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O.a.s. Mission In Panama: Report

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On June 12 in Panama City, Ecuadoran Foreign Minister Diego Cordovez said he is confident the government and opposition have the political will to settle their differences. Cordovez is a member of the Organization of American States mission sent to Panama to help mediate a solution to the political crisis following the annulment of the May 7 elections. The minister, a former United Nations official who helped negotiate the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, said the OAS can only "promote a dialogue and perhaps give ideas based on our national experience based on similar situations." OAS secretary general Joao Baena Soares, and the foreign ministers of Guatemala and Trinidad and Tobago are the other members of the mission. On their first visit to Panama late last month, the OAS mission could not persuade the opposition and government to hold direct talks. Opposition leaders said they would talk only with Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega and he refused. Cordovez said, "I think there is a political will in the government and the opposition that has to be translated into specific steps. It seems to me that it is most urgent to establish mechanisms that allow Panamanians to talk and negotiate." On June 13, opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara said Noriega has refused to negotiate with the opposition. In statements to reporters after meeting with the OAS mission, Endara said he was informed of Noriega's attitude by members of the mission. Earlier in the day, the OAS diplomats met with Noriega. Endara said the Civic Democratic Opposition Alliance (ADOC) would continue to demand "that our triumph in the May 7 elections be recognized." He added that despite the general's refusal to negotiate, the opposition "is not negative" about the mission's results." According to Endara, "They (the military) have to accept the democratic solution as their patriotic duty. They must accept us as the winners of the elections and allow the transfer of power September 1." Also on Tuesday, the OAS mission met with members of the national legislature. Carlos Duque, president of the ruling Democratic Revolutionary Party, and presidential candidate for the pro-government coalition on May 7, called for an end to US military involvement in the region, and termination of US economic sanctions against Panama. Duque said negotiations were impossible if "the opposition is intransigent." He added that "Gen. Noriega's departure is not on the negotiating table." (Basic data from AP, 06/12/89; AFP, 06/14/89)

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