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Panama: Endara Admits Charges Against Some Former Government Officials Politically Motivated

by Deborah Tyroler

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In an interview with AP on Feb. 13, President Guillermo Endara said some charges against officials of the ousted government are politically motivated, but he has refused to intervene because he "supports an independent judicial system." The attorney general has filed charges ranging from murder to theft against hundreds of former officials, based on complaints by any citizen. One case names the 89 members of the Council of State, whose offense was to endorse former Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega's choice for provisional president in September 1989. Endara said, "I believe that these actions are strictly political. They (the accused) didn't cause physical damage to anyone, nor did they trample on anyone." The Council of State also included scholars such as Victor Levi, founder and rector of the government's Technological University. Endara said he had received calls locally and from abroad for several days asking him to intervene in the Council of State prosecution. "I roundly refused. My hands are tied in this and I am the one who tied them because I believe that it is essential that I maintain my independence from the judicial branch." [As of Feb. 3, Attorney General Rogelio Cruz had ordered the arrest of former presidents Manuel Solis Palma and Francisco Rodriguez, 18 former cabinet ministers and directors of government agencies, the 89 members of the Council of State, and dozens of lower-ranking members of the former military force, and civil service. Cruz said over 1,000 complaints had been filed by citizens against persons involved with the ousted government.] In the interview with AP, Endara also said if US aid is slow in coming, the frustration of an estimated 200,000 jobless could spill over and threaten his government. "That would be unfortunate for Panama and unfortunate for the United States, which has sacrificed so much in Panama," he added. (Basic data from Notimex, 02/03/90; AP, 02/14/90)

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