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Deborah Tyroler

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El Salvador: Update On Peace Talks

by Deborah Tyroler

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May 20-21: In Managua, representatives of Salvadoran political parties and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) to discuss "minimum conditions" for a cease-fire agreement. The next round of UN-mediated talks is scheduled for May 24-June 3 in Caracas, Venezuela. Shafik Handal headed the FMLN delegation. Also present were representatives of the Christian Democrat Party (PDC), the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), the National Conciliation Party (PCN), the Democratic Convergence (CD), and several civic organizations. May 21: FMLN commander Joaquin Villalobos told reporters in Managua that peace negotiations with the government had entered a final phase. While reaching a cease-fire agreement by the end of May was unlikely, he said, peace could be attained this year. According to Villalobos, lack of consensus on the issues of armed forces restructuring and creation of a new civilian police force are the main obstacles to reaching a cease-fire agreement. He noted that the government recently released a statement asserting that military restructuring was not negotiable. "Our response...is that the FMLN's armed forces are not negotiable," said Villalobos. May 22: Jose Francisco Guerrero, Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) deputy and Legislative Assembly secretary, expressed his opposition to ratification of constitutional reforms prior to a cease-fire agreement. Guerrero asserted that rebel sabotage of the national electricity grid, death threats against mayors and judges in Usulután department, and utilization of car bombs all presented obstacles to reaching an accord. May 23: Commander Rebeca Palacios, member of the FMLN political diplomatic commission, said that the meeting in Caracas would be decisive in determining when a cease-fire could be implemented. Palacios said the FMLN delegation would submit proposals addressing questions of planning and socio-economic reforms. She added that measures to guarantee a lasting peace must be implemented before hostilities could cease. FMLN commander Miguel Saenz said that the rebels were ready for a cease-fire, but would not enter into an agreement until mechanisms were in place to implement constitutional reforms mandated in prior accords as well as a purge of the armed forces and an end to military impunity. In addition, said Saenz, the issues of territory controlled by the FMLN, and rebel demobilization must be addressed before serious consideration of a cease-fire calendar. (Basic data from AFP, 05/21/91, 05/23/91; ACAN-EFE, 05/22/91, 05/23/91; EFE, 05/21-23/91)

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