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In a recent interview with the Washington Post, Guillermo Endara, presidential candidate for the opposition Civic Opposition Democratic Alliance (ADOC), said, "The fraud is going to have to be great for them to win. If there is massive fraud, people will be sufficiently motivated to make a protest never before seen in Panama, and we want to be at the forefront of it." On May 7, Panamanians will elect the president, two vice presidents, 67 national legislators and 505 local representatives. ADOC consists of a coalition of three parties: the Christian Democrats, the Nationalist Republican Liberal Movement (MOLIRENA), and the Authentic Liberal Party. Endara is a former aide to late opposition leader Arnulfo Arias. ADOC's vice presidential candidates are Ricardo Arias Calderon, the head of the Christian Democratic Party, and Guillermo Ford, the leader of the Molirena party. The pro-Noriega parties have joined together in the National Liberation Coalition (COLINA). Its eight parties are as follows: Democratic Revolutionary, Labor, People's, National Action, Workers Democratic, Liberal, Republican and Panamanian Revolutionary. COLINA's presidential candidate is Carlos Duque, a long-time Noriega ally and business associate. COLINA candidate for first vice president is Ramon Sieiro, a brother-in-law of Noriega. Aquilino Boyd, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the US and the United Nations, is running for second vice president. Boyd denies that the coalition has any intention to rig the vote. He told the Post, "We wish to win a free, fair and honest election." In a report issued April 11, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an arm of the Organization of American States, expressed "concern to the government of Panama as regards the current electoral process, in which serious irregularities are occurring." The commission said that during a visit to Panama from Feb. 27 to March 3, its delegation received complaints of "massive alterations" of voter lists, "pressures on public functionaries" to follow the government line, "retention and/or premature perforation" of opposition supporters' identity cards to prevent them from voting, government funding and support for COLINA rallies, pro-government bias in electoral administration, and a lack of "sufficient guarantees" to prevent multiple voting, especially by soldiers. According to a survey conducted in March for the Christian Democratic Party by a Venezuelan polling firm, Doxa C.A., Endara was leading Duque 57% to 20%, with 2% for a third candidate, Hildebrando Nicosia. Nicosia is running as candidate for Arias' Authentic Panamanian Party, which split after his death. Panama's Electoral Tribunal granted official recognition to Nicosia's minority faction of the party, allowing it exclusive use of the party's symbols and facilities. The majority wing, headed by Endara, was forced to move to another party. The OAS rights commission criticized this development as tending to confuse the voters. In addition to ruling on party disputes, the Electoral Tribunal administers and controls the election process, issues identity cards, registers voters, settles electoral challenges not resolved at lower levels and officially declares the winning candidates. Tribunal president, Yolando Pulice de Rodriguez, is a close Noriega ally. According to a recently published book by former colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera, Pulice participated in rigging the results of Panama's 1984 elections at Diaz Herrera's house. Although the Defense Forces and the civilian government are prohibited by law from participating in partisan electoral politics, according to the Post they have been openly campaigning
for COLINA. At least 200 independent foreign observers are expected to try to monitor the elections. The government has said they will not be prevented from doing so, but has clarified that most of them will not be officially accredited and are not welcome. In Panama, after ballots in the polling places are counted, the ballots are immediately burned, making a recount impossible. At each voting table, protests are decided by majority vote of the 15 officials entitled to be present, which include three Electoral Tribunal appointees and one representative of each political party. Since COLINA consists of eight parties, it will be assured of the majority in any protest that develops. (Basic data from Washington Post, 04/19/89; Notimex, 04/23/89)