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Nicaraguan Government Formally Proposes Amendments To Electoral & Media Legislation

by Deborah Tyroler

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On April 7, the Nicaraguan government formally proposed 29 amendments to electoral and media legislation toward fulfilling the terms of the Feb. 14 regional peace accord. The amendments affect 24 laws and add five. Some of the proposed changes are summarized below: * Increase opposition participation in election oversight bodies. * Establish public financing for election campaigns. * Grant political candidates equal time on state-owned media outlets. * Guarantee all parties the right to campaign "wherever voting-age citizens congregate." * Prohibit use of government employees or property for campaigning. * Waiver of existing rule that parties must receive at least 5% of the popular vote to gain a seat in the National Assembly. * 60% of available financing for political campaigns to be set aside and distributed equally among the parties or alliances participating in the election. The remaining 40% would be distributed according to the proportion of the votes each party received in the last national elections, held in 1984. * Registration of Nicaraguan voters outside the country. The proposed amendment permitting the registration of Nicaraguan voters outside the country requires them to return to Nicaragua to cast their ballots. Some opposition leaders argue that such requirement effectively nullifies the amendment of its value. Some opposition groups have called for restrictions on voting and running for office by members of the Nicaraguan armed forces and an increase of two years in the minimum voting age, and for lifting a prohibition on foreign financing of political activities. The proposed changes do not address these demands. (Basic data from New York Times, 04/08/89)

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