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Latin American Bishops Call On U.S. To Lift Trade Embargoes Against Nicaragua & Panama

by Deborah Tyroler

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On May 18, a delegation of bishops from the Latin American Episcopal Conference, met with UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar to discuss the Central American situation, US economic embargoes against three Latin American nations, and the foreign debt crisis. In statements to Notimex, the clergypersons said that at a meeting with President George Bush, they asked Bush to consider the "human" dimension of the foreign debt problem. Bishop Dario Castrillon of Colombia said that the Church supports a generalized reduction in Latin American nations' debt burdens, rather than debt payment moratoriums. He added that when efforts to make debt service payments result in starvation and sacrifices of elementary human rights, then debt payments "must be relegated to a secondary level." Oscar Rodriguez, auxiliary archbishop of Honduras, and secretary general of the Latin American Episcopal Conference, said that the delegation had expressed the Church's support for a UN peacekeeping force in Central America. Next, Rodriguez affirmed that the Conference has made several public statements supporting the immediate termination of the US economic embargoes against Nicaragua, Panama and Cuba. He said that such operations are "intended to punish governments, but in reality the populations of these countries are the victims." On May 17 in Managua, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, head of the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference, reiterated his support for lifting the US economic embargo. The embargo was introduced by the Reagan administration in 1985, and renewed every year since then. Obando said the 900 members of the Latin American Episcopal Conference had expressed their support for ending the embargo, and that he was confident President Bush would respond in a positive fashion.

(Basic data from AFP, 05/17/89; Notimex, 05/18/89)

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