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Panama: President Endara On Hunger Strike To Protest Cut In U.S. Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 1, President Guillermo Endara commenced a hunger strike, presumably to protest plans by certain members of the US Congress to cut a Bush administration request for US aid to rebuild the Panamanian economy. Endara has established himself in the Metropolitan Cathedral, announcing his strike was "in solidarity with my fellow citizens in Panama who suffer malnutrition because of poverty." In a speech before the National Assembly shortly before beginning the fast, Endara said, "Let God enlighten those who have the decision to undertake efforts to provide the necessary financing to solve our people's most urgent problems." He said Panama needed at least \$1.5 billion in aid to jump start the economy. On Feb. 28, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), chairperson of the appropriations subcommittee that deals with foreign aid, asserted that he would cut the \$500 million in aid for Panama proposed by the Bush administration. Leahy said congressmen would prefer to give some of the money, if it is available, to emerging new democracies in Eastern Europe. He added that he would like more aid to meet humanitarian needs in Africa. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, President Bush announced that he had lifted the last sanctions against Panama imposed for its failure to cooperate in the drug war. The decision will permit low tariffs and fees on Panamanian imports to the US market. (Basic data from several sources, including Xinhua, Notimex, AFP, AP, 03/01/90)

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