

Statements by Ministers

Central American Presidents in their August meeting at Esquipulas.

That agreement seeks to achieve "the climate of liberty that democracy ensures", and it sets forth conditions with which all five Governments must comply. Two characteristics invest this agreement with unusual promise. It is unanimous and it is indigenous. It is not a prescription from outside but a commitment made deliberately by all five Presidents.

It is my impression, after talking to each President, that all intend to keep the word they gave. Indeed, a strength of this agreement is that no one—no Government, no guerilla force, no outside power—will want to stand accused of making this agreement fail. It is, therefore, of unusual importance that, in addition to whatever help countries like Canada might offer, we seek to create a public opinion that is informed and dispassionate about this process so that compliance can be fairly judged and pressure for compliance fully maintained.

No peace is simple. Countries which are serious about contributing to the success of this process must begin by understanding the complexity of the conflicts and the history of Central America and understanding also the relative frailty of the democracy which this accord seeks to promote.

Only eight years ago, in 1979, Costa Rica was the only democracy in the region. The Government of Nicaragua then was an oppressive, almost feudal, regime, a regime which invited revolution. The tradition in the region, again excepting Costa Rica, has been for crises to be resolved by force and military rule. There are, therefore, no deep roots for the democratic parties and institutions which can guarantee civil liberties and human rights as we Canadians have come to understand them.

The region is still torn by extremism—extremism of the right, extremism of the left—and it is marked by poverty, injustice and exploitation. Its economy is hobbled by debt, low commodity prices, frequent inefficiency, and the spectre and reality of war which drive growth away and distort domestic priorities. Even nature has been cruel. The capital cities of Managua, Guatemala and San Salvador have all been struck visibly by earthquakes. Those, Sir, are the circumstances in which the five Presidents seek peace.

Moreover, despite their unanimity, there are deep suspicions among them—doubts that the civil authorities in El Salvador, Guatemala and, to a lesser degree, Honduras, will in the end be strong enough to control the army, to control the police, to end the tradition of repression. There is also a profound skepticism as to whether the Sandinistas will let real democracy threaten the revolution which their constitution describes as irreversible.

In addition, each Government which signed the agreement must deal with combatants and refugees who have not been parties to this accord and whose views only become known in piecemeal fashion. That is to mention simply the complexities of the region itself which are complicated further by the

extension to Central America of the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

There are, Sir, plenty of obstacles, but there is also a genuine commitment to the peace initiative and a recognition that the alternative is hopeless; continued bloodshed, economic stagnation, the withering of young, democratic institutions, and the consequent rebirth of coercive forces of the right and of the left.

[Translation]

Canada's interest and involvement in Central America is relatively recent, but our standing is high. Over the last five years we have tripled our bilateral aid to over \$105 million, and, on a per capita basis, our aid to Central America is second only to what we do in the Caribbean. In that period, total direct Canadian assistance amounted to nearly \$170 million, including support for Canadian non-governmental organizations who are active throughout the region.

To get some better sense of the people and, the countryside, we visited a Farmers For Peace workshop in Nicaragua where farmers are trained to repair machinery.

We visited also two NGO projects in southern Honduras, one where Horizons For Friendship helps educate orphans, and the other, a rural clinic operated by Canadian church workers.

Members of our delegation visited different CIDA projects—with purposes ranging from purifying water to providing daycare for single parents, to improving dairy production, to building houses, and meeting other practical needs.

Some of our delegation also met with human rights groups, womens' associations, artists, and refugees in the camp at Limon. We saw for ourselves the good reputation of Canada, which gives us credentials to contribute to the peace process.

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 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-