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Salvadoran Rebels Call For Postponement Of Elections: Summary Of Proposal Delivered To Government

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On Jan. 23, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) proposed postponing presidential elections from March 19 to September 15 and called for peace talks with the government in the interim. The proposal, signed by the top five guerrilla commanders, was delivered to President Jose Napoleon Duarte through Catholic Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas. The proposal was to have been made public in Mexico City on Jan. 24. The Associated Press, however, obtained a copy on Monday. According to the AP, the rebels called on the government to commit itself to the following pre-conditions regarding the elections: halt military repression of labor and campesino leaders and of street demonstrations; confine military and police personnel to barracks on election day; award a seat on the Central Elections Council to the Democratic Convergence; form a watchdog panel to guarantee the integrity of the vote count; revise the electoral code through negotiations among all parties; respect absentee ballots cast by Salvadorans who have left the country during the war; require the US to stay out of the electoral process; and, forbid US aid to any party. If the government accepts the above commitments, the FMLN has pledged to the following: respect the political activity of all parties and all government election authorities; respect the lives of mayors, unless the mayors carry out military-related functions; a truce beginning two days before the election date and ending two days after elections; full participation of what the guerrillas called their "entire social base" in the campaign and election activity; endorsement of Democratic Convergence candidates; acceptance of the legitimacy of electoral results; and, respect for the continuation of the present Christian Democrat government until elections are carried out. President Duarte and Archbishop Rivera y Damas discussed the rebel proposal behind closed doors on Monday afternoon. FMLN representatives delivered the document to the archbishop on Jan. 20 in Mexico City. Mario Roldan, vice presidential candidate for the Democratic Convergence, told the AFP that he had obtained a copy of the proposal but refused to elaborate other than to say "it is going to demand sacrifices from everyone in El Salvador, including the rebels." During his homily at San Salvador's cathedral on Jan. 22, auxiliary bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez announced the delivery of the rebel proposal by the archbishop. The meeting with FMLN representatives in Mexico City, he said, was part of the Church's efforts to "open paths to peace." Rivera y Damas acts as mediator in the dialogue process between the rebels and the government. Rosa Chavez condemned the increasing violence perpetrated by the death squads, soldiers "who abuse their authority," and the rebels. He said that 75% of the country's 262 mayors have renounced their posts since mid- December after having received threats from the FMLN. According to presidential spokesman Roberto Viera, President Duarte called the FMLN proposal "positive," since it is the first time the rebels have talked of elections in eight years of war. In a Jan. 25 press conference, the ruling Christian Democratic party presidential candidate, Fidel Chavez Mena said that although some aspects of the FMLN peace proposal were positive, others contradicted the Salvadoran constitution. Col. Sigfredo Ochoa, leader of the ultra-right National Republican Alliance (ARENA), described the rebel proposal as a "trap." (Basic data from Notimex, 01/22/89; AFP, AP, 01/23/89; Uno Mas Uno, 01/25/89; Xinhua, 01/25/89)

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