

8-30-1991

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Nicaragua: Update On Recontras & Related Developments." (1991). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/5994>

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Nicaragua: Update On Recontras & Related Developments

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, August 30, 1991

Aug. 28: "Recontra" leaders threatened to occupy segments of the Pan-American Highway unless President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro or Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado agree to participate in a meeting with them in northern Nicaragua. During previous talks with government officials, recontra leaders submitted seven demands which the government must fulfill prior to recontra disarmament. Included were guarantees for security of former contras, or protection from Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) sympathizers and members. Army spokesperson Lt.Col. Ricardo Wheelock told reporters from ACAN-EFE news agency that on Sept. 2 army troop reinforcements will be sent to locales in northern Nicaragua where recontra activity has been most intense. According to Wheelock, two separate groups of recontras are active in the sixth military region, comprised of Matagalpa and Jinotega departments. One has between 80 and 120 combatants, and is willing to participate in negotiations as a means to achieve its demands. The other, headed by "Indomable," consists of less than 70 combatants, and is more interested in military confrontation. Aug. 29: Interior Minister Hurtado told reporters that he will personally head an official delegation scheduled to meet with recontra leaders on Sept. 3. According to Hurtado, 32 guerrilla bands comprised of a total 2,000 combatants are currently operating in the country. Hurtado said the Chamorro government plans to offer cash to an estimated 100,000 civilians as an incentive to surrender lethal weapons. Since the formal demobilization of the contras in June 1990, public security forces have carried out periodic campaigns to seize weapons held by civilians. Deputy foreign minister Ernesto Leal confirmed that the Chamorro administration has requested funding from foreign governments for the program. Hurtado also inaugurated a meeting of the Security Commission, comprised of delegates from the government, the FSLN, former contras, the Catholic church hierarchy, and human rights groups. Recontras are not represented on the commission. The meeting marked the commission's third session since the contra war ended in June 1990. The commission was established as a means to facilitate consolidation of the pacification process. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 08/28/91, 08/29/91; AFP, 08/29/91)

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