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Guatemala: President Serrano On Human Rights, Cuba, & Rebel Characteristics

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On Feb. 6, President Jorge Serrano told reporters that the negative assessment of his administration's human rights record appearing in the annual human rights report by the US State Department reflected US opposition to Guatemala's position on Cuba. According to Serrano, the State Department report refers to incidents which occurred in 1989 and 1990, "and just one case in 1991." He added that many of the above cases are currently being processed by the courts. [See CAU 02/07/92 for coverage of State Department report.] Serrano asserted that his government has insisted on a "Latin American dialogue" aimed at seeking freedom for the Cuban people. He said, "It is not right that Latin American presidents do not have a policy toward Cuba and that we cannot sit down with Fidel Castro and tell him what is wrong...The US does not understand the Latin Americans. They think that because elected governments are in power, one can talk about reducing armies." Next, Serrano said the US "looks at Guatemala and thinks that by attacking the military, civilian rule is strengthened. What they will end up with are problems like those in Venezuela." Serrano claimed there are no similarities between the Guatemalan and Salvadoran insurgencies. In Guatemala, he said, the rebel leadership comes from the same economic and social class background as the country's political leaders. The president added, "Nearly all of us went to the same high schools, the same universities, and there is more exchange between the two groups. [The Guatemalan rebels] are not at the same level as the Salvadoran rebels." Serrano dismissed the notion that the United Nations should intervene in peace talks between the government and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). (Basic data from Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/06/92)

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