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Salvadorans Celebrate End Of War, Part 1

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 31: At the 1st army brigade headquarters in San Salvador, President Alfredo Cristiani presided over a ceremony marking the end of the civil war. Squads representing all armed forces units formed for review and medal presentation by the president. Also present at the ceremony were members of the diplomatic corps, National Assembly deputies, judiciary officials, and representatives of the Catholic Church. Cristiani congratulated the troops for their "sacrifice and patriotism, [and for doing] everything necessary to gallantly prevent the republic from sinking into chaos and falling under totalitarian domination." Gen. Gilberto Rubio, head of the armed forces chiefs of staff, told the crowd, "I have the honor of informing the Salvadoran nation that today marks the end of the military campaign against communist aggression....We have successfully completed our battle in defense of national sovereignty, order, security, republican institutions and democracy." Defense Minister Gen. Rene Emilio Ponce said, "It is now the responsibility of all Salvadorans to put the past aside...Let us forever bury sectarian strife and the thirst for vengeance." According to Ponce, the army's future mission is to "sow understanding where before there was hatred, and to harvest beans and corn where there was desolation. Hatred, resentment and vice must disappear. This is the only way toward reconciliation." Hundreds of people rallied at the Comalapa airport outside of San Salvador to greet Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) commanders Shafick Handal, Joaquin Villalobos, Francisco Jovel, Eduardo Sancho and 25 other top-level rebel leaders arriving from Mexico City. Leonel Gonzalez, the fifth member of the FMLN general command who returned to El Salvador several days earlier, UN observers and diplomats from Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Spain were also on hand to greet the delegation. The rebel leaders were accompanied by a delegation from the Cuban Communist Party. Sancho said, "This is the beginning of real national independence. The revolutionary democratic process is beginning and we all must participate." Villalobos told reporters that the FMLN's next task will be to organize itself into a grassroots-based political party dedicated to improving social welfare conditions so that the peace agreement can be transformed from "words into deeds." According to Handal, "From this moment on the accords should become part of daily life...[A] peaceful and democratic El Salvador should emerge with bonds of social justice allowing the country to develop in a climate of collective effort." Feb. 1: The formal cease-fire began. As specified in the accords calendar, the army officially suspended forced recruitment. [The army is to submit a bill to the national legislature by April 2 on institutionalizing an alternative recruitment system. The peace accords stipulate that all Salvadoran males register for military service, but that entry into active service is to be voluntary or through a random selection procedure.] Gen. Victor Suanzes Pardo, leader of the UN verification commission's (ONUSAL) military contingent, commenced a tour of enclaves set aside for government troops and rebel combatants during the cease-fire. The peace accords stipulate 100 sites for 65,000 members of the public security forces, and 50 sites for 10,000 rebel combatants. Between Feb. 6 and March 30, site numbers are to be reduced to 50 for military troops, and 15 for the rebels. Suanzes Pardo reported that thus far everything was proceeding smoothly and according to plan. At the San Salvador fairgrounds, about 3,000 persons participated in a ceremony marking the beginning of the formal cease-fire. President Cristiani formally instated the 10-member National Peace Commission (COPAZ), charged with monitoring implementation

of peace accords. Cristiani and diplomats and officials from Peru, France, Germany, Brazil and Spain joined a crowd at the "Salvador del Mundo" monument where runners arrived from the nation's 14 department capitals. The runners passed torches to 14 children dressed in white who lit an eternal "flame of peace" at the foot of the monument. Venezuelan pop music star Jose Luis (El Puma) Rodriguez sang Schiller's lyrics to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." Armando Calderon Sol, San Salvador mayor and Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) leader, said keeping peace "is an obligation before history, an obligation to our children." COPAZ member and rebel leader Villalobos said, "This is the hour of peace and reconciliation...We cease to be enemies and become political adversaries, resolving differences by civic means...It is erroneous to think that the civil war has ended and now the political war has begun." Villalobos added that the FMLN is fully committed to constructing a true and lasting peace. On Saturday afternoon at the San Salvador cathedral, thousands of FMLN supporters participated in a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of Augustin Farabundo Marti's death. Farabundo Marti, a leader in a peasant uprising which resulted in "La Matanza," was executed in 1932 by an army firing squad. Soldiers massacred an estimated 30,000 civilians in order to quash the uprising and trade union activism. At a San Salvador press conference of FMLN leaders, Handal said he felt "like a fish in water" after 10 years of living underground and in exile. He asserted that the FMLN favors a "free market economy, based on participation by all sectors of society, and social justice." According to Handal, the political party to be established by the FMLN will not subscribe to any traditional set of ideological beliefs. Villalobos said the government's economic construction plan was insufficient to make a significant difference in social welfare conditions, and too closely identified with neo-liberal concepts. He pointed out that the plan calls for investment of 80% of all funds in infrastructure projects. In contrast, the FMLN favors an approach which channels most financial resources into development and social welfare projects geared toward achieving greater stability. Gonzalez accused the army of "maintaining a confrontational attitude" toward the civilian population. He mentioned the eviction of several peasant families from an agricultural cooperative in Usulután department. Gonzalez called on the government and army to terminate such evictions, and thereby avoid "complications" in the peace process. In San Salvador, the five members of the FMLN general command addressed thousands of supporters from throughout the country who traveled to the capital to participate in an evening cease-fire celebration. Villalobos said, "We were often referred to as tiny groups...a small, isolated minority. But today we have shown that [the FMLN] is the largest organized political force in the nation." Also present were the Spanish and Mexican Ambassadors; Salvadoran musical group Tepehuani, recently home from exile; Nicaraguan singer Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy; and, dozens of other musical groups. Event organizers cordoned off 20 blocks of downtown Sal Salvador. Observers estimated that at least 400,000 people joined in the celebration which lasted until Sunday morning. Army and police units were not present in the area. (cont.)

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