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# Issue Paper NICARAGUA CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS JANUARY 1995-DECEMBER 1996 February 1997

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### MAP

See original.

Source: Brosnahan Sept. 1994, 385.

### GLOSSARY

**ANPDH**

Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (Asociación Nicaragüense Pro-Derechos Humanos)

**CENIDH**

Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights (Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos)

**CPDH**

Permanent Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos)

**CSE**

Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral)

**EPS**

Sandinista People's Army (Ejercito Popular Sandinista)<sup>[1]</sup>

**FSLN**

Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional)

**OAS**

Organization of American States

**OASCIAV**

OAS International Support and Verification Commission (Organization of American States—OAS)

**PN**

National Police (Policia Nacional)

**Note:**

Most of these official names have been translated for the reader's convenience. The translations are unofficial, however, as English has no official status in Nicaragua.

**NOTE**

[1] The Nicaraguan army changed its name in July 1995 with the adoption of the constitutional reform and has since been known as the "Army of Nicaragua" (Ejercito de Nicaragua). [\[back\]](#)

**INTRODUCTION**

This chronology supplements the July 1994 DIRB Question and Answer Series paper *Nicaragua Update*. This chronology details political and social events that occurred between January 1995 and December 1996, in particular the activities of the various armed groups in the centre and north of Nicaragua, especially in the departments of Matagalpa, Jonotega, Esteli, Chontales and Nuevo Segovia. These groups, composed mainly of former anti-Sandinista rebels ("recontras") and ex-members of the Sandinista militia ("recompas"), rearmed in the early 90s under the pretext that Violeta Chamorro's administration had failed to implement the demobilization agreements reached at the time, especially with regard to the provisions awarding land to veterans. In view of the diversity of the groups involved and the large number of actions in which they have been involved, this paper deals only with the most important facts. This chronology also reports on the series of bombings of Catholic churches during the period leading up to the Pope's visit in February 1996. The paper also generally covers, among other things, the authorities' response to various social movements, the passing of crucial constitutional and other legislative instruments, and significant events surrounding the October 1996 elections.

**CHRONOLOGY****1995****6 January**

Fifteen people (13 members of an armed gang and 2 enlisted men) are killed near La Marañososa, in the department of Jinotega (*Central America Report* 27 Jan. 1995, 5; AI 1996, 236; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 478-79). The Sandinista People's Army (Ejército Popular Sandinista—EPS) claims to have shot them in self-defence (*ibid.*; *Central America Report* 27 Jan. 1995). Human rights organizations and the OAS International Support and Verification Commission (OASCIAV) question the army's version (*ibid.*; AI 1996, 236; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 478-79). According to Amnesty International, the people died "in circumstances suggesting they may have been extrajudicially executed" (AI 1996, 236). A joint commission supported by the EPS, and in which the Ministry of the Interior plans to participate, is formed to investigate the incident (*Central America Report* 27 Jan. 1995). Lino Hernandez, the director of the Permanent Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos—CPDH, a non-governmental human rights watchdog organization established in 1977), suspects an EPS ambush (IPS 14 Mar. 1995) In March 1995, Jinotega District Criminal Court Judge Maria Elia Bárcena acquits the 23 EPS soldiers accused of being responsible for the deaths in La Marañososa, on the grounds of insufficient evidence (*Central America Report* 9 Jun. 1995, 6; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 482).

### **27 January**

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) agrees to prosecute the Nicaraguan government in the case of Jean Paul Genie Lacayo, who died in October 1990 (*Tico Times* 3 Feb. 1995; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 480). General Humberto Ortega, the commander-in-chief of the EPS and eight men in his escort had been charged with Lacayo's murder but were acquitted in June 1994 by a military court (*ibid.*; AI 1995, 225). Amnesty International has complained about the fact that the case is under military jurisdiction, "because military jurisdiction does not offer guarantees of due process and impartiality" (*ibid.*). The *Tico Times* writes that the IACHR is to determine whether the Nicaraguan justice system handled the case satisfactorily (13 Sept. 1996).

### **21 February**

General Humberto Ortega, former president Daniel Ortega's brother, resigns as commander-in-chief of the EPS (AFP 21 Feb. 1995; *Keesing's* 24 Mar. 1995, 40403; *Problèmes d'Amérique latine* Jan.-Mar. 1996, 118). Replacing him is General Joaquín Cuadra, General Ortega's deputy since 1979 (*Keesing's* 24 Mar. 1995).

### **27 February**

Ten thousand teachers go on strike for higher wages (*La Nación* 28 Mar. 1995). According to the daily newspaper *Barricada*, 210 teachers are eventually fired for taking part in the strike, which lasts for 19 days (Xinhua 18 Mar. 1995).

### **1 April**

Xinhua News Agency reports that 22 people are arrested and another 12 injured by the riot squad after striking employees of a match factory try to bar a truck from leaving the premises (1 Apr. 1995). In June 1995, the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights (Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos—CENIDH), a non-governmental human rights organization that claims its representatives have been victims of police brutality, files a complaint with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the Government of Nicaragua (*Country Reports 1995 1996*, 485).

### **May 1995 - February 1996**

Catholic churches in several Nicaraguan cities, including Managua, Masaya, Matagalpa, León and Jinotepe, are the targets of some 20 bombings (AFP 10 Feb. 1996; Reuters 10 Feb.; AP 7 Feb. 1996; ACAN-EFE 7 Feb. 1996; AFP 7. Feb. 1996; *La Nación* 18 Sept. 1995; Xinhua 19 Sept. 1995; *Index on Censorship* 1995, 180; *La Nación* 29 July 1995; UPI 28 July 1995; Reuters 13 May 1995; *The Miami*

*Herald* 14 May 1995). The bombings damage property but no injuries are reported (*La Nación* 18 Sept. 1995). According to the *Excelsior*, a commission of inquiry, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the police and the armed forces, is set up by the government in July 1995 to investigate the bombings (16 July 1995).

## May

According to *Country Reports 1995*, the OASCIAV formally complains to the government "after a military jeep fired on one of its vehicles three times" (1996, 485). The army claimed that the soldiers were firing at "wild animals" and not at the vehicle. The government calls the actions "irresponsible" (*ibid.*).

## 8-25 May

A strike by truck and bus owners for higher pay triggers a protest movement against the Chamorro administration's austerity program (*Keesing's* 1996, R54; AP 16 May 1995). On 16 May, police arrest three strikers and injure one after some thirty demonstrating strikers attack a police cruiser and burn its tires, according to the Managua Chief of Police (Xinhua 16 May 1995; AP 16 May 1995). Two members of a transport cooperative and one police officer are killed the next day in clashes during another demonstration in Managua (*Central America Report* 26 May 1995, 7; AI 1996, 236; *Keesing's* June 1995, 40544; *La Nación* 19 May 1995). The police reports and the commission of inquiry set up by the government state that the demonstrators fired first (*Country Reports 1995* 1996, 487; Reuters 18 May 1995; *La Nación* 19 May 1995; AI 1996, 236; *Central America Report* 26 May 1995, 7). However, human rights organizations blame the police for the deaths (AI 1996, 236; *Libération* 19 May 1995, 14; *Central America Report* 30 June 1995). On 21 May, shots are fired at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during a funeral march for one of the two demonstrators killed on 17 May (*Keesing's* 27 June 1995, 40544; Reuters 21 May 1995; *The Miami Herald* 23 May 1995). On 24 May, home-made bombs are hurled at the presidential palace as thousands of protesters demonstrate in Managua (*ibid.*; *Keesing's* 27 June 1995, 40544).

## 15 June

The National Assembly is occupied by about 40 pro-FSLN peasants demanding a solution to the land ownership problem (*Keesing's* 24 July 1995, 40594; Radio Nicaragua 17 June 1995). On 22 June, police clash with a group of reporters attempting to gain access to the still-occupied National Assembly (UPI 22 June 1995).

## Mid-June

Police lieutenant Marvin Torres reportedly shoots and kills Camilo Federico Sánchez Carmona while interrogating him after the latter allegedly confessed to sexually molesting a minor (*Miami Herald* 19 June 1995; *Country Reports 1995* 1996, 479). *The Miami Herald* writes that Torres received "an outpouring" of public support but human rights organizations call this a clear case of "police using brutality against suspects because they are frustrated by an increasing workload, frequent acquittal of suspects by the judiciary, and a lack of resources" (*ibid.*).

## 30 June

*Central America Report* states that the latest reports coming out of Nicaragua's human rights commissions point to "increasing violations of human rights on the part of the PN over recent years" (30 June 1995, 6). The CPDH announces that in 1994 "they processed 160 reports of physical torture, 120 illegal house searches and 160 detentions without an order for arrest" (*ibid.*). The Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (Asociación Nicaragüense Pro-Derechos Humanos—ANPDH), a non-governmental human rights organization established in 1986, reveals that "of the 125 reports of

human rights violations they received in the first trimester of this year, 83 involved the National Police" (ibid.).

#### **4 July**

President Chamorro accepts 65 constitutional amendments passed by the National Assembly that are intended, among other things, to limit the powers of the presidency and the army and strengthen the legislative branch of government (*Country Reports 1995 1996*, 484; *Keesing's* 1996, R54; *Problèmes d'Amérique latine* Jan.-Mar. 1996, 118). The EPS is renamed the Army of Nicaragua (Ejército de Nicaragua) (ibid.). One of the amendments reduces from 72 to 48 hours the timeframe within which a suspect held by the police must be brought before a judge (*Country Reports 1995 1996*, 481). This reform has been voted into law after nine months of disagreement between the executive and legislative branches of government, which Amnesty International suggests "led to [...] the paralysis of the Supreme Court of Justice. This resulted in further deterioration of prison conditions, exacerbated by delays in judicial procedures." (1996, 236).

#### **4-5 July**

A Conference On Property, sponsored jointly by the Carter Center for Democracy and the UN Development Program, is held in Montelimar on Nicaragua's Pacific coast (*Chronicle of Latin American Economic Affairs* 27 July 1995; *The Miami Herald* 6 July 1995). After meeting for 36 hours, Nicaragua's major political figures reach "consensus on immediate steps" to deal with conflicts over properties confiscated by the Sandinistas when they were in power. Foreign Affairs Minister Ernesto Leal announces at the end of the conference that "the small-property owners and the beneficiaries of land reforms are going to be protected" and that the land reforms implemented by the Sandinistas will be respected (*Chronicle of Latin American Economic Affairs* 27 Jul. 1995).

#### **21 July**

According to *Country Reports 1995*, "vandals broke into the Church's official radio station, Radio Católica, and stole transmission equipment that prevented the station from broadcasting for several hours" (1996, 483). This incident is said to be part of "an apparent campaign of harassment of Catholic Church-linked institutions by unidentified parties" (ibid.).

#### **27 July**

UPI reports that some 30 rebels led by José Angel Urbina (also known as "Commandant Arandu") surrender their weapons in Matiguas, 160 km north of Managua, after negotiations with the OAS, Cardinal Obando y Bravo and the army (27 July 1995).

#### **15 August**

A bomb explosion in the Cristo Rey Catholic school in Managua results in some property damage but no injuries (*Central America Report* 25 Aug. 1995, 4; *La Nación* 17 août 1996; Reuters 16 Aug. 1995).

#### **6 September**

Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, claims that there was a conspiracy to assassinate him; he had stated earlier that he had received death threats (*La Presse* 7 Sept. 1995, A-10; *Latin American Weekly Report* 21 Sept. 1995, 432; *Index on Censorship* 1995). He says he knows the names of the people who made the threats and "details of the assassination plans" (*Latin American Regional Reports* 5 Oct. 1995, 4). Ten days later, Emilio Espinales Silva, a recontra in exile in Honduras, states that Tomás Borge, a former Minister of the Interior in the Sandinista government, approached him to carry out the assassination of Cardinal Obando y Bravo (*La Nación* 20 Sept. 1995b; AFP 17 Sept. 1995). Army Chief of Staff Joaquín Cuadra asks the Ministry of the Interior to investigate the matter and denies Espinales Silva's allegations (AFP 19 Sept. 1995).

**Mid-September**

Four representatives of the Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral—CSE) are kidnapped by an armed band led by "El Charro" in the northern department of Jinotega (*La Nación* 13 Sept. 1995; Xinhua 13 Sept. 1995). The kidnappers demanded that the army withdraw from the area bounded by the Honduran border; the army complies, [translation] "in order to save the lives" of the hostages (*La Nación* 14 Sept. 1995). The hostages are freed on 13 September after mediation by the Organization of American States (OAS) (*ibid.*; Xinhua 13 Sept. 1995; Television Nacional 16 Sept. 1995).

**17 September**

Cardinal Obando y Bravo leads thousands of Catholics in a protest march against the bombing of Catholic churches (*La Nación* 18 Sept. 1995; *Central America Report* 15 Sept. 1995, 8). President Chamorro and members of her cabinet join the march (*La Nación* 18 Sept. 1995).

**18 September**

University student Cardo Jirón is killed in cross fire between police and a criminal gang that was about to assault a group of students (*La Nación* 20 Sept. 1995a; *Country Reports 1995 1996*, 481). According to *Country Reports 1995*, the police "detained and severely beat several students who were with Jirón, believing them to be part of the gang even though they had no weapons" (1996, 481). Charges are later brought against three of the police officers involved (*ibid.*).

**24 September**

According to *Country Reports 1995*, army major Ivan Gutierrez shot and killed Carlos José Salinas in an amusement park because of some "disparaging remarks" made about Gutierrez's daughter (1996, 479-80). Eyewitnesses say that Salinas had nothing to do with these remarks (*ibid.*). Gutierrez is arrested and charged with murder on 6 October 1995 (*ibid.*).

**End of September**

Army Chief of Staff General Joaquín Cuadra announces that a military operation has been launched with the dispatch of a contingent of 3,000 to the northern and central Nicaragua (particularly the departments of Jinotega and Matagalpa) to "protect the region's coffee plantations and combat some 220 members of the 40 armed groups" (*Central America Report* 13 Oct. 1995; *Latin American Weekly Report* 5 Oct. 1995, 456).

**22 October**

The National Assembly elects Julia Mena of the Independent Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Independiente) Vice-President of Nicaragua (*Latin American Weekly Report* 2 Nov. 1995, 504; Reuters 23 Oct. 1995). Since the President is also a woman, the country is led by two women, a "combination unique in the Americas" (*ibid.*).

**12 November**

*Rocky Mountain News* indicates that the number of reports about violence against women in Nicaragua has increased significantly in the past few years (12 Nov. 1995). Government statistics show that violence against women is up 21% since 1990, "twice the increase of the overall crime rate" (*ibid.*). The number of rapes reported during the first six months of 1995 is given as 1,170, as opposed to 906 for the whole of 1994 (*ibid.*).

**30 November**

President Chamorro signs the new property law (*Central America Report* 15 Dec. 1995, 6; *The Orange County Register* 1 Dec. 1995; *The Guardian* 1 Dec. 1995;). "The law outlines the mechanisms which, in

theory, will allow the final resolution of 6,000 property claims made by former owners who feel aggrieved by the Sandinista programs" (*Central America Report* 15 Dec. 1995, 6). The new law is the product of a compromise between the conservatives and the Sandinistas, although neither group is altogether satisfied with the results (*The Orange County Register* 1 Dec. 1995; *Central America Report* 15 Dec. 1995, 6).

### **6 December**

The National Assembly passes the new electoral law (*Keesing's* 24 Jan. 1996, 40861; *L'État du monde* 1997 1996, 521; UPI 11 Dec. 1995; *Notisur—Latin American Political Affairs* 15 Dec. 1995). Among other things, it changes the voting system in presidential elections by introducing a second ballot if no candidate obtains more than 45% of the vote on the first ballot (*L'État du monde* 1997 1996, 521; UPI 11 Dec. 1995; *Notisur—Latin American Political Affairs* 15 Dec. 1995). In other changes, mayors are to be elected by popular vote and Nicaraguans living outside the country are given the right to vote (*ibid.*). Elections are called for 20 October 1996 (UPI 11 Dec. 1995; *Notisur—Latin American Political Affairs* 15 Dec. 1995).

### **12 December**

Several hundred students and professors occupy Managua Airport for several hours, demanding that the government do its constitutional duty increasing funding for universities (*Le Devoir* 13 Dec. 1995, A5; *The Miami Herald* 13 Dec. 1995). Nicaragua ratifies a South American agreement on violence against women (OAS n.d.; UPI 6 Feb. 1995). The agreement was signed in 1994 by Nicaragua at the OAS general assembly (*ibid.*).

### **13 December**

One person is killed and 35 to 43 are injured in clashes between police and students near the National Assembly building in Managua during a demonstration against inadequate government funding for universities (*Keesing's* 1996, R54; Reuters 14 Dec. 1995; *La Presse* 14 Dec. 1995, C4). The police use tear gas on the crowd and then open fire on the 800 demonstrators (*ibid.*; *La Lettre de la Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme* May 1996; Reuters 14 Dec. 1995). Citing CENIDH, the FIDH report states that [translation] "the forces of law and order [...] killed a worker in cold blood [...] near the National Assembly...by shooting him point blank in the head" (May 1996). The next day, Nicaraguan authorities confirm that the police contravened regulations by firing at the students (Reuters 14 Dec. 1995; *The Miami Herald* 28 Dec. 1995). Subsequently, "twelve police officers [are] confined to their units pending results of the investigation into the incident" of 13 December (*ibid.*).

### **19 December**

General Joaquín Cuadra reports that 372 people, including 207 civilians, died in 1995 as a result of "the actions of [...] armed bands operating in the north and centre of the country" (*Latin American Weekly Report* 11 Jan. 1996, 12; *The Patriot Ledger* 20 Dec. 1995). Twenty-nine soldiers and 136 "delinquents" were killed in 132 clashes between the army and these armed bands (*Latin American Regional Reports* 25 Jan. 1996, 3; *The Patriot Ledger* 20 Dec. 1995). General Cuadra adds that "88 of the armed bands ha[ve] been broken up, [...] 385 members captured [and a] further 175 have surrendered voluntarily" (*Latin American Regional Reports* 25 Jan. 1996), while about 500 "armed delinquents" are still at large (*ibid.*).

## **1996**

### **Beginning of January**

Three or four Nicaraguan Army soldiers are killed in the northern department of Jinotega, apparently

ambushed by a band of recontras (UPI 5 Jan. 1996; *Central America Report* 1 Feb. 1996b, 2).

### **16-24 January**

Fourteen or fifteen people suspected of being involved in the wave of bombings of Catholic churches in 1995 are arrested in León (*Latin American Weekly Report* 1 Feb. 1996, 48; *Central America Report* 25 Jan. 1996, 4; Reuters 16 Jan. 1996). The police claim that some of the detainees have close links to the Sandinistas and that seven of the suspects admitted their guilt but then retracted their confession (ibid.). FSLN Leader Daniel Ortega states that any member of the FSLN who is involved in such activities will be expelled from the party (*Central America Report* 25 Jan 1996, 4). On 24 January, 12 people, some of whom are close to the Sandinistas, are convicted in a León court of involvement in the bombings of the Catholic churches (*Current History* Mar. 1996, 143; *The New York Times* 25 Jan. 1996). In addition, twelve other people, including several alleged Sandinistas, are arrested in connection with this case (ibid.).

### **25 January**

Arnoldo Alemán, one of the candidates running for president in the October 1996 elections, escapes unharmed from an ambush laid by an armed band on a road near Quilali, in northern Nicaragua (Reuters 25 Jan. 1996, *Central America Report* 1 Feb. 1996a, 2; *L'État du Monde* 1997 1996, 521; *Current History* Mar. 1996, 143). Initially blaming the Sandinistas for the attempt, Alemán later retracted the accusation and "said he could not blame 'either the Sandinistas or the Nicaraguan Resistance (contras)'" and instead blamed "'the inefficiency of this government'" (*Central America Report* 1 Feb. 1996a, 2; IPS 29 Jan. 1996).

### **27 January**

Xinhua News Agency reports that "Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro is sending a commission to the north of the country to investigate reports of rape, robbery and abuse by a paramilitary group in San José de Bocay" (27 Jan. 1996). The allegations were made by the Bishop of Esteli, Abelardo Matta (ibid.; *Central America Report* 22 Feb. 1996, 6; ibid. 21 Mar. 1996, 4). They have been denied, however, by the army's commander-in-chief, General Joaquín Cuadra, who insists that the government troops left the region in 1994 (Xinhua 27 Jan. 1996).

### **31 January**

Two students and a police officer are injured when police eject 300 students from the Foreign Affairs Ministry offices in Managua; the students occupied the building the night before, taking a number of hostages and demanding increased government funding for universities (*Keesing's* 22 Feb. 1996, 40897; *Le Monde* 5 Feb. 1996). In addition, 107 students are arrested and 520 home-made bombs are seized (*Le Devoir* 1 Feb. 1996, A5; Reuters 31 Jan. 1996; *Keesing's* 22 Feb. 1996, 40897). The hostages included the Ambassadors of Pakistan and the Philippines (Reuters 31 Jan. 1996; *Keesing's* 22 Feb. 1996, 40897; *Le Monde* 5 Feb. 1996). The next day, some 700 students demonstrate in front of the PN headquarters in Managua to demand the release of the 107 students (AFP 2 Feb. 1996b). After a few minutes, the government announces that 35 students are being released (ibid.; Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2 Feb. 1996). On 2 February, the PN announces the release of almost all the students arrested in connection with the occupation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building (AFP 2 Feb. 1996a).

Fifteen policemen are taken hostage when a group of students commandeer a bus in Managua (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2 Feb. 1996; *La Nación* 1 Feb. 1996; AFP 2 Feb. 1996b). The hostages are released following the mediation efforts of the director of the CENDH, Vilma Nuñez (ibid.; AFP 2 Feb. 1996b).

### **Early February**

According to *Central America Report*, former police officer Marvin Torres, charged with killing Camilo Federico Sánchez Carmona in June 1995 while the latter was under interrogation, has been found innocent by a Managua tribunal (22 Feb. 1996, 6) (see the entry for mid-June 1995). Legal and human rights experts "universally" condemn the verdict (ibid. 7 Mar. 1996, 5) and ANPDH president Julio César Saborio calls the verdict "a blank cheque to the National Police to use any method they like during interrogation" (ibid. 22 Feb. 1996, 6).

### **7 February**

Pope John Paul II's visit to Nicaragua takes place in spite of various attempts to thwart it (*Le Monde* 9 Feb. 1996). Some 6,000 police officers, 1,800 soldiers and 5,000 civilian volunteers are detailed to protect the Pope (AFP 7 Feb. 1996). The Pontiff is welcomed to Nicaragua by President Chamorro and celebrates mass in Managua in front of a crowd of some 300,000 people (ibid.; *La Nación* 8 Feb. 1996). John Paul II visited Nicaragua once before, in 1983, when the Sandinistas were in power (*Le Monde* 9 Feb. 1996; *La Nación* 7 Feb. 1996).

### **13 February**

Mariano Fiallos resigns as CSE president (Reuters 13 Feb. 1996; *La Nación* 14 Feb. 1996; *L'État du monde* 1997 1996, 521; *Latin American Weekly Report* 29 Feb. 1996). He claims that "applying the new electoral law 'is not a viable proposition'" (ibid.), and calls for major changes in it. He objects in particular to the provision in the new law that prevents him, in his capacity as the president of the CSE, from exercising any control over election officials in rural areas (Reuters 13 Feb. 1996). The National Assembly accepts Fiallos's resignation three days later (*La Nación* 16 Feb. 1996; *Latin American Weekly Report* 29 Feb. 1996).

### **15 February**

According to AFP, General Joaquín Cuadra has admitted that the army distributed weapons to civilians in 1994 (15 Feb. 1996). The general, speaking on television, justifies the arms handout by saying that civilians had to defend themselves from attacks by armed groups (ibid.). He had made claims to the contrary three weeks earlier, when representatives of the Catholic Church in Esteli denounced crimes perpetrated by civilians who had been armed by the government (ibid.) (see the entry for 27 Jan. 1995).

### **21 February**

Two European Union vehicles transporting food in Jinotega province are attacked by "armed men" (Reuters 21 Feb. 1996; *Tico Times* 1 Mar. 1996). Three Nicaraguan workers die in the incident (ibid.).

### **22 February**

*Central America Report* states that the CPDH's report on human rights violations in 1995 labels the PN as a major human rights violator (22 Feb. 1996, 6). The CPDH reports "40 cases of physical torture in prisons, 46 of detention without arrest warrants, 36 of police harassment and threats for political or personal reasons, 33 violent arrests and 2 rapes of persons in police custody" (ibid.). The report also criticizes "the recent deterioration of citizen security in rural areas," and especially in "a strip of land running through the center of Nicaragua where the value of life is practically zero" (ibid.).

### **23 February**

OASCIAV director Sergio Caramagna informs Inter Press Service that violence is on the rise in some departments of Nicaragua, most notably Matagalpa, Jinotega, Nueva Segovia, Chontales and Esteli, and that "this has provoked the displacement of enormous sections of the rural population, seeking refuge from the gangs and armed groups" (23 Feb. 1996). Caramagna attributes the situation to "the lack of state authority presence in this area" (ibid.). *Central America Report* also reports that in the past few

months, violence has been escalating in the north and centre of Nicaragua "particularly the mountainous areas of Jinotega, Matagalpa and Segovia" The violence has taken the form of "threats, extortion, robberies, assaults, kidnappings and killings which have led farmers to flee the area and students and teachers to abandon their classrooms" (ibid.). In May, the Nicaraguan army reports that 68 people (45 civilians, 19 members of armed bands and 4 soldiers) have died in northern Nicaragua since the beginning of the year (*Latin American Weekly Report* 2 May 1996, 12).

### **27 February**

Former police officer Marvin Torres is sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a military court after being found guilty of [translation] "negligence, misuse of a firearm and abuse of authority" in relation to the death during interrogation of Camilo Federico Sánchez Carmona (*La Nación* 28 Feb. 1996; *Central America Report* 7 Mar. 1996, 5) (see the entries for mid-June 1995 and early February 1996). Torres was acquitted by a civilian court in early February 1996 (ibid.). Legal experts claimed that trying Torres in a military court after he had been acquitted by a civilian court contravened his constitutional right not to be tried twice for the same crime (ibid.).

### **March**

According to *The Christian Science Monitor*, the National Coalition of Women, whose members represent various Nicaraguan political parties, "is requesting all parties to adopt" its "platform stressing women's rights" (28 Aug. 1996).

### **End of March**

According to *Notisur—Latin American Political Affairs*, talks scheduled for 27 March between the army and the head of the Frente Norte 3-80 armed band, former contra leader Ciriaco Palacios (nicknamed "El Charro"), are called off (5 Apr. 1996). A temporary two-week ceasefire had been arranged on 15 March pending the negotiations (ibid.).

### **3 May**

According to Notifax, the National Assembly extends the OASCIAV's mandate by one year, to July 1997, [translation] "in order that the electoral process may be monitored in the various departments and municipalities throughout the country" (3 May 1996).

### **Mid-May**

The army sets up an operation [translation] "to ensure the smooth running of the electoral process" (*La Nación* 8 July 1996; *El nuevo diario* 21 May 1996). More than 5,000 soldiers are expected to be deployed, mostly in the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega (ibid.).

### **28 May**

According to Reuters, eight Miskito Indians are kidnapped by an armed band of recontras in the area of Somotigni, near the Honduran border (7 June 1996). The government announces their release on 7 June following mediation by the OAS, which states that "none of the kidnappers' demands [were] met" (ibid.). The recontras were demanding that the army withdraw from the Somotigni area and that the Miskitos be disarmed (ibid.) (see the entry for 8 July 1996).

### **1 June**

Cynthia Gerzony, an American on a mission to observe the elections in northern Nicaragua, is released (UPI 1 June 1996; *Central America Report* 6 June 1996, 8; Notifax 3 June 1996). She was kidnapped on 31 May in the department of Jinotega by recontras demanding that polling stations be set up in the northern Nicaraguan locality of Somutigne, near the Honduran border (ibid.). Gerzony's release was obtained through OAS mediation (*Central America Report* 6 June 1996, 8; Notifax 3 June 1996).

#### 4 June

The government announces the death of the former contra leader Ciriaco Palacios (also known as "El Charro") "in a clash between troops and his bandit group on 2 June in Matagalpa department" (*Keesing's* 24 July 1996, 41140; Notifax 5 June 1996; *Tico Times* 14 June 1996; Reuters 4 June 1996). He was one of the last rebel leaders in the northern part of the country (*ibid.*; EFE 6 June 1996). According to the *Miami Herald*, "other recontras and peasants living in the region say that [Ciriaco Palacios] was killed by a remote-controlled bomb concealed inside a radio" (6 August 1996).

#### 6 June

A group of recontras occupies one of Managua's biggest radio stations, co-owned by the leader of the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (*La Nación* 8 June 1996; *Index on Censorship* 1996, 106-107). This move is part of an internal conflict in the party concerning the selection of its candidate for the presidential election (*ibid.*). The occupiers leave the premises peacefully following negotiations by the CPDH (*La Nación* 8 June 1996). According to some sources, various groups, in particular the CSE and the CPDH, consider the occupation a [translation] "dangerous" act that sets a [translation] "bad precedent for the smooth running of the electoral process" (*La Nación* 9 June 1996).

#### 9 June

The police report that "armed gangs have continued their violent attacks in northern Nicaragua" against CSE officials (*Notimex* 9 June 1996). In an incident of this kind, two security guards and a [translation] "delinquent" are killed when an armed group attempts to ambush the persons who were escorting electoral officials (*La Nación* 10 June 1996).

#### 21 June

Donald Amed Romero Gutiérrez, a university student, dies after being shot in the back by the police (IPS 11 July 1996; *La Nación* 24 June 1996). The incident occurred during a police operation to arrest a gang of delinquents (*ibid.* 25 June 1996). According to the police, Gutiérrez belonged to this gang, but his family and his classmates deny it (*ibid.*). Inter Press Service, citing CENIDH, reports that Romero Gutierrez was a "victim of a 'summary execution'" (11 July 1996).

#### 22 June

Foreign Affairs Minister Ernesto Leal announces the release of some 30 hostages, most of them electoral observers from the Nicaraguan government, who have been held captive by an armed group since June 19 (*La Nación* 23 June 1996; *Central America Report* 4 July 1996, 5; Reuters 21 June 1996). Their release was obtained after the army agreed to meet the armed band's demands and withdrew from an area along the border with Honduras (*ibid.*). A joint OAS and Catholic church mission negotiated the hostages' release (Notifax 24 June 1996; *Latin American Weekly Report* 11 July 1996, 312; *Central America Report* 4 July 1996, 5; *La Nación* 23 July 1996).

#### 23 June

A spokesman for the army reports that an armed band has kidnapped five peasants in the El Tablazo region in north Nicaragua (Notifax 25 June 1996; Reuters 24 June 1996). The peasants are unconditionally released three days later (Notifax 27 June 1996b; ITAR-TASS 27 June 1996).

#### 25 June

According to UPI, Carlos Gallo, a deputy and the chairman of the parliamentary commission on human rights, claims that members of the Honduran army are supplying weapons to armed bands in the north, in particular in the area of Río Coco (25 June 1996).

The Nicaraguan government submits to the international community a plan for removing 91,000 mines

over the next five years (IPS 14 June 1996; *La Nación* 26 June 1996). These mines, laid down during the civil war, have killed 48 and injured 424 civilians between 1993 and 1996 (ibid.).

### **8 July**

Notifax cites an article in the daily *La Tribuna* according to which the army will deploy troops on a permanent basis in the Río Coco zone, near the Honduran border (Notifax 8 July 1996). The purpose of this measure is to protect the Miskito communities against attacks from armed bands (ibid.) (see the entry for 28 May 1996).

### **11 July**

IPS reports that the ANPDH, in a report entitled "'Political Crisis in Nicaragua'," reveals that 421 human rights violations were brought to the attention of the association between January and September 1995, "282 of which allegedly included the public security forces" (11 July 1996). Most of the complaints against the police "include the abuse of authority, illegal arrests, degrading treatment and physical aggression" (ibid.).

### **15 July**

An armed band of recontras ambushes and fires on a military truck in the department of Matagalpa, killing six soldiers and injuring another (Reuters 15 July 1996; *La Nación* 16 July 1996).

### **27 July**

*La Prensa* reports that Leopoldo Lopez, deputy minister of finance responsible for land ownership issues, has stated that the return of confiscated properties to their original owners is "idealistic and impossible," because many of them have been turned over to peasants or, in urban localities, they were divided into small lots and distributed "to a large number of people" (27 July 1996). Lopez recommends that owners of properties that were confiscated and that cannot be restored to them accept the compensation offered by the government (ibid.).

### **31 July**

Representatives of about 20 political parties sign an "Electoral Ethics Agreement that defines the 'rules of the game'" for the October elections (IPS 10 August 1996, 16; Notifax 31 July 1996; *La Nación* 1 Aug. 1996). They undertake, in particular, [translation] "to avoid violence" and to comply with the election results (Notifax 31 July 1996; *La Nación* 1 Aug. 1996). The code was drawn up in the presence of CSE officials (ibid.).

### **2 August**

The National Assembly approves a new national police law that [translation] "'makes the police answerable to the constitution and the laws'" of the country (Notifax 2 Aug. 1996; ANPDH August-September 1996). The human rights organization ANPDH criticizes this law, claiming that it leads to [translation] "legal inequality" (Aug.-Sept. 1996). According to the ANPDH, the law is detrimental to people who file complaints about National Police violations of human rights because the police then become both [translation] "a party [to the case] and the judge" (ibid.).

### **12 August**

Twenty candidates in the presidential election sign a [translation] "compromise minimum programme" ("*compromiso con una agenda mínima*") developed by Vice-President Julia Mena and the former Sandinista minister Alejandro Martínez Cuenca (*La Nación* 13 August 1996; Notifax 13 Aug. 1996). The items covered by the programme include [translation] "promoting national agreement concerning elections and good government, fighting corruption head on, security in the cities, stimulating production and seeking a 'fair' solution to the problem of land ownership" (Notifax 27 June 1996a; *La*

*Nación* 13 Aug. 1996). The Liberal Alliance candidate, Arnoldo Alemán, refused to sign this document which, according to him, is not credible because it was developed by a Sandinista economist [translation] "who contributed to the economic destruction of the country" (Notifax 13 Aug. 1996).

### **12-16 August**

According to Reuters, the National Assembly votes "to modernize family violence laws" (20 Aug. 1996). The reform includes the repeal of a provision that made adultery a crime for women (ibid.).

### **13-15 August**

According to *La Nación*, various non-governmental organizations are holding, in Managua, the first national conference on violence against children, with the aim in particular of making Nicaraguan society aware of its existence (15 Aug. 1996). A report distributed on this occasion states that [translation] "the laws covering children and the family in Nicaragua are inadequate and their scope is limited" (ibid.)

### **6 September**

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [translation] "insists" that General Humberto Ortega and General Joaquín Cuadra appear before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in relation to the death of Jean-Paul Genie Lacayo in October 1990 (*La Nación* 7 Sept. 1996). According to the Commission, the absence of the two generals would constitute [translation] "a negative precedent and would be a serious setback for the inter-American justice system, which Nicaragua joined in 1991" (ibid.). The *Tico Times* reports on 13 September that the generals did not appear before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (13 Sept. 1996).

### **10 September**

The National Assembly adopts a new labour code which replaces the 1944 code (*Central America Report* 19 Sept. 1996; *La Nación* 11 Sept. 1996). The new code is said to be "slightly more pro-worker than its 1944 predecessor" (*Central America Report* 19 Sept. 1996).

### **26 September**

AFP reports that the chief of the riot police, Manuel Lezama, and his wife and two of his daughters have been killed in their home in a northern district of Managua by [translation] "a group of unidentified persons" (26 Sept. 1996).

According to Notifax, the chief of the armed forces, Joaquín Cuadra, announces a [translation] "sizeable" deployment of soldiers to the northern and central parts of the country to ensure that the elections of 20 October run smoothly (26 Sept. 1996).

### **7 October**

Managua police report an increase of 11.4 per cent in the crime rate from 1995 to 1996 (Reuters 7 Oct. 1996). According to Pedro Aguilar, Managua Chief of Police, this rise is attributable largely to the fact that the number of youth gangs in Managua increased from 12 to 66 in one year (*Latin American Regional Reports* 25 July 1996, 4; Reuters 7 Oct. 1996). The gang members, ranging in age from 11 to 15 years old, are "armed with guns and knives," and many of them have recently returned from the United States (*Latin American Regional Reports* 25 July 1996).

### **18 October**

The *National Catholic Reporter* reports comments made by a Nicaraguan union organizer "whose name was not revealed in order to safeguard her family" (18 Oct. 1996). According to her, "even though the right to organize is recognized in the Nicaraguan constitution, workers in *maquilas* must meet in secret

to avoid reprisals from owners" (ibid.). The *maquilas* are clothing manufacturing plants where working conditions are very hard (ibid.).

### **20 October**

Almost two and a half million Nicaraguan voters are eligible to go to the polls to elect a new president as well as deputies to the National Assembly and the Central American Parliament, representatives of departments, and councillors and mayors for the 145 municipalities in the country (*Le Monde* 20-21 Oct. 1996; *Libération* 22 Oct. 1996). Twenty-four political groups are represented on the ballot and there are 21 candidates for the presidential election alone (*La Nación* 20 Oct. 1996). Arnoldo Alemán, the Liberal Alliance candidate, and Daniel Ortega, the FSLN candidate, are considered to be the top two contenders in the presidential election (*Le Monde* 20-21 Oct. 1996; *Libération* 22 Oct. 1996).

### **21 October**

The first tallies for the presidential election give Liberal Alliance candidate Arnoldo Alemán the edge with 48.26 per cent of the vote, against 39.10 per cent for FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega (Notifax 21 Oct. 1996; *La Nación* 22 Oct. 1996). The latter announces that his party will not recognize the results of the election which, in his opinion, was marred by many irregularities (Notifax 21 Oct. 1996; *La Nación* 22 Oct. 1996). According to him, about 60,000 votes for the FSLN recorded in various departments were not transmitted to the CSE (ibid.). The OAS and the European Union, which account for the majority of the 1,400 international observers, say that they did not note any major irregularity that could affect the final election results (ibid.; *Le Monde* 23 Oct. 1996).

### **23 October**

The government bans all political demonstrations in the country until the final election results are published (*Libération* 24 Oct. 1996; Deutsche Presse-Agentur 23 Oct. 1996). This prohibition is issued after nine of the smaller opposition parties join the FSLN in challenging the results of the election of 20 October (ibid.).

### **31 October**

During a riot by some 300 inmates of a penitentiary in Juigalpa (in northern Nicaragua), thirty inmates take a number of guards and instructors hostage [translation] "in a bid to obtain better food" (*La Nación* 1 Nov. 1996a; IPS 1 Nov. 1996). According to official sources, two guards and two inmates sustain injuries (ibid.). The hostages are freed following mediation by the Catholic church and CENIDH (*La Nación* 1 Nov. 1996a). According to Vilma Nuñez of CENIDH, "the prison situation in Nicaragua is a time bomb due to the inhuman living conditions created by lack of funding" (IPS 1 Nov. 1996).

The FSLN and seven of the smaller political parties, having obtained less than three per cent of the vote on the basis of preliminary results, ask the CSE to declare the results in Managua null and void (*Latin American Weekly Report* 7 Nov. 1996, 509; Notifax 31 Oct. 1996; *La Nación* 1 Nov. 1996). On 5 November, the FSLN calls for a [translation] "mass mobilization" to take place on 8 November in order to denounce the results of the 20 October elections (*La Nación* 6 Nov. 1996; Reuters 5 Nov. 1996).

### **5 November**

A PN press release states that the president of the CSE, Rosa Marina Zelaya, has received anonymous death threats over the telephone (Notifax 5 Nov. 1996; Xinhua 5 Nov. 1996).

### **8 November**

The CSE announces complete preliminary results, according to which Arnoldo Alemán of the Liberal Alliance is the winner with 51.02 per cent of the vote (*Le Monde* 11 Nov. 1996; *La Nación* 9 Nov. 1996a; Notifax 8 Nov. 1996; *Central America Report* 14 Nov. 1996, 4). Daniel Ortega, the FSLN

candidate, who came second with 37.75 per cent of the votes, has refused to concede to Alemán but has urged his supporters [translation] "to refrain from any violence" (*Le Monde* 11 Nov. 1995). Numerous international observers have found the election to be fair (*ibid.*; *La Nación* 9 Nov. 1996b). In the legislative elections, the Liberal Alliance won 42 seats in the National Assembly, while the FSLN obtained 37 of a total of 93 seats (*Le Monde* 11 Nov. 1996; *Central America Report* 14 Nov. 1996, 4).

### **11 November**

The management of a Managua television channel says that its reporters were assaulted by Sandinista militants during demonstrations in Managua and Matagalpa organized by the FSLN on 8 November to protest the election results (*La Nación* 12 Nov. 1996; Canal Dos Television 13 Nov. 1996). On 13 November Daniel Ortega apologized on behalf of his party to the reporters assaulted during the two demonstrations (*ibid.*).

The FSLN officially requests the CSE to annul the elections in the departments of Matagalpa and Managua and to review the results in 11 of the country's 17 electoral districts (*La Nación* 13 Nov. 1996; *Central America Report* 14 Nov. 1996, 6; Radio Sandino 11 Nov. 1996).

### **16 November**

In the department of Matagalpa, a group of Liberal Alliance sympathizers is shot at by [translation] "unidentified men" (*La Nación* 19 Nov. 1996; Notifax 18 Nov. 1996). Two people are injured (*ibid.*).

### **17 November**

According to *La Nación*, Cardinal Obando y Bravo claims that he and other members of the Nicaraguan episcopal conference have received anonymous death threats over the telephone [translation] "in the last few days" (18 Nov. 1996).

### **22 November**

The CSE announces the official election results, according to which the Liberal Alliance candidate, Arnaldo Alemán, is the winner of the presidential election (*Le Monde* 24-25 Nov. 1996, 4; *Excelsior* 28 Nov. 1996; Deutsche Presse-Agentur 23 Nov. 1996). Alemán obtained 51.03 per cent of the votes, while his closest rival, Daniel Ortega, got 37.75 per cent (AFP 23 Nov. 1996; Deutsche Presse-Agentur 23 Nov. 1996). The latter does not recognize the legitimacy of the election and refuses to concede to Alemán but at the same time stated that the Sandinistas [translation] "respect the legal mechanisms" (*La Nación* 25 Nov. 1996). Arnaldo Alemán says that he is ready to begin a dialogue with Ortega in order to arrive at [translation] "an agreement to ensure good government" ("*acuerdo de gobernabilidad*") (*Excelsior* 28 Nov. 1996).

### **26 November**

Daniel Ortega claims that the Arnaldo Alemán government, which will take office on 11 January 1997, is [translation] "the fruit of electoral fraud [...] a rotten fruit which nobody likes" (AFP 26 Nov. 1996; *La Nación* 27 Nov. 1996). Ortega also presents a 14-point proposal for ensuring good government and states that the goal of his initiative is to [translation] "solve the crisis resulting from the electoral fraud that occurred in the 20 October elections" (*ibid.*).

### **28 November to late December 1996**

As proposed by the FSLN, a group of deputies vote to impeach of the first secretary of the National Assembly, Jaime Bonilla, and the first vice-president, Adolfo Jarquín, with a view to blocking the adjournment of the Assembly ordered by Jaime Bonilla (Reuters 28 Nov. 1996; Xinhua 29 Nov. 1996; *La Nación* 3 Dec. 1996; *Latin American Weekly Report* 12 Dec. 1996). This move leads to a parliamentary crisis. The Liberal Alliance, which has been boycotting the Assembly, charges that the

Sandinista deputies intend to push through various laws before the opening of the new session on 9 January 1997 (ibid.). The Sandinistas and their allies have, for example, passed a law that gives the National Assembly the power to select the president of the central bank and the human rights prosecutor, a responsibility that was previously within the jurisdiction of the president (ibid.). Adolfo Jarquín declares void the laws passed since November 28 in view of the absence of a quorum (ibid.). The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the validity of this legislation by 23 December (Reuters 13 Dec. 1996; Notifax 11 Dec. 1996).

### **3 December**

According to General Joaquín Cuadra, the various armed bands have mobilized and have intensified their activities since the elections of 20 October 1996 (Reuters 3 Dec. 1996; AP 5 Dec. 1996). The bands are attempting to establish a position of strength which would improve their hand in any negotiations for demobilization entered into with the new government (Reuters 3 Dec. 1996). According to the army, six recontras have been killed in confrontations since the end of November 1996 (AP 5 Dec. 1996).

### **4 December**

The CSE announces the final results of the legislative elections of 20 October 1996: the Liberal Alliance obtains 42 of 93 seats in the National Assembly, less than an absolute majority (Reuters 4 Dec. 1996; *Le Monde* 6 Dec. 1996, *Latin America Regional Report* 12 Dec. 1996). The FSLN has 36 seats, three fewer than before (ibid.).

### **8 December**

President-Elect Arnoldo Alemán introduces his cabinet, which includes [translation] "former supporters of Anastasio Somoza, the dictator who was overthrown in 1979, [and] former Sandinista and Contra leaders" (AFP 9 Dec. 1996; UPI 8 Dec. 1996). Most of the senior ministerial positions are given to members of the Liberal Alliance (ibid.; Reuters 8 Dec. 1996).

### **16 December**

According to UPI, an armed band frees a Catholic priest whom it kidnapped three days earlier in a bid, among other things, to obtain the release of four of its members from jail (16 Dec. 1996). The priest was freed unconditionally "after the abductors met with representatives of the church and the Organization of American States" (ibid.).

## **NOTES ON SELECTED SOURCES**

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*La Nación* is a private newspaper founded in 1946. It is the main daily in Costa Rica and has a circulation of about 100,000. Its Internet site provides the full text of its articles and contains an archival section dating back to 19 July 1995. Its Central America section covers the main releases of the news agencies EFE (Spain), Agence France Presse and Associated Press. Its home page on the WWW is at the following Internet address: <URL: <http://www.nacion.co.cr>>.

### **Notifax [Managua], Nicaragua.**

Notifax is a private information agency providing a daily summary of the main news items about Nicaragua that have appeared in that country's newspapers as well as of the main news agencies' releases. Notifax's Internet site contains an archival section covering approximately the last six months. Its home page on the WWW is at the following Internet address: <URL: <http://www.notifax.com>>.

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