

## 21. CENTRAL AMERICA

**BACKGROUND**

The year 1988 was marked by unsuccessful efforts to adopt in full the Central American Peace Plan proposed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez. The "Arias Plan", signed on 7 August 1987 at Esquipulas, Guatemala, has retained its importance because it was the first time leaders of the five Central American countries--Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras--agreed in principle to comply with a process aimed at bringing peace to the region. The plan essentially requires of each Government a national reconciliation with opponents, a cease-fire within the existing constitutional framework, efforts to halt foreign aid to insurgents, a commitment not to provide assistance to groups aimed at destabilizing other governments, free and democratic elections, measures to help refugees return home and joint efforts to obtain international economic aid.

That implementation and verification of the planned measures are the main obstacles facing the signatories was evident at the summit held in San José, Costa Rica on 15 and 16 January 1988. Talks between the Governments of Guatemala and El Salvador and their respective opponents to negotiate a cease-fire have yet to produce serious results. On 28 February 1989 the Salvadoran army unilaterally declared a cease-fire until 1 June, when President Duarte was to step down. However, the guerrillas immediately rejected the declaration and launched renewed attacks on military installations, declaring that they would accept only a negotiated cease-fire. In early February 1989 an accord was reached by the Governments of Honduras and Nicaragua. The Sandinistas agreed to make serious moves towards democratization and ensure fair procedures at the elections set for February 1990, in return for promises by the Honduran Government to disband the *contra* forces operating within its borders.

At Tesoro Beach, El Salvador on 13-14 February 1989, the five Central American Presidents held a Summit meeting to "reactivate the Arias Plan." The five agreed to the Honduran-Nicaraguan accord reached days earlier, with the additional provision that the *contra* forces and their families operating within Honduras borders would be repatriated or moved to other countries after disbanding. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega reaffirmed his intention to eliminate all censorship laws and hold all-level government elections no later than February 1990. At the Summit, the Presidents also agreed to invite UN observers into the region.

On 24 February 1989, in a letter to UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar, Foreign Ministry officials from all five signatories of the Peace Accord requested that a team of unarmed military observers from Canada, Spain and West Germany, as well as from an unnamed Latin American country, be sent to Central America. The main role of the observers would be to verify that none of the countries involved in the peace process supports any subversive activities against a neighbour country, to report on cross-border guerrilla movements, and to observe the 1990 Nicaraguan elections. Canada, Spain and West Germany have agreed to take part in the peace-keeping mission and are now awaiting a formal request from the UN Secretary-General (for more information see Peacekeeping and Observation, Chapter 20 of *The Guide*).