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Panama: Protest Actions Scheduled For Anniversary Of 1989 U.S. Invasion

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 10: An estimated 100 residents of the El Chorrillo neighborhood of Panama City marched through the streets of the capital, and rallied in front of the national legislature building demanding US\$12 million in damage compensation payments from the government. Thousands were left homeless during intensive bombings of the neighborhood during the US invasion in December 1989. Residents also called on the government to write off an estimated US\$6 million in rent charged for temporary housing. Relatives of 45 soldiers and civilians jailed in the wake of the invasion commenced a series of protests to demand release of family members. Spokespersons told reporters that protest actions were scheduled to continue through Dec. 20, anniversary of the US invasion.

Dec. 13: The Committee of Relatives of Soldiers Killed in the US Invasion demanded that the government acknowledge the real number of soldiers who died in December 1989. According to the Committee, 2,500 Panamanian civilians and 500 soldiers were killed, and 2,800 persons left homeless. Government statistics specify a combined civilian and soldier death toll of only 500. Committee leader Isabel Corro said, "While the US [government] acknowledged their deaths, the Endara government has done nothing for us." Corro noted that under the constitution, soldiers killed "defending the country from foreign aggressors" are to receive posthumous promotion, and widows and children have rights to a pension equal to US\$50 per month. Dec. 16: Corro told reporters that on Dec. 20, over 20 organizations would participate in a march to commemorate and mourn the US invasion. On Dec. 17, she said, relatives of the Panamanians killed during the invasion plan to request a meeting with legislators to request sponsorship of a bill that would change Dec. 20 from "National Reflection Day" to "National Mourning Day." Next, on Dec. 18, several organizations plan to participate in a demonstration in front of the US Embassy. A candlelight vigil is scheduled for Dec. 19. Finally, Corro said, on Dec. 20 demonstrators will march through capital city streets to the site where US soldiers buried 124 Panamanians in a mass grave. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 12/10/91, 12/16/91, 12/17/91; Notimex, 12/13/91, 12/17/91)

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