

*Contadora Treaty*

Other facts provide hope. As I said, under the Agreement, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs were to meet within fifteen days. That meeting took place on August 19 and 20, in San Salvador. Later, on August 22 and 23, in Caracas, the Ministers met their counterparts from the Contadora Group and the Lima Support Group, as well as representatives from the United Nations and the OAS, and agreed to set up a verification commission. Not being part of the area, Canada is not a member of the commission. However, we informed all the governments involved that we were willing if need be to provide the commission with technical advice.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we may safely conclude that real progress has been made. However, we should avoid deceiving ourselves. Guerilla warfare continues, as well as competition between the superpowers. The problem of poverty remains and is compounded by the massive influx of refugees fleeing the conflicts. Human rights, civil liberties and democratic institutions are still trampled in certain parts of the area. The latest events are a positive, albeit hesitating step in the right direction. The Canadian Government will continue to encourage and support Central America and Contadora Group countries and extend any technical advice they will deem useful.

• (1720)

[English]

**Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri—Westmount):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments of both of my colleagues. I must say that I and others in this House undoubtedly have been heartened and encouraged by the positive developments that one sees emerging from the Guatemala peace plan of August 7. However, I must say that I am not quite as sanguine as the spokesman for the Government with respect to the evolution of the plan as it is designed. I say that largely because of my concerns with the continuing policy of our good neighbour to the south, the United States. Only today Mr. Shultz has testified that the Government wishes to increase its funding to the Contras by \$270 million over the forthcoming 18 month period, which is an escalation over the amount of \$100 million, the timetable for which expires on September 30. In fact, as I read the press report as it came over the wire, it appeared that Mr. Shultz justifies this because of the timetable. The cease-fire does not take effect until November 7. Hence it is the argument of the U.S. administration that this would leave the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime unconstrained by the threat of the rebel Contra forces during that period, playing into the hands of the Communists. I can only say that this is hardly the basis upon which we should be building a secure and lasting peace in Central America.

I will go back and talk a bit about the history of some of the issues in a moment, but I would like to emphasize to the Conservative Government, and I am sure my colleague, the Hon. Member for New Westminster—Coquitlam (Ms. Jewett), will agree with me, that one thing Canada can do

concretely is to exercise our supposed good offices in Washington to bring a stop to this increased funding to the extent possible. In that regard I am confident that the efforts of the Government will be supported by many if not an overwhelming majority of Americans as well as Congressmen.

I need not remind this House of the tremendous opposition which was expressed not only here but in the United States to the funding of the Contras in the first instance. Here, on the very eve of a major breakthrough, we are faced with a reaffirmation and an escalation of that policy which all of us in this House on both sides condemned in the first instance.

I commend the Government on any steps it may take to make Canadian expertise available for the purposes of verification. We know that Canada enjoys an international reputation in that regard, well earned in many corners of the Globe over many years, and I am happy that we have officials in Central America at the present time, but there is one major obstacle going far beyond the issue of verification, and that is, the current policy of the U.S. administration. It is with respect to that policy that Canada is in a unique position to exercise influence.

I can say to this House in a personal vein that I am gratified and have been gratified by the tremendous concern shown by my constituents and by Canadians across this land for the circumstances in Central America. I know that my colleague, the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) feels the same way. He has many constituents who continue to make representations to him saying Canada has a major role to play.

Apart from the human tragedy to which we must respond, the refugee issues, the suffering, the fact that a surrogate war is being conducted by untrained teenagers, the great human tragedy of the situation also must be placed in the context of a potential widespread armed confrontation in the western hemisphere; our own Vietnam. The situation in Central America hangs like sword of Damocles over the peace and security of the western hemisphere. It is a matter of the most urgent priority. Hence, the Contadora process which we have all supported seemed almost at one point in recent months to have ceased being a process altogether. There seemed to be so little movement in that regard. Now we have seen in the region itself five Presidents agreeing upon a plan, which is ambiguous in many respects and is perhaps somewhat obscure but basically contains very significant elements which could provide for a major breakthrough. These elements include a ceasefire within 90 days, the agreement from each nation not to supply any rebel group which would try to overthrow any existing Central American Government, no attacks to be launched from other Central American countries, reconciliation and amnesty for rebel forces and a process of democratization, internationally-supervised free elections at the end of each Government's present term of office.