

3-6-1992

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## Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Nicaragua: Rebel Uprisings On Atlantic Coast." (1992). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/7157>

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## Nicaragua: Rebel Uprisings On Atlantic Coast

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, March 6, 1992

Feb. 18: An Interior Ministry spokesperson reported that one police officer and a soldier were killed when a rebel group attacked the police station at Waspan, located 600 km. northeast of Managua in the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region. The spokesperson said reports received from Waspan were "confusing," but it appeared that at least three additional police and army personnel were wounded, and an undetermined number abducted by rebels. According to local press reports, the clash occurred when about 200 members of the indigenous rebel group Yatama ("children of mother earth" in Miskito) stormed the town of Waspan, attacked the police station, and occupied several government buildings in the town. Unofficial sources cited by the Agence France-Presse reported that a second rebel group took over a section of the Waspan-Puerto Cabezas highway. The Yatama rebels demanded removal of all Sandinista army and police personnel stationed in the autonomous region, and the establishment of a new police force incorporating former Yatama combatants. They also insisted on the resignation of elected members of the regional government, and compliance by Managua with terms of a disarmament agreement signed in 1990. Autonomous region governor Leonel Panting accused Brooklin Rivera, a former Yatama leader and director of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coastal Development Institute (INDERA), of heading the rebellion. As INDERA director, Rivera is a member of President Violeta Chamorro's cabinet. Pedro Mercado, coordinator of the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Regional Council (local government umbrella group), told reporters that the rebels had threatened to attack Puerto Cabezas, the autonomous region's capital and largest city. Unofficial sources reported that about 130 soldiers were sent to Puerto Cabezas as reinforcements. Feb. 19: In Waspan, police dislodged rebels occupying government buildings and arrested 37 persons. A military spokesperson in Managua confirmed that President Chamorro had ordered deployment of additional military forces to Puerto Cabezas. Members of the army's elite Hilario Sanchez Battalion arrested four of five persons believed to be responsible for the Feb. 17 murder of a Waspan police officer. INDERA deputy director Owyn Hodgson attributed the conflicts in the region to "extreme poverty and despair." At least 180 anti-riot police were sent to patrol the streets of Waspan and Puerto Cabezas. Feb. 20: In Managua, President Chamorro met with a peace commission from the autonomous region in an effort to defuse the crisis. The commission included representatives from INDERA, Yatama, the regional government, the Organization of American States (OAS)-sponsored Verification and Support Commission (CIAV), the Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Churches (CEPAD), and the Moravian church. Feb. 21: Police released the 37 persons who had been arrested on Feb. 19 in connection with the attacks in Waspan and Puerto Cabezas. Police and army reinforcements which had been sent to Waspan were ordered back to respective bases. Rebels killed a bodyguard assigned to Puerto Cabezas mayor Roy Dixon. INDERA leader Rivera denied charges that he was behind the rebellion. Rivera said leaders of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) were accusing him of leading the uprising because they could not "forgive" him for "leading the Miskito resistance for 11 years," and for his role "in the electoral campaign which put President Chamorro in office." According to Rivera, "The army officers now in the autonomous region are the same people who led the repression against the indigenous people during 11 years [of Sandinista rule]." Rivera said the government in Managua has done nothing to comply with promises made to rebels in previous disarmament accords. He added

that Yatama members had received very little assistance from the CIAV. Feb. 22: Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado told reporters that shortly after police reinforcements left the area, an estimated 400 Yatama rebels took over Waspan for a second time. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 02/18/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/18-02/22/92)

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