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## **Nicaragua: Update On Former Contras' Protest Against Government, Nov. 8-nov. 13**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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Nov. 8: On Thursday evening in Campoa (116 km. east of Managua), former contras and members of the United National Opposition (UNO) barricaded themselves in the town hall and government offices. (See CAU 11/07/90, 11/09/90, for previous coverage of protests in eastern Nicaragua over the failure of President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's government to deliver on resettlement assistance for the demobilized contras and their families. Among other things, the protesters are demanding the resignations of Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado, Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo and army Gen. Humberto Ortega.) Nov. 9: At a press conference, Interior Minister Hurtado reported that former contras attacked a police station in Nueva Guinea (305 km. southeast of Managua), resulting in the deaths of three contras, and injuries to another 35 people, including 24 former rebels and nine police agents. According to Hurtado, the attack occurred before dawn, and 21 people were arrested, but only five were held on weapons charges. The minister said the attackers fired AK-47 assault rifles at the station, then fled to a nearby church where they surrendered to delegates of Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo and the International Verification and Support Commission (CIAV), a multilateral group organized under the aegis of the regional peace accord by the UN and the Organization of American States. Hurtado said there is evidence that the attackers tossed a grenade which exploded in a nearby park, causing injuries to civilians. The minister added that the Rama Road linking Managua to Bluefields remained barricaded by former contras and supporters. About 20 roadblocks comprised of old tires, wood, and stones were set up on the main route between the towns of Rama and Juigalpa. Next, Hurtado said a barricade by mayors from Boaco and Chontales departments on the road linking Managua to the South Atlantic region was not connected to former contra "sectors." The mayors were insisting on the resignation of Hurtado, Lacayo, Ortega and senior army officers. The Associated Press reported that the protests have the support of the Roman Catholic Church, business leaders, town mayors and some UNO deputies. Vice President Virgilio Godoy publicly announced his support for the rebellion against the government. In a statement to the Agence France Presse, he said, "I have to support that which the government agreements on the disarmament and demobilization of the former contras land, disarmament of civilians and reduction of the armed forces, or be accused of irresponsibility." Godoy said he supported demands for the resignations of Hurtado, Lacayo and Ortega. He blamed Ortega, President Chamorro and Hurtado for the incidents in Nueva Guinea. Police dispersed a group of protesters attempting to set up another barricade on the road linking northern cities Jinotega and Matagalpa. In the Atlantic coastal towns of Kukra Hill and Laguna de Perlas, another group occupied the local headquarters of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Nov. 10: According to a report by Notimex, calm returned to Bluefields following an agreement between protesters and local government delegate, Alvin Guthrie. The agreement included the creation of a "civil regional police" force which "responds to the interests of the people," and restructuring of national ministerial representatives in the area, including the Interior Ministry. An unidentified police source told AFP that in La Concepcion (30 km. from Managua), a group of former contras surrounded the police station, and took three police agents hostage. AP reported that "protesters" took three policemen hostage,

in addition to Socorro Galan, former head of the Friendship Committee with socialist countries, and Galan's brother. Roadway access to the town was obstructed by felled trees. Oscar Melendez, a spokesperson for the protesters, told AP that they have demanded meetings with President Chamorro, Vice President Godoy, or Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo. He said the protesters are demanding the closing of a local military base, and that weapons be confiscated from about 150 Sandinista agricultural cooperative members "who have provoked the people" in the area. The AP also reported that UNO members occupied the government's local telecommunications office, and staged sit-ins Friday night at police stations. La Concepcion is the 17th town to join the "Civic Movement to Save Democracy," which thus far was largely confined to the eastern and southeastern parts of the country. President Barrios de Chamorro commenced closed-door meetings with 18 mayors who support the anti-government protest. talks in closed-door meetings with 18 mayors who Five ministers, including Interior Minister Hurtado, also attended. Police investigated an explosion at the Ticuantepe bridge, 14 km. south of Managua. According to a report by La Prensa, on Nov. 9 100 soldiers attacked the village of El Coral, 380 km. southeast of Managua, resulting in "several deaths, many injuries and some disappearances." The AFP reported that hundreds of merchants who work in Managua's Mercado Oriental and a group of former contras occupied the Catholic El Calvario church. Protesters inside the church were masked. Foreign journalists were threatened with death when they attempted interviews. Nov. 11: An official communique stated that after a 10-hour meeting, which ended at dawn on Sunday, the mayors meeting with President Chamorro and five cabinet members refused to request that the former contras and supporters stop all pressure tactics in order to enter into negotiations with the government. Chamorro had offered to travel with her cabinet on Nov. 14 to Juigalpa, capital of Chontales department, to hear demands of former contras, the mayors and residents. This meeting was cancelled. AFP reported that in the two weeks of the protest, five persons have died, and 40 were injured, including nine policemen. Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo warned that unless the government and former contras arrive at an understanding, another civil war may result. The prelate officiated at mass at a church located in a residential neighborhood in Managua. The Santo Domingo church, where the archbishop has said mass since 1972, remained occupied by protesters. Nov. 12: Police using tear gas and clubs dispersed demonstrators and began knocking down barricades in various parts of the country. AP reported that in Managua more than 150 riot police backed by three helicopters broke up a protest by former contras. Nov. 13: Former contras and supporters took over a church and government buildings in Masaya, located about 30 km. southeast of Managua. At a press conference in Managua, Presidency Minister Lacayo told reporters that "the willingness of the government for dialogue is inexhaustible," but that force would be used to counter force. He said, "In areas where people are unarmed the police will try to persuade them. Where there are armed people we must think about the army because we don't want to endanger the lives of citizens," he said. President Chamorro has repeatedly offered to negotiate with the protesters but they have refused. Lacayo said, "We don't believe (the former contras) want to revert to war...The main leaders of the resistance are firm that this path leads nowhere." Interior Minister Hurtado added: "It will be a question of considering alternatives between dialogue and the use of other methods." Lacayo said he agreed that some of the demands were just, including the demand for land. He reiterated Chamorro's call for the protesters to end their actions, and said they were being manipulated for political purposes. Chamorro has called the rebellion "dangerous and illegal," and that it is politically motivated, in an apparent reference to Godoy. The vice president recently described the mayors' actions as "a beautiful public protest." (Basic data from Notimex, 11/09/90, 11/10/90; AP, 11/09/90, 11/11/90, 11/13/90; AFP, 11/09-11/90, 11/13/90; AP, 11/10/90, 11/13/90)

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