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On Americas Watch Statement Regarding Human Rights Abuses By Nicaraguan Government Troops

by Deborah Tyroler

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Since the Sapoa cease-fire agreement was signed between the Nicaraguan government and the contras in March 1988, government troops have been accused of executing 40 to 50 civilians in northern Nicaragua. In a recent statement, Juan Mendez, executive director of Americas Watch (headquartered in New York), said, "The executions are too numerous to be isolated cases. They constitute a pattern of abuse by government forces." Nicaraguan officials refused to comment on the charges, and an Interior Ministry spokesperson told the New York Times that the government would likely not comment until it had a chance to investigate all the cases. Regional coordinator of Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared by the Counter-revolutionaries, Dani Chavarría Rivera, told the Times that "The contras disguise themselves as soldiers to discredit the army." She asserted that the contras had killed or kidnapped 6,000 people in Matagalpa department in the last eight years. In the year following the Sapoa ceasefire agreement, she added, the contras have killed or kidnapped 300 people. Human rights groups and residents of the area say the contras still commit abuses. According to Americas Watch, in contrast to the contra army, political killings by Nicaraguan government troops were rare throughout most of the war. With the exception of notable cases seven years ago, it said that government abuses had been "sporadic and that they did not reflect a pattern." In a 1988 report, Americas Watch noted a series of murders of suspected contra collaborators and family members. It charged that "the cases are numerous enough to suggest tolerance or complicity by higher authorities." Mendez said the conclusion appearing in the report was confirmed by more recent killings by both army and Interior Ministry troops. In the statement, he said, "The government's failure to put an end to this practice merits severe condemnation." He also commended Nicaraguan officials for prosecuting some human rights violators. (Basic data from New York Times, 04/16/89)

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