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Panamanian "dialogue" To End Political Crisis: Summary Of Recent Developments

by Deborah Tyroler

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July 28: The Opposition Civic Democratic Alliance (ADOC) requested that the Organization of American States (OAS) mission "clarify" its mediation concepts before resuming participation in a dialogue with representatives of pro-government political parties and the Panamanian Defense Forces. The formal request was signed by Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderon and Guillermo Ford, ADOC candidates in the annulled May 7 elections. ADOC asserted that specific items contained in the resolution adopted July 19 by OAS member nation foreign ministers were "contradictory." The resolution called for a transfer of power to begin on or before Sept. 1, and that new elections be organized as soon as possible. The ADOC communique said that these elements of the OAS resolution defied the will of the Panamanian people as expressed in the May 7 elections, and requested recognition of the opposition coalition's "clear triumph and overwhelming majority" in the elections. At the first session of the "national dialogue" on July 16-17, participants established basic agreement on the agenda for future discussions. Aug. 1: In a statement, the Christian Democrat Party headed by Ricardo Arias Calderon reiterated that Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega must resign as commander in chief of the PDF, and that results of the May 7 elections must be recognized in order for Panama to "achieve full democracy." Next, the statement declared that transfer of power on Sept. 1 must be carried out on the basis of "democratic mechanisms." The Christian Democrats warned that the "Noriega regime seeks to interpret this transfer as merely a replacement of officials." In addition, the statement said that national reconciliation demands respect for all human rights, which would mean the immediate release of all political prisoners, the end of repression and intimidation of citizens, the immediate return of exiles, reopening of all media outlets, reestablishment of the right peaceful assembly, an end to abuses of public employees, and the administration of justice in line with Panama's constitution and legislation. Aug. 2: The Panamanian Council of State met to discuss alternatives for a "government of national union" to be installed Sept. 1 to be presented at a future dialogue session. Meanwhile, ADOC leaders met with members of the OAS mission. (Basic data from Xinhua, 07/28/89, 08/01/89, 08/02/89)

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