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Salvadoran President On Peace Talk Proposal; Rebel Response

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On Oct. 2, during an address to the UN General Assembly, Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani said his government would propose "a complete end to hostilities that would bring a definitive end to fighting" when officials meet in Costa Rica Oct. 16-17 with representatives of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). He gave no details of the cease-fire proposal. According to Cristiani, the same mechanisms for the repatriation and demobilization of the Nicaraguan contras could be employed in the case of the Salvadoran rebels. The president accused the FMLN of illegitimately taking up arms, of "taking advantage" of El Salvador's economic crisis to spread its "fanaticism," and of rejecting several proposals for dialogue offered by his government. Next, Cristiani said the "absence of democracy" in Nicaragua has been the "origin of political and social conflicts" in Central America. [About 50 people protesting Cristiani's arrival at UN headquarters Monday apparently missed their mark, and attacked the motorcade of East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer. Two men jumped in front of the limousine carrying Fischer, and were dragged away by police. Eight people were arrested and several policemen injured in the ensuing scuffle. Meanwhile, Cristiani was driven unnoticed into the UN garage. Carrying signs reading "Cristiani equals death squads," the protesters said they would harrass the politician at each stop of his visit in the US.] Cristiani’s speech was delivered a week after the FMLN mounted its heaviest offensive in months. More than 70 soldiers and guerrillas were reportedly killed or wounded in fighting in at least eight of the country's 14 departments since Sept. 25. The FMLN said the resumption of military action was a response to an escalation in illegal arrests of labor union members, and disappearances and political murders by government security forces. At a news conference after his speech, Cristiani said he expected the monthly peace talks agreed to by the two sides would last for some time. In a statement released Oct. 3 in Mexico City, the FMLN described Cristiani's proposal as "unreal and impractical," since it suggests a cease-fire prior to concrete measures to bring "democratization, social justice and self-determination" to El Salvador. The statement said, "To end the war and then to negotiate is the equivalent of asking for surrender without having won the war. Aside from being unreal," the plan "would transform itself into a formula for not negotiating and for prolonging the war." Rebel station Radio Venceremos described the proposal as hypocritical, "demagogic, demented and delirious." Cristiani was accused of trying to improve his image abroad while at the helm of a "brutal fascistic government." (Basic data from AFP, Notimex, 10/02/89; New York Times, 10/03/89, 10/04/89)

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