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Nicaragua Lifts Freeze On New Visas To U.S. Diplomats

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 20, in a gesture to express its willingness for good relations with the new administration in Washington, the Nicaraguan government announced it was lifting the freeze on issuing new visas for US diplomats. Since July, 1988, diplomatic relations between Washington and Managua have been limited to minor consular functions and intelligence gathering. Following a July 10 anti-government demonstration in the town of Nandaime which turned violent, Nicaragua expelled US Ambassador Richard Melton and seven other US diplomats. The diplomats were accused of inciting the confrontation as part of a broader plan to foment political destabilization. The US then expelled Nicaraguan Ambassador to Washington, Carlos Tunnermann, and seven Nicaraguan diplomats. In September, President Daniel Ortega canceled a trip to the US, where he was scheduled to deliver a speech before the UN General Assembly, when the State Department refused to grant visas to all members of his 60-person entourage. For several months, US officials have been told by the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry that visa applications would not be considered for diplomats unless Washington permits Tunnermann to return to the US. In addition to being Nicaragua's Ambassador to the US, Tunnermann was Nicaragua's delegate to the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS). The Nicaraguan government has argued that because of the OAS post, the State Department had no authority to expel Tunnermann from the US. (Basic data from New York Times, 01/21/89)

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