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US Cancels Visa of Diplomat

by LADB Staff

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In late February, the US cancelled the visa of Honduran diplomat Luis Alonso Discua Elvir and ordered him to leave the country by the end of the month. Discua, a retired general, is former head of the armed forces. He was appointed to his post as counselor to the Honduran delegation at the UN, with a monthly salary of US\$5,000, by former President Carlos Roberto Reina (1994-1998) in 1996. The appointment came at a time when Gen. Discua was under fire for alleged human rights abuses committed by the military in the 1980s.

Discua was the first commander of the notorious Battalion 3-16, which is almost universally condemned for systematic human rights abuses (see NotiSur, 1996-01-26). Despite outcries against the appointment from human rights groups, Reina went ahead with the appointment, explaining that he wanted the general out of the country to avoid a coup. The US government said it cancelled Discua's visa because he violated the terms of his appointment by living in Miami instead of the New York, where he was assigned. US officials said Discua spent most of his time in Miami where he has investments and went to New York only on weekends to collect his paycheck.

Discua told a Honduran radio station by telephone that it was cheaper to live in Miami. A press officer at the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa said the UN had investigated Discua and then asked the US State Department to cancel his visa. Along with the cancellation of his diplomatic visa, the US also cancelled his tourist visa. Discua will presumably return to Honduras where he would have to reapply for a tourist visa to re-enter the US. Local newspapers said Discua owns 10 houses in Miami and has business dealings in Washington and offshore bank accounts.

The Foreign Relations Ministry said Discua had resigned his post at the UN effective March 1. Vice Minister Roberto Arita said that Discua's version of the events was that he lost his visa because he had resigned, not the other way around. In his letter of resignation, Discua said he was leaving the post for "personal reasons."

In an editorial on the Discua matter, the daily El Heraldo said Discua's expulsion from the UN showed the poor credibility of the Honduran diplomatic corps. "The credibility of Honduran foreign policy has sunk to the floor," the editorial said. Berta Oliva, coordinator of the Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH), said that if Discua did not return to Honduras, the government should ask for his extradition. COFADEH announced that it would bring charges for human rights violations against Discua in an international tribunal.

Foreign Minister Roberto Flores said Discua would not be named to another diplomatic post. Both the Foreign Ministry and the comptroller general have said they would investigate the case to see if Discua owed the state for the salary he collected while living in Miami.

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