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Panama: Vice President Says Difficulties With U.S. Over One Aspect Of Bilateral Legal Assistance Treaty Resolved

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Dec. 1 in a report to the Organization of American States, Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderon said his government has resolved one problem in negotiations with the US on a bilateral legal assistance treaty aimed at reducing drug trafficking and money laundering. According to Arias Calderon, Washington is now accepting Panama's demand that neither signatory be obligated by treaty to punish activities which are classified as illegal in only one of the countries. The above understanding would presumably safeguard banking secrecy conventions in Panama. The vice president enumerated the following actions as evidence of the Panamanian government's commitment to fighting the drug trade: confiscation of 1,300 kg. of cocaine with an estimated value of \$166 million, detention of 639 drug trafficking suspects, and freezing 400 bank accounts belonging to suspected drug traffickers. Arias Calderon reported that the US government has disbursed about \$78 million of the \$420 million in aid approved by the US Congress. He said a \$130 million installment is to be released soon. (Basic data from Notimex, 12/01/90)

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