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## Nicaragua: Oas Reports On Masatepe Violence

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

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A campaign rally for the Nicaraguan Opposition Unity (UNO) Masatepe, erupted in violence on Dec. 10. (See CAU, 12/13/89.) Initial press accounts about the incident, citing election observers from the Center for Democracy (CFD), were disputed by independent election observers from the Organization of American States. The US-based CFD receives funding from the US Agency for International Development and reportedly works closely with the US State Department. (In March 1987, the Center gave its "Sentinel of Democracy" award to UNO presidential candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro.) Members of the CFD delegation claimed that Sandinista mobs used machetes to hack to death two UNO supporters. The OAS reports that one man, not two, was killed and, according to his family he was a Sandinista, rather than an UNO, supporter. It is not known who killed him. CFD members also alleged that the melee began when an organized mob of 75 to 100 Sandinista supporters attacked the UNO demonstration. OAS observers at the demonstration disagreed, saying that the violence occurred between about 200 UNO demonstrators and an unspecified number of Sandinista supporters, and that "it is impossible to determine who was responsible for initiating the violence." The OAS report said that UNO demonstrators attacked the local Sandinista campaign headquarters and a neighboring house, and also burned two vehicles. The CFD observers, although witnesses to the UNO rampage, made no mention of it in their report. The attacks on the houses began after Barrios de Chamorro spoke at the rally, and 200 UNO demonstrators marched on the Sandinista office, claiming that they were going to free hostages held inside. OAS observers found no evidence that there had ever been hostages. The UNO demonstrators hurled rocks and flaming projectiles at the buildings, breaking windows, furniture, and peppering the roof with holes. They also turned over a truck belonging to a United Nations agency and set it on fire, along with a motorcycle. At least 13 people, including both Sandinista and UNO supporters, were injured. Despite the actions of the UNO demonstrators, the CFD and some media accounts blamed the Nicaraguan government. The CFD statement urged "the Sandinista government to control mobs of government supporters and thereby stop this electoral violence," but it did not place any similar responsibility on the UNO leaders. In contrast, the OAS report places responsibility on both sides, urging political parties to reach agreements about how to prevent such incidents in the future. The OAS also recommended a complete investigation of the incident and faulted the local police for not intervening earlier. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) filed a formal complaint with the Supreme Electoral Council charging that UNO had planned to provoke a violent incident in Masatepe. The Council and the United Nations have commenced investigations. The FSLN pointed out that UNO has refused to sign a statement offered by the FSLN on Dec. 1 calling on all parties to campaign without provocations or violence. [Basic data from 12/14/89 report by Witness for Peace (Washington, DC); 12/15/89 report by Nicaragua Network (Washington, DC)]

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