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Nicaragua: Update On Protest Mounted By Former Contras & U.N.o. Politicians

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[Former contras and United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) politicians launched a protest Nov. 1 calling for delivery of land to the ex-combatants, resignations of cabinet members, disarmament of civilians, and several other demands. See CAU, 11/09/90, 11/14/90, 11/16/90 for previous coverage of protest.] Nov. 15: Army units with machine guns and rocket launchers were deployed for the first time to disband a blockade at Sebaco, located north of Managua. The deployment of the military followed a shootout that left four police officers dead and 23 people wounded. Nov. 16: Riot police used teargas to disperse about 60 people at barricades in the city of Juigalpa to clear the Rama Road. The Associated Press reported that at least 24 people have died and dozens have been injured in conflicts over barricades and building takeovers the past two weeks. Seventy members of the 92-seat National Assembly approved a statement declaring support for President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro for her handling of the crisis. The statement said, "In strengthening law and order, the use of the mechanism of dialogue and consensus reaches adequate solutions to political and social conflict...We condemn violence wherever it comes from and support the search for peaceful solutions." Three members abstained from voting on the statement. Nineteen members were absent during the vote. Mayor Armando Incer told reporters that 15 armored tanks made incursions in Boaco and Chontales departments, "in clear violation of the government's promise to refrain from utilizing military reinforcement in the region." He said that an unspecified number of civilians were injured during the incursion and denied that there are armed civilians participating in maintaining road barricades. Government spokespersons said the military vehicles were used only for transporting provisions to the area and denied that any incidents occurred. Nov. 17: After 12 hours of discussion, negotiations between the government and UNO mayors calling for resignations of cabinet ministers reportedly broke down. Former contra political leader Aristides Sanchez, detained Nov. 15 by police, was transported to a hospital in Managua. Sanchez recently underwent open heart surgery in the US. Nov. 18: During a broadcast by the state-run television station, presidential spokesperson Danilo Lacayo read a government communique asserting that a destabilization plan had been aborted and that its main instigator, Aristides Sanchez, had been arrested. According to the communique, part of the plan consisted of manipulating the former contras' demands. About 200 soldiers and police, backed by helicopters, tore down barricades on the 320-km.-long Rama Road, where at least 13 barriers had been erected. Most of the troops were armed with automatic weapons and some rode in armored cars. The operation was peaceful, reporters at the scene said. In a communique, President Chamorro said: "Faced with the existence of this dangerous plan and the need to reestablish free transportation along the Rama highway, the government...ordered the forces of public order...to normalize transit...with the total clearing of all of the highway." Chamorro said Sanchez had tried "to manipulate the demands of the demobilized rebels with the intention of destabilizing the country." Notimex reported that the conflict had thus far caused 20 deaths and injuries to more than 60 persons. Nov. 19: Former contras reconstructed barricades to block the Rama Road near La Gateada and Muelle de los Buelles, located about 290 km. southeast of Managua. Mayors supporting the former contras' protest rejected President

Chamorro's suggestion of a meeting of mayors and cabinet members Nov. 21 in Juigalpa, and scheduled a mayoral meeting for that day in Managua. According to government statistics, barely 3,000 of an estimated 20,000 former contras have received land. Nov. 20: The Sandinista National Liberation Front's 31 mayors reiterated their "total support" for the president in her attempts to resolve the conflict. Another group of National Opposition Unity (UNO) mayors met with President Chamorro to prepare for her visit to Juigalpa, 130 km. southeast of Managua, where she is to hear protesters' demands. Official sources reported that the government planned to deliver on Nov. 21 several thousand hectares of land to former contras in an attempt to begin fulfillment of agreements made in late May this year. According to a government communique, former contra leader Aristides Sanchez was released Monday night and boarded a plane for Miami. Sanchez was scheduled for cardiac surgery at a Miami hospital. Prior to leaving the country, Sanchez made a sworn statement to the Managua region attorney general. According to government sources, the statement said that "ambitions for power by a group led by Godoy, Agustin Jarquin, Humberto Castilla, Azucena Ferrey and Arnolando Aleman...are behind the disturbances intended to make the country ungovernable." Next, Sanchez wrote letters to President Chamorro and former contra leader Oscar Sovalbarro ("Ruben"). The president was told Sanchez supported the government's "democratic efforts." Sovalbarro was asked to distance himself from the "politiqueros" who only want to use the contras' civic organization to obtain power for themselves. Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado accused former contra leader Aristides Sanchez of coordinating the "frustrated plan to destabilize the government." At a press conference, Hurtado said Sanchez had been organizing the road blockades and occupations of public buildings to provoke chaos. According to Hurtado, police detected "movements and coded messages" transmitted via sophisticated radio equipment, found in the contras' civic organization headquarters in Managua. The same office was used by Sanchez. The minister said Sanchez had surrendered before leaving the country, informing police of the destabilization plan and the involvement of Vice President Virgilio Godoy. Also involved, he added, were UNO Deputies Agustin Jarquin, Humberto Castilla, and Azucena Ferrey, and Managua Mayor Arnolando Aleman. The Associated Press reported that Cecilia Rodriguez de Sanchez, Aristides Sanchez's spouse, asserted that police tortured her husband to force a confession to implicate the vice president in the anti-government conspiracy. In an interview by phone from Miami with a Managua radio station, Rodriguez de Sanchez claimed her husband was drugged, kept in cells "full of rats in 100-degree heat" and in "a drawer, like they have in the morgue." Daily newspaper La Prensa ran a front-page story quoting Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo as saying that Sanchez's alleged confession and the televised appearance of government officials reading the confession were "a show." It quoted Obando y Bravo as saying he spoke to President Chamorro about the political situation and believes "she does not have all the information that she should have and all the control that a person who guides the destiny of a country should have." Presidential spokesperson Danilo Lacayo said Sanchez, 47, was treated well and kept in an air-conditioned office because of his heart condition. Lacayo said Sanchez was free to return from exile if he wished to face conspiracy charges. The spokesperson told reporters that Sanchez was visited by representatives of the church, the Organization of American States and his wife. (Basic data from AFP, 11/16-21/90; AP, 11/16/90, 11/18-20/90; Notimex, 11/18/90, 11/20/90; ACAN-EFE, 11/18/90)

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