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Panama: Endara Complains About Rejection By Latin American Governments, Visits Costa Rica

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On Jan. 21 in Panama City during a speech, President Guillermo Endara expressed his frustration at the Latin American governments which have failed to recognize his government. He said, "No other government has a clearer mandate or is more legitimate than ours...Why do they question my legitimacy?" In the speech, Endara ruled out a referendum on his rule, or calling new elections. Next, Endara blasted Peruvian President Alan Garcia, who has refused to recognize his government while the US occupation troops remain in the country. He said, "Nobody questioned Mr. Garcia's rule, and won with 56% of the vote." The Panamanian leader continued by criticizing the Organization of American States (OAS): "I don't see any role for the OAS, and it is a total failure." He pointed out that last year an OAS mediating team failed to resolve the Panamanian political crisis. On Jan. 22 in San Jose, Costa Rica, President Endara said he will abolish the army in Panama. He told reporters: "In the working session we had in the Presidential House this morning, President (Oscar) Arias suggested that Panama should take advantage of the situation to abolish the army. I accepted that suggestion and will carry it out." Costa Rica, which abolished its army after a 40-day revolution in 1948, is the only Latin American country without a national army. Endara met with Security Minister Hernan Garron and Interior Minister Antonio Alvarez to discuss how Costa Rica's police and rural guard operate. Endara said, "We want to learn the Costa Rican model. With the material and explanation they gave us, we will try to implement it because this model is what the Panamanian people want." Endara's trip to Costa Rica was his first to a foreign country since he was sworn in as president Dec. 20 on a US military base. According to Notimex, the main results of the 24-hour visit were a pledge by Costa Rica to resume full diplomatic relations with Panama, support for a \$50 million border cooperation program, and offering firm political support for Endara in the context of isolation from the rest of Latin America. Unidentified Costa Rican government sources cited by Notimex said Endara's visit to San Jose was "suggested by the United States," in an attempt to boost the legitimacy campaign for the new government in Panama City. (Basic data from AFP, 01/21/90; AP, 01/22/90; Notimex, 01/21/90, 01/22/90)

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