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El Salvador: Update On Implementation Of Peace Accords

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 20, leaders from the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) announced that, given the continued concern over government noncompliance with peace accord commitments, the FMLN would only disarm a group of about 500 rebel combatants, less than one third of the total 1,843 fighters originally scheduled to demobilize on that day. Under the current compliance timetable, FMLN demobilization is to be fully completed by Dec. 15, and 80% of the rebel force should have been disarmed by Nov. 20. In a press conference, FMLN leader Leonel Gonzalez said the rebels decided to commence at least partial demobilization on the 20th after receiving a letter from UN Secretary General Butros Butros Ghali promising that he would pressure the government to comply with its commitments under the accords. Gonzalez added that, "We will demobilize the [additional] 1,343 troops little by little, giving the government time to meet its remaining obligations...We will be watching next week to see if they catch up on their promises and then we will go ahead with our demobilization." Demobilization of the 500 rebels did take place on Nov. 21, leaving the FMLN with a total of 3,870 armed combatants still stationed at 15 designated demobilization encampments. Nevertheless, on Nov. 24, in a statement read to reporters by Joaquin Villalobos, the FMLN announced its decision to indefinitely suspend further demobilization. According to the statement, the FMLN is concerned that once the entire rebel army has been disarmed, government forces will begin to evict peasants and former rebels who were granted land parcels under the peace accords. Villalobos expressed disappointment over the government's repeated failure to provide temporary legal guarantees which would protect against such evictions until formal land titles are issued. The announcement came on the heels of a statement by President Alfredo Cristiani reiterating that he plans to deploy army troops in coffee growing areas beginning on Dec. 16, the day after the deadline for total FMLN demobilization (see CAU 11/20/92). Cristiani's decision was criticized by San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas during his Nov. 22 Sunday homily. Rivera y Damas characterized the deployment a serious threat to continued compliance with the peace accords, adding that Church legal experts largely agree with the FMLN that Cristiani's decision violates both the constitution and the peace accords. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 11/19/92, 11/20/92, 11/24/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 11/22/92, 11/24/92)

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