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El Salvador: Update On Peace Talks In Mexico, April 24 - 25

by Deborah Tyroler

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[The current round of peace talks commenced April 4, and were tentatively scheduled to conclude on April 23. For previous coverage of the talks see CAU, 04/05/91, 04/12/91, 04/17/91 and 04/23/91.]

April 24: Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) commander Shafick Handal told reporters that the two sides have at last started "to negotiate the possibility of an accord." The rebel delegation chief said the government and rebel delegations have commenced analyzing proposed constitutional reforms point by point to determine the extent to which each side is capable of compromise. Shafick said the meetings could conclude with a "minimal agreement." On the "package" of constitutional reforms submitted by the four political parties represented in the Salvadoran national congress, Shafick stated that the FMLN will respond only to material, positions and options which originate at the negotiations table. Presidency Minister Oscar Santamaria, who heads the government delegation, said the meeting would be concluded "in two or three days."

April 25: According to UN mediator Alvaro de Soto, both the government and the rebels have acknowledged the necessity of constitutional reforms in order for El Salvador to establish peace. He added that the talks have no fixed end- date, and the priority topic is constitutional reform. Salvadoran Vice President Francisco Merino told reporters that four major political parties had agreed on several reforms that would "tailor the constitution to the needs of a democratic society and give El Salvador a clear chance at regaining peace." The reforms, which modify 29 of the constitution's 274 articles, call for changes to the armed forces and creation of a civilian police force, a Supreme Electoral Court, and the post of attorney general for human rights. The reforms must be approved by two successive legislatures, hence the rush to have them approved before the Legislative Assembly adjourns April 30, thereby avoiding a three-year delay. According to Merino, the reform package was agreed to at the end of 10 hours of intense consultations between "all parties in favor of peace." (Basic data from Notimex, 04/24/91; AFP, AP, EFE, 04/24/91, 04/25/91)

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