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Guatemala: Guerrillas Call For Talks With Representatives Of Several Social Sectors, Including Military

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 30, in a statement published in Guatemala's major newspapers, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) repeated an offer to negotiate a cease-fire with President Vinicio Cerezo's government. The statement called for talks with several social sectors to identify an alternative to what the URNG called a repressive and terrorist government. Next, the rebels stated that Cerezo and Defense Minister Alejandro Hector Gramajo have ignored previous requests to resume 1987 talks held in Madrid. Guerrillas have been fighting the government for over 30 years. The government has been condemned on numerous occasions for ignoring multiple thousands of murders of civilians by rightist death squads and its own security forces in its attempt to exterminate the guerrillas. The URNG a coalition of the country's four rebel organizations said the government had not fulfilled its pledge to promote social change, and that Guatemala remains in the throes of "instability, chaos and corruption." The statement included a copy of a letter from the URNG to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar asking him to intervene on behalf of human rights in Guatemala. The statement said a dialogue among all political, business, religious and military sectors of society was needed to end "repression, terror, human rights violations and to begin a true democratic process." The URNG said the talks could take place in any country which offered security for dialogue participants. In a separate statement during the week, the URNG said the rebels had killed 1,172 soldiers in nearly 800 clashes since April. Military spokespersons responded by asserting that they have defeated the guerrillas and that only 1,000 armed insurgents are left in isolated pockets of the country. In statements to reporters on Oct. 2, Defense Minister Gramajo rejected the possibility of a dialogue between the government and the URNG. He said rebel statements calling for peace talks with several sectors of Guatemalan society were "nothing more" than political maneuvers designed to give them a positive image, or to remind Guatemalans that they still exist. (Basic data from AFP, 09/30/89; Notimex, 10/02/89)

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