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President Aleman Accuses Sandinistas of Complicity in Murders

by LADB Staff

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At the end of April, as the November presidential election campaign was about to begin, Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman said there was a plot to assassinate him, and he accused the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) of starting off the campaign by murdering voters. Aleman suggested that the assassination plotters were members of the Frente Unido Andres Castro (FUAC), which he identified as "the armed wing of the Frente Sandinista." He invited FSLN secretary general and presidential candidate Daniel Ortega and his "clique" to leave the country and "let Nicaraguans live in peace." He also promised to eradicate the FUAC.

FUAC is a pro-Sandinista band of former combatants (rearmados) in the armed conflict of the 1980s. The group accepted a government proposal to demobilize in December 1997 (see EcoCentral, 1997-11-20). However, a FUAC faction backed out of the agreement, saying the Aleman administration reneged on promises of increased attention to social and economic needs in the northern region and immunity from prosecution for the FUAC (see EcoCentral, 1998-01-15).

On April 19, members of the FUAC allegedly killed five people in the community of Siuna, Region Autonoma Atlantico Norte (RAAN). Since all the victims were members of the governing Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), Aleman linked the killings to Ortega and the FSLN by claiming that the purpose of the murders was "to scare" PLC voters away from the polls in the coming elections.

A recent opinion poll indicated that Ortega was leading PLC presidential candidate Enrique Bolanos by eight percentage points. Aleman also ordered police protection for Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo and other church officials. Earlier, Obando y Bravo said he had information from reliable sources that a Central American network of conspirators planned to assassinate cardinals and bishops. However, he said it would be improper to reveal the identity of the sources. He refused to say whether the FSLN was behind the plot and declined police protection. Later he said there had been an assassination attempt against him in 1984.

Following Aleman's accusations, former Sandinista Carlos Guadamuz said FSLN leaders had considered assassinating Aleman in 1995 when he was mayor of Managua. Guadamuz claimed the head of Ortega's election campaign, Dionisio Marengo, directed the plan. After a falling out with Ortega in 1999, Guadamuz was forced out of his post as director of the Sandinista radio station Radio Ya (see NotiCen, 2000-02-24). An FSLN spokesperson said the party would not comment on what a "lunatic" said.

Daniel Ortega challenges Aleman to court battle

Ortega responded to Aleman by challenging him to take his charges before a court. In a speech to Sandinistas during a Labor Day gathering May 1, Ortega said he would renounce his legislative immunity and stand trial if Aleman could prove his accusations. Two Sandinistas in the RAAN had already filed a slander suit against Aleman. Referring to the lawsuit, Aleman said he would not surrender his immunity to respond to "the stupidities of a bunch of assassins." He said the threat of lawsuits was a ploy to divert public attention away from the FUAC's crimes.

While the exchanges over electoral politics and lawsuits continued, Aleman and Defense Minister Jose Adan Guerra announced a security plan for the RAAN municipalities of Bonanza, Rosita, and Siuna. Besides wiping out the FUAC, the plan calls for economic and social development projects in the region. Guerra said poverty, poor communications, and the large size of the area helped spawn criminal bands. At the same time, Aleman accused local military and police in the RAAN of ignoring citizen complaints against the FUAC. He said residents were afraid to call for help because they believed the police and army belonged to the FUAC.

FUAC leaders Amaru Falcon and Laureano Rivera denied the band was involved in the Siuna killings. In an interview with the daily *El Nuevo Diario*, they said the organization would remain armed until the government made good on its 1997 promises. "We want to be heard by the government," said Falcon. "The two parties are the same. The current leaders of the FSLN respond only to the bourgeoisie; they are aristocrats who abandoned the people." The two men said it was easy to blame the FUAC to create a warlike atmosphere during the election campaign.

Two former members of the FUAC general staff, Carlos Ramirez and Roberto Perez Todos, also denied that the murders and other depredations in the North were the work of the FUAC. They told *El Nuevo Diario* that what was really happening in the three municipalities was a social, political, and economic crisis made worse by conflicts over land. They said the FUAC had helped eliminate some of the criminal bands plaguing the region. They said the population is "fed up" with corruption, and the political establishment is trying to divert attention away from the real problems.

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