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Salvadoran Peace Talks: Summary Of Developments, November 7 - 14

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Peace talks between government and rebel negotiators resumed on Nov. 4 in Mexico City. Alvaro de Soto, UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar's envoy to the talks, continued in his role as mediator. The government delegation was comprised of Presidency Minister Oscar Alfredo Santamaria and David Escobar Galindo. Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) representatives included commanders Roberto Canas, Shafik Handal, Ana Guadalupe Martinez, Martha Vallardes and Salvador Samayoa. In addition, nine FMLN commanders and military officer counterparts participated in round-table discussions on a cease-fire. (See CAU 11/08/91 for previous coverage on peace talk round.) Nov. 7: In statements to reporters in Tegucigalpa (Honduras), President Alfredo Cristiani threatened that the government would withdraw from the talks if the FMLN continues to sabotage the nation's electricity grid. Cristiani rejected the rebel proposal for an informal truce. He said, "We seek a definitive end to the conflict and do not accept truces or 'armed peace'...[which] would only serve to prolong the war." UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar called on both sides to be more cautious and circumspect in statements to the press. Nov. 8: Rebel negotiator Roberto Canas told reporters that the talks had reached a "difficult point." He said the refusal to consider FMLN proposals on troop strength reduction and an informal truce by government and army negotiators does not contribute to peace. Despite the difficulties, Canas added, "some approximation" on military issues had occurred. Col. Mauricio Vargas said the main stumbling block was the FMLN's "inability to come to the fundamental decision to disarm and demobilize." Without this assurance from the rebels, he said, the army would not reduce troop strength. In a communiqué, Perez de Cuellar expressed concern over escalation of military conflict in El Salvador. He said that in previous rounds, both government and rebel negotiators responded positively to the UN's suggestion that territory controlled by the two sides could be used as the reference point for cease-fire arrangements. Under these circumstances, the Secretary General said, the current fighting "is futile and can produce nothing but victims and destruction just when peace is on the horizon." Nov. 9: FMLN spokesperson Roberto Canas told journalists that the peace talks would recess until Nov. 12. Nov. 11: In a communiqué broadcast on Salvadoran radio stations, the government asserted that recent fighting constituted the third major FMLN offensive in the 12-year war. According to the statement, the renewed intensity of rebel attacks on the nation's economic infrastructure endangered the negotiations process. President Cristiani reiterated threats that the government would withdraw from the peace talks if rebel economic sabotage continues. The president said, "If the FMLN attacks were aimed at military targets, we would not say a thing," but they are directed "exclusively at the civilian sector." Nov. 12: At a press conference, nine rebel commanders said they are committed to continuing the talks until the two sides conclude a negotiated peace agreement. Rebel spokesperson Canas read an official statement from the FMLN high command calling on the government "to agree immediately to a truce, which implies the immediate suspension of military conflict and offensive operations by both sides." Canas said the FMLN would agree to suspend activities affecting cities and roadways as well as economic sabotage on condition that the army withdraws from rebel-controlled territory, and halts artillery...
Canas denied government claims that recent FMLN operations constitute a third major offensive. He pointed out that all FMLN commanders are in Mexico concentrating their efforts on reaching a peace accord. According to Canas, rebel combatants are currently practicing defensive operations in response to counterinsurgency offensives by government troops. Such rebel actions, he added, would cease immediately if the army halts its offensives.

Nov. 13: Salvadoran Foreign Minister Manuel Pacas requested that the UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar intervene with the FMLN in order to persuade the rebels to halt their "third offensive." Nov. 14: At a press conference in Mexico City, commanders of the rebel front's five armies declared a unilateral truce, effective Nov. 16. The commanders are Salvador Sanchez, Joaquin Villalobos, Francisco Jovel, Eduardo Sanchez, and Shafik Handal. They said the truce would continue until a definitive cease-fire agreement with the government is concluded. Villalobos said rebel combatants would engage in military actions only "in case of an extraordinary attack," and will remain within FMLN-controlled territory.

In San Salvador, Cristiani hailed the truce announcement as a "sign of good will." He said the government "will be analyzing the situation beginning Saturday in order to take corresponding unilateral measures with the objective of definitively ending the war in the shortest time possible." Christian Democrat Party (PDC) leader Gerardo Lechevalier said, "We celebrate anything that reduces the level of violence. We call on the government to take the FMLN at its word, and to adopt corresponding measures to ensure that tomorrow is the last day of the war." (Basic data from Notimex, 11/09/91; Spanish news service EFE, 11/09/91, 11/12/91; ACAN-EFE, 11/08/91, 11/13/91; Agence France-Presse, 11/08/91, 11/09/91, 11/11-14/91; Associated Press, 11/12/91, 11/14/91)

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