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Central American Presidents Agree To Meet In Costa Rica On Dec. 10

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Dec. 4 and Dec. 5, Central American foreign ministers and presidents confirmed attendance at a summit, described as an "extraordinary" session, in Costa Rica, beginning Dec. 10. Representatives of Rio Group governments, the United Nations and the Organization of American States have been requested to attend as witnesses. The Rio Group includes Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Agenda items have not yet been firmed up. According to a statement by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias on Dec. 5, the principal matters to be discussed will be resumption of peace talks in El Salvador, and attempts to seek a cease-fire in that country. The Nicaraguan government has insisted that the agenda include contra demobilization. On Monday night in Managua, President Daniel Ortega told a crowd of about 30,000 at the Plaza of the Revolution he would request that Dec. 31 be established as the new deadline for contra army dismantlement. In August, the five presidents had agreed on Dec. 5 as the deadline for "voluntary" contra dismantlement, repatriation and relocation. About 5,000 contra fighters are living in Honduras jungle camps near the Nicaraguan border and are receiving US aid. There are also an estimated 6,000 contras inside Nicaragua. In addition, the Nicaraguan government has proposed that the five presidents sign an agreement guaranteeing respect for human rights throughout the region, and inviting the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to carry out an investigation in the five countries, especially El Salvador. In a nationally broadcast speech on Monday night, Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani said he would attend the meeting in Costa Rica on Dec. 10. He reiterated that Nicaragua is responsible for death and destruction in El Salvador, and asserted that President Ortega is supporting the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) to "cover his back" in a plan to "sacrifice the Nicaraguan people under a totalitarian dictatorship." Last week the governments of Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela offered to host the Central American summit. In statements to reporters on Nov. 30, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez said that while the five presidents were in principle agreeable to accepting such invitations, President Arias said that it was "absurd" for the Central American leaders to convene outside the region, and proposed instead that the summit take place in Costa Rica. Next, representatives of the FMLN have visited several Latin American nations since the offensive began on Nov. 11 to request that governments apply pressure on the Salvadoran regime to participate in serious peace negotiations. These diplomatic efforts were focused on Rio Group members, or those nations previously known as the Contadora Group and its Support Group. On Nov. 28, FMLN representative Miguel Angel Saenz Varela told reporters in Buenos Aires that Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez had also offered to mediate in the Salvadoran conflict. (Basic data from several reports by Notimex, Xinhua, AP)

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