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Honduran Government Complaints On Settlement Of Salvadorans In Contested Border Area

by Deborah Tyroler

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March 2: In Tegucigalpa, local media sources cited a Honduran military intelligence report as saying that 200 families linked to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) have settled in the Dolores area of La Paz department (Honduras). According to the intelligence report, each Salvadoran family received three hectares of land to farm, and "the UN observer mission to El Salvador (ONUSAL), the UN observer group in Central American (ONUCA) and the FMLN participated in the land distribution." Hondurans evicted from the Dolores area were quoted as saying that the Salvadorans began distributing land in the area last year. [Dolores is located in the border area contested by the Honduran and Salvadoran governments. In July 1969, conflict over border demarcation resulted in the four-day "Soccer War." The two nations normalized relations in 1980 after signing a treaty agreement which specifies a prohibition against military operations in the contested region. In 1986, the two governments turned the border dispute over to the International Court of Justice (the UN's legal arm, also known as the World Court), which is expected to deliver a ruling in June 1992. FMLN rebels organized camps in the area prior to launching their first major offensive in January 1980.] Honduran Foreign Minister Mario Carias said his government would seek a formal explanation concerning FMLN settlements in the disputed area. The Salvadoran Embassy in Tegucigalpa released a statement denying Honduran allegations concerning land distribution in Dolores. According to embassy, the Salvadoran government has fulfilled terms of the 1980 treaty, and maintains its commitment to accept the World Court ruling. In San Salvador, President Alfredo Cristiani said, "The government has not distributed any land in the border region nor has it any intention of doing so" as long as World Court deliberations continue. In a letter to UN Secretary Butros Butros Gali, Honduran Ambassador to the UN Roberto Flores Bermudez requested deployment of a UN police team to monitor the border area. He asserted that the FMLN has made public statements of UN support for distributing land in the contested border region. In addition, Flores Bermudez said UN troop presence is also desirable to guarantee compliance with the upcoming ruling by the World Court. March 5: In statements to journalists, La Paz department governor Mauro Suazo said mayors of Santa Ana and Mercedes de Oriente, both located in the Dolores area, had reported recent land occupations by relatives of FMLN rebels. He added that vehicles carrying Salvadoran plates had been seen in the area. Salvadoran President Cristiani reiterated that land distribution was not taking place in the area under dispute. The president said his government will investigate the situation, and subsequently act to ensure compliance with bilateral accords. March 7: Honduran President Rafael Callejas told reporters that the allegations about land distribution in Dolores had not yet been verified. Honduran army public relations director Col. Napoleon Santos said that in late 1991, military personnel investigated denunciations of land distribution in the contested region, and submitted a report to the Foreign Ministry. Honduran Foreign Minister Mario Carias said that based on the above report, the ministry submitted complaints to the Salvadoran ministry nearly a month ago. March 10: Honduran Defense Minister Claudio Lainez told reporters that the army was prepared to dislodge the Salvadorans in the area under litigation if necessary. [Basic data from Prensa Latina (Cuba), 03/03/92; Spanish

news service EFE, 03/04/92; Agence France-Presse, 03/02/92, 03/05/92, 03/08/92, 03/10/92; Notimex, 03/02/92, 03/10/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/10/92]

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