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Nicaragua: Chronology Of Political Violence & Related Events, January 8 - 21

by Deborah Tyroler

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Jan. 8: El Rama mayor Alejandro Balmaceda delivered a letter to Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo signed by recontra leaders "Dimas Tigrillo," "Rojito" and "Matizon." The letter contained an ultimatum to President Violeta Chamorro giving her one week to meet recontra demands or face violent repercussions. The demands included incorporation of recontras into leadership positions in the armed forces and police, and the removal of army chief Gen. Humberto Ortega. Balmaceda, accompanied by five other mayors, met with Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo and representatives of the Organization of American States-sponsored International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV). The Matagalpa Coffee Growers Association issued a press release urging President Chamorro to negotiate with recontra and recompa groups in order to salvage the coffee harvest. The growers called for a solution to farm takeovers, barricade of rural roads, and armed intimidation of growers and workers by recontra and recompa groups. Jan. 9: Interior Ministry spokespersons reported that on Jan. 8, a vehicle carrying three recontra leaders was ambushed near La Trinidad, Esteli department. Recontra commander Leonel Benavides Castillo ("Freddy") was killed, and Encarnacion Valdivia ("Dimas Tigrillo") and Jacinto Tercero ("Campeon") were wounded. Three civilians were also wounded. The Ministry report said recompas were responsible. Recompa spokespersons denied involvement in the ambush, asserting that the attack was perpetrated by recontras under the command of "Indomable." Jan. 10: Army chief Gen. Humberto Ortega denied allegations that the military furnishes supplies to recompa forces. Ortega, who described the recompas as "adventurers" and "counterrevolutionaries," called on persons making such statements to present evidence. Next, Ortega said the army believes recompas were responsible for the Jan. 8 ambush in La Trinidad, Esteli. Jan. 13: Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado told reporters that during negotiations in Managua, recontra leader Jose Angel Moran Flores ("Indomable") agreed to a truce. Moran said he would assign 20 of his men to participate in the Special Disarmament Brigade (BED). Established in November 1991, the BED's mandate is to recover weapons held by civilians. Participants at the meeting included Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, a member of the CIAV, and recontras "Salvaje," "Bruja" and "Alfalima." Jan. 14: Spokespersons for President Chamorro said a special airplane outfitted as an ambulance was dispatched to Managua by the US Department of Defense to transport recontra leader Valdivia to a hospital in Costa Rica. Valdivia, under intensive care since being wounded in a Jan. 8 ambush, was accompanied by Health Minister Ernesto Salmeron, and OAS-CIAV observers. Recontra chief "Indomable" told reporters he had evidence implicating Interior Ministry special anti-riot forces, the "black berets," in the Jan. 8 ambush. Jan. 15: At a meeting with Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado in Tomatoya, Jinotega department, four recontra leaders ("Bolivar," "Relampago," "Bigote de Oro," and "Ducuali") agreed to disarm respective combatants under their command between Jan. 21 and Feb. 3. The agreement concluded over six months of talks. On Jan. 21, 70 recontras will begin working with the BED. Hurtado said the agreement contains new commitments by the government turn over farmland to former contras. Next, special joint police forces (policia mixta) comprised of former recontras and Sandinistas are to set up in the following municipalities located in northern
Nicaragua: El Jicaro, Quilali, San Juan de Rio Coco, Telpáneca, La Trinidad, Yali, San Rafael del Norte, La Concordia, Cua, San José de Bocay, Wiwili, Rio Blanco, Waslala, Limay, Condega, Pueblo Nuevo, and Palacaguina. According to daily newspaper El Nuevo Diario, soldiers and police officers exchanged fire with recontras in San Gabriel, Jinotega department. No casualties were reported.

Jan. 16: Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado and recompa leaders "William," "Herminio," "Moises," and "Caminante" signed an agreement stipulating demobilization of recompa forces simultaneous to that of recontras, between Jan. 21 and Feb. 3. The accord calls for 20 recompas to be incorporated into the BED, while up to 70 recompas will join police ranks. The government estimates that between 400 and 500 armed recompas most former mid-level army and interior ministry officers currently operate in northern Nicaragua. The leaders who signed the accords say they represent about 200 recompas.

Jan. 19: Local newspapers reported that the government ordered substitution of Sandinista police chiefs and deputy chiefs at five locales. Jaime Zeledon ("Bolivar") will take over as chief in Jinotega, capital of Jinotega department; "Rojito," deputy chief, San Rafael del Norte; Santos Olivas, chief, Yali; Raul Antonio, deputy chief, Pantasma; and, Ronaldo Espinoza, deputy chief, Wiwili. An additional 30 recontra combatants were incorporated into police forces in municipalities throughout northern Nicaragua.

Jan. 21: Army spokespersons told reporters that on Jan. 20, two recontras were killed and four wounded during a clash between recontra and recompa forces in Las Cruces, 190 km. north of Managua. In a second clash between the same two groups at nearby Las Colinas, Jinotega department, six recontras were killed and six wounded. The spokespersons said both incidents occurred when recontras led by "Indomable" attacked recompas enroute to locations where they were to surrender their weapons. According to military sources, on Jan. 19 in Rancho Grande, 200 km. north of Managua, recontras led by "El Dragon" disarmed local police and partially destroyed a bank branch office. A total of 75 recontras and 115 recompas surrendered their weapons to the BED in a ceremony held in Tomatoya, Jinotega department. Seventy of the recontras and 20 recompas were incorporated into the National Police. Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado said a total of 400 recontra and recompa combatants are expected to disarm by Feb. 3. Police chief posts in 10 Jinotega department municipalities will be turned over to members of the recontra leadership, and four similar posts are earmarked for demobilized recompas.

(Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 01/08-10/92, 01/13-15/92, 01/17/92, 01/21/92; Chinese news service Xinhua, 01/14/92, 01/21/92; Notimex, 01/21/92; ACAN- EFE, 01/09/92, 01/13-16/92, 01/19/92, 01/21/92)