



Latin American Studies Association

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EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITIES ...AND NEW RISKS

Preliminary Report of the LASA Commission on Compliance with the Central America Peace Accords

"President Arias has done something here that is extraordinary; he has changed the situation from one of stalemate to one of new opportunities and new risks."

Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica, and
former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador
San José, January 15, 1988

I. Introduction

Central America, an area of great diversity, has witnessed a growing amount of social conflict over the past 40 years. In the southeast, Costa Rica has enjoyed many decades of democracy and general development, coupled with peaceful growth. To the north, first in Guatemala, then in El Salvador and Nicaragua, bloody conflict has increasingly dominated the local scene. On August 7, 1987, the elected presidents of the five principal Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) signed an unprecedented set of agreements, first proposed by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica and designed to bring lasting peace to the region.

The commitments assumed by the parties, far reaching in their cumulative intent, were not equally susceptible to immediate compliance. Some were within the capacity of the governments in power to fulfill; with respect to others, however, while steps indicative of good faith were possible within the time frame envisaged by the Agreement, full implementation was not. On January 15th, 1988, the five presidents met in San José, Costa Rica, to review progress under the original agreement, to receive and review the official report from the International Commission on Verification and Follow-up (CIVS), and to determine the future of this peace process. They signed a new document committing themselves to a continuation of the process and calling for immediate fulfillment of those points in which the participating nations had not fully complied by that date.

The Guatemala Accords¹ represented a sudden and dramatic region-wide effort to reinforce internal democratic processes and to eliminate external support for irregular and insurrectionary forces in the region. But, according to most observers in Central America, this turn of events is not without perils for the participating governments. The peace process has affected the traditional levels of influence for important portions of the political spectrum and for the country that has been the strongest external influence in the area during the past century, the United States. It has required, and continues to require, that the presidents of the region take risks both domestically and internationally that they might not have had to face without their commitments on August 7.

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association of Latin American specialists in the world; its 2400 members include a large proportion of the college and university scholars in the United States who research and teach about Latin America. LASA wished to contribute to public understanding and discourse about the Central American peace process. Recognizing the difficulty of measuring compliance with such diverse goals, LASA commissioned seventeen scholars to apply their collective years of experience in Latin America to the problem and charged them with assessing compliance with the accords by the various states.

The 17 members of the commission include twelve academic investigators with extensive prior research and study experience in Central America and many prior publications on Central America. Their areas of specialization include history, political science, economics, anthropology, and international law. The commission includes, as well, the directors of four of the major Latin American studies centers in the United States. [The full list of the members of the Commission is provided as Appendix 1.]

Fourteen of the members of the commission traveled to Central America in mid-January 1988, and were present in San José, Costa Rica, when the five Central American Presidents reaffirmed their commitments to the August 7 accords. They then traveled in smaller groups to interview representatives of all of the major participants in the peace process throughout the region. More than 100 interviews were conducted between January 15 and January 21, across all five of the participating countries, as well as in Panama and Mexico. The three remaining members joined the delegation in Miami to evaluate the results of the fieldwork and to assist in the drafting of this report.

In response to the continuous and urgent requests for information on Central America that LASA members receive from citizens' groups and congressional representatives, this preliminary report has been prepared to communicate the principal conclusions of the commission. An expanded and fully-documented final version of the report will be

¹ The agreements reached by the Central American presidents have been given many names. Because they were reached in talks initiated at the shrine of Esquipulas in Guatemala and were signed in Guatemala City, they are often referred to as the "Esquipulas" agreements or the "Guatemala" accords. Since this was the second meeting of the five presidents in Guatemala, they are distinguished from the results of the first meeting (in May 1986) by calling these agreements "Esquipulas II." They are the direct outgrowth of the "Arias Plan." We will, in general, use these terms interchangeably, though there may be some leaning toward the term preferred in Central America, Esquipulas II.

released at the XIV International Congress of LASA which begins on March 17, 1988.

II. General Findings

The members of the commission found it impossible to appreciate the quality of compliance without taking the distinctive historical experience of each state into account. The major part of the report, therefore, consists of country-by-country assessments of the process of compliance in each. It was thought, however, that a broader picture would also be useful, and the group therefore prepared the following general findings about the process as a whole. They are presented here, point by point, as they relate to the specific terms of the August 7, 1987 agreement signed in Guatemala City. The sequence below provides translations of the essential clauses of each point agreed to in the accords, and they are presented in the same order as they appear in the signed document.

Point 1-a of the Agreement: *On national reconciliation and dialogue. The five presidents committed themselves "to carry out urgently . . . actions toward national reconciliation that would allow popular participation with full guarantees in political processes of a democratic nature, based upon justice, freedom and democracy, and to create, for these purposes, the mechanisms that according to law, would allow dialogue with opposition groups." To accomplish this purpose the five governments promised to "initiate dialogue with all nonarmed groups of internal opposition and with those that have accepted amnesty."*

Commission finding on Point 1-a: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua are deeply divided societies. Their governments have taken the formal steps envisioned by the agreements to varying degrees -- appointing national commissions of reconciliation and dialoguing with internal opposition groups. None of the three, however, have yet evidenced a willingness to discuss the sort of constitutional and structural change that the armed opposition groups have identified as essential for achieving national reconciliation.

Point 1-b of the Agreement: *On amnesty. The five presidents agreed that "in each Central American country, except those where the International Committee for Verification and Follow-up has determined that it is unnecessary, decrees of amnesty will be issued establishing all conditions needed to guarantee the safeguarding of life, freedom in all its forms, material possessions and the security of persons to whom these decrees apply."*

Commission finding on Point 1-b: Formal amnesty has been declared in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua; Costa Rica was exempted from this obligation by the International Commission on Verification and Follow-up. In Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua these measures have not contributed substantially to national reconciliation. The good faith of the declarations is subject to sharp debate within Central America, and it is difficult at this point to resolve the conflicting claims. In Guatemala and El Salvador the amnesty also applied to those guilty of military abuses; the ability and the willingness of the governments of those two countries to guarantee the security of persons accepting amnesty is subject to legitimate doubt.

Point 2 of the Agreement: *Calls for cease-fire. "The governments vehemently exhort that a cessation of hostilities be agreed in the states of the region that currently suffer from the actions of irregular troops or insurgents. The governments of said states promise to take all the actions necessary to achieve an effective cease-fire within the constitutional framework."*

Commission finding on Point 2: The call to pursue negotiations for a cease-fire has led to irregular but continuing discussions in the case of Nicaragua. Talks were initiated but have been discontinued in Guatemala and El Salvador. In none of the three cases have lasting cease-fires been achieved.

Point 3 of the Agreement: *Steps toward democratization. The five presidents agreed to "promote an authentic, pluralist and democratic process of participation that would imply the promotion of social justice, the respect for human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity of the states, and the right of all nations to determine freely and without foreign intervention of any kind, their economic, political and social model . . ." They committed themselves to carrying out, in verifiable manner, creation of "complete freedom for television, radio and the press . . . [including] the freedom for all ideological groups to open and to sustain media operations without submitting to prior censorship, . . . full political party pluralism" and, "for those governments with states of emergency or martial law in force" the revocation of such laws and the return of the full force of constitutional guarantees.*

Commission finding on Point 3: The accords call upon the governments to strengthen democratic institutions and specify three areas for measuring compliance.

- (1) The first concerns freedom of information. Since the accord, the most significant changes have been the reopening of *Radio Católica* and *La Prensa* and the elimination of prior censorship in Nicaragua.
- (2) The second calls for political party pluralism. The only events that possibly signal some change have been the ability of exiled opposition leaders to return to El Salvador for limited periods of time, the reregistration of the MNR party in El Salvador, and the registration of one new political party in Nicaragua.
- (3) The third addresses the restoration of constitutional guarantees. The only change in this area is the lifting of the state of emergency in Nicaragua, including the abolition of the Popular Anti-Somocista Tribunals. El Salvador's state of siege lapsed in January of 1987, and it had not been reinstated at the time of this study.

Point 4 of the Agreement: *Free elections. The Central American presidents have called for free, pluralist, and honest elections throughout the region, once the pre-conditions for democratic government have been established. In particular, they have called for elections for the creation of a Central American Parliament, first proposed in the declaration of the five presidents on May 25th, 1986, that is now known as "Esquipulas I."*

Commission finding on Point 4: The accord called for carrying out free elections at a time established separately by each country. There has been no occasion for compliance since the signing of the accord. The proposed treaty for establishing a Central American Parliament has thus far been ratified only by Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Point 5 of the Agreement: *Cessation of assistance to irregular forces and to insurrection movements. "The governments of the five Central American states will urge the governments of the region and the extraregional governments that openly or secretly provide military, logistical, financial, promotional, human resources, armaments, ammunition, and equipment aid to the irregular forces or to the rebels, to cease such aid, as an indispensable element to procure the permanent and lasting peace in the region."*

Commission finding on Point 5: Since the time of the agreement, there has been little consistent evidence for substantial material aid being provided by any Central American country to irregulars or insurrectionists operating in neighboring countries, although Honduras has served as a major channel for U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan Resistance forces.

The major failure of the Central American peace accords has been the continuation of material aid to irregular and insurrectionist forces from governments outside the region, despite the request agreed upon in the accord that such extraregional powers terminate all aid to insurgent and other irregular forces.

Point 6 of the Agreement: *Non-use of territory for aggression against other countries. "The five countries that sign this document reemphasize their commitment to impede the use of their own territory and to neither lend nor permit logistical military assistance to persons, organizations, or groups that attempt to destabilize the governments of the nations of Central America."*

Commission finding on Point 6: There has been a substantial decrease in the number of such troops operating from Honduras, but the use of its territory by the Nicaraguan Resistance, contrary to these accords, continues. There remain claims that Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua have allowed some use of their territory for support of armed opposition forces, but there is no documented level of use in those countries comparable to that encountered in Honduras. The Costa Rican government has complied to the extent of its ability, including a ban in January 1988 on non-military, political activity by representatives of the Nicaraguan Resistance.

Point 7 of the Agreement: *"The governments of the five Central American nations, with the participation of the Contadora Group exercising its mediation function, will continue negotiations on the still-pending points of agreements with respect to security matters, verification, and control under the terms of the Contadora Agreement for the Peace and Cooperation in Central America."*

Commission finding on Point 7: The Contadora governments continue to be willing to supervise and mediate talks on the security issues that have not been covered by the

Guatemala Agreements. The next scheduled meeting of the Security and Armaments Sub-commission is expected to take place in Cartagena, Colombia, on February 14, 1988.

Point 8 of the Agreement: *On refugees and displaced persons.* "The Central American governments commit themselves to tend with a sense of urgency to the flows of refugees and displaced persons that the regional crisis has provoked, by means of granting protection and assistance, . . . as well as repatriation, resettlement, and relocation so long as it is voluntary and individual."

Commission finding on Point 8: Some steps have been taken by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua to facilitate the return of refugees. In Guatemala and El Salvador, however, these steps have not provided sufficient security, freedom of action or economic support to seriously encourage a significant movement of returning refugees.

Point 9 of the Agreement: *On cooperation for peace and development.* Under this point the five presidents agreed to adopt further measures to accelerate development efforts; in particular, they agree to seek joint programs of assistance from the international community.

Commission finding on Point 9: To meet the call to consider development in its entirety as an intrinsic component of the achievement of peace requires considerably more time and vastly more resources from both within and outside the region than have been forthcoming.

Point 10 of the Agreement: *On international verification.* This point calls for the creation of an international verification commission composed of the foreign ministers of the five Central American states, representatives of the four Contadora Group nations (Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela), the four Contadora Support Group nations (Peru, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay), and the secretaries general of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. It conveys to this group the responsibility for determining compliance with the agreements and for reporting to the presidents of the five Central American nations within 150 days of the original agreement.

Commission finding on Point 10: The International Verification Commission (CIVS) has carried out its task under the provisions of the accord. It has found that there were substantial steps toward fulfillment by all parties and that there were additional steps needed by all countries to be in full compliance. The Executive Commission of the Guatemala Agreement, consisting of the Central American foreign ministers, must now determine mechanisms for further verification. Whether extraregional verification will be sought in the future is unclear; diplomatic sources indicated that Honduras and El Salvador appear particularly hostile to verification by parties from outside the region.

Point 11 of the Agreement: *On the calendar for fulfillment of the Agreement.* This final point establishes a timetable for fulfillment and for verification.

Commission finding on Point 11: The five countries have not met fully the ambitious timetable set by the accords; but on January 15th, 1988, the five Central American presidents declared their continuing commitment to the Agreement and declared that the remaining compliance would be immediate.

III. Individual Country Analyses

GUATEMALA

Guatemala is a nation where the Spanish-speaking Ladino culture has traditionally dominated over the 50% of the population that is spread across over twenty distinct indigenous groups. The basis for that domination has often been violence. The Indian population's frustrations appear to underlie the armed insurgency of the last decade. Guatemala faces the daunting task of redressing several centuries of accumulated economic structural traits that have created staggering inequalities in living conditions, health, and literacy across class, racial, and regional lines.

During the three decades after 1954, and especially after 1966, tens of thousands of Guatemalans were murdered by elements connected to state security forces and right-wing paramilitary groups for participation in political party activity and for activity in labor, student, peasant, and professional organizations. With the 1985 election Guatemala began what President Cerezo calls a "transition to democracy," a process of building institutions and processes of political participation within a traditionally liberal, representative constitutional framework.

National Reconciliation. There is widespread agreement in Guatemala that at present there is enough political space to enable groups which work within the system to make themselves heard and to establish bases of popular support. The Guatemalan government has met with representatives of the armed resistance on at least one occasion, but does not feel obliged to continue the dialogue until these groups disarm (the accord is not clear as to whether any government is obliged to conduct talks with groups that do not lay down their arms permanently). Opinion differs in Guatemala about the extent to which the refusal of the government to pursue further dialogue is a result of pressure from the military and also about whether the government itself lacks the political will to pursue this aspect of the reconciliation process.

The amnesty question is a particularly thorny issue for Guatemala. It was striking that respondents representing a wide range of ideological differences admitted that, given the present political context and the lack of guarantees and safeguards, it was not realistic to expect individuals who have engaged in armed political conflict to give themselves over to the authorities. Another common observation was that prior amnesty decrees were more sound than the one generated in conjunction with Esquipulas II. We found no evidence that more than a handful of individuals have availed themselves of the most recent decree.

Guatemala formed a National Reconciliation Commission in response to the requirements of the Accords. Labor leaders and representatives of the popular classes with

whom we spoke were critical of the makeup of the commission, calling it too much centered in the upper classes. Also, the fact that the two party representatives came from center-right and rightist parties left a substantial range of political views unrepresented on the commission.

One of the major functions of the Reconciliation Commission was to "verify the effectiveness of the reconciliation process," but we could not establish for Guatemala that this function has been carried out with any degree of effectiveness. It may be tempting to blame this on a lack of political will on the part of the government; but verifying the effectiveness of the amnesty, the reality of a cease-fire, and the extent of democratization in Guatemala are tasks of such gargantuan proportions that it is perhaps understandable why these tasks were never really taken seriously. The commission met about once a week, but has never issued a written report.

Cease-fire. The position of the Guatemalan government and its supporters is that declaring a cease-fire is not relevant in an undeclared conflict that largely involves hit-and-run tactics by subversive elements and counteractions by the government. Nor is the armed opposition, for whom the cause-effect arrow points in the other direction, anxious to participate in a process that would involve verification of a cease fire by elements it does regard as trustworthy. Most of our respondents agreed that both the army and the resistance have intensified their efforts in order to show that they have not lost ground and that they must be taken into account in all future considerations.

Cessation of Aid to Irregular Forces, and Non-use of Territory. These aspects of the agreement do not loom large for Guatemala. The government has been criticized for allowing the Nicaraguan Resistance (NR) to meet with support groups in Guatemalan territory, the official response to which is that Guatemala does not deny entry to groups and individuals who abide by the law while in the country. It is also alleged that the Guatemalan military has conducted training for the NR in special schools, but this could not be determined conclusively.

Refugees and Displaced Persons. Guatemala's war and recent history of political repression have generated tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons. There are estimated to be 40,000 refugees in camps in southern Mexico. The National Reconciliation Commission was unable even to estimate the overall number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Efforts by a committee representing political exiles who returned to Guatemala to discuss their status were frustrated by government denunciations that they represented the armed opposition. The National Reconciliation Commission attempted but was unable to visit refugee camps in southern Mexico. Overall, the problems of refugees and displaced persons remain largely unaddressed by the Guatemalan government under the aegis of the peace plan.

Democratization. The state of democratization in Guatemala today may only be evaluated against the background of decades of military rule and state terror that preceded the military's relinquishment of control of the executive branch to Christian Democratic president Vinicio Cerezo in January of 1986. Against this background, freedom of the press in Guatemala is relatively broad but not complete: government censorship of the mass media is not practiced, but access to the print and broadcast media by certain political groups is somewhat restricted by the generally conservative posture of major media. Leftist groups including the URNG (Unión Revolucionaria

Nacional Guatemalteca) have recently been able to purchase newspaper space to publish their opinions. Because dozens of Guatemalan journalists were murdered in the 1970s and early 1980s, newspapers and television outlets practice self-censorship by exercising extreme caution in what to investigate and report, as they do not want to offend the sensibilities of certain interests, especially the armed forces. No journalists have been killed in the last two years, but the press remains highly cautious.

Similarly, there are few formal limitations upon the participation of political parties in Guatemala today. However, parties of the Left and far Left have suffered so much repression under the military regimes of recent decades that many leftists went into exile or underground. Since 1985 the only leftist party to return to the legal, overt political arena has been the Partido Democrático Socialista (PSD), which took part in the 1985 election. Most of the parties actively participating in the legal political arena in Guatemala today appear generally free to organize and seek the support of potential voters.

Guatemala did not have a general state of emergency or state of siege in effect at the time of the Accords, and it therefore complied easily with that formal provision. However, freedom of movement and association in the countryside and outside the major cities -- especially in zones in which there has been activity by the armed opposition in recent years -- is often effectively quite restricted by the armed forces and by civil patrols (local militias in which participation is not always voluntary). Recourse to the courts for redress of such effective limitations of individual rights has been highly restricted by violent repression, fear of such repression, institutional weaknesses of the courts, and lack of executive cooperation with the courts. Some progress has been made in all these areas recently, but full exercise of constitutionally protected civil liberties still eludes large numbers of Guatemalans. Moreover, many opposition parties and labor organizations complain that the present government frequently acts in an unconstitutional manner, ignoring judicial orders to comply with the constitution of 1985 and setting a poor example for other political actors.

Human Rights. Guatemala's human rights performance before and after the accord remains deeply flawed. While most observers agree that the overall number of politically motivated killings and abductions of Guatemalans since the end of 1985 has remained well below levels observed from 1979 through 1985, they also affirm that no meaningful alteration in the infrastructure of state terror and insurgent terror has occurred. Thus the official security forces and paramilitary organizations responsible for most such state-sponsored terror persist, as do leftist armed groups; and both continue to abduct and murder perceived political opponents at varying rates from month to month.

In the matter of promoting social justice, all observers agree that no progress of any sort toward redressing such problems was made under the aegis of Esquipulas II toward redressing poverty or racial and class inequalities. Guatemala's greatest difficulty in the area of social justice -- the grave inequalities and disadvantages suffered by the large indigenous population -- remains unchanged by the accord and by the current process of transition to civilian rule.

Electoral Freedom. Guatemala's 1985 national election was judged by observers to have been procedurally honest and correctly counted. The electoral laws and mechanisms for the conduct and counting of the vote appeared quite satisfactory. The military regime

made no major effort to sway the outcome in favor of any particular party. The 1985 electoral campaign, however, was marred for most of its duration by the climate of fear that had pervaded Guatemalan life for two decades and by military rule itself, both of which led the parties participating to severely restrain themselves as to the issues they discussed. Moreover, parties to the left of the PSD were unwilling to participate in the climate of generalized state and paramilitary violence that had severely decimated their ranks and leadership in the previous two decades.

Given the limitations of the amnesty law enacted under Esquipulas II, few members of those parties of the left still operating from exile and underground appear likely to return to Guatemala to contest possible forthcoming Central American Parliament elections. No parties to the left of the PSD have surfaced and entered the electoral arena to contest the upcoming April 1988 municipal elections.

Significance of the Peace Process. Many Guatemalans believe that the Accords have had very little impact on domestic politics, and that such impact as has occurred has been other than in the areas formally contemplated by the agreements. The accords have not promoted much dialogue among political opponents, nor have they altered the performance of the government in the areas of human rights, race relations, or social justice. The Esquipulas Accords have definitely not contributed to an end to the guerilla insurgency and counterinsurgency war by the armed forces; indeed, the war has heated up substantially since August 1987. Most Guatemalan and other observers, however, believe that the participation of president Vinicio Cerezo in the peace process has in some measure served him as a useful political strategy by deflecting attention from the daunting array of social, political, economic, and policy problems that beset the country.

Guatemala's foreign policy of pursuing a regional peace accord, mediating between Nicaragua and the Sandinista regime's critics, and seeking to reduce tensions in the isthmus have improved the country's formerly abysmal image in the international community. This improvement of Guatemala's relations with the United States, European, and Latin American nations has facilitated and will probably continue to facilitate Guatemala's reorganization of its foreign debt, the acquisition of international credit, the recuperation of its decimated tourism industry, and cooperation from industrial nations.

EL SALVADOR

For the last several years, both analysts and policymakers have increasingly focused on the processes of conflict and democratization in Nicaragua. One unfortunate result has been a concomitant decrease in attention to the ongoing civil war in El Salvador. Yet the Salvadoran war has continued for eight years and claimed more than 60,000 lives. U.S. military and economic aid over the same period has totaled nearly \$3.5 billion and last year's aid package of nearly \$750 million puts El Salvador behind only Israel and Egypt in terms of the amount of U.S. aid received.

How has the peace process launched by the Guatemala Accords affected the Salvadoran conflict? Below, we discuss the Salvadoran situation with regard to three key areas specified in the Esquipulas agreement: dialogue, democratization, and amnesty.

Dialogue. The dialogue envisioned at Esquipulas has two aspects: (1) a dialogue with the "internal" opposition which would be concerned with political issues and would be conducted under the auspices of a National Reconciliation Commission, and (2) a dialogue with the armed opposition regarding a cessation of hostilities.

With regard to "internal" opposition, the Salvadoran National Reconciliation Commission was formed with only one member to the left of the Christian Democratic government, Mario Reni Roldán. Roldán was an alternate and resigned in the wake of the assassination of the director of the nongovernmental human rights organization. The representative of the major rightist party, ARENA, subsequently resigned as well, leaving the commission without members representing the opposition parties of either spectrum.

Dialogue with the armed opposition occurred on October 4 and 5, 1987. The government insisted that the discussions be limited to designing a ceasefire that would allow the armed opposition to lay down their arms and participate peacefully in the ongoing political processes. The FDR (Frente Democrático Revolucionario) and the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí de Revolución Nacional) suggested that such a limitation of topics (generally specified in Esquipulas II) would be a step backward for El Salvador since earlier meetings had included a broader agenda. The meeting produced no cease-fire and no further meetings have been held.

There is little likelihood of ending the war through the dialogue envisioned in the Guatemala Accords. The armed opposition insist that the government must agree both to share power with the FMLN and to allow it to retain control of the areas in which they now form a "dual" government. The military is unwilling to agree to these demands and, according to one Western official, the civilian government does not exercise sufficient authority over the military to mandate such a solution without provoking a coup. Moreover, each side believes in the possibility of military victory, leading to reluctance to negotiate now. Finally, informed sources suggest that a complete curtailment of even the small amount of logistical assistance that the FMLN may receive from Nicaragua would neither destroy nor significantly weaken the armed opposition's military efforts. Thus, even if Nicaragua completely complies with the portions of the agreements requiring nonsupport of insurgent forces, the Salvadoran war will continue.

Democratization. The Accords require a democratization process involving freedom of the press, freedom to form political parties, and the lifting of any state of emergency. The Salvadoran government argues that it has complied fully with these aspects of the plan both before and after the signing on August 7.

It is true that the last several years have seen an opening of political "space" in El Salvador. There are new leftist groups and the number of street demonstrations has increased. In addition, the state of emergency was lifted, inadvertently, in January 1987 when a "legislative strike" by the rightist party, ARENA, prevented a quorum needed to continue it. Since the signing of the agreement, two of the FDR's main leaders, Guillermo Ungo and Rubén Zamora, have returned to the country for brief visits. During a visit in November, both openly engaged in political activities, including the registration of Ungo's party with the Electoral Council and the formation of a new coalition, the Democratic Convergence, with the Social Democratic Party of Mario Reni Roldán.

The fear of repression and reprisals for political activity remains and human rights groups report that since the signing of Esquipulas II, death squad activity and government repression seem to have increased. In assessing the effects of such activities on democratization, the following points are key. First, given the fresh memories of widespread death squad activity in the 1981-83 period, fewer assassinations or other activities to have the same chilling effect on political freedom. Second, while the extent of military and government control over the death squads has been the subject of debate, the potential explanations for death squad activity -- that the armed forces have control and the government is unwilling to persecute them, that the armed forces have control and the government is unable to exercise authority, or that the armed forces have no control and so cannot provide public security -- are all unappealing from the point of view of promoting open political activity. Third, while it is suggested by independent observers that both death squads and the military seem more able to target actual FMLN sympathizers, this only raises the deeper issue of whether individuals -- in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region -- have the right to sympathize with the political goals and/or methods of the armed opposition provided that they furnish no direct support to actual armed actions. While Esquipulas II would not seem to limit political freedom to those unsympathetic to opposition movements, the actual practice of allowing such sympathies is, of course, not viewed kindly by either the civilian government or the armed forces.

Amnesty. Under the terms of the amnesty decreed in El Salvador 427 prisoners accused of political crimes against the state were released. Military personnel, fewer than 20, accused of attacks against citizens were also freed, and no military personnel can now be indicted for crimes against civilians committed prior to October 27, 1987.

These amnesty measures satisfy neither the left nor the right. Both the left and human rights groups argue that citizens accused of crimes against the state had good chances for acquittal under constitutional law because their crimes tended to be ones of possessing knowledge about the guerrilla and not criminal acts. The military defendants, they argue, should have been prosecuted because they were being tried for assassinations which were punishable crimes. The military was equally unhappy about the amnesty. In the past, the courts rarely prosecuted military defendants, and the military believe that the civilian prisoners set free would join the gorilla forces. Each side, then, believed that the other had the advantage under the terms of the amnesty.

Human Rights. President Duarte's government has showcased human rights issues in order to demonstrate El Salvador's superior compliance with the Guatemala accords. The case most cited by the government as an example of respect for human rights is the Santa Marta resettlement camps for refugees who fled El Salvador to escape the civil war.

From early 1985 to March of 1987, around 2,500 refugees who found conditions in Honduras intolerable began returning in small groups to El Salvador. When the Guatemala Accords were signed, approximately 700 refugees decided to test the implementation of the accord by crossing into El Salvador. Many went to the Santa Marta camps. While there has been no intentional killing at Santa Marta, people have been detained and interrogated. President Duarte points to this spontaneous resettlement that has occurred despite military resistance as evidence of the government's repatriation of refugees and observation of human rights conventions.

Reports confirm further that repression, which has become more selective and less frequent than before 1983, is again on the rise. Political murders have been carried out with impunity due to the amnesty granted to political criminals. On October 26, 1987, the head of the nongovernment Human Rights Commission, Herbert Ernesto Anaya, was assassinated. Responsibility for his death is attributed to both the left and the right.

All groups agreed that there has been an increase in violent activities on the part of the armed opposition and the military since August 7, 1987. The claims of achieving "democratic space" must be considered against the backdrop of continued and escalating human rights violations.

Significance for El Salvador. While El Salvador has complied with various portions of the Esquipulas agreement, compliance has not been complete and peace does not seem more likely than it did prior to August. Both the military stalemate between the FMLN and the military and the continuing polarization and intransigence evidenced by both groups are symptomatic of the society as a whole. There are growing tensions between the military and the government as the Christian Democratic Party has proven unable to deliver on the economic growth and political mobilization that the military sees as a necessary component of a complete counter-insurgency strategy. This does not bode well for peace and democracy in El Salvador.

As a result of these twin processes of polarization and fragmentation, many sectors of Salvadoran society look outside the country for both the source of the problems and the means to effect peace. The military, Christian Democrats, business people and the far-right blame Nicaragua for the "subversion" and (in private conversations) some suggest that peaceful coexistence with the current government of Nicaragua is impossible. Some of the left sees the U.S. as the source of almost all the country's problems and generally argues for a sharp reduction in U.S. influence. Others argue that the U.S. should use its influence to restrain the military while Cuba, Nicaragua, and other "friends" of the FMLN pressure them to make compromises that might lead to peace. The difficulty with all these views is that no matter how constrained El Salvador may be by international factors and foreign influence, the conflict is indigenous and deeply rooted; the fact of "looking outside" is indicative of both the desperate mood of the country and the deep desire for a final end to the conflict.

There remains general agreement in Salvadoran society that Esquipulas II has been important in at least shifting the political discourse toward the promise of peace. While Esquipulas may be written in what one high government official described as the "language of the angels," such a shift in the terms of the debate is welcomed by a populace exhausted from years of war, death squads, and economic collapse.

HONDURAS

Honduras is the poorest country in Central America. However, it does not have the same degree of inequalities in income distribution nor the tradition of political violence of several of its neighbors. In the post-World War II period, there has been considerable political uncertainty and instability, characterized by a number of limited reform efforts under both civilian and military regimes. In the early 1970s, the country experienced a reformist military regime, followed by two military caretaker governments. The

political system now shows signs of growing institutional democratization.

Even though the two traditional parties, Liberal and National, garnered 94 percent of the popular vote in the 1985 elections, the continuing challenge for the system is the political incorporation of the popular sectors, particularly peasant groups. Even though the military is a major force whose concerns must be taken into account by civilian groups, systematic human rights violations have not typically been a mechanism of political control. In comparison with Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan politics, Honduran politics have been reasonably consensual and paternalistic.

As conflict has grown in the region, Honduras has had the misfortune of geographic centrality, bordering on all three nations experiencing major internal violence. This geographic fact has made the country the object of considerable attention from the nations involved, including, after 1980, the United States. This has provided Honduras with new opportunities and new challenges. Economic and military assistance to the country increased from \$55 million dollars in 1980 (\$51 million economic and \$4 million military) to \$255 million in 1987 (\$195 million economic, of which \$89 million is balance-of-payments assistance and \$60 million direct military aid). In addition, since 1981, the United States has supported the Nicaraguan resistance in bases in Honduras at a cost of some \$237 million. While these infusions have had a major impact on the country's economic growth rates, the costs have been considerable. Besides economic distortions and difficulties in absorbing such large sums, the presence of the Nicaraguan armed opposition has created new threats to the tentative democratic process. Honduras began the decade at the margins of the Central American conflict; today it finds itself in the center.

When the five Central American presidents signed the August 7, 1988 Peace Accords, Honduras, unlike its neighbors, had fewer internal challenges with which to cope in response to the accords. Since there was no armed opposition opposing the Honduras government, no cease-fire was necessary. Democratization, defined under *esquipulas II* as media and political party freedom and lifting of emergency rule, was arguably underway.

The Key Compliance Issue. The key issue that needs to be resolved for Honduras to be in full compliance with the obligations it undertook in Guatemala City and recommitted itself to at San José, Costa Rica in January 1988, is the non-use of its territory by the Nicaraguan resistance. The Honduran government did pressure the Nicaraguan resistance into closing its major base camp in the Las Vegas salient, near the border. Both government and opposition sources agree that most of the Nicaraguan resistance forces are now fighting inside Nicaragua. However, there is wide agreement that a substantial number of insurgents (estimates range from 1,500 to 3,000) are still based in Honduras. A diplomatic source in Honduras noted that secondary headquarters of the Nicaraguan Resistance also remains in the country.

Although much less significant, another issue that has resulted in criticism of the Honduran government's compliance with the agreement is that of national reconciliation. To begin with, Honduras was the last country to establish a National Reconciliation Commission, beating the deadline by only three days. The commission was made up solely of representatives of the established party system and an inactive church leader as chairman. While the commission did engage in dialogue with dissident members of the society, it lacked a mechanism to convert these concerns into constructive responses.

of representatives of the established party system and an inactive church leader as chairman. While the commission did engage in dialogue with dissident members of the society, it lacked a mechanism to convert these concerns into constructive responses.

A third concern relates to democratization. While Honduras has moved to set up the institutions of a free society, the military retains a key role in the national political decision-making process. One of the unintended consequences of increased military assistance has been its enhancement as a powerful institution, contributing to its growing political capacity vis-a-vis civil organizations. Another problem associated with democratization is increased political violence. While violence in Honduras is minor in comparison with its neighbors, several incidents since August have given many Hondurans pause for deep concern. These include the assassination in January 1988 of two Hondurans called to testify before the Interamerican Human Rights Court in a suit against Honduras regarding alleged human rights abuses by the military in 1981 and 1982.

Yet another concern is the difficulty experienced by persons in lower social strata, particularly peasants, in gaining political and economic access. A specific problem is the unwillingness of the government to enforce the agrarian reform law on the books since the early 1970s. While there does exist an active titling project for peasants on government land, there are untoward delays in acting upon petitions for access to underutilized private property. Peasant efforts to take matters into their own hands have been met with arrest. The amnesty decree to comply with the provisions of the Guatemala Peace Accords was written to include peasants who had participated in land invasions. The government notes that this was done because there were no others who could be classified as political prisoners. Peasant organizations and human rights organizations in Honduras maintain, however, that the government has been involved in various human rights abuses in the countryside over the land question.

NICARAGUA

Before we evaluate the measures taken by Nicaragua in response to the Guatemala Accords, it is useful to list them in some detail. Four days after he returned to Nicaragua, President Daniel Ortega took the first step to establish a Commission on National Reconciliation, and on August 25 he announced its composition. He also announced at that time that three noted priests, all previously banned from returning to Nicaragua because of their alleged support for Nicaragua's armed opposition, would be allowed to reenter the country.

On September 13, President Ortega issued a pardon for 16 Central American nationals convicted of participating in counterrevolutionary activities. Approved by the National Assembly, the pardon went into effect on September 23. Shortly afterward he announced the derogation of a decree known as the Absentee Law, which had been enacted on July 19, 1981. This law established courts of exception under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, and it allowed the confiscation of properties of absentee owners. The president also called for a national dialogue with opposition parties and scheduled the talks for October 5. On September 19, Violeta de Chamorro was authorized to reopen *La Prensa*, "with no further restrictions than those imposed by responsible journalism." Three days later, prior censorship of the media was lifted and *Radio Catolica* was allowed to begin broadcasting again.

During October, the main government activity relating to the Esquipulas Agreement was centered on the National Dialogue, which progressed at a slow pace before collapsing over the issue of the constitutional reforms demanded by the opposition and refused by the government.

On November 6 President Ortega proposed to Cardinal Obando that he serve as mediator in negotiations between the government and the armed opposition. The parties met twice in the Dominican Republic in the month of December but the talks were not successful. President Ortega sent an amnesty bill to the National Assembly which was approved on November 19. The bill permits the release of prisoners convicted of violating the public security laws if the following conditions, called for in the Esquipulas Accords, are met: (1) that all the Central American governments have prevented the use of their territory by groups that sought to destabilize the Nicaraguan government; (2) that the other Central American governments have stopped all support of the armed anti-Sandinista forces, and (3) that all extraregional support to the armed resistance organizations had ended. On November 22, a total of 985 prisoners were released, including 188 former members of the Somoza National Guard. But, according to the Nicaraguan government, since the conditions provided under Esquipulas had not been met by the January 15th meeting of the Central American presidents in San José, the amnesty had not been implemented fully.

After the January 15, 1988 meeting of Central American presidents held in San Jose, Costa Rica, the Nicaraguan government responded to the public pledges of the other Central American nations to fulfill their remaining commitments "immediately, totally, and unconditionally." Nicaragua lifted the State of Emergency and suspended the functioning of the exceptional courts related to public security, announced its willingness to enter into direct talks with the armed opposition, and offered to release all the remaining prisoners accused or convicted of political crimes, once a cease-fire emerged from the talks with the Nicaraguan Resistance, or to permit them to emigrate if any country would take them.

The National Reconciliation Commission. The National Reconciliation Commission, assumed high visibility in Nicaragua. The members appointed by the president are Gustavo Parajon (a physician and Baptist minister), Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo (Archbishop of Managua), Mauricio Diaz (an opposition political leader from the Popular Social Christian Party), and Sergio Ramirez Mercado (Nicaragua's vice-president). Despite previous Sandinista verbal abuse of the Cardinal, the Nicaraguan government selected him over two other church nominees, and encouraged the group to elect him president. Nicaragua's religious and political institutions achieved a measure of their own reconciliation with the naming and acceptance of the Cardinal as president of the Commission.

The commission met eight times by November 26, 1987, and made reports, as required by the Guatemala Accord, to the International Verification Commission (CIVS). The full reports were printed in the Nicaraguan newspapers. They dealt with the specific measures taken by Nicaragua to comply with the Guatemala Accord, included listings of specific charges of human rights' violations, and reflected an unusual convergence of the views of government and opposition.

Nicaragua utilized the National Reconciliation Commission as an instrument for lessening political tension, although criticism arose concerning full compliance with the

Esquipulas Agreement, even within the commission itself. For example, in his testimony before the CIVS on December 31, Cardinal Obando reaffirmed his support for what Nicaragua had accomplished and listed six steps which, he said, must still be taken. He criticized: (1) the continuing state of emergency, (2) the government's failure to declare total amnesty as the Catholic Church requested, (3) the lack of complete freedom of the means of communication, (4) the continuing abuse of human rights, (5) the failure to achieve a ceasefire, and (6) the collapse of the National Dialogue.

Human Rights. The human rights situation in Nicaragua has been the subject of numerous and frequently conflicting reports. Over the course of the last seven years, the apparent quality and implicit credibility these reports have varied greatly. The LASA commission consulted prior reports and, while in Central America, spoke with representatives of several of the Nicaraguan and international human rights organizations that report on Nicaragua. The organizations and the more credible reports agree on four important points. First, they strongly criticize the state of emergency, for it allowed detention of persons without due process. Some individuals have been held for months without being informed of the charges against them. But consensus is also clear that in Nicaragua there are very few claims that people "disappear" or are murdered by the state, as is repeatedly and extensively claimed in other Central American countries. Human rights organizations also vigorously object to the "Popular Anti-somocista Tribunals," special courts for persons accused of crimes under laws similar to the sedition laws in force in the United States during wartime in the past. Even some Nicaraguan government spokesmen criticized these tribunals as improper in times of war or of peace. The final point of concurrence among the human rights observers is that most of the abuses attributed to the government occur in the war zones of Nicaragua.

There is a predictable discrepancy among human rights groups concerning the total number and type of prisoners in Nicaragua. The most commonly cited figure is 7,000, of which 1,500-to-2,000 are believed to be former National Guardsmen convicted after the overthrow of Somoza. Many of the total, the numbers are not known precisely, are believed to be common criminals who would not necessarily be affected by the Esquipulas amnesty when fully implemented. Some groups suggest that another 1,000 persons may be held in a "shadow system" of detention centers to which national and international organizations are denied access.

The derogation of the state of emergency in January 1988, the abolition of the "Popular Tribunals," the promise of the government to release the remaining political prisoners when a cease-fire is achieved with the armed opposition are encouraging steps that are certain to be supported by the international human rights community. An end to the ward, it is clear, would also lead to direct improvements in the human rights situation.

Democracy, Elections and the Opposition. The issue of democracy is of course at the heart of the Esquipulas movement. As President Arias has said many times there can be no peace in Central America without democracy. In the elections of November, 1984, the Sandinista Front (FSLN) won the presidency and a majority of the seats in the National Assembly by drawing approximately 67 percent of the votes cast. Some political groups refrained from participating in those elections; some claimed that they could not participate effectively.

Since that election the National Assembly has elaborated a Constitution, in a manner similar in some ways to the recent writing of new constitutions in Guatemala and El Salvador. The constitution was promulgated in January, 1987; and it calls for the new presidential elections prior to January 1991. No specific date is set, but the president of the Nicaraguan equivalent to a national election commission, the Supreme Electoral Council, indicated to members of this Commission that he expects that elections will be held in November 1990. Municipal and regional elections are also prescribed in the constitution, but no date is set for them. Nicaraguan sources in the National Assembly suggest that the timing of the elections depends on the outcome of the cease-fire negotiations and the passage of enabling legislation.

The war, the negotiations for a ceasefire, and the discussions with internal opposition parties create a climate of uncertainty; but supporters of the government assert that the constitutional commitment of Nicaragua to democratic electoral procedures is firm and the machinery is in place to carry them out. Despite the apparent Marxist orientation of the nine comandantes of the FSLN, these procedures have been developed in a National Assembly with significant opposition voices and are clearly in the Western European tradition.

The Opposition's Views. Opposition political leaders object to characterizations of Nicaragua as a democracy. In varying degrees, opposition leaders criticize the imposition of the state of emergency which existed from March 1982 and was lifted temporarily during the 1984 electoral period. They claim that they are subject to harassment and intimidation; and they object to the lack of freedom of press and of association. A recent proposal by COSEP (the High Council on Private Enterprise, a consortium of anti-Sandinista chambers of commerce, industry, agriculture, etc.) to establish a new television station which would compete with the Sandinista-operated monopoly was rejected by the government.

One of the most frustrating aspects of life for Nicaragua's opposition is the close identification between the hegemonic Sandinista Party, the FSLN, and the national government. The Sandinistas, by virtue of this association, have access to much greater resources -- both financial and personal, according to the critics -- and dominate a government which determines who has violated "public order" and who has not. Furthermore, the extra-judicial system of "Popular Anti-Somocista Tribunals," under whose auspices many Nicaraguans have been tried and convicted, operated (until January 1988) beyond the pale of normal judicial procedures.

The level of anti-administration public political activity in Nicaragua has grown steadily during the implementation of the Peace Accords. Large demonstrations have been held by opposition political parties, labor organizations, and business groups without government intervention or opposition. Within three days of the lifting of the state of emergency on January 19th, several opposition parties communicated their intention to hold outdoor rallies. And they have proceeded without major interference.

While some members of the opposition responded favorably to these measures, others doubted the government's sincerity. The internationally respected critic of the Nicaraguan government, Violeta de Chamorro, was similarly unimpressed with Nicaragua's turn toward liberalization. In her testimony before the CIVS, Chamorro described *La Prensa* (and by extension Nicaragua), as "living under a precarious liberty, which the

Sandinistas see themselves obliged to extend from time to time and which they can terminate at any moment."

Recent changes may not be satisfactory to Chamorro, but they are substantial. Whether they are due to military pressure and are cosmetic, as many believe, or to a desperate sense that concessions are necessary to prevent a Sandinista collapse, or whether they represent a sincere campaign in behalf of reconciliation cannot be known. It is clear that the longstanding war situation obscures the distinction between the loyal and disloyal opposition and impedes the development of democracy. It is difficult to imagine Nicaragua totally honoring its commitment to pluralism and reforming its system toward democracy while the war continues. On the positive side, the new Central American spirit of Esquipulas and the conciliatory measures recently taken by the Nicaraguan government offer the immediate possibility of decreasing the bitterness of the Nicaraguan political scene.

COSTA RICA

The Esquipulas Agreement was not designed to solve internal political problems in Costa Rica nor was it expected to have any impact on that country's political process. Costa Rica's solid reputation as the most democratic country in Latin America, with an excellent record of respect for human rights and freedom of expression, assure it immunity from the scrutiny of the Esquipulas reporting mechanisms. Nevertheless, a sense of equity with the other Central American countries and a recognition that Costa Rica's democratic system could be improved led President Arias to cooperate with the international committees set up by the Esquipulas Agreement to monitor progress toward peace and democracy. To have done otherwise would have risked Arias' peacemaking role.

Costa Rica named a National Reconciliation Commission like the other Central American countries. The commission's members were announced on October 21, 1987. Joaquín Vargas Gené, a former editor of *La República* was elected president. The commission immediately invited political parties, labor unions, and other associations to send complaints and grievances. According to Vargas, the commission met every Monday and Tuesday and on other occasions when necessary. Reasoning that other agencies such as the Red Cross and the United Nations Refugee Program were already dealing with the important issues of refugees and displaced persons in Costa Rica and judging that issues of workers' rights were beyond its purview, the Commission concentrated on violations of individual rights and democratic reform. In a few weeks it had received a much greater indication of unease than anyone familiar with Costa Rica's democratic system might have expected. The commission quietly began to act as Costa Rica's ombudsman.

The commission looked into several cases of arbitrary arrest and lengthy detentions without trial. It uncovered the fact that large numbers of persons with criminal records or judged suspicious by the police were placed under "preventive arrest" to avoid trouble. The commission found that the Immigration Department sometimes detained unwanted foreigners for lengthy periods and that Costa Ricans and others were often detained or harassed by customs officers for bringing in "subversive" literature even though no laws had been violated.

Some twenty soldiers of the Nicaraguan resistance movement, many of them wounded and hospitalized in Costa Rica, had been arrested for violation of Costa Rica's neutrality legislation and sentenced to five years in prison. The commission found it ironic that, while other armed opposition fighters in Central America were granted amnesty by the amnesty laws required by the Esquipulas Agreement, these men, who had not taken up arms against Costa Rica, now languished in Costa Rican jails. According to Vargas, the commission also explored ways of perfecting Costa Rica's electoral system and widening freedom of expression.

The commission duly reported its activities to the CIVS but deliberately avoided airing its investigations in the Costa Rican media. It justified its low-profile approach on three grounds: the problems uncovered were small scale, the government of Costa Rica was more likely to cooperate in eliminating the abuses if the commission worked in a quiet manner with the agencies involved rather than if the commission took a confrontational attitude, and undue publicity about Costa Rica's imperfections would, they thought, give ammunition to "leftist" opponents intent on destroying the political system.

On the issue of use of territory for armed opposition forces, Costa Rica claimed that it had done all that it possibly could have to remove such forces. Although it was common knowledge before the Arias presidency that Nicaraguan Resistance fighters were operating from Costa Rican territory, during 1986 and 1987 Costa Rica made efforts to remove all resistance camps. The CIVS report declared that Costa Rica was in compliance with this requirement of the Esquipulas Agreement.

IV. Perspectives of the Armed Opposition Forces

The LASA commission considers that any report on the peace process would be incomplete if it omits presentation of the perspectives of the principal groups of "irregular" or "insurrectional" forces to which several key points of the Guatemala Accords refer. The following observations are based on interviews with high-level representatives of each group after the signing of the January 15, 1988, declaration of re-commitment to the August 7th Accords. The interviews were undertaken in Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico.

The principal armed opposition groups in Central America (the Farabundi Martí Liberation Front -- FMLN of El Salvador, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union -- URNG, and the Nicaraguan Resistance -- NR) have been participating in the peace process, although none have abandoned their prime dependence on military means to achieve their objectives. Those objectives, for all three groups, include modification of each country's constitution and changes in the exercise of political and economic power within states. The FMLN, URNG, and RN all have insisted that the issues be discussed within the context of the cease-fire talks called for under the August 7, 1987, accord agreed to by the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The governments of these countries have to date taken the position that these talks should be limited to the single issue of a cease-fire, although recently there has been some give on this in the case of Nicaragua. Talks in the autumn of 1987 between the FMLN, and its political allies, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), and the government of El Salvador, between the URNG and the government of Guatemala, and between the RN and the government of Nicaragua did not resolve this agenda issue.

The armed opposition has been willing to participate in the peace process in part because of the legitimation such participation has provided them. In addition, the regional and extraregional nature of the peace process has allowed for broader dissemination of opposition views. The armed opposition feels that participation in the process has increased international pressures for greater political space within the respective countries. Such space, it believes, has not included the possibility of direct participation in established mechanisms of political participation. That, according to the armed opposition, would require structural changes in the particular countries in question. At issue is whether the cease-fire talks or the National Reconciliation Commission's discussions might broaden to focus on that. The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua have been reluctant to do that.

Participation in the peace process by the armed opposition to the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua has placed pressure on the FMLN, URNG, and the RN to agree to a cease-fire, as well as to lay down arms and accept amnesty. The terms of the amnesty have thus far been defined by the governments and have not been acceptable to the armed opposition. In particular, the requirement to disarm prior to negotiating democratization has been a principal stumbling block for the armed opposition. However, the ongoing nature of the process is, in itself, considered by the armed opposition to have increased, at least to a degree, the possibility of negotiated settlements.

As a consequence, while participation in the peace process by the armed opposition, and by the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, has not led to their abandonment of military means as the prime method of conflict resolution, it has introduced the possibility of nonmilitary alternatives. As some progress, albeit limited, has resulted from the Contadora and Esquipulas processes, there is the hope that this will increase reliance on negotiations. All of the participants in the peace process have admitted this possibility while at the same time recognizing the difficulties of accomplishing it. Over the long term, this could reduce the level of warfare, with obvious benefits for the civilian population, which would then have more possibilities of participating in political and economic decision-making within their countries. Achievement of this requires the continuation of the peace process and renewed commitment to participation on the part of the armed opposition and the governments.

V. Perspectives of the Contadora Countries and the Support Group

The "Contadora Group" consists of the four countries, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia, that met in January 1983 to initiate a process of international consultation to promote a negotiated peace in the region. They have been assisted, since 1986, by four other Latin American countries, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay, which are identified as the "Contadora Support Group." These eight countries contain more than 80 percent of Latin America's total population and have repeatedly hosted meetings at the Foreign Minister level for all five Central American countries to seek a negotiated solution. They mediated negotiations on August 3 and 4 in Tegucigalpa that provided the minimum bases for the meeting of the presidents in Guatemala City two days later. They accepted responsibility for continuing discussions among the five Central American countries on issues of security, military force levels, and foreign military assistance; these issues were then specifically excluded from the Esquipulas II agreements. They, together with the secretaries general of the United Nations and the Organization of American States,

became the core group of the International Commission on Verification and Follow-up (CIVS). The presidents of the eight Contadora and Support Group nations met in Acapulco in November 1987 and reaffirmed their support for the Central American peace process and the Esquipulas Accords.

The report of the CIVS was the initial basis for the San José meeting on January 15. The five Central American presidents gathered to discuss the of compliance with the Esquipulas II accords, based on the evaluation provided by the Verification Commission. The participation of the Central American foreign ministers in the verification process itself was seen by some of the other members of the CIVS as unprecedented; for, as one participant in the commission's deliberations indicated to us, "the Central American foreign ministers were able, in many cases, to dictate key paragraphs of the verification document." This led, he suggested, to a modification of the conclusions of the group of ten and to reduction in the criticism of Guatemala, El Salvador, and even Costa Rica, and to an increase in the criticism of Nicaragua. Nevertheless, all fifteen members of the Verification Commission accepted and signed the final document on January 13, 1988.

The agreement then signed by the Central American presidents in San José on January 15, 1988, eliminated the CIVS and turned verification tasks over to an Executive Committee composed of the the five foreign ministers. It left no specific role for the Contadora countries, the support group, or the secretaries general of the United Nations and the OAS. This decision was seen as a weakening of international participation in the peace process.

We questioned many of our principal sources on the significance of the elimination of the CIVS, and we traveled to Mexico and Panama to discuss the significance of the change with representatives of the foreign ministries of those two countries. Their positions can be summarized as follows:

- a) The Contadora Group and the Contadora Support Group remain committed to pursuing a Latin American solution to problems of conflict within Central America.
- b) Discussions of international security issues in Central America are scheduled for early February 1988 under Contadora auspices.
- c) The next meeting of the Group of Eight is scheduled for late February 1988, and it is likely to review the Central American peace process at that time and the possibilities for new initiatives to bring about a negotiated peace to the region.
- d) To demonstrate its interest in the continued participation of these countries in the verification process, Nicaragua requested formally, on January 20, that the Group of Eight, plus the secretaries general, create a special verification team to re-evaluate Nicaragua's compliance with the Esquipulas accords, especially in light of the additional measures taken by Nicaragua after negotiations in San José on January 15.
- e) The Contadora countries feel that they have a right to comment on international issues that affect the Central American region since they affect the stability of the Western Hemisphere as a whole. And it is their position that additional assistance from the United States to the Nicaraguan Resistance would contribute to the collapse of the whole structure of the processes of peace in the region.

VI. Conclusions

The peace process set in motion by the agreements signed in August 1987 has generated significant change in Central America. They have not reduced or eliminated the most fundamental social and economic problems of the region, nor could they have been reasonably expected to. They have, however, strengthened in meaningful ways the prospects for democracy, civilian governments, and negotiations among the Central American governments as principal vehicles for social, political, and economic change in the future.

The agreements signed by the five Central American presidents have opened opportunities, limited though they still may be, that would have been inconceivable in Central America just one year ago. They have strengthened the hand of civilian elected presidents in all those countries with histories of strong military influence over national politics. They have strengthened the opportunities for a free press throughout the region, even when that freedom remains incomplete in several of them. They have provided an opportunity for the five presidents to take a stand, publicly and formally, on the presence and role of irregular forces and insurrectionary forces; all five have taken public and formal positions in opposition to all support for such forces and in opposition to the use of any territory in the region for supporting them. In the end, it is clear that each of the five presidents has been strengthened by the regional commitments, under international scrutiny, that the agreements have embodied. They have been able to take steps toward more democratic processes, toward dialogue, toward amnesty, and ultimately toward national reconciliation -- small steps, to be sure -- that they would not have been able to take without the Guatemala Accords and that they will not be able to sustain if the peace process breaks down.

The agreements have carried risks. They have exposed all of the presidents to greater political pressures as the democratic processes have become more open, even where that opening remains limited. They have led to the release of common criminals, convicted violators of human rights, and others whose return to civil life causes great concern, all released under amnesties designed for political prisoners. They have led to increases, it is hoped only temporary, in the levels of violence, for all of the more extreme contenders for political attention and political power have increased their activity, apparently to thwart the legitimizing of more democratic, institutionalized figures, parties, and processes.

But there are virtually no voices in the region calling for an end to the process. Even the representatives of the principal armed opposition groups, both Left and Right, call for complete compliance with the accords by all governments in the region.

The principal and most visible failure of the accords has been the failure of governments outside the region to abide by the expressed wishes of the Central American governments to cease their assistance to irregular forces and the armed forces of insurrection. There is no interpretation of the Guatemala Accords of August 7, and no interpretation of the reaffirmation of January 15, that would permit or encourage any further assistance, "*openly or covertly . . . , in terms of military, financial, logistical, or propaganda assistance, armaments, munitions, or equipment*" to any irregular forces in the region.

Appendix 1. Composition of the LASA Commission *

Co-chairmen of the Commission:

Prof. Charles L. Stansifer
Professor of History, and
Director, Center of
Latin American Studies
The University of Kansas

Prof. Michael E. Conroy
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The University of Texas at Austin

Ambassador Ambler Moss
Dean, Graduate School
of International Studies
The University of Miami, and
Former ambassador to Panama

Prof. Marysa Navarro
Professor of History, and
Associate Dean for Social Sciences
Dartmouth College, and
Chair, LASA Task Force on Women

Other members, in alphabetical order:

Prof. Richard N. Adams
Rappaport Centennial Professor of
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Associate Professor of Government,
and Associate Dean,
St. Lawrence University

Prof. John Booth
Professor of Political Science, and
Chairman, Department of
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North Texas State University

Prof. F. Scott Palmer
Chair, Latin American Studies
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Prof. Margaret Crahan
Luce Professor of Religion, Power,
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Occidental College, and
Member, Board of Directors, Inter-
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Prof. Manuel Pastor, Jr.
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Prof. Reid Reading
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Prof. Jan L. Flora
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Prof. Mark Rosenberg
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Professor Dario Moreno
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