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## Nicaragua: On Reports Of Contra Kidnappings Of Civilians

by Deborah Tyroler

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During the weekend, Nicaraguan officials said the contras have escalated civilian "recruitment" kidnappings for another round of fighting. Myrna Santiago, an official of the government's National Human Rights Commission, told UPI (06/05/88) that kidnappings have "definitely" been stepped up: "There has been a...wave of abductions reported during the truce, whereas before they were fairly sporadic. We believe the contras may be bearing up for a renewal of the war, and they definitely need more people." Contra spokesperson Martha Sacasa told UPI in a telephone interview from Miami that the kidnapping allegations "are outrageous and unfounded." Defense Ministry officials said figures showed 393 civilians were captured by the contras in the first three months of the year, compared to 473 in the two months following the March 23 Sapoia truce. According to Carrie Parker, Witness for Peace (WFP) spokesperson in Nicaragua, "They call it recruitment, but we call it forced induction into the rebel army...We have interviewed dozens of victims who managed to escape. They told us the contras would come to their village and tell them: 'You have two choices come with us or be killed.' It's a very effective tactic." WFP said there were 79 abductees in the three months prior to the truce and that another 60 kidnapping reports were "most likely" true. Since the truce, the group has tabulated 70 abductions and is investigating another 266 cases. Parker said, "The numbers have risen dramatically. We don't have the same resources as the government and can't confirm every report, but I don't think the official figures are too far off base...The most outrageous thing is that these increases have happened during a truce, which both sides are obligated to respect." [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.] A Defense Ministry official, who requested anonymity, told UPI that the rebels have increased abductions "to swell the contra census and thus get more American aid." The US Agency for International Development, which was authorized by Congress in March to oversee delivery of humanitarian aid to the contras, said last week it had begun to provide cash for contras inside Nicaragua because the two sides have not agreed on a mechanism for delivering food and other supplies to the contras. AID is reportedly sending money to be distributed at the rate of \$1 a day to each contra fighter inside Nicaragua. "If one contra group captures 50 people, that's an extra \$50 a day for them," the Defense Ministry official said. "Those extra people have to be fed, but \$1 can buy a lot of rice and beans." The government has promised to extend the truce which ended on May 30 for another 30 days. The contras say they will observe the extension at least through the end of the next round of peace talks through June 9.

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