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Deborah Tyroler

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## **U.N. Report On Nicaraguan Electoral Process**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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In a report issued Dec. 12, UN special representative monitoring the electoral process, Elliot Richardson, said the voter registration process has been concluded "very satisfactorily." The government's efforts to register eligible voters are described as "particularly impressive given the lack of financial resources and the inadequacies of transport and communications systems." Richardson expressed concern about the effect of escalating violence on election preparations. The UN report said the number of attacks by the contras tripled during the voter registration process, leading Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to suspend the cease-fire on Nov. 1. Since then, it said, the army has refrained from launching large-scale offensive operations, although troop movements could be observed throughout the country. Instead, the army "undertook a number of isolated actions designed to keep the resistance units on the move and to drive them back to their bases outside Nicaragua." The report said that in several cases violence broke out at political rallies organized by the National Opposition Union (UNO), though not at those organized by the governing FSLN or other parties. It said observers from the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) believe that "in most cases the attacks came from small groups of UNO's opponents who are usually very young and who overreact to the demonstrators' slogans." Richardson also expressed concern about the increasingly inflammatory tone of news coverage of the campaign, saying "attacks on opponents have reached levels which would be unacceptable in other countries...Policy debates or genuine political proposals take backstage to volleys of accusations and epithets." Regarding the state-owned media, Richardson said, "the amount of bias toward the governing party and the attacks on its potential rivals have exceeded all reasonable bounds." He emphasized that opposition news organizations were also culpable: "The violence of the language used in the media and the manipulation of the news by the most important media on both sides are also alarming." (Basic data from New York Times, 12/13/89)

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