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Cholera Update, February 19 - March 6

by Deborah Tyroler

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Feb. 19: Honduran health officials reported one new confirmed case of cholera at Cienaga, Lempira department, bringing total cases to 14. Feb. 20: Nicaraguan Health Minister Ernesto Salmeron reported the nation's second confirmed case of the disease in La Paz Centro, Leon department. According to Salmeron, the cholera bacteria has been found in Lake Xolotlan near Managua, and in garbage dumps in the capital. Salmeron said contamination of the lake is especially dangerous, since water from Xolotlan is used by thousands of people for irrigation. Salvadoran Health Ministry spokespersons said an average of six new cholera cases per day are being reported throughout the country. Since September last year, approximately 860 cases of the disease have been confirmed, and the death toll is 43. According to World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) statistics, Peru is the country hardest hit by cholera with nearly 250,000 confirmed cases. Next in the ranking are Ecuador at 42,000, and Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala, with about 3,000 cases each. Feb. 25: Costa Rican Health Minister Carlos Castro told reporters that cholera cases in Nicaragua in reality total at least 300. Nicaraguan authorities have officially recognized only two confirmed cases since Oct. 31. According to Castro, the rest of the cholera cases have instead been reported as simple diarrhea. The minister also expressed concern that Lake Nicaragua, near the Costa Rican border, may be contaminated with the cholera bacteria. [Lake Xolotlan is linked to Lake Nicaragua, which in turn flows into the San Juan River on the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border.] Feb. 26: At a press conference, Nicaraguan Health Minister Salmeron denied Castro's statements. Salvadoran health officials reported 43 deaths and nearly 3,000 confirmed cases of cholera since August 1991. In the first two months of 1992, 1,025 new cases of the disease were reported. March 6: Guatemalan Health Minister Miguel Angel Montepeque reported 65 deaths and 1,981 confirmed cases of cholera since June 1991. Cholera victims have been identified in all 22 of the nation's departments. The highest incidence of the disease has occurred in Guatemala (765 cases) and Escuintla (470) departments. March 11: Honduran health official Alirio Cruz told reporters that an intensive cholera prevention campaign had been initiated in Salvadoran border area, including in the so-called "bolsones" claimed by both governments. Cruz said Health Ministry personnel are planning a population census in the area to determine local demographic conditions for purposes of meeting health requirements. According to Cruz, residents in the disputed territories have a basic right to health services irrespective of national origin. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 02/20/92; Agence France-Presse, 02/19/92, 02/25/92, 02/26/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/26/92, 03/11/92)

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