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Deborah Tyroler

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Nicaragua: Armed Forces Chief Ordered By National Assembly To "explain" Army Actions

by Deborah Tyroler

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On May 21, the National Assembly voted 47 to 43 to summon armed forces chief Gen. Humberto Ortega to appear before the legislature in order to "explain" why the army has not acted to forcibly remove revueltos occupying plantations and farms throughout the country. Former president Daniel Ortega said the summons was part of National Assembly president (speaker) Alfredo Cesar's destabilization campaign against the Chamorro administration. He dismissed claims that President Violeta Chamorro was planning to remove Gen. Ortega from his post. On May 25, Gen. Ortega accused Cesar of undermining the peace and reconciliation process. He said Cesar was planning to launch a campaign to discredit the government during his upcoming trip to Europe, in an attempt to organize a foreign aid boycott against the Chamorro administration. The general reiterated firm support for the government. He called on the FSLN, the National Assembly, private business owners, and the Catholic Church to support the Chamorro administration. After dismissing statements regarding his own complicity in revuelto actions, Ortega added that unions and individuals demanding farm land had no justification for resorting to violence. He said such actions only make it more difficult to find solutions to protesters' demands. The army and police, said Ortega, were determined to militarily confront all violence. Ortega also stated that the government could be more coherent and efficient in addressing social problems. Local media sources reported May 28 that President Chamorro had refused to authorize the request for Gen. Ortega to appear before a National Assembly plenary session scheduled to take place June 3. She said Ortega would, however, attend a meeting with members of the National Assembly's defense and governance committee. On May 29, Gen. Ortega submitted a request for an injunction (*recurso de amparo*) to the Supreme Court which would invalidate the National Assembly summons. Cesar accused President Chamorro of allying herself with the military and against the legislature by "blocking its legitimate right to summon any [government official]." He said Chamorro lacked the authority to "determine whether a legislative act is constitutional." Gen. Ortega delivered a detailed report on the nation's military situation to the National Assembly defense and governance committee. The Supreme Court ruled on June 1 that Gen. Ortega is under no obligation to comply with the National Assembly summons. After pointing out that the army is an institution subordinate to the executive, the Court ruling said the legislature's power to summons government officials is limited to cabinet ministers, deputy ministers and directors of government agencies and enterprises. On the same day, President Chamorro said the US government's decision to postpone disbursement of aid monies to Nicaragua will not lead to changes in government policy. (See coverage of US decision in CAU 06/05/92.) In the same vein, and in reference to Cesar and supporters, she added that Gen. Ortega "will leave the army when I say so." In a letter addressed to President Chamorro and published by the local media June 2, Gen. Ortega said that he was willing to appear before the National Assembly to respond to accusations against him. He requested Chamorro's endorsement of his appearance. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 05/21/92, 05/25/92, 05/28/92, 05/28/92, 06/01/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 05/21/92, 05/25/92, 05/28/92, 05/29/92, 06/01/92, 06/02/92)

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