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THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA:  
THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE  
AND SECURITY AND PEACE  
INITIATIVES

SECURITY COUNCIL  
Forty-second year

Report of the Secretary-General

1. At the meeting held in Rio de Janeiro on 17 and 18 December 1986, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela, the members of the Contadora Group, and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay, the countries of the Support Group, requested my participation, as well as the participation of the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), in a visit to the five Central American countries, which they had decided to organize as a matter of urgency with a view to resuming their peace initiative.

2. I decided to accept the invitation from the eight Ministers, in view of the rapid deterioration of the situation in the region and the serious threat of an outbreak of hostilities there, and also in the light of Security Council resolutions 530 (1983) of 19 May 1983 and 562 (1985) of 10 May 1985, and General Assembly resolutions 38/10 of 11 November 1983, 39/4 of 26 October 1984 and 41/37 of 18 November 1986. In those resolutions, the Council and the Assembly unanimously expressed their concern at the serious situation in the region and their firm support for the peace initiatives of the Contadora Group, which has had the backing of the Support Group since July 1985; and also requested me to keep them both informed of developments in the situation and the implementation of those resolutions.

3. As reflected in their Rio de Janeiro Communiqué of 18 December, one of the factors leading to the invitation from the eight Ministers for Foreign Affairs was the joint offer of services extended on 18 November 1986 by the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and OAS to the five Central American States and the eight countries of the Contadora Group and the Support Group. That offer, which had been prompted by my growing concern, shared by my OAS counterpart, at the seriousness of

the situation on the isthmus, was designed to bring to their attention the resources available to the two Organizations, with the aim of promoting or, where appropriate, complementing the Contadora peace initiatives.

4. The visit began on 18 January with a preliminary meeting of the eight Ministers for Foreign Affairs in Panama City, a meeting attended by the Secretary-General of OAS and myself. We then visited Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador on 19 and 20 January. In the course of the visit, I was present, together with the Secretary-General of OAS, at discussions between the Presidents and high authorities of the aforementioned countries and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Contadora Group and the Support Group. In addition, I held separate discussions on problems of the region and other matters with each of the heads of State of the respective countries. The mission ended in Mexico City on 21 January, when a Communiqué was issued by the eight Ministers (A/42/98-S/18637).

5. Despite its relatively brief duration, the visit did enable me to make a personal assessment of the situation as a whole, and of the positions of the five Central American Governments, as expressed orally and, in some cases, also in writing, with regard to the ongoing crisis in the region. Those contacts have led me to the realization that the five Governments maintain, with different degrees of emphasis and with nuances, their commitment to the basic principles underlying the Contadora approach.

6. I have, however, noted that this meeting of the minds, which should lay the basis for reactivating the negotiating process, is currently neutralized by other factors such as the growing climate of mistrust between certain States in the area; the impact of factors external to the region; the difficulties which the Parties are having translating their stated desire for peace into specific actions; and the existence of a vicious circle with respect, on the one hand, to the internal democratization process and, on the other, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and of non-use of force. I have also noted that there are objections to resuming the dialogue, which are basically of a purely procedural nature. It is to be hoped that, given the necessary political will, formulas will be found to dispel these and other obstacles to dialogue, which is the basic premise for any effort to bring about peace. Only thus will it be possible to begin to break the vicious circle mentioned above.

7. Under the circumstances, I am pleased by the determination of the eight Governments of the Contadora Group and the Support Group to persevere with their peace efforts, for I remain convinced that there is no fitting alternative to a peaceful, negotiated and regional solution to the Central American conflict.

8. I cannot fail to mention the deep impression made on me by the natural disasters which have befallen the capitals of some of the countries in the region: Managua, much of which was destroyed in 1972, and San Salvador, with its thousands of homeless people and its ruined buildings tumbling into the streets as a result of the recent earthquake. These disasters merely underscore something that was already self-evident: the need to draw up an emergency plan for the reconstruction

and large-scale economic development for the region, which in turn will help facilitate the solution of the political crisis it is undergoing. The recent meeting in Guatemala City between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the European Community or their representatives, and their five Central American colleagues, with the participation of the Foreign Ministers of the Contadora Group is important in that connection.

9. As I had occasion to point out during my discussions with the heads of State of the Central American countries, one of the most painful consequences of the crisis which the area is experiencing is the growing number of refugees in the neighbouring countries. With the co-operation of the countries of asylum, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is providing protection and assistance to over 125,000 refugees and, at the same time, exploring with the countries of origin the possibility of voluntary repatriation for those who wish to return to their homes. Although an overall peace agreement in Central America would clearly help create conditions favourable to the voluntary repatriation of the refugees, it should be possible in the mean time to take steps to improve their living conditions while resisting any temptation to use them for purposes of proselytism or political propaganda and facilitating UNHCR's repatriation operations.

10. Central America is today at a historical cross-roads; it can either choose to overcome suspicions and animosities, which are based on ideological differences that are frequently exaggerated, and work out harmonized strategies to promote the economic and social development of the region or it can choose to continue down the dangerous path leading towards a generalized conflict with fatal consequences for all peoples of the isthmus and unpredictable repercussions on the rest of the continent. I wish to take this opportunity to appeal again to the Central American Governments to join together to seek political solutions to the problems that divide them. I also wish to urge all the other States, above all those with ties to and interests in the region, to facilitate a negotiated solution to the crisis and to join forces to establish a co-ordinated plan of large-scale economic assistance to the five countries in the area.

11. The countries of the isthmus, which have common ethnic, cultural and linguistic roots and a combined population of not more than 25 million, must overcome their differences, however serious they may appear, for they pale by comparison with what historically has been their common enemy: underdevelopment. Overcoming underdevelopment would be the best way to guarantee a just and lasting peace in Central America and also to dispel any security concerns which third parties might have. I, for my part, interpreting the sentiment of the international community as expressed in the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, shall spare no effort to help bring peace and development to that area.

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