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Deborah Tyroler

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Former Contra Directorate Member, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, Requests Authorization To Open Private Tv Channel

by Deborah Tyroler

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Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Barrios, well-known journalist and former member of the Nicaraguan Resistance directorate, has requested authorization to open a private television channel in time for the national election campaign. Presidential elections are to occur before Feb. 25, 1990. In a recent interview with the New York Times in Miami, where he resides in exile, Chamorro said he made the request early this month through relatives in Managua. The initial request, he said, was dismissed by Nicaraguan government officials who said they would not provide application forms for such a project. Chamorro asserted that he and a partner, Carlos A. Briceno, a Nicaraguan television journalist who also lives in Miami, would seek broad support to force consideration of their application under the auspices of the regional peace agreement that guarantees freedom of expression. "You cannot have free expression when you don't have the means to communicate. Television is the perfect medium for a country like Nicaragua, and we think our proposal will test the willingness of the Sandinistas to live up to the promises that they have made," Chamorro said. According to Chamorro, he proposed the new TV channel to provide domestic opposition groups with the opportunity to compete with the two government-owned television stations, currently the only sources of TV broadcasting in Nicaragua. Government officials have said they will set aside one of the two channels for political broadcasting during the campaign. Chamorro, who said he would return to Nicaragua to oversee the new channel if it is approved, asserted that such an arrangement would be inadequate to permit the opposition to compete fairly with the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Chamorro said that if the new station is approved, he expected it would require about \$10 million startup capital. The capital, he said, would be provided by foundations and government sources, principally Western European, that have already expressed interest in the project. The new channel, he said, would offer a full range of programming, and would use dramatic series programming and technical assistance from Venezuelan television. Both Chamorro and Briceno said they had requested Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, to help pressure the Nicaraguan government into accepting their proposal. (Basic data from New York Times, 03/12/89)

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