

*Contadora Treaty*

encourage Nicaragua to move toward the original goals of the Sandinista revolution which were recently restated in its new constitution: a commitment to political pluralism, a mixed economy and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries.

We believe that improvements must be made in the Nicaraguan civil and human rights record. The continued suspension of many basic civil rights under the State of Emergency is profoundly disturbing. We encourage political pluralism in Nicaragua and we support the ability of legitimate domestic political opposition parties to continue to function. We have deplored the decision to close down the *La Prensa* newspaper, and the harassment of opposition groups and of the churches. The recent arrest and sentencing of the head of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Commission and the head of the Nicaraguan Bar Association within days of the signing of the peace accord was a disturbing and potentially counterproductive development. It was not consistent with the spirit of the agreement and only served to emphasize the need for reforms within Nicaragua. We hope that the implementation of the peace plan will result in the lifting of the State of Emergency and the removal of the current restrictions on the press and opposition groups and an end to incidents such as that to which I have referred.

The achievement of social justice ranks with the promotion of peace and economic development as one of the highest priorities for Canadian policy in the region. We welcome the fact that the peace plan includes a commitment to representative and pluralist democratic systems of government in all countries in the region.

Human rights violations in Guatemala and El Salvador continue also to be of great concern to the Canadian Government. Canada has been monitoring the human rights situation in both countries, and we have also pursued investigations of a number of cases of particular interest to Canada. Canada has co-sponsored UN General Assembly resolutions expressing deep concern at the continuing violations of human rights in Guatemala, and has voted in favour of resolutions expressing similar concerns in El Salvador.

Canada maintains normal commercial relations with Nicaragua and provides the usual assistance to Canadian firms seeking to do business there. Canada does not support the U.S.A. embargo on trade with Nicaragua, nor has the Government introduced special programs to increase Canadian trade by exploiting the embargo. Nicaragua has established a trading company in Toronto and it is hoped that this initiative will enhance trade opportunities for both countries.

Some critics of the Government's policy on Central America, including the Hon. Member for New Westminster—Coquitlam (Ms. Jewett), have also raised the question of whether Canada should have an embassy in Nicaragua. At present Canada maintains two embassies in Central America, one in San José, Costa Rica, accredited to Costa Rica,

Panama, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, and one in Guatemala City.

The fact that we do not maintain a resident mission in Nicaragua, or indeed in several other Central American countries, does not reflect a political decision on the part of the Canadian Government. The Canadian Government enjoys an excellent working relationship with the Government of Nicaragua, notwithstanding the absence of a resident Canadian Embassy in Managua itself. Ideally, we should like to have resident diplomatic missions in virtually every capital of the world. Economic constraints rule this out. Especially in the current atmosphere of austerity, as the Government attempts to reduce the national deficit, it would be unrealistic to consider adding to the number of diplomatic posts. In fact, the Government has recently closed a number of missions abroad.

Nevertheless, as a reflection of Canada's growing concern for stability in Central America, the personnel resources of our Embassy in San José have been augmented and program responsibilities rearranged in order to be able to devote more attention to Nicaraguan affairs.

It is our view that, through frequent visits to Nicaragua by our Ambassador and his staff (every two weeks on average), we receive accurate and detailed reporting on Nicaragua's domestic political situation, its economic problems and international outreach. Our Embassy has built a wide network of close contacts including, of course, government leaders and senior officials. In addition, the Department of External Affairs maintains close relations with Nicaraguan diplomatic staff in Ottawa, and we discuss Central American issues with many other governments as well as with private organizations in Canada.

There are approximately 50 Canadians residing in Nicaragua who have registered with the embassy in Costa Rica. In addition, a large number of Canadians visit Nicaragua, most in organized groups. Routine consular services of an immediate nature (passport renewal, replacement of stolen documents, et cetera) are provided the British Embassy in Managua. In case of a major emergency, contingency plans are in place to help Canadians leave the country.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate the Government's satisfaction that negotiations for a peaceful settlement in Central America are underway again. We are under no illusions about the serious obstacles which lie in the way of a just peace but Canada stands ready to do what it can to support the process, as the Government has done since it took office.

• (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the introduction of the subject of peace in Central America by my colleague, the Hon. Member for New Westminster—Coquitlam (Ms. Jewett), and move to ask and answer, if I can, the question of why Central America is important to the peace of