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Jimmy Carter & Former Argentine President Raul Alfonsin Visit Nicaragua In First Phase Of Electoral Observation

by Deborah Tyroler

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The Nicaraguan government, the 14-party opposition coalition, and Nicaragua's Supreme Electoral Council sent an invitation for election observers to the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, based at the Carter Center, Emory University, in Atlanta, Ga. Former US president Jimmy Carter arrived in Managua on Sept. 16 as head of a Council delegation. Former Argentine president Raul Alfonsin, a member of the Council delegation, also arrived at the international airport in Managua on Saturday. President Daniel Ortega met Carter and Alfonsin at the airport. Other members of the Council include Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, former US president Gerald Ford, and Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley. At a brief press conference held at the airport after the arrivals of Carter and Alfonsin, Carter said in response to a reporter's question, "If President Alfonsin and I and others can certify in February that the elections have been honest and fair and that the successful candidates are the legitimate leaders of Nicaragua, this would almost ensure, in my opinion, an immediate improvement in relations between the United States and Nicaragua." Asked what lessons he had learned during the Panamanian elections that could be applied to his current task, Carter replied: "From what I know to date, those means used to have a fraudulent election in Panama have been carefully avoided for Nicaragua." In reference to an aborted plan by the Bush administration to channel $3 million in aid to opposition presidential candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Carter said any campaign contributions "should be open and overt in nature and comply completely with the laws in Nicaragua." Carter said the Council will send up to 20 observers to Nicaragua for the February elections, and will coordinate its efforts with the observer missions from the United Nations and the Organization of American States. He added that the intent will be for the Council to issue a joint declaration on the elections with the UN and OAS observer delegations. Alfonsin said that 1990 elections will promote changes in Nicaragua's diplomatic relations with other countries, and a more constructive attitude by the US toward Nicaragua. On Sept. 16, after a lunch with Barrios de Chamorro, Carter told reporters he was certain technical difficulties surrounding the electoral process will be overcome, and that the February elections will be honest. In the company of Alfonsin, and her running mate Virgilio Godoy, Barrios de Chamorro said she agreed with Carter. On Sept. 17, President Ortega told reporters that the presence of observers such as former presidents Alfonsin and Carter would help to "strengthen" Nicaragua's electoral process. Carter told reporters on Monday that he would request financial support from several nations for Nicaragua's electoral preparations. At a meeting with a group of farmers in Nandaime on Sept. 18, President Ortega said the government had invited the UN, OAS, and former presidents Carter and Alfonsin, among others, to observe the elections in an effort to demonstrate to the US that Nicaraguans will vote in favor of the Sandinista revolution. He said, "We will show the Yankees that the people will vote for Sandino and not for (President George) Bush. These will be the candidates: Nicaragua defending Sandino and the opposition defending Bush." On Sept. 19, Carter told reporters that he successfully negotiated with the Nicaraguan government for the return of contra Miskito Indian leader Brooklyn Rivera to Nicaragua. The government dropped...
a prohibition on his return after Rivera agreed to renounce armed struggle against the government, refrain from illegal activities and cooperate in the electoral process. Carter said Rivera accepted the terms that he and Interior Minister Tomas Borge agreed to Sept. 18 during a visit to Puerto Cabezas. Rivera left Nicaragua in 1981, and has been residing in Costa Rica. Talks between the government and Rivera have occurred intermittently for the past four years. The conditions set by the government in Rivera's case are basically the same for the return of non-Indian contras. Under a previous government offer, Rivera was to disarm his followers within 30 days of his return to Nicaragua. Carter announced the agreement on the Rivera issue on his return to Managua from Puerto Cabezas, shortly before heading back to Atlanta. During his three-day visit, Carter met on three occasions with President Ortega. He also met with opposition candidates, representatives of the UN and OAS observer missions, the Supreme Electoral Council, and the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP). Before departing, Carter said that all complaints, criticisms and problems surrounding the electoral process are less important than the pledge by all parties and the Nicaraguan people to participate in the process. (Basic data from AP, 09/15/89, 09/19/89; Notimex, 09/15-18/89; Xinhua, 09/16/89)

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