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## **Panama: Notes On Competitors In May 7 Elections**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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The pro-government party alliance in Panama is called the Coalition for National Liberation (COLINA). The main opposition party organization is the Democratic Civic Opposition Alliance (ADOC). These two coalitions are the main competitors in the May 7 presidential elections. On March 2, ADOC sponsored a demonstration in Panama City, attended by 160,000 (according to AFP). Amid chants calling for the ouster of the "Noriega regime," ADOC first vice presidential candidate Christian Democrat Ricardo Arias, said, "This gathering proves that we will soon win back our liberty. These people demand change and democracy." ADOC's presidential candidate is Guillermo Endara, a former member of the Authentic Panamanian Party (PPA). The PPA split with ADOC in December. Guillermo Ford of the National Liberal Republican Movement (MOLIRENA) is the Alliance's candidate for the second vice presidency. ADOC's presidential platform focuses on "national reconstruction," promising democratization, economic recovery, the end of military involvement in politics, and a "cleaning up" of public administration. Opposition candidates make frequent references to Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega's alleged involvement in drug trafficking and his possible role in past electoral fraud. At a rally on Jan. 31, Arias threatened a "total strike" in Panama if Noriega interferes in any way with the elections. "We are going to paralyze the country from border to border, from sea to sea, until Noriega falls," Arias said. Earlier, Arias accused Noriega of involvement in the December attempted coup in Argentina. According to Arias, the coup leader has close ties with Noriega, was in Panama days before the rebellion, and used the general's private plane to return to Argentina. Panamanian officials deny any involvement and claim that the accusations are aimed at discrediting COLINA before the elections. ADOC's "negative" campaigning prompted Noriega to remark that the opposition "is searching in other countries, especially the United States, for a political line to follow." He accused members of the opposition of "waiting for approval from the US government before taking a step." All COLINA candidates reportedly have close links to Noriega. Ramon Sieiro, the first vice presidential candidate, is the general's brother-in-law. Presidential candidate Carlos Duque has publicly expressed his desire that "the last US soldier leave Panamanian territory." He added, "We are a friendly people but have been treated as the worst of enemies. We are not enemies of the American people. We only want to be treated as a free and sovereign nation." ADOC's position has been significantly weakened by a recent split in its former majority party, the Authentic Panamanian Party (PPA). In the 1984 elections, the PPA won 70% of the ballot for the opposition coalition over 45,000 more than the most successful pro-government party. At present, while some of its members, including Guillermo Endara, have elected to stay with ADOC, the official PPA has become a non-aligned "third force" in the May elections. PPA's leader, Hidelbrando Nicosia, is running for the presidency, and claims to have the support of the majority of PPA members. Alfonso Diaz and Emilio Ponce Arce are the candidates for first and second vice presidents, respectively, on the official PPA ticket. (Basic data from 03/10/89 report by Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean-CRIES, Managua)

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