

Obviously, another question in Canada concerns the public position we should take regarding the support of the United States of the contras, and the support by the Soviet Union and Cuba of the Sandinista government and of guerrilla activity in El Salvador. We oppose third party intervention in Central America, whatever the source, and have made that position clear to both superpowers. Some Canadians argue sincerely that our Central American policy should concentrate more on public criticism of the United States. I believe that such a policy would reduce, and not increase, whatever real influence we might have in Washington, on this question. It could, in addition, impede our ability to play other, more active roles in support of the peace plan. The five governments of Central America are in no doubt about the difference between Canadian and U.S. policy, and our conduct should be guided by what makes us most effective in Central America itself.

The issue of compliance with the peace plan is most acute in three countries: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras.

In Nicaragua, real commitments have been made to democratic reform - the formation of a National Reconciliation Commission, the re-opening of La Prensa and Radio Catolica, the re-admission of exiled clerics, and the release of almost 1,000 political prisoners. Earlier this month, the government also expressed a willingness to enter into indirect dialogue with the contras, through the mediation of Cardinal Obando y Bravo. These commitments are real and they are encouraging. But we should recall that, by some estimates, there are still between 7-8,000 political prisoners held in Nicaraguan jails, that some clerics remain in exile, that Radio Catolica was prevented from broadcasting its first newscast, and that the dialogue with the contras is narrowly defined and still in very preliminary stages. There has been no complete amnesty.