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Preliminary Talks Between Salvadoran Government & Rebels Scheduled For Sept. 10-14 In Mexico
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On Sept. 5 in Mexico City, Ana Guadalupe Martinez, diplomatic official for the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) announced a proposal that the rebels begin talks described as preliminary to dialogue with a Salvadoran government delegation in Mexico on Sept. 10-14. She said there were no conditions regarding the level or composition of the government delegation. Next, Martinez said the FMLN suggested that San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas act as mediator. In addition, the rebels requested representatives of the Organization of American States and the United Nations be present at the meeting as witnesses. Martinez said the FMLN had sent a letter to President Alfredo Cristiani about a month ago presenting terms for negotiations citing an offer of discussions made by President Alfredo Cristiani in his inaugural address. She added that the rebels had decided to make public their acceptance of the government's conditions "because we have had no answer and decided to make some concessions." In effect, the FMLN dropped prior insistence that talks be held in El Salvador, and for the armed forces to participate in any talks, preliminary or otherwise. Martinez said, "We are going to be talking about the war and the armed forces. But if the army does not want to be present, or cannot reach an agreement on whether to participate or not, so be it." Rebel spokespeople told reporters that Archbishop Rivera y Damas had informed Cristiani of their new offer on Sept. 1. In an interview with Notimex on Sept. 5 in San Salvador, Guillermo Ungo, leader of the opposition Revolutionary National Movement (MNR), said that while the FMLN's position is "impeccable," the problem continues to be one of determining what issues will be negotiated. In other words, he said, does the government want to negotiate FMLN demobilization, or a solution to the war to be followed by demobilization. Ungo stated that the Cristiani government's capacity to negotiate is questionable. In this sense, he said, the delegation that will meet with the rebels must be equipped with matters to negotiate acceptable to Washington. Next, Ungo said that he had the impression the US government's mood is simply to gain time, rather than any real interest in negotiations at the moment. Gerardo Diaz, secretary general of the FENASTRAS labor federation, said there are concrete signs showing that the FMLN is willing to dialogue with the government toward reaching an agreement. He added that certain "government sectors" will try to boycott a dialogue. Christian Democrat Party leader and former foreign minister Ricardo Acevedo Peralta expressed skepticism on the possibility of achieving peace by means of dialogue between the guerrillas and the rightist government. The government's economic austerity measures, he said, militate against ending the civil war via a negotiation process between the rebels and ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance). He added that as long as solutions to the problems of El Salvador's majority are not found, achieving peace will be very difficult. On Sept. 6, Cristiani accepted the guerrilla proposal for preliminary discussions in Mexico. He rejected the participation of Archbishop Rivera y Damas as mediator. On Sept. 7 in Mexico City, FMLN spokespeople Martinez and Mario Lopez read a statement at a press conference saying that the rebels would reduce military activity toward bringing about "as soon as possible a definitive process of negotiation" to end the civil war. They said the FMLN would suspend acts of sabotage against the electric power supply and telephone network and was ending its the use
of land mines and explosives in booby traps. Martinez said, "This is not a total cease-fire." The FMLN requested that in exchange, the government take similar actions and end repression. In San Salvador, President Cristiani described the FMLN's statement regarding suspension of operations and other measures as "positive." He also announced that members of the government delegation had been selected. The meetings between the two sides, he said, would be "continuous" and private. Delegation members are Justice Minister Oscar Santamaria; Presidency Minister Col. Antonio Martinez Bareta; attorneys Abelardo Torres and Hector Contreras; and, writer Hugo Escobar Galindo. The government's goodwill gesture is apparently action in response to requests that rebel wounded be permitted to leave the country for medical treatment. Cristiani announced that on Sept. 8, the executive would introduce a bill in the legislature to permit rebel war wounded to leave El Salvador. [In statements to reporters on Sept. 6, Cristiani said that the Geneva Convention does not apply to El Salvador because the FMLN is acting outside the law, and therefore, "there is no state of war." Nonetheless, he said, accords of a humanitarian nature could be developed that would permit more than one wounded guerrilla to leave the country.] (Basic data from Notimex, 09/05-07/89; New York Times, 09/06/89; AFP, 09/07/89)

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