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Deborah Tyroler

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Salvadoran Rebels Open To Talks If Elections May Yet Be Postponed; President Duarte Confirms March 19 Vote

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 10, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) pledged to continue working toward peace talks as long as postponement of the presidential elections remains open to discussion. In a statement, the rebel high command said it would be willing to participate in talks before March 19, unless the elections are not postponed. The FMLN's statement was in response to an invitation to dialogue extended March 9 by a commission comprised of representatives of President Jose Napoleon Duarte's government and El Salvador's political parties. The commission was established by Duarte to discuss means toward ending the war, integrating rebels into the nation's political life, and rebel recognition of the Salvadoran military as the country's only legitimate army. The FMLN has insisted that the commission also discuss keeping the military inside the barracks during any balloting, and reforms to electoral legislation and the nation's electoral council. On the evening of March 13, President Duarte confirmed that the general elections would take place as scheduled on March 19. He asserted that the elections "are of vital importance for democracy," and requested that friendly governments, such as Mexico, Spain and Venezuela, enter into contact with the rebels to persuade them to withdraw threats toward disrupting the election process. Duarte called on presidents of these nations to make the FMLN "understand the injustice and anti-democratic nature of its attitude." (Basic data from Xinhua, 03/10/89; Notimex, 03/10/89, 03/13/89)

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