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Guatemala: Prison Revolt Ends

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 26, about 100 inmates at the Pavon prison farm, located 15 miles east of Guatemala City, raided a prison armory and attempted to flee. When the escape failed, the rebellious prisoners took over certain sectors of the prison farm, and held hundreds of persons hostage. Most of the "hostages" many of whom chose to stay inside the prison were relatives of prisoners who had been visiting inmates on Easter when the rebellion occurred. (See CAU 03/29/89 for an account of events and statements covering March 26-28.) Developments since Tuesday are summarized below. March 29: About 100 inmates who did not participate in the rebellion attempted to escape the prison grounds. After being shot at by guards and taken into custody, they were taken to other prison sites. No injuries were reported. The escapees said they were desperate because they had not eaten for three days, and had not had water since the afternoon of March 28. On the same day, authorities turned off all electricity and water to the prison facility. Later, Julio Escobar Arango, Supreme Court ombudsman for jails, told reporters the rebels responded by offering to surrender if the prison guards were replaced. The rebels reportedly originally demanded pardons for the uprising, reduced sentences, better food and treatment, and replacement of the warden and assistant warden. Diverse media sources reported at least 12 persons had died in the uprising. March 30: According to radio station Emisoras Unidad, the rebellious inmates agreed to free all captives and disarm. The radio quoted unidentified officials as saying a final agreement was on the point of being signed with the inmates. AFP reported that the government's most recent offer included reducing the rebels' sentences by at least five years, and changing the warden and all guards at the prison. The government also reportedly agreed to improve living conditions in the prison, and not to penalize prisoners who participated in the rebellion. The hostages released on Thursday, estimated at 560, were mainly women and children who had been visiting prisoners. Others were released earlier. According to a report by DPA, about 1,000 prisoners were reported to have participated in the rebellion. (Basic data from AP, Notimex, 03/29/89; AFP, DPA, Xinhua, 03/30/89)

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