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El Salvador: Third Round Of U.N.-mediated Peace Talks Underway In Costa Rica; Fmln Proposes Abolishing Military

by Deborah Tyroler

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The third round of UN-mediated peace talks between the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Salvadoran government commenced July 20 near San Jose, Costa Rica. The government delegation is comprised of Justice Minister Oscar Santamaria, Cols. Juan Antonio Martinez Varela and Rodolfo Revelo, and advisers Abelardo Torres and David Escobar. The FMLN delegation members are Shafick Handal, German Cienfuegos, Eduardo Sancho, Ana Guadalupe Martinez, Salvador Samayoa, and members of the Front's diplomatic political committee. On July 18, during an interview with AP at the FMLN office in Mexico City, Handal said, "There is a sector of the armed forces that must pay the bill for so much oppression imposed on the country." Handal rejected the government's call to a cease-fire while negotiations proceed: "First, there must be agreements on how to demilitarize Salvadoran society. If we halt military pressure, recalcitrant elements would feel free to embark on a bloodbath like that of the early 1980s." Earlier this week, Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) said about 50 upper-echelon officers should be removed from the Salvadoran armed forces. He predicted that the war would go on for years in the absence of drastic military reform. Handal said, "Fifty seems to us a low number." Rebel leaders have mentioned the figure 200 when estimating how many officers should be purged. In a recent interview with AP, Salvadoran Defense Minister Gen. Humberto Larios said, "We do not reject the idea of purifying our institution. The armed forces, like any other institution is subject to evolution, to improvement." He added that any changes in personnel and practices must be undertaken by the military itself: "We are purifying ourselves." Handal replied, "If Larios maintains that the army is being constantly 'purified' and nevertheless it continues to play the role of repressor, then it's obvious that 'purification' is not enough to clean it up. We have concluded that it should be abolished flat-out." The FMLN proposes that accords on gradual "demilitarization," which would include rebel disarmament, conclude with abolishment of the armed forces. A civilian-led police force would ensure law and order in a demilitarized El Salvador, according to the FMLN proposal. On July 19, upon arriving in San Jose, Handal told reporters that the FMLN was prepared to launch a new offensive if the third round of talks produces no political agreements. The major topic of discussion, he said, will be the demilitarization of the country, and concrete agreements to this effect depend on the government delegation's posture and attitude. Handal also proposed that the US should participate in the fourth round of peace talks, since Washington kept the civil war going with military aid to the government, and because it exercised considerable influence over President Alfredo Cristiani's government. He added that US pressure is essential to convincing the Salvadoran government to overhaul the military. The rebels demand trials for military personnel accused of human rights abuses. Handal said, "To the extent that repressive elements are removed from the armed forces, conditions for peace will improve." (Basic data from AP, 07/18/90; AFP, Notimex, 07/19/90)

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