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Organization Of American States Mission Leaves Panama

by Deborah Tyroler

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On May 27, after four days of talks aimed at suggesting a solution to Panama's political crisis, an Organization of American States (OAS) delegation left the country. The delegates said they would request that another OAS mission travel to Panama in the near future for additional talks with Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega and the political opposition. Noriega told the mission it was up to the political parties to sit down and negotiate. Opposition leaders insisted Noriega must negotiate because he is the real power in Panama. According to delegation member, Ecuadoran Foreign Minister Diego Cordovez, "There are complex problems and deep emotions involved in the Panamanian situation. We have promoted communication between the different political sectors. We have fulfilled our mandate." Cordovez said the mission met with government and opposition leaders as well as Roman Catholic Church officials and other groups and made them all aware of the different points of view. Guillermo Endara, opposition presidential candidate in the May 7 elections, said: "Unfortunately, there has been no progress for the good of Panama." The OAS sent the mission, headed by Secretary-General Joao Baena Soares, to engage in talks with representatives of the government, opposition groups, the Church, and other organizations with the aim of suggesting a plan for resolving the country's political crisis. The Panamanian government claimed the US interfered openly in the May 7 elections in favor of the opposition by providing financial assistance and by repeatedly calling for the ouster of Noriega. Washington obtained a public condemnation of Noriega from the OAS. The OAS delegation is expected to submit a full report on their mission next week to the OAS, which must decide what to do next. On May 26, the OAS delegation received assurances from Alfredo Manfredo, Panamanian member of the Canal Commission, that Canal operations were not in danger. He told reporters after meeting with the delegation that it is in Panama's interest to see that Canal operations continue to be efficient and reliable. Also on Friday, after meeting with the OAS delegation, Noriega told reporters: "The key to the problem lies with the contending political parties. The opposition has declined to talk to [pro-government presidential candidate Carlos] Duque. "If the opposition remains intransigent, the Defense Forces are not going to slip on a banana peel" and be drawn into the dispute. "The two sides have to start talking," he said. In a telephone interview with AP on May 26, Endara said, "We are willing to talk to Noriega about an institutional solution, but for this it is vital that Noriega retire." (Basic data from Notimex, 05/26/89, 05/27/89; AP, 05/26/89, 05/27/89; DPA, 05/27/89)

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