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Deborah Tyroler

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Nicaragua: Property Titles To Persons Residing On Government Land, Immunity For Unprosecuted Crimes Proposed

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to the March 9 issue of the New York Times, the Nicaraguan executive has proposed legislation that would grant property titles to "tens of thousands of people and organizations including the Sandinista National Liberation Front and virtually all of its leaders now residing legally or illegally on property owned by the Government." Another proposed law would declare immunity for all unprosecuted crimes that may have been committed since 1979 and the last day of March. According to government officials, the legislation constitutes an attempt to prevent witch hunts by the new government. Roger Guevara Mena, a leader of the National Opposition Unity (UNO), and president of the Nicaraguan Bar Association, "This authorizes and pardons in advance the theft and decapitalization of the goods of the state. It pardons crimes that haven't even been committed yet. It would permit men to rape women here without penalty until the end of the month." Leader of the Superior Council for Private Enterprise (COSEP), Ramiro Gurdian Ortiz, said: "It is immoral for a government, or a political party that is going to turn over the government to another party, to be passing laws so quickly. They are selling houses to themselves, selling property to themselves, selling vehicles to themselves." The new package of legislation was introduced in the National Assembly on March 8. According to Rogelio Ramirez Mercado, a lawyer and National Assembly delegate, and brother to Vice President Sergio Ramirez Mercado, "What is important is that there could be a kind of McCarthyism here. We are trying to protect against that, and if we try to do it with conceptual theories or abstracts, we'll be lost." Government officials have moved to return responsibility for tax collections, property assessments, civil registries and other government functions to the court system rather than the official bureaucracy. Next, the government is attempting to provide full legal status and rights to pro-Sandinista organizations, ranging from business associations to the Sandinista Defense Committees. The Times reported that unidentified UNO leaders and some Sandinista officials say that the government has been selling official vehicles and other property to its supporters at low prices and processing special long-term visa and residency papers for foreigners who support the FSLN.

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