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Date For Central American Summit Remains Uncertain

by Deborah Tyroler

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As of Jan. 20, it appeared as if the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua had agreed on Feb. 8-9 as the dates for a summit. (See CAU, 01/20/89.) On Jan. 21, however, Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte contacted Guatemalan counterpart Vinicio Cerezo requesting that the summit be rescheduled for Feb. 13-14. The summit is take place in San Salvador. According to an announcement by Costa Rican Foreign Minister Rodrigo Madrigal Nieto on Jan. 23, a date for the summit will be established when the five foreign ministers meet informally in Caracas on Feb. 2. The ministers and four of the region's five presidents are scheduled to attend the inauguration ceremonies of Venezuelan President-elect Carlos Andres Perez. Madrigal Nieto said the delay in setting a date for the summit was the result of "scheduling problems," rather than political disagreements. He added that he did not believe the summit would be delayed until March. The Honduran government has expressed objections to several proposed dates for the summit. President Jose Azcona Hoyo plans to travel to the US and Japan in the second half of February. In early February, the Honduran and Salvadoran foreign ministers are scheduled to make appearances before the International Court of Justice to testify on matters related to border conflicts. On the same day, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto Brockman called on neighboring governments to reconfirm the Feb. 8-9 date for the summit toward reactivating the peace process. In a letter to his counterparts in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, D'Escoto insisted on the "imperious necessity" of avoiding yet another delay in scheduling the summit. In the letter, the Nicaraguan minister said that the diverse and contradictory reports throughout Central America regarding the date project an image to the world of "arbitrariness, lack of seriousness or disinterest" in the summit. President Azcona has said he will participate in a summit as long as it is scheduled between Feb. 3 and Feb. 15. Costa Rican Oscar Arias has stated that he will accept any date his colleagues agree on, although he would prefer Feb. 19-20, the date proposed by his government. Guatemalan President Cerezo has said he agree to a summit on Feb. 13-14 in accordance with the wishes of Salvadoran President Duarte. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega would prefer that his counterparts stick to the previously agreed to Feb. 8-9 date. In his letter, Nicaraguan Minister D'Escoto reiterated invitations to neighboring governments regarding a technical meeting on Feb. 4-5, and of foreign ministers on Feb. 5-7 in Managua. On Jan. 24, Honduran President Azcona reiterated that he is willing to participate in a Central American summit before Feb. 15. Secretary of public relations for the Guatemalan presidency, Julio Santos, told the Mexican government's news agency, Notimex, on Jan. 24 that the absence of consensus on the date for the summit meeting continues. Santos added that his government had proposed the Feb. 8-9 date. In November 1988, the five foreign ministers agreed to hold the summit on Jan. 15-16 in San Salvador. Earlier this month, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias requested that the meeting be postponed until after the installation of US President George Bush and Venezuelan President-elect Carlos Andres Perez. If the Feb. 8-9 date is rejected in favor of a later date, it would mark the sixth postponement of the summit meeting since August 1988. (Basic data from Xinhua, 01/23/89; Notimex, 01/23/89, 01/24/89)

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