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Nicaraguan Recontras & Recompas Occupy Northern Towns: Summary Of Developments, March 3 - 11

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March 3: Interior Ministry spokespersons reported that three members of the Special Disarmament Brigade (BED) were killed, seven wounded and five were missing following an ambush by unidentified assailants near Brisas, Jinotega department. The BED members were traveling in a military vehicle en route to Waslala, Jinotega, where they were scheduled to participate in the disarmament of 750 recontras and 200 recompas. The attack was attributed to former contras led by "Camaneca." March 6: In Managua, deputy interior minister Alfredo Mendieta told reporters about 600 armed recontras and recompas staged a protest in Ocotal, capital of Nueva Segovia department. The protesters occupied several government buildings and blocked street traffic, but no violent incidents were reported. Mendieta attributed the situation in Ocotal to the fact that payments offered by the government for weapons turned in during the disarmament process in February had created "economic expectations" which in turn led to "rearmament" by many individuals hoping to obtain more financial concessions. Subsequent Interior Ministry reports confirmed that joint recontra-recompa groups had staged a series of protests in and around the towns of Ocotal, Ducuali, Jalapa, Quilali, El Jicaro, Totogalpa, and Condega, located in Nueva Segovia, Madriz and Esteli departments. Protest activities included seizing at least 40 vehicles used to block the Pan American Highway, occupation of two radio stations, and occupation of the Ocotal post office. In communiques broadcast over the occupied radio stations, protesters demanded access to agricultural production loans, improved health care and education, and construction of new roads in rural areas. An Interior Ministry spokesperson said police and army units in Ocotal had been ordered to remain in their barracks in an effort "to avoid direct confrontations with the protesters." Unofficial reports cited by ACAN-EFE indicated that as many as 1,800 armed men had occupied Ocotal. Local media reports indicated that most of the recontras and recompas left Ocotal just before the arrival of 150 soldiers, members of an elite army battalion. The soldiers were airlifted to the area aboard six military helicopters. In Ocotal, Radio Segovia correspondent Francisco Machado said the town was occupied by about "1,200 Sandinistas and 600 contras." He said both groups were under the command of Sandinista leader "Jaguar." EPS (army) spokesperson Col. Ricardo Wheelock denied reports that 1,800 men had occupied Ocotal. He said there were only about 500, and not all protesters were armed. According to Wheelock, about 20 protesters remained in Ocotal after the arrival of military reinforcements. Interior Ministry spokesperson Frank Cesar said the recontras and recompas voluntarily vacated the buildings they had occupied, and agreed to be taken to areas where they would disarm. Cesar said government officials had agreed to meet with recontra and recompa representatives to discuss their demands in exchange for the weapons surrender. Interior Minister Hurtado assigned a four-member delegation comprised of civilians and military personnel to negotiate with representatives of the protesters. Honduran Ambassador to Nicaragua Col. Manuel Maldonado said that on March 5 in Ducuali, about "700 recontras and 300 recompas" blocked the Pan American Highway. The ambassador and traveling companions were detained for two hours. Maldonado and party were en route to Honduras. According to the ambassador, recontra chief "Condor" asked him to intercede on their behalf and persuade Nicaraguan authorities

to comply with commitments under the 1990 disarmament accords. Maldonado said a disarmament commission member, who had likewise been detained at the roadblock, persuaded the recontras to let his party proceed. March 7: The government delegation scheduled to meet with recontra and recompa representatives in Jalapa, but failed to arrive result of a road block erected by another group of disaffected former combatants. The delegation included Finance Minister Emilio Pereira. March 10: The government sent another delegation to negotiate with recontras and recompas to Ocotal, this one headed by deputy interior minister Mendieta. March 11: Local media reports indicated that 2,000 rearmed recompa, recontra and other irregular groups agreed to disarm within the next 72 hours in exchange for government provision of materials for construction of 136 homes, agricultural production loans, and farm land, among other things. The protesters were concentrated in a camp located 7 km. outside of Ocotal. Disarmament is to take place under observation of representatives from the Organization of American States (OAS)-sponsored International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV). Ocotal mayor Arnulfo Aguilera said a special commission comprised of recompa and government representatives had been appointed to oversee compliance with the accords. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 03/03/92, 03/06/92; Associated Press, 03/06/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/03/92, 03/06/92, 03/07/92, 03/09-11/92; Notimex, 03/03/92, 03/11/92; Deutsche Press Agentur, 03/12/92)

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