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Guatemala: Army Cutbacks "not Possible"

by Deborah Tyroler

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At a recent summit meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, Nicaraguan President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro proposed general disarmament by all Central American nations. After persistent questioning by journalists, army spokesperson Col. Luis Isaacs appeared on television and asserted that each Central American country had its own problems and a generalized policy should not be applied. He also said that the Guatemalan people acknowledge the army's long-standing "tradition" of not only military prowess but also "civil service." Foreign Minister Ariel Rivera told diplomats that army cutbacks in Guatemala would not be possible. Defense Minister Gen. Juan Bolanos said that the army will expand its forces, equivalent to 1% of the Guatemalan population, or to 90,000 members. Soldiers number 60,000 at present. The proposal made by Chamorro and supported by Costa Rican President Rafael Calderon was not included in summit resolutions. (Basic data from Cerigua weekly newsbriefs, 06/18-24/90)

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