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## **Exile Arrested in Alleged Plot to Kill Fidel Castro at Ibero-American Summit**

by LADB Staff

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The tenth Ibero-American Summit focused this year as it has so often in the past on Cuba. Though the main agenda item was improving the condition of children in the region, the agenda was overshadowed by Cuban President Fidel Castro's surprise announcement of a plot to assassinate him, the arrest of Cuban-exile terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, a clash between Castro and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, and a bitter exchange between Castro and Salvadoran President Francisco Flores.

Representatives from 19 Latin American countries plus Portugal and Spain met in Panama City, Nov. 17 and 18 for the annual summit. At the start of the summit, Castro announced that the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was behind a conspiracy to assassinate him in Panama. He named Posada as the leader of a group of plotters that included Cuban exiles and Central American accomplices.

During a televised summit session, Castro said that Posada had come from El Salvador to kill him and that the Salvadoran government "knows perfectly well that he lives there." Flores vigorously countered by blaming Castro for the deaths of "tens of thousands" of Salvadorans during the civil war of the 1980s because of Cuban assistance to the guerrillas.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez interceded with a remark intended to defuse the heated exchange. "If we are going to start raising accusations about the past, we would have to start with Spain," he said. "Let's forget things of the past; we have to end here with a spirit of optimism and union."

### ***Castro rejects resolution against Basque ETA***

The exchange with Flores and the Posada arrest coincided with debate on a summit resolution that Spain badly wanted in the final declaration. The resolution, put forward by El Salvador, was to condemn terrorist acts committed by the Basque separatist organization ETA. ETA attacks in Spain have killed 20 people this year.

The declaration, signed by all but Castro, promised to combat all forms of terrorism and, in particular, terrorist acts committed by the ETA. Castro refused to go along with the resolution arguing that it was "selective." He said that in the nine previous Ibero-American summits, there never was any condemnation of terrorism directed at Cuba.

Aznar said Castro's refusal to back the resolution was a serious matter that would have consequences for bilateral relations. Spanish official sources said they would give Castro time to reconsider and then take unspecified measures. During his exchange with Flores, Castro said he was

"puzzled" that the anti-terrorism resolution came from the country "where the ringleader [Posada] of the terrorists lives, against whom they haven't taken action."

Castro said the Cuban government had asked Flores to do something about Posada in October. Clarifying the Cuban position on the ETA resolution, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Cuba did not support the ETA and considered the Basque issue an internal matter in Spain. "In an Ibero-American summit, you cannot accept a text on terrorism in Europe," he said. "The resolution has to be about terrorism in Ibero-America."

### *Panamanian police arrest four*

CANF spokeswoman Ninoska Perez denied the organization had anything to do with any assassination attempt against Castro. "They are accusations without proof," she said. "Where are the people he's talking about?" Hours after Castro's announcement, Panamanian police, armed with precise information from Castro on the alleged conspirators, arrested Posada, 72, and three Florida men: Manuel Diaz, 65, Pedro Remon, 56, and Guillermo Novo Sampoll, 61. Police think Manuel Diaz is Gaspar Jimenez, a convicted terrorist who was a suspect in a car bombing in 1976 that blew off the legs of a Miami journalist. He is thought to have ties with CANF official Alberto Hernandez.

Perez Roque said the Cuban government had been aware of the conspiracy since July, and he gave Panamanian authorities a list of names, telephone numbers, and addresses of others implicated in the plot. Besides the four who were first arrested in Panama, the list includes Cesar Matamoros Chacon, 63, and Roberto Carrillo, 60, both Cuban exiles living in Panama City, and Jose Hurtado, a Panamanian who supposedly served as Posada's chauffeur in Panama. Matamoros was arrested but later released. Also listed were two Cuban exiles living in Florida, Antonio Iglesias Pons, 65, and Santiago Alvarez Fernandez Magrina, 61, and Carlos Vicente Lopez Sanchez, 28, a Honduran.

Cuban authorities said explosives for the assassination plot came from Honduras, and they identified Lopez Sanchez as possibly involved in transporting them. Lopez Sanchez is a Miami resident with links to the Cuban-exile community there, but he is currently living in Honduras. In the hotel where the four men were arrested, police found thousands of dollars, which the men said was to pay for anti-Castro advertising, but no weapons. Police also found eight kilos of plastic explosives in a vacant lot near the Tocumen airport.

Authorities said the assassination attempt was to take place as Castro was being driven from the airport to his hotel or during a planned visit to the University of Panama. Posada has a long history of anti-Castro activities. The Cuban government believes he was behind the bombing in 1976 of a Cubana de Aviacion jetliner that killed 73 people. Posada said in a 1998 interview with The New York Times that he orchestrated a bombing campaign in Havana in 1997 with financing from CANF. He later gave two different versions of a denial that CANF had financed his terrorist activities (see NotiCen, 1998-03-13). Raul Ernesto Cruz de Leon and Otto Rodriguez Llerena, both Salvadoran citizens, were convicted of setting off the bombs in 1997 at Havana tourist sites and are awaiting an appeal of their death sentences in a Cuban prison (see Noticen, 1999-03-25, 1999-04-22).

After the trials of the two bombers, the Salvadoran government said it would investigate Posada's anti-Castro activities in El Salvador. Accusations fly in El Salvador Following the summit, El

Salvador's governing party Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) accused the opposition Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) of giving Castro the information he had on Posada and congratulated Flores for standing up to Castro. "The reaction of the president was a reaction of national dignity," said Vice President Carlos Quintanilla Schmidt.

Mauricio Sandoval, director of the national police (Policia Nacional Civil, PNC), told Reuters news service that former FMLN Deputy Eugenio Chicas was the liaison with Cuban intelligence on the Posada case. Chicas denied the accusation and suggested Sandoval was trying to cover up the failures of the Salvadoran intelligence service (Organismo de Inteligencia del Estado, OIE), which Sandoval heads.

Chicas said Sandoval had failed to carry out an investigation of Posada's connection to the Havana bombings after Cuban authorities requested it. Salvador Samayoa, president of the Consejo de Seguridad Nacional, which advises Flores on public-security matters, said Salvadorans owed Cuba an apology for the assistance the government gave to the Cuban terrorist.

FMLN Deputy Jorge Shafik Handal called the president's remarks at the summit immature and said the essential point was that Posada had a Salvadoran passport. He said that Posada's presence in El Salvador was commonly known and that government officials could hardly claim they were unaware of his presence.

In January, Salvadoran officials told The Miami Herald they had ordered Posada to stop launching terrorist plots from El Salvador. One official said Flores had "zero tolerance" for such activities. But the government did not expel Posada, said the official, because he had protection from ARENA.

FMLN Deputy Nidia Diaz rejected Flores' claim about Cuban culpability during the civil war. In a telephone interview with Cuban television, Diaz said the conflict was not caused by Cuban aggression but by the social injustice imposed on the country by the Salvadoran political class supported militarily by the US. She criticized Flores for abstaining in the recent UN vote to condemn the US embargo against Cuba (see NotiCen, 2000-11-16) at the same time that a Cuban medical brigade was treating dengue patients in El Salvador.

From San Jose, Costa Rica, the Comision de Derechos Humanos de Centroamerica (CODEHUCA) advised El Salvador to "withdraw its support and concealment of terrorist activities against Cuba." With Castro's accusation that Central American countries had harbored Posada, government officials and opposition leaders around the region began asking for information on Posada's activities.

Former Guatemalan president Vinicio Cerezo (1986-1991) told Agence France-Presse that Posada was probably in Guatemala between 1988 and 1990. To avoid problems with Cuba, Cerezo said he ordered Posada to face the charges against him or leave Guatemala, which he subsequently did, moving to Honduras. Mario Polanco, director of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GMA), asked the Guatemalan government to investigate possible human rights violations committed by Posada while he was in the country.

In 1998, Ramon Custodio, head of the Comité de Derechos Humanos in Honduras, said his organization had evidence that Posada was living in Honduras under the protection of right-wing politicians and that he had participated in attempts to kill President Carlos Roberto Reina (1994-1998) in the mid-1990s (see NotiCen, 1994-10-02).

Citing police sources, the Managua daily *El Nuevo Diario* said Posada had been in Nicaragua twice this year traveling on a Salvadoran passport under the name Franco Rodriguez Mena. Immigration officials in El Salvador confirmed that they had issued a passport to Posada in 1991 under the name of Ramon Medina Rodriguez and another one in 1995 under the name of Franco Rodriguez Mena. Interior Vice Minister Gabriel Carranza said the passports were authentic and so were the documents offered to show Salvadoran citizenship.

Posada had left Salvador with the Franco Rodriguez Mena passport 59 times since 1995 for trips to Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and the US. Both Chavez and Castro said they would ask Panama to extradite Posada. He is wanted in Venezuela for a retrial on the 1976 jetliner bombing. Salvadoran Interior Minister Mario Acosta said his government might also ask for Posada's extradition on charges of using false documents. However, Panamanian officials signaled that the extradition requests would be denied.

On Nov. 23, President Mireya Moscoso said Posada and the others would be tried in Panama. Currently, the four are being held without charges for the 60 days allowed for other countries to request extradition, but they will likely be tried for illegal possession of explosives, criminal association, and terrorism. Castro steps up criticism of neighbors Back in Cuba, Castro stepped up his attacks. Spain, he said, had acted with "arrogance" in pressing for the ETA resolution. He criticized Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo for seconding the ETA resolution and for Mexico's close ties with the US.

Declaring a gulf between Cuba and the rest of the region, Castro said the ETA resolution was supported by the other heads of state out of devotion to neoliberalism and other ideas inimical to Cuban "revolutionary thought." He pardoned only Chavez and Spanish King Juan Carlos.

### *Summit issues Panama Declaration*

The ETA-terrorism controversy and the Posada arrest eclipsed the main business of the summit. However, the final declaration included resolutions on behalf of children. The declaration pledged to guarantee universal free and obligatory primary education for all children by 2015, increase use of information technologies in schools, improve nutrition for children, and broaden health-care systems with the goal of cutting maternal mortality in half by 2010. The declaration also proposed that steps be taken to protect orphans and street children and to crack down on sexual exploitation of children and child labor.

The declaration urged the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and economic integration. Other resolutions called for measures to contain the spread of AIDS, a condemnation of the US embargo against Cuba, and for Argentina and Great Britain to settle their dispute over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands. The next summit will take place in Peru in 2001. [Sources: Reuters, 11/18/00; *El Pais* (Spain), *La Prensa* (Panama), BBC, *The New York Times*, 11/19/00; Spanish News

Service EFE, 11/18/0, 11/20/21; El Mundo (Spain), 11/21/00; El Panama America, 11/17/00, 11/18/00, 11/20/00, 11/21/00; Prensa Latina, 11/17/00, 11/21/00, 11/22/00; La Razon (Spain), 11/22/00; The Miami Herald, 01/30/00, 11/21/00, 11/22/00, 11/23/00; Associated Press, 08/09/98, 11/17/00, 11/18/00, 11/19/00, 11/23/00; Prensa Grafica (El Salvador) 11/21/00, 11/24/00; Agence France-Presse, 11/09/00, 11/19/00, 11/20/00, 11/22/00, 11/24/00, 11/25/00; Notimex, 11/11/00, 11/17/00, 11/18/00, 11/19/00, 11/24/00, 11/27/00; Granma (Cuba), El Diario de Hoy (El Salvador), 11/28/00]

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