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Guatemalan President Will Not Join American Heads Of State At Costa Rican Celebration

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Oct. 23, President Vinicio Cerezo confirmed that he would not join heads of state from throughout the hemisphere in San Jose, Costa Rica, this weekend. He said, "The meeting in San Jose has a grand objective to celebrate 100 years of Costa Rican democracy, which we all admire and recognize. However, it is a protocol affair. There will be no statements, political decisions, presentations." Cerezo said that his agenda was quite full this weekend, and since no serious discussion or decision-making was scheduled for the San Jose event, he had decided to stay in Guatemala City. A report by Notimex suggested that the Guatemalan leader was chagrined by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias' ability to upstage his own diplomatic initiatives. In March this year at an Organization of American States meeting, Cerezo called for a hemispheric summit to discuss several regional concerns, including the foreign debt, anti-drug trafficking efforts, Central America, and a series of problems under the general headings of Latin America's deteriorating economic and social welfare conditions. The tentative date for the summit meeting was set for January 1990. Since then, President Arias decided to celebrate his country's "democracy centennial" by inviting his hemispheric counterparts to the event with the exceptions of the presidents of Cuba, Panama and Chile. An unidentified top Guatemalan official told Notimex that it would be "very difficult" to arrange another hemispheric encounter in January, so soon after the Costa Rican affair. However, he said, his government would continue with plans to host such a summit. Some Guatemalan officials and newspaper editors point out that Cerezo was the principal force behind the first Central American summit in 1986. Then, in August 1987, the Esquipulas II peace accords were signed at a summit in Guatemala City. One of the 1987 accord provisions, the establishment of a Central American Parliament, was pushed by Cerezo as an essential forum for regional governments to organize cooperative programs and to forestall and reduce conflicts in the interest of long-term peace. The Costa Rican legislature has not yet approved membership and participation in the regional parliament. It was Oscar Arias, however, who received the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership in advancing the Central American peace process. Notimex cited unidentified Guatemalan officials who blame the Foreign Ministry's "erratic" follow-up to the president's initiatives. Since Cerezo took office, three foreign ministers have come and gone. The fourth was installed last week. (Basic data from Notimex, 10/23/89)

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