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Panamanian President Ends Hunger Strike

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 13, President Guillermo Endara ended the hunger strike initiated March 1 in an attempt to obtain US financial assistance. Endara said he ended the strike to protect his health. In an interview with AP on March 10, Endara said, "People cannot eat democracy." The US has turned over only \$160 million of \$400 million it withheld in back pay during the last two years before the December invasion. Unemployment, estimated at 20% prior to the invasion, is now over 30%. Endara said, "It is painful to see that for ridiculous and foolish reasons they are holding back money that belongs to Panama... "In order to survive, democracy must show that it is effective, that it can provide people food and justice. If it does not do that, it fails...I am still optimistic. I think our experiment will be successful, but I see signs of concern. There could be popular unrest, unless there are some quick solutions. The congressional delay of approval endangers our democracy." The \$500 million aid package for Panama requested by President Bush has not yet been approved by Congress. The aid monies would be diverted from the Pentagon's budget. (Basic data from AP, 03/10/90, 03/13/90)

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