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El Salvador: Peace Talks To Resume

by Deborah Tyroler

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March 16: Friday was the first day of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front's suspension of attacks on civilian government employees, businesses, and transportation and telecommunications facilities. The suspension was announced previously by the FMLN as a gesture of good will toward creating an atmosphere conducive to resuming peace negotiations with the government under United Nations auspices. In a Radio Venceremos broadcast, the FMLN called on the government to make similar good will gestures, such as terminating attacks on civilians, ending human rights abuses, and lifting the state of siege. The statement asserted that the war will be intensified if army hard-liners continue successful in obstructing peace talks. The statement said President Alfredo Cristiani's acknowledgement of the FMLN's decision to suspend certain types of attacks was positive. The Salvadoran government welcomed the overture as a "positive gesture" but demanded more concessions. Officials said the rebels should stop all attacks on the economy, and cease use of mines. March 18: San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas urged the government to respond in kind to the rebel gesture by reducing repression, and reigning in human rights abuses. He said, "We invite [the government and armed forces] to reciprocate with signs that reduce human rights abuses, and enhance democratization." March 19: On Monday evening, FMLN commanders Shafick Handal, Francisco Jovel, Salvador Samayoa, and Carlos Calles met with Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez in Caracas to request his assistance in bringing El Salvador's civil war to an end via political negotiations. Perez offered Venezuela as the site for resume peace talks, and reiterated support for a political solution to the conflict. A Salvadoran radio station reported statements by FMLN commander Ana Guadalupe Martinez in Paris. She said that the FMLN would support opposition parties in the March 1991 elections with the aim of forming a coalition to defeat the rightist Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). March 20: In Caracas, FMLN commanders met with members of Venezuelan political parties to solicit support for political negotiations between the rebels and the government. The rebel leaders reiterated the following proposals: reduce the size of the Salvadoran armed forces; reform the armed forces to ensure that the military is subordinate to civilian rulers and to prevent human rights abuses and the establishment and action of military-sanctioned paramilitary groups (death squads); judiciary reform; and revision of voter registration lists. The FMLN commanders said one of their primary objectives is to see a democratic process in El Salvador based on a transparent electoral system. The rebel leaders did not dismiss the possibility of meeting with Cristiani when he visits Caracas later in the month. At a press conference in San Salvador, the Rev. Edgar Palacios called on the government and the FMLN to offer "fruits of negotiation," and not "only gestures of good will." Palacios was speaking on behalf of the Permanent Committee on National Debate for Peace (CPDN), comprised of over 70 religious and political organizations. The CPDN coordinator emphasized the need for all political and social sectors, including private businessowners, to participate in the search for peace by means of a "social pact that will provide the basis for a new society...Peace cannot be the outcome of an agreement between the FMLN and the government, but rather the product of an accord among diverse sectors of national life." Palacios announced that on March 24, the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, will be marked by a "pilgrimage for peace and democracy." He invited members of the armed forces to participate as

"citizens." He added that the pilgrimage will take place, despite the state of emergency, because it is a religious event, not a political act. FMLN commanders and Alvaro de Soto will meet March 21 at UN offices in Mexico City to discuss the UN envoy's discussions with government officials. Francisco Jovel March 21: FMLN commanders Shafick Handal, Salvador Samayoa, Carlos Calles and Francisco Jovel met with UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar's personal representative, Alvaro de Soto, at UN offices in Mexico City. De Soto had earlier visited San Salvador to discuss proposals and procedures toward arranging peace negotiations. Late Wednesday, Salvadoran Information Minister Mario Sandoval issued a communique, and answered questions at a press conference, announcing that the government and the rebels would likely resume negotiations in April. In the communique, he said the government had expressed its willingness to begin the talks immediately and without pre-conditions, although the date and site will be decided on the basis of mutual agreement. UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar is to preside over the talks, said Sandoval. Sandoval said Venezuela had not been selected as the site for the negotiations. Sandoval said President Cristiani will travel next week to Caracas, Venezuela. His visit will coincide with one planned by FMLN commanders. The New York Times quoted an unidentified senior official who said the "continuous and uninterrupted" talks are expected to lead to an agreement by the fall. An unidentified aide to Cristiani quoted by the Times said that the talks would be held in a nearby Latin American capital. Unidentified aides said the talks were intended to enable the guerrillas to take part in municipal and legislative elections next March. The government, the aides said, has set September as the deadline for concluding a treaty to give the rebels time to transform their army and civilian network into a political organization capable of entering the electoral process in January. An unidentified aide quoted by the Times said Cristiani recognizes the FMLN's strong base in El Salvador, and their ability to survive as an insurgent army without support of any kind from the Nicaraguan government. (Basic data from Notimex, 03/16/90, 03/20/90, 03/21/90; Xinhua, 03/19/90, 03/21/90, 03/22/90; New York Times, 03/17/90, 03/22/90; AFP, 03/21/90; Tass, 03/21/90)

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