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## On Electoral Reform Demands By Nicaraguan Opposition

by Deborah Tyroler

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Among the most important electoral reforms under discussion by Nicaraguan opposition parties are a universal vote registration of Nicaraguan citizens inside and outside the country; regulations prohibiting members of the military from voting or running for office, and an end to legislation that prohibits foreign funding of party activities. Other proposals include an increase in the minimum voting age from 16 to 18, a prohibition on presidential re-election, and permission for establishing a new independent television station. Demands under debate would affect the country's electoral and media legislation and, in some cases, its Constitution. Changes would occur under the terms of a regional accord signed Feb. 14 by the Central American presidents in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan government is committed to permitting free and competitive elections and greater political pluralism in exchange for dismantling the contra bases in Honduras. Under the accord, general elections are to be held on or before Feb. 25, 1990, and are to be preceded by a six-month campaign period and a four-month organizing period. Opposition leaders point out that those deadlines leave just one month more for completion of legislative changes under the accord, which requires "reforms in electoral legislation and laws to guarantee political organization and action in the broadest sense." In a recent statement to opposition leaders, President Daniel Ortega announced that the government was planning to send to the National Assembly a set of 19 proposed changes that had already emerged from talks between Sandinista leaders and individual opposition leaders. Among the changes mentioned by Ortega are granting of voting rights to Nicaraguans outside the country, a ban on using "state goods" in the campaign, and ratification of several of the general steps defined in the El Salvador accord. Independent analysts have estimated that as many as 300,000 Nicaraguans, or about 10% of the population, have left the country. In addition to registering such potential voters, opposition leaders say they seek to prevent election fraud by pressing for nationwide identity cards such as those common in other Central American countries. (Basic data from New York Times, 04/02/89)

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