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## **Guatemalan President: U.S. Foreign Economic Aid Cutback Chance For Greater Political Independence**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Feb. 20 at a press conference in Guatemala City, President Vinicio Cerezo said that Washington's cutback in foreign economic aid will serve as an opportunity for Central America to exercise greater political independence. However, he added that reduced economic aid did not seem to be "totally coherent" with "public statements by the US of promoting consolidation of democratic processes in Latin America." Cerezo said Washington's huge fiscal deficit, changes in Eastern Europe, the anti-drug campaign, and the decision to provide aid to Panama after invasion by US troops, led to the cutback in US foreign economic assistance. US aid to Guatemala dropped from \$153 million last year to the current \$120 million. Military assistance was reduced from \$9.4 million to \$3.2 million. Cerezo said, "For us it is positive. We are going to demonstrate this year that despite the [aid] cutback and the decline in coffee prices, we will achieve economic growth with the people's sacrifice." The Guatemalan leader added that Central American governments should take advantage of current circumstances to promote self-sustaining development. (Basic data from Notimex, 02/20/90)

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