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Nicaragua: Notes On Visa Delays For U.S. Journalists

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to Mark Uhlig of the New York Times (01/16/90), since September the Nicaraguan government has denied or delayed visas for five journalists who wanted to enter Nicaragua. All five are US citizens and have traveled extensively in Central America on assignment for US news organizations. Nicaraguan officials deny there has been a deliberate attempt to screen journalists entering the country. They say only one photographer, Jason Bleibtreu, has been directly informed that he will be forbidden to enter. Bleibtreu is a photographer from Sigma Photo and Worldwide Television News. The other four journalists denied entry to Nicaragua, according to Uhlig, are Wilson Ring, a Tegucigalpa based freelance reporter who frequently writes for The Washington Post and Time magazine; John McQuaid, the Mexico City based correspondent for The New Orleans Times Picayune; Greg Flakus, the Costa Rica based regional radio correspondent for the Voice of America; and, Ron Kinney, a Honduras-based free lance photographer who works frequently for Newsweek and the New York Times. Senior spokesperson for President Daniel Ortega, Manuel Espinoza Enriquez, said Bleibtreu's case was closed: "He will not be allowed in. State Security has reported to the government that he has been working as a contra courier under the cloak of journalism." From 1985 until July 1, 1988, US journalists and other US citizens visiting Nicaragua did not need visas to enter the country. President Ortega then announced that, beginning last July 1, all US citizens would be required to obtain visas to prevent US intelligence agents from using Nicaragua's liberal entry procedures for attempts to influence the elections. The decision was also described by Nicaraguan officials as a means of countering continued US visa restrictions on Nicaragua citizens and officials traveling to the US. Other Central American countries with strict requirements for foreign journalists are El Salvador and Honduras.

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