

Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark, Members of Parliament, church leaders and Central American interest groups in Toronto.

On October 23, Vice-President Ramirez left Ottawa with assurances that Canada would help design mechanisms to implement a new Central American peace plan, as long as all five countries requested it (*Ottawa Citizen*, October 23).

Clark Visit to Central America

External Affairs Minister Joe Clark wrote about his upcoming whirlwind Central American tour in the *Ottawa Citizen* on November 17: "I want to let them know that Canada is willing to provide practical help. We can, for example, help with the security mechanisms that will be needed as a ceasefire, an amnesty, and the suspension of outside military assistance are implemented. I have often stated Canada's willingness to help peacekeeping procedures". In an interview with the CBC's *As It Happens* on October 23, Mr. Clark said: "What we're doing already is on a country-to-country basis in the region where we have a variety of development programs in place, and we've made clear our view that the basic problems in Central America are social and economic in origin and that they don't benefit from outside third party interference" (External Affairs interview transcript, October 22).

The *Toronto Star* reported that Mr. Clark's itinerary in Central America would include visits to Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica between November 21 and 29. He was to meet with Central American presidents, prominent opposition groups and politicians, but would not meet with Contra leaders or leaders of El Salvador's left-wing guerrillas. He also did not intend to criticize the Reagan administration but planned to ask the Sandinista government to stop its "extensive restrictions on civil rights." He also planned to condemn human rights abuses in El Salvador and Guatemala (*Toronto Star*, November 17).

Mr. Clark's purpose in this visit, as outlined by senior Ottawa officials in a background briefing before Mr. Clark's departure, was to demonstrate Canada's support for the peace process, to encourage democratization in the region and to convey Canada's concern over human rights violations, as well as to "start a chemistry" that would win Ottawa an invitation from the Central American states to participate in the peace process (*Toronto Star*, November 17 and *London Free Press*, November 18). Mr. Clark also wished to create some sense of urgency among the five countries in looking at the problem of how to keep the peace once it was in place (External Affairs interview transcript, December 1).

The Department of External Affairs announced on November 16 that Canada would restore bilateral aid to Guatemala, amid concerns that human rights violations were still commonplace in that country. This policy was intended as a direct response to the urgent economic and social needs of the poor who make up the majority of Guatemalans. It was also intended as

a reflection of Canada's global commitment to directing Canadian assistance to the most disadvantaged groups (External Affairs *Communiqué*, November 13). In Guatemala, Mr. Clark was told by Nineth de Garcia, a leading human rights activist in that country, that Canada should channel aid through private agencies and not governments (*Toronto Star*, November 29).

In Nicaragua, Mr. Clark announced that Canada might be willing to let Nicaraguan Contra guerrillas enter Canada as refugees if it would help bring peace to the region. Mr. Clark was quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as having said that: "One of the things that might be asked of us is to provide some limited help in dealing with people who had been involved in some of the conflicts somewhere in the region, and who, for one reason or another, can't go home." Mr. Clark stressed that his consideration was purely hypothetical (*Globe and Mail*, November 23).

Mr. Clark also announced a further \$1-million dollars in aid to Nicaragua in the form of a dairy herd management project (External Affairs *Communiqué*, November 23). He was, however, criticized by Canadian aid workers in Nicaragua for not having publicly condemned the US support for Contra insurgents and for saying Canada might accept Contras as refugees (*Toronto Star*, November 24). Mr. Clark stated his position on urging the US to stop helping Contra rebels: "Lecturing the US about its aid to the Contras just makes the Americans more stubborn. It's counter-productive, it's ineffective, it doesn't work, and might in fact have the opposite effect" (*Montreal Gazette*, November 24).

Mr. Clark's comments regarding the Contras came under scrutiny in Canada as a law had already been passed barring entry to anyone the government "had reason to believe" might be a war criminal, which could certainly include Contras (*Globe and Mail*, November 25). Immigration Minister Benoît Bouchard stated that the above-mentioned law did not allow permission or status to be given to somebody who had used violence. (*La Presse*, November 26).

In El Salvador, Mr. Clark brought up the possibility that Canadian soldiers be sent as observers for the implementation of the peace plan which, he stressed, was a personal suggestion that had not yet been discussed in Cabinet. Mr. Clark also stated that he would consider the return of important leftist leaders to El Salvador as an important step towards the renewal of confidence in peace in that country (*Le Devoir*, November 26).

In Honduras, President José Azcona told Mr. Clark that he "intended to honor and encourage the peace plan." The problem of how Honduras was to deal with Contra bases within its borders remained, since to comply with the peace plan would effectively mean doing away with rebel bases. When asked for current information on Honduran compliance with the peace plan, Mr. Clark said that officials with the Department