

The Accord asks "the respect and support of the international community for our efforts. We have plans in Central America for peace and development, but we need help to make them a reality." I had planned to visit the region sometime before the Spring of next year, but moved that forward after the Esquipulas agreement, to provide a visible signal of Canada's support. I sought to meet, in seven days, as broad as possible a representation of the people and organizations who, because they are involved in the conflict, must be brought into the process of peace. I had meetings with the five Presidents; the five Foreign Ministers; other Ministers and commandantes; the two clerics, Cardinal Obando y Bravo and Archbishop Rivera y Damas who are charged with leading reconciliation in, respectively, Nicaragua and El Salvador; leaders of the political wing of the guerrillas in El Salvador; a contra representative in Costa Rica, Alfredo Cesar, who was once the head of the Nicaraguan Central Bank under the Sandinistas; the Miskito Indian Leader Brooklyn Rivera; Opposition leaders in Nicaragua including Pablo Antonio Cuadra, the noted poet and co-director of La Prensa, and groups preoccupied with human rights.

In addition, our delegation included Lieutenant-Colonel Don Ethell and Lieutenant-Colonel Gerald Thompson, two Canadian officers who have commanded international peacekeeping operations elsewhere in the world. They had detailed discussions with Central American authorities about the practical challenges of designing and operating verification and peacekeeping mechanisms. The Esquipulas plan proposes procedures of verification and follow up, but I told each president of Canada's concern that they were underestimating the complexity of putting such mechanisms in place. A peacekeeping operation must fit precisely the conditions in the region where the peace is to be kept. You cannot simply shift a model that works in Cyprus to the very different conditions of Central America. Our experts believe it could take up to six months to design and mount a mechanism that would prove effective in Central America. I said that Canadian expertise would be available for all or part of that work, if the five presidents agreed unanimously that they wanted Canadian help. I emphasized that we were not seeking an invitation, because we want the decision on this vital question to be taken by Central Americans for Central American reasons. I indicated that there were general conditions of unanimity and authority that Canada requires before becoming involved in any aspect of any peacekeeping operations. I should tell the House that I do not think it would be appropriate to attach new conditions in this case, since the problems in Central America are already complex enough. As a result of our conversations, I believe the five governments have a greater sense of the urgency of getting on with the design of the mechanisms they will need.