

World & Nation

Nicaraguan leaders discuss peace prospect in Washington

By Bill Pritchard

Washington (NC) — Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo and President Daniel Ortega discussed the prospects for cease-fire negotiations in their war-torn country at the Vatican Embassy in Washington November 13, during a day of intense activity on the Nicaraguan peace front.

The cardinal also received a letter from the Nicaraguan Resistance, the umbrella group of the U.S.-backed anti-Sandinista forces, while visiting the Washington Archdiocesan Pastoral Center that afternoon.

After the morning meeting with the cardinal and House Speaker Jim Wright, D-Texas, at the embassy, Ortega presented an 11-point cease-fire proposal to Wright for forwarding to the leadership of Nicaragua's U.S.-backed contra rebels.

The Ortega proposal calls for a cease-fire to begin December 5 and last until at least January 6 — when an international assessment is due on whether the Central American peace accord signed August 7 is working. Three cease-fire zones would be established and 15 days before hostilities are suspended, the Sandinista army would halt operations in those zones, allowing the contras to freely move into them. The contras would be barred from receiving military aid and would have to surrender their weapons at the end of the first month of the cease-fire. They would then be allowed to participate openly in Nicaraguan politics.

No details of the discussion with Cardinal Obando Bravo were made public, but Wright said the churchman would take Ortega's proposals to the "armed resistance."

Archbishop Pio Laghi, apostolic pronuncio to the United States, was present at the discussions as a "neutral host," a Vatican Embassy spokesman said.

Rebel leaders steered clear of any face-to-face involvement in the Washington talks. The content of their letter to the cardinal, delivered by the Nicaraguan Resistance's Washington representative, Ernesto Palacio, was kept secret.

The deadline established by an August 7 peace pact for cease-fires in Central America's civil wars was November 5.

On November 12, Adolfo Calero, one of

the six directors of the Nicaraguan Resistance, told Catholic News Service that he and his colleagues would be out of town before Cardinal Obando Bravo's plane landed that evening. They had no intention of participating in cease-fire talks in the U.S. capital, he said.

"We expect to speak to him in Central America," Calero said. The cardinal had his own program for the Washington visit, he said.

It would be up to the cardinal to set the time and place for cease-fire discussions, he added.

Of the churchman's mediating role, Calero said the resistance leaders are "full of enthusiasm" and "accept him wholeheartedly."

Calero met privately with Wright that afternoon to discuss the "overall situation" in Nicaragua.

Earlier in the day a church spokeswoman said Cardinal Obando Bravo had left Managua, the Nicaraguan capital, to begin mediating the cease-fire talks announced by Ortega the previous week.

On November 11, the Nicaraguan bishops approved the cardinal's taking the mediating role. Although he had been appointed by Ortega on November 6, Cardinal Obando Bravo said he would first consult with his fellow bishops before deciding whether to accept the job.

"The bishops consider this a very important step and give all their support to the cardinal," said the bishops' conference spokeswoman.

Nicaraguan churchmen say they agree that the country needs peace, but there is disagreement among them on how to achieve it — depending on their view of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front.

Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Vivas Robelo of Managua said he wants neither "the dictatorship of an unjust Somoza" nor the "Sandinistas' brand of Marxism."

Anastasio Somoza was the Nicaraguan president unseated in 1979 by the Sandinista-led revolution.

Bishop Vivas is a member of the National Reconciliation Commission — established to monitor compliance with the Central Ameri-



MEDIATOR FOR PEACE — Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua, arrives at Miami International Airport on his way to Washington. The cardinal will meet with U.S. and Nicaraguan leaders in his role as mediator in the Nicaraguan peace process.

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can peace pact proposed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. It aims to end civil wars and establish civil rights and democratic government throughout Central America.

"I wouldn't say the Sandinistas haven't done some good for the people," the bishop said, "but what I lament is their tendency to be totalitarian, to make it a crime to think differently from them."

Monsignor Bismarck Carballo, director of communications for the Managua Archdiocese and a vocal critic of the government, said "long-term peace in Nicaragua must revolve around justice and the service of truth."

U.S.-born Bishop Salvador Schlaeffer of Bluefields — where indigenous Miskito Indians have frequently clashed with the government — said that "the church is in

favor of dialogue, but not necessarily in the ways the government proclaims."

"Reconciliation must be for the good of the people," he said.

But a number of priests, who view the bishops of Nicaragua as trying to minimize the Sandinistas' role in the peace process said they believe the hierarchy equates "reconciliation" with "suppression of the (Sandinista) revolution."

"We don't want reconciliation if it means a return to the class system," said Father Jose Maria Vigil, a Claretian theologian living in Managua. "We cannot return to a situation where one man is exploited by another," he said, "that would be going backwards."

Correspondent Joanne Sisto in Managua also contributed to this report.

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