

1-19-1990

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El Salvador: Government & Rebel Proposals On Resuming Peace Talks

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Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, January 19, 1990

On Jan. 18, in a communique the Salvadoran government's National Communications Secretariat insisted that the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) "cease all armed actions in accordance with the [Dec. 12]...summit agreement." The FMLN's "public renunciation of violence," said the communique, would be an essential element in creating a favorable climate for resuming the peace talks. Next, government officials have asserted that talks with a rebel delegation would be "direct," and witnessed by representatives of the Salvadoran Church and the secretaries general of the Organization of American States and the United Nations. President Alfredo Cristiani's spokespersons have stated that the UN's good offices should be used only as a forum in which to resume the peace talks, and to serve as witness to the process. In contrast, the FMLN has insisted that UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar mediate, not merely witness the proceedings. Presidential spokesperson Mauricio Sandoval announced that Cristiani has a meeting with Perez de Cuellar on Jan. 31. He said that it was likely talks at the UN would be scheduled for February. In a statement released Jan. 17, the FMLN called on President Cristiani once again to set up a meeting with Perez de Cuellar within the next 30 days, and reiterated that the secretary general must serve as mediator. In addition, the rebel high command expressed willingness to negotiate, "but with the participation of the country's political parties and social groups with the objective of obtaining solutions reflecting the multifaceted and pluralist interests of the nation." In a letter this week to the Salvadoran Episcopal Conference, the FMLN stated that as a first step toward resuming peace talks, "the state of siege should be lifted, and actions taken toward guaranteeing respect for human rights, freedom of expression and of information." (Basic data from Notimex, 01/18/90) [Ed. note based on back issues of CAU: It is not likely the FMLN will accept the government's demand for a unilateral cease-fire prior to peace talks as a "good faith" gesture. The rebels would at least demand a similar and simultaneous gesture on the part of government troops, and that such a truce be monitored by an international force, presumably organized by the UN. The FMLN has previously suggested that a truce by both sides be supervised by the UN. The FMLN has declared unilateral cease-fires on many occasions, the most recent being for over a week during the Christmas holiday season. A unilateral cease-fire was understood to be a commitment to refrain from offensive operations. The rebels would carry out defensive operations in the event of attack by government forces. The Salvadoran military refused to participate in a holiday season cease-fire. During the cease-fire period, military spokespersons accused the rebels of violating their unilateral pledge. Rebel radio statements asserted that it has been standard procedure for the military to refuse to participate in cease-fires. Subsequently, government troops escalate offensive operations and then accuse the FMLN of violating its cease-fire pledge as rebels attempt to defend themselves.]

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