

CONTRA LEADERS READY TO GO' TO MANAGUA UNDER PEACE PLAN

By Julia Preston
Washington Post Foreign Service

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Aug. 25—Most of the senior civilian leaders of the Nicaraguan rebels say they are prepared to return from exile to participate in politics in Nicaragua under the terms of a regional peace plan signed Aug. 7 in Guatemala.

"I'm ready and anxious to go," Alfonso Robelo, one of six civilian directors of the Nicaraguan Resistance, the alliance of the U.S.-backed rebels known as contras, said yesterday. The resistance also includes an irregular army of about 10,000 guerrillas.

The contra leaders' willingness to go back to their country confronts the leftist Sandinista government with a tough test as it weighs how to comply with the pact signed by the five Central American presidents. The peace plan calls for each nation to offer an amnesty, so armed rebels can lay down their weapons, and for full pluralistic political freedoms to be established.

In Managua, President Daniel Ortega, in his first gesture towards relaxing Nicaragua's restrictive political environment, announced today that three expelled Roman Catholic clerics will be allowed to return.

Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega and the Rev. Bismarck Carballo, both Nicaraguans and outspoken government critics, were banned in June 1986 after Congress voted \$100 million in contra aid. They have been living in the United States.

The Rev. Benito Pitito, an Italian, was one of 10 priests expelled in October 1984.

The Roman Catholic leader, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, said after meeting with Ortega today in Managua that he also expects the church's radio station will go back on the air in coming weeks. Carballo was the station's director when he was exiled.

Not all of the contras spoke in favor of the amnesty this week. The contras' highest military commander, Enrique Bermudez, said in Honduras that his troops will not accept it and will not lay down their arms.

The resistance's civilian leaders, who plan to meet President Reagan Thursday in California, said they will ask the administration to seek new military aid for contra fighters immediately but to withhold it to see if the Sandinista government lives up to the Central American accord. They also want nonlethal aid to sustain their troops in place in Nicaragua during a cease-fire.

The accord diminished prospects that Congress would approve any new aid for the contras, since the pact signed by the presidents rejects foreign aid to guerrilla groups in the region. But the contras' politicians are seeking to stave off that possibility by publicly accepting the plan and looking for ways to turn it to their political advantage.

Three of six directors have said they are willing to risk a return to Nicaragua: Robelo, Alfredo Cesar and Azucena Ferrey. A fourth member, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, has conditioned his return on the reopening of his family's newspaper, La Prensa, Robelo said. All four



ALFONSO ROBELO
... one of three planning return



PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO
... wants newspaper reopened

were well known for their open participation in politics before they fled their country.

The leaders said they will go back if the Sandinista government revises a current amnesty to include them and to guarantee their security. However, they said they do not intend to break with the resistance and are awaiting a decision by all six members to put their strategy into action.

The other two directors, Adolfo Calero and Aristides Sanchez, are the most conservative and also opposed to contra military operations.

In late September the Social Christian Party, still functioning in Nicaragua, celebrates the 30th anniversary of its founding. Ferrey and another exiled Social Christian who is a member of the resistance,

Jose Davila, are ready to try a brief trip to Managua "to make the first sounding," Davila said.

Robelo and Cesar said they would return after Nov. 7 when the pact's provisions are to take effect, if the Sandinistas make the sweeping democratic changes that it requires and a cease-fire begins.

"The fact that Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega signed this piece of paper to me represents a substantial change," Robelo said. "Maybe he did it without intending to respect it. But we are going to give him the benefit of the doubt."

Cesar said, "We don't need to continue with armed warfare if there is democracy in Nicaragua. We don't believe in using violence just to get power."

Robelo, a member of an early

Sandinista junta and now head of a conservative political party in exile, left Nicaragua in 1982. Cesar, a former head of the Central Bank, also left this year. Ferrey, one of Nicaragua's most prominent opposition activists, left early this year.

Under current conditions the contra leaders face 30 years in jail for sedition.

Some observers suggested the contras could be trying to avoid being isolated by the plan and are banking on the Sandinistas being the first to fail to meet its terms.

"We're at playing tricks," Roberto responded. "But we don't want Daniel Ortega to trick us, either."

Cesar said there had been some "confusion" among contra guerrillas in the field about the peace plan but asserted they were learning to accept it. "We are explaining in detail to them that we will not be disarmed," he said.

Special correspondent Wilson Ring added from Tegucigalpa, Honduras:

Bermudez, whose official title is commander of the northern army of the Nicaraguan Resistance, said, "Amnesty is not for us. We consider ourselves to be peaceful people who were forced to take arms to defend ourselves because we cannot do it as civilians."

"We are going to say we support the peace agreement," Bermudez added in an interview at a contra base camp. "We will talk about a cease-fire, but we will present our own conditions."

The contra military chief spoke on the condition that the camp's location not be revealed. He is one of the top contra leaders scheduled to

meet Thursday with President Reagan. He said the rebels would not consider an amnesty because they have not committed any crimes.

Bermudez said he did not think the other Central American presidents who signed the pact believe the Sandinistas will change.

"President Arias is very interested in having the plan go forward with his name on it. He wants a Nobel Prize. [Guatemalan] President [Vinicio] Cerezo is interested in a Central American parliament. He would pass to immortality," he said.

"But the Nicaraguan people will pay the price. That is not fair. . . . We will take all measures and provisions not to get disarmed. If we don't get the support we need we will fight until the last man. We cannot be sold out for the interests of others," Bermudez said.

Bermudez cited conditions that must be met for the rebels to stop fighting. He called for a cease-fire in place, with rebels allowed to receive food, medicine and other non-lethal supplies. Sandinista troops must be bound by the same restrictions, with no new arms buildup.

Bermudez demanded that all international volunteers helping the Sandinistas leave Nicaragua. He said the Nicaraguan Army must be separated from the Sandinista party, and all local Sandinista block committees must be abolished. The rebels argue that the committees are used to repress the population.

Bermudez said his troops remain committed to their war. "I told them the Guatemala treaty doesn't bring us anything. The war will continue," he said.