

Multilateral Relations

CENTRAL AMERICA

Peace Process

Efforts at achieving a satisfactory peace in Central America received Canada's continued attention during this two-month period, with particular emphasis being placed on transforming the Contadora draft peace treaty into a workable model. (The Contadora draft was developed by Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama, and called for a ban on subversion of neighboring countries in the region, as well as for the withdrawal of foreign military advisers and other assistance.) Canadian support for the Contadora initiative was reiterated before the UN General Assembly October 24 by Canada's Chargé d'Affaires David Lee in a speech on the Central American situation. Mr. Lee, after noting Canada's regret of the extension to the region of "East/West confrontation and the directly related militarization," said in his statement that Contadora offered the only "international instrument with the potential for reconciliation." For this reason, the initiative deserved continued support in its process of revision. However, because of heightened "violence and instability" in Central America, Canada would accept a greater number of refugees, while at the same time continuing its aid commitments. Mr. Lee concluded by stressing the importance of UN member countries' support for the Contadora effort.

Speaking of the Contadora draft agreement in the Commons November 13, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark stated that he would be meeting for consultations with the Ambassadors of the Contadora nations later in the month (November 26). Responding to questions from Dan Heap (NDP, Spadina), Mr. Clark stated that while Canada had reservations with regard to the verification process outlined in the present draft, it supported the process and would work toward advancing the peace process. Mr. Clark indicated Canada's willingness to renew an earlier offer to supply Canadian "expertise" in the field of verification measures, in order to develop a treaty which Canada would feel secure in signing. "If there is anything we can do to improve that agreement, Canada wants to do it," said Mr. Clark.

Interviewed on CTV television November 15, Mexican Ambassador to Canada José Andres de Oteyza outlined

the possible role to be played by Canada in Central America. Mr. de Oteyza stated that the Contadora group had been in contact with the Canadian government, and both parties had agreed that the region's problems stemmed from "economic and social backwardness." In common with earlier statements by External Affairs Minister Joe Clark, Mr. de Oteyza held that increased militarization in Central America must end. He indicated that the Peace Act of the Contadora Group was a document with commitments in the fields of "disarmament, economic development and national security," and his group's mission would be to promote the draft with the Canadian government (as well as the nations in the region). He added that Canada, because of its "international prestige and respect," could play a role in establishing and maintaining security in Central America by bringing this prestige to bear on both the US and the Central American countries directly involved. Canada, said Mr. Oteyza, was a "true democracy, democracy not only for Canadians, but also vis-à-vis the rest of the world" (External Affairs transcript, November 21).

Elaborating on the role for Canada in the peace process, External Affairs spokesman Sean Brady stated in an NBC radio interview November 22 that the Contadora group had appealed to Canada because of Canada's consistent support for the process and its increased and objective interest in the region's problems. As well, Canadian experience and expertise in international peacekeeping had proved attractive. Mr. Brady reiterated Canadian concerns over the "tightness" of verification measures outlined in the draft proposals, but added that the Clark-Contadora meeting would provide an opportunity to negotiate in that area. He also said that the Canadian government was concerned over both increased militarization and "heightened media concern" which was creating an atmosphere close to "hysteria" (because of the fear of a US invasion of Nicaragua). Canada supported a "hands-off policy" in the area, said Mr. Brady, which would allow dialogue between the parties concerned. "We are concerned that the participants be given a chance now to prove that they are trying to