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Nicaragua Talks At U.N. On Contra Demobilization, Cease-fire Rescheduled For Nov. 9-10

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On Nov. 1, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega suspended a 19-month unilateral cease-fire with the contras. He also called on Honduras, the contras, and the International Verification and Support Commission (CIAV) mandated by the Aug. 7 regional summit agreement to participate in a meeting to discuss logistics and timing of the contra demobilization. Ortega proposed that the meeting take place at the United Nations in New York on Nov. 6-7. (See 11/01/89, 11/03/89 issues of CAU.) The Honduran government declined the invitation asserting that it had fully complied with its obligations thus far under the Aug. 7 accord, and that contra demobilization plans were a "Nicaraguan problem." The agreement calls for the voluntary demobilization and relocation of the contras from Honduran camps by Dec. 5. Nothing has yet been accomplished toward contra demobilization. By Thursday, Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo had accepted an invitation by Ortega to attend the meeting in New York meeting in the capacity of witness. As of Nov. 2, UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General Joao Baena Soares, and UN and OAS officials charged with coordinating the CIAV had made plans to attend the meeting. Nov. 3: Nicaraguan Resistance directorate member Wilfredo Montalvan told AP that the contras would definitely not attend the meeting at the UN on Nov. 6-7. He said, "The date proposed by Ortega is a strategy of his political party to take us off guard. That is, he proposed that date for his convenience. Therefore, we propose that it be Nov. 13 to be able to prepare ourselves. "And if Ortega thinks the only thing that is going to be discussed there is the unconditional surrender of our troops, he should forget that, since he is very wrong. Our demobilization is voluntary and will (occur) when you can observe that Nicaragua is taking true steps toward the route of democracy." Montalvan said the agenda of any meeting with the Nicaraguan government would include a general amnesty for political prisoners. Roberto Ferrey, another member of the contra directorate, confirmed that chief military commander Enrique Bermudez and four other contra military leaders would attend. A communique released by contra leaders in Tegucigalpa said the agenda for the meeting in New York would include establishing a "verifiable cease-fire," granting a "total amnesty" by the Nicaraguan government, and "reforms" to be carried out by the government in Managua that would permit eventual voluntary repatriation by the contra fighters. The communique said Bermudez would head the contra delegation. In Managua, after stating that Honduran participation in the proposed meeting in New York is "indispensable and valuable." President Ortega said he was confident Honduras would agree to a meeting at a later date, and proposed a rescheduling for Nov. 9-10. Nov. 4: UN spokespersons said the Nov. 6-7 meeting proposed by President Ortega had been postponed. Nov. 6: In a letter to President Ortega, Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo said that a delegation headed by the Honduran ambassador to the UN, Roberto Martinez Ordonez, would participate in the Nov. 9-10 meetings in the capacity of observer. Azcona added that "if the parties to the conflict agree, we will be able to carry out a more relevant role" in the talks. UN officials announced that contra representatives have agreed to participate in a meeting on Nov. 9-10. A senior UN official who requested anonymity told AP that all issues will be on the agenda, including contra dismantlement, security guarantees for rebels
returning to Nicaragua, and political reform in Nicaragua. According to the US State Department, about 2,000 contras have infiltrated into Nicaragua in recent weeks from Honduras. Thus, the State Department counts about 10,000 contras remain in Honduras and 4,000 in Nicaragua. The AP (11/07/89) cited contra sources in Tegucigalpa who said the contra delegation visited Washington on Monday to meet with US officials. Nov. 7: Honduran ambassador at the UN Martinez Ordonez told reporters that while Honduras wants the contras out, "we are not going to remove them at the point of a gun." He described his government's participation as observer at the talks as a "conciliatory gesture." In response to a question on whether contra demobilization could be complete by Dec. 5, Martinez Ordonez said that if a delay ensures the contras' departure, his government would not object. Next, the ambassador asserted that if the meeting in New York does not produce some type of agreement that would adhere to the timetable and other specifics laid out in the Tela accord, "we will have to return to the diplomacy of the five Central American countries." Costa Rica's ambassador to the UN, Carlos Jose Gutierrez, agreed with Martinez Ordonez, pointing out that a revision of the Tela agreement provisions on contra dismantlement can be undertaken only by the five presidents. He mentioned that the next summit is scheduled for December in Nicaragua. (Basic data from AP, 11/03/89, 11/04/89, 11/06/89, 11/07/89; Notimex, 11/03/89, 11/06/89, 11/07/89; AFP, 11/03/89, 11/04/89; Xinhua, 11/04/89; New York Times, 11/03/89)