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Deborah Tyroler

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Nicaragua: U.S. Reluctant To Finance Civilian Disarmament

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 5, Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo told reporters that the US government had demonstrated reluctance in financing a civilian disarmament program. He said most European governments do not wish to participate in the campaign because they believe such role is Washington's responsibility, based on the fact that the US supplied weapons to the contras. According to Lacayo, governments holding observer status at the Organization of American States (OAS) e.g., France, Spain, Italy and Canada are willing to provide limited financial support for the initiative. Lacayo said US officials expressed concern that Sandinista agricultural workers would participate in a "cycle" of weapons delivery. After receiving payment for weapons in hand, the workers would obtain others from the army to cash in, and so forth. The minister added, "The State Department believes the Sandinistas will become rich in this fashion." Lacayo asserted that the OAS International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV) could forestall such problems. Moreover, the army is not disposed to turning over weapons to civilians. Unofficial sources estimate that 100,000 weapons remain in civilian hands. Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado says the figure is closer to 80,000, while Gen. Joaquin Cuadra, head of the army joint chiefs, places the number at between 30,000 and 50,000 weapons. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 09/05/91)

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