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## **Nicaragua: Omar Cabezas Appointed National Coordinator Of Sandinista Defense Committees**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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Recently, in an attempt to revitalize its largest mass organization, the Sandinista Defense Committee (CDS), the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) appointed Omar Cabezas as national coordinator. Cabezas is author of the best-selling autobiography, "Fire From the Mountains." Originating at the height of the 1978-79 insurrection, defense committees were organized in poor neighborhoods to provide food and medical care for Sandinista combatants. After the revolution, the CDS spread throughout the country in the form of neighborhood or block committees to mobilize participation in community projects. In recent years, however, the CDS has virtually disappeared from the social landscape of many neighborhoods in Nicaragua's cities. Persons fearing the loss of material wealth claimed the committees served as networks of Sandinista spies. Others complained that over time the committees had developed a rigid organizational structure and a "vertical" style of organizing. Some of the tasks performed by the CDS were voluntary night watches, using pressure tactics to curb speculation practiced by vendors and shopowners, and reporting on draft dodgers. Many Nicaraguans lost enthusiasm for participating in these tasks when professional police forces were developed in the cities, or because they considered these and other tasks distasteful for a variety of reasons. Cabezas has announced that tasks such as political mobilization and military recruitment will no longer be included in CDS activities. Instead, he says, the CDS will focus on immediate community needs and concerns. At the neighborhood level, the organization will henceforth be called "Community Development Committee," and is to be focused on incorporating all social groups. Cabezas has appealed to "evangelicals, Christians, communists, brunettes, blondes, Sandinistas, priests, atheists, and people with or without a political party" to unite around concrete neighborhood projects. The new committees, he says, must be apolitical in order to avoid divisive conflicts. Cabezas has urged local leaders not to "wait for instructions; invent your own solutions." By separating the CDS from the FSLN and incorporating all social classes, the party hopes regain support through persuasion and example. Said one local coordinator, "If the Sandinista party members become dynamic and active in resolving the problems of the community, it will give the FSLN recognition among the people, not just because we triumphed over Somoza, but because the members are capable of taking up political action again." [Basic data from 08/31/88 Guardian, summarized by Central America Resource Center, Minneapolis, Minn.]

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