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## Central American Summit Meeting: Summary Of Events & Statements

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Dec. 15-17, Presidents Alfredo Cristiani (El Salvador), Rafael Angel Calderon (Costa Rica), Vinicio Cerezo (Guatemala), Rafael Callejas (Honduras), and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (Nicaragua) attended a summit in Puntarenas, Costa Rica. Panamanian President Guillermo Endara participated as an observer. Major agenda items were the Salvadoran conflict, regional disarmament, and economic integration. Developments are summarized below.

Dec. 13: Guatemalan President Cerezo was expected to propose that Central American nations' foreign debt refinancing negotiations take place through environmental protection programs as an amendment to the Central American Economic Action Program (PAECA) approved at a summit in June. According to the Agence France Presse, oceanographer Frances Jean Michel Cousteau, and US Smithsonian Institute director Eric Fisher planned to attend the summit to present a proposal for regional ecological recovery. In addition to pollution, Central America is characterized by severe soil erosion, deforestation, and indiscriminate use of herbicides. Military conflict during the 1980s was responsible for deforestation of vast areas in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Specialists say that El Salvador ranks first in terms of ecological devastation throughout the Americas, and may lose its natural resource base before 2000 unless remedial efforts are undertaken immediately. The large influxes of Nicaraguan and Salvadoran refugees to Honduras resulted in the destruction of 200,000 ha. of forest lands in that country. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) president Enrique Iglesias submitted a proposal to the five presidents aimed at creating a regional consulting group coordinated by the IDB. The group's principal objective would economic integration, giving impetus to the US "Initiative for the Americas," or plans for a continental free trade area. The IDB proposal suggests an initial meeting of the consulting group in the first six months of 1991. The proposal marks the second time in the last 11 years that the IDB has promoted the creation of such a regional effort to channel foreign investment and aid to Central America. The IDB effort failed in the early 1980s largely because the US government was concerned that a regional organization could channel aid to the Nicaraguan government.

Dec. 16: Summit participants issued a joint invitation to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to visit Central America and to use his influence toward resolving the conflict in El Salvador. Nicaraguan President Barrios de Chamorro will deliver an official invitation to Gorbachev to visit the region in February when she is scheduled to visit Moscow. The Soviet Union has diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras, and trade links with Panama. Central American businesspersons requested that the presidents establish mechanisms to implement the PAECA. Next, the businesspersons requested direct participation in the Plan. According to the business community, progress on PAECA is necessary in order to obtain desperately needed financial resources. Washington has advised the five governments that US aid will decline substantially. Next, future US aid will be "coordinated" with the rest of the advanced industrialized world to avoid duplication and unnecessary spending. Washington is Central America's principal source of aid monies, and the US accounts for 90% of regional exports. At a press conference, Costa Rican President Calderon announced a "new concrete action plan" to bring about a rapid negotiated end to the Salvadoran civil war under the aegis of the

Esquipulas II agreements. According to Calderon, the Central American presidents are convinced that an official visit by Gorbachev next year would contribute in a definitive way to realizing "total pacification" of the sub-region. Honduran President Rafael Callejas told reporters that regional leaders must assume a major role in resolving the Salvadoran conflict. IDB president Iglesias told summit participants that economic growth this year for the region as a whole would be negative. However, he said, structural adjustment programs adopted by respective governments may lead to GDP growth rates of 2% to 5% between 1992 and 1995. Next, Iglesias praised Central American preliminary free trade accords with Mexico and the US. Dec. 17: At the close of the summit, the presidents issued a 13-page joint statement, called the "Declaration of Puntarenas." Most items focused on regional economic integration and joint environmental conservation, anti-drug trade, and foreign debt reduction efforts. Selected highlights of the statement are summarized below. \* The US was called on to establish a "just trade agreement" with Central American nations. \* The role of Central America in the formation of the Democracy and Development Association (ADD) was described as "vital." \* Central American leaders accept "the initiative by Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela to organize regional projects that identify and develop new sources of energy." This program will contribute to "mitigating Central American nations' high level of dependency on oil, which is further aggravated during times of crisis." \* The European Economic Community (EEC) was called on to offer the same trade benefits to Central America recently provided to the region's major drug producer nations Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The objective of the EEC's trade benefits to the latter nations is to provide economic alternatives to production and export of narcotics. \* Presidents of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica will promote talks between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and "diverse sectors" of Guatemala City to bring about an end to the conflict in that country. The URNG was called on to "abandon armed struggle and join the peaceful political process." In the past 30 years of warfare in Guatemala, over 100,000 people have been killed. According to human rights organizations, the army and death squads were responsible for the vast majority of killings. \* In an appendix to the communique, the presidents demanded that the FMLN declare an immediate cease-fire, abandon the war, and join the political process. "We condemn the FMLN for its violent actions, which have caused pain and death in the Salvadoran civilian population and caused serious damage to the economic infrastructure of the country," the communique said. Next, the presidents called on the rebels to "immediately halt use of sophisticated weaponry such as was used in the recent offensive." The UN Central America Observer Force (ONUCA) was requested to investigate the origin of the weapons. The rebels used surface-to-air missiles to down an A-37 fighter plane on Nov. 23, and an AC-47 on Dec. 4. Senior FMLN commander Maria Marta Valladares, better known as Nidia Diaz, called the communique biased and said the rebels will not heed it. "Once again the Central American presidents issue a resolution that is removed from the Salvadoran reality. It makes no sense to ask us to abandon the armed struggle as long as the causes that gave rise to the armed struggle are not overcome." Diaz said she had hoped the presidents would declare support for the current negotiations process mediated by Alvaro de Soto, personal representative of UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar. The commander asserted that the rebels would continue to acquire and use sophisticated weapons "as long as necessary." At a press conference, Honduran President Callejas said the Declaration's major purpose was to emphasize the commitment by regional governments peace rather than violence. According to Callejas, the statement sends an unequivocal message to subversives that the era of force over the law has ended. Guatemalan President Cerezo said that war as a means to resolve conflicts is no longer acceptable. He added that "in the past, when authoritarian governments did not listen to reason," armed struggle was "justifiable, to

a certain extent." Salvadoran President Cristiani said condemning the FMLN strengthens the negotiations process since war is delegitimized as a means for resolving conflicts. He reiterated that his government continues committed to participation and support of the UN-mediated negotiations process. (Basic data from EFE, 12/14/90; DPA, 12/16/90; AFP, 12/13/90, 12/15/90, 12/16/90, 12/17/90; AP, 12/15-17/90; ACAN-EFE, 12/14/90, 12/16/90, 12/17/90; Notimex, 12/14/90, 12/17/90)

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