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Deborah Tyroler

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Talks Between Nicaraguan Government & Miskito Indian Leaders Rivera & Fagoth Collapse

by Deborah Tyroler

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Miskito Indian rebel leaders Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Fagoth spent five days in Managua last week negotiating terms of a permanent ceasefire with the government. On May 14, Nicaraguan officials reportedly rejected what they described as absurd proposals by Rivera, thereby ending the talks. Miskito Indian guerrillas have been fighting the Sandinistas since 1981, but most of their leaders have refused to join with the main contra army directed by the CIA. Their major objective has been local control of the coastal region, rather than overthrowing the Nicaraguan government. Yatama, the Indian group Rivera represents, agreed to a ceasefire in February. Rivera told the New York Times on May 13 that the war would be resumed if no agreement was established with the government. In recent weeks, several Yatama field commanders have signed individual accords with the government. One senior Miskito commander, Osorno Coleman, has joined the contras and apparently separated himself from Yatama. Rivera said the CIA, which mistrusts Yatama, had won Coleman over. He added, "The CIA is very much opposed to this peace process we are engaged in." One of the government negotiators, Jose Gonzalez, who is senior Sandinista military officer in the region where most Miskitos reside, accused the Miskito delegates of "ethnocentrism and ethno-populism." He said they were seeking to exaggerate ethnic differences among Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguan government has promulgated unprecedented legislation offering limited autonomy to the Indian peoples of the Atlantic coast region. Rivera requested that the Constitution be revised to provide greater authority to locally elected officials. Under the Miskito proposal discussed last week in Managua, local officials would operate their own judicial system, provide their own social services, raise taxes and regulate hunting, fishing, agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources in the area. The national government would be limited to defending the area against aggression, controlling international borders and directing foreign relations. Both sides had agreed in principle to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to deliver food and other relief supplies to Miskito rebels during the ceasefire. The US Congress approved \$2.19 million for food, clothing and medicine for the Miskitos. (Basic data from New York Times, 05/15/88, 05/16/88)

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