating to recent violations and observance of the ceasefire are summarized below. March 25: According to church workers in Waslala, seven contras kidnapped five civilian men, including two Catholic lay leaders and the son of an evangelical pastor. They were taken from Corozales, approximately six miles from Waslala. Two of the men were released within hours, and two escaped the following night. March 26: A woman, her 11-year-old son, and a 12-year-old friend were kidnapped by the contras while traveling north of Waslala. According to the 12-year-old, who escaped and returned to Waslala the same day, contras told the woman they had kidnapped her because her former husband's brother worked for state security. March 27: A wealthy farmer who had been kidnapped by contras on March 4 escaped. He and a civilian friend had been traveling in a civilian jeep eight miles southeast of Matiguas, Matagalpa, when the contras stopped their vehicle. The two men were taken prisoner and the vehicle was burned. Only one of the two men succeeded in escaping. He told WFP that the contras told him they had no intention of laying down their arms until the Sandinistas gave up power. March 29: About ten contras attacked a private home with gunfire at the Saturnino Lanses cooperative in Plan Grande, west of Quilali. Ernestina Diaz, 18, six months pregnant, was killed. A Witness for Peace (WFP) volunteer was informed that three self-defense militia members were inside the house at the time of the attack. It is not clear if they returned fire. March 30: Five contras reportedly kidnapped a civilian from his home in La Aula, 12 miles north of Rio Blanco. According to the man's wife, the contras yelled for the occupants to leave their house. The victim was accused of working for state security, and having Nicaraguan soldiers in the home. His wife said neither charge was true. April 1: Two Ministry of Construction (MICONS) workers who were among five kidnapped by the contras on March 10 outside of Waslala, were released on Good Friday. Speaking with WFP in Waslala, they said that the contras were generally encouraged by the ceasefire, and were willing to put down their arms and stop the "shedding of blood." The two men told WFP that the contras had lied to them in order to intimidate them, telling them that one of the other five MICONS workers, who escaped, was killed by the Nicaraguan Army. WFP has confirmed that the man is alive and has returned home. The men who were released do not expect the remaining two to be released because both previously served in the Nicaraguan Army, which is considered a crime by the contras. April 4: In Wiwili and Quilali, WFP volunteers reported hearing scattered gunfire throughout Holy Week. On Monday, WFP confirmed a clash between the Nicaraguan Army and the contras: both sides said an Army patrol of 200 men moved into the La Vigia area, where contras have been holed up for several weeks. The matter of who started the exchange of fire remains unclear. Estimates of casualties were six soldiers and nine contras killed. WFP, however, confirmed only one soldier killed and four wounded soldiers. April 5: At 7 a.m. several hundred contras stopped the Wiwili-Esteli civilian transport as it was passing through La Chiclera, west of Wiwili. The contras forced

all men to leave the truck, and then kidnapped two of them. According to the driver's assistant, the contras detained the truck for two hours. April 14: According to a WFP news bulletin, for the first time in six months, the community of Bocana de Paiwas in eastern Matagalpa, has had electricity for three consecutive weeks. Local officials told WFP that contras normally destroy electrical pylons or cables within days of repair, but that since the cease-fire went into effect, the contras have not destroyed any poles. [Basic data from 04/07/88, 04/14/88 news bulletins by Witness for Peace. (WFP 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.)]

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