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ACTION INL-01

INFO LOG-00 INLB-01 AID-00 ARA-01 ACQ-01 OASY-00 SRPP-00
EB-00 OIGO-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 L-01 ADS-00 DRL-09
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P 242203Z JUL 96
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0545
DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE
FBI WASHDC
NSC WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 9785
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
NDIC JOHNSTOWN PA
SECDEF WASHDC
DEA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY QUITO
CIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
DIRONDCP WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM

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STATE FOR INL, ARA/AND, L/LEI
NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS
ONDCP FOR BILL BOZIN
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEA FOR OF, OFL, OC, AX
JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND NDDS/VAN VLIET
FBI FOR DIV. 6
USIA FOR AR, I/GAR

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TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/01
 TAGS: SNAR, PGOV, PREL, PHUM, PINR, CO
 SUBJECT: PROTESTING COCA GROWERS CONTINUE STAND-OFF

REF: A) BOGOTA 6948 B) BOGOTA 7066

1. CLASSIFIED BY POL/ECONOFF. S.K. ABEYTA. REASON: 1.5(D)

SUMMARY

2. (U) FOLLOWING THE DISPERSAL OF THOUSANDS OF PROTESTING COCA GROWERS FROM THE TOWN OF EL RETORNO (GUAVIARE DEPARTMENT) (REFTELS) JULY 21, TENSION REMAINS HIGH IN THE GUAVIARE FRONTIER TOWN AND COCA TRADING CENTER OF MIRAFLORES. SEVERAL THOUSAND PROTESTERS CONTINUE TO OCCUPY THE MIRAFLORES AIRSTRIP UNDER ORDERS FROM THEIR DESIGNATED STRIKE COMMITTEE. THE TROOP PRESENCE IN AND AROUND MIRAFLORES REMAINS STRONG TO PREVENT A GUERRILLA INCURSION. NEITHER DATE NOR LOCATION HAS BEEN SET FOR

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 INTERIOR MINISTER SERPA'S MUCH-ANTICIPATED MEETING WITH A DELEGATION OF CAMPESINOS REPRESENTING THE PROTESTERS. END SUMMARY.

CAMPESINOS BLOCK ACCESS TO AIRSTRIP IN MIRAFLORES

3. (U) FOLLOWING THE JULY 21 DISPERSAL FROM GUAVIARE TOWN EL RETORNO OF AS MANY AS 17,000 PROTESTERS ORIGINALLY INTENDING TO MARCH ON SAN JOSE AND TAKE THE AIRPORT THERE, THE FOCUS OF TENSION IN GUAVIARE REVERTED TO MIRAFLORES. THERE, ACCORDING TO WILDLY DIFFERING ESTIMATES, SOME 4,000 TO 20,000 CAMPESINOS CONTINUE TO BLOCK ACCESS TO THE TOWN'S AIRSTRIP AND MAIN STREET TO PROTEST GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO CRACK DOWN ON ILLICIT CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING OF COCA IN THE GUAVIARE. FORMING WHAT SOME MEDIA ACCOUNTS DESCRIBED AS A "HUMAN CARPET" AT TIMES COVERING THE AIRSTRIP, PROTESTERS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY BLOCKED PLANES FROM LANDING IN ACCORDANCE WITH ORDERS BY THE CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE SINCE JULY 15. ON JULY 15 AN ATTEMPT TO PREVENT A MILITARY TROOP CARRIER FROM LANDING FAILED WHEN GROUND TROOPS REPORTEDLY FIRED SHOTS INTO THE AIR TO INTIMIDATE THE CROWD. ON JULY 19 A DC-3 NEARLY CRASHED WHEN PROTESTERS DROVE A CAR ONTO ITS PATH AS IT ATTEMPTED TO LAND. THE STRIKE COMMITTEE

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CONFISCATED THE 2,200 KILOS OF FOOD SUPPLIES WHICH THE DC-3 WAS BRINGING IN FOR DELIVERY TO LOCAL MERCHANTS. PROTESTERS REPORTEDLY PREVENTED OTHER UNSPECIFIED AIRCRAFT FROM LANDING DURING THE COURSE OF THE WEEK. THE STRIKE COMMITTEE DID AUTHORIZE A PLANE CARRYING REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN TO LAND ON JULY 23. ACCORDING TO BOGOTA DAILY "EL ESPECTADOR," PROTESTERS ARE REFUSING TO ALLOW THE DEPARTURE OF A LARGE NUMBER OF COCA HARVESTERS WHO WANT TO LEAVE MIRAFLORES. "EL TIEMPO" LIKEWISE

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PICTURED CAMPESINOS WHO HAD INDICATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO BE EVACUATED FROM MIRAFLORES BUT WHO WERE EFFECTIVELY STRANDED BY THEIR PROTESTING COMRADES. RIVER TRAFFIC IS PARALYZED AS WELL FOR LACK OF GASOLINE SINCE THE GOVERNMENT SEVERELY RESTRICTED THE AVAILABILITY OF GASOLINE WHICH IS USED IN THE PROCESSING OF COCA BASE.

COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES DEPLOYED TO PREVENT GUERRILLA INCURSION

4. (U) ACCORDING TO AN "EL TIEMPO" ACCOUNT JULY 24, 1,500 COLOMBIAN ARMY TROOPS OF THE 2ND MOBILE BRIGADE AND THE ANTINARCOTICS POLICE (DANTI) ARE DEPLOYED IN AND AROUND MIRAFLORES TO PREVENT GUERRILLAS FROM OVERRUNNING AND DESTROYING THE TOWN AS THEY DID IN AUGUST 1995. NAVY LAUNCHES ARE REPORTEDLY PATROLLING THE WATERS OF THE VAUPES RIVER ON WHICH MIRAFLORES IS SITUATED. PROTESTERS AND THE GOVERNMENT FORCES ARE AT AN EFFECTIVE STAND-OFF, WITH THE ARMY AND POLICE HOLDING BACK UNTIL SOME ACTION BY THE PROTESTERS PROVOKES A REACTION.

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ACTION INL-01

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DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
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DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE
FBI WASHDC
NSC WASHDC
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NDIC JOHNSTOWN PA
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AMEMBASSY QUITO
CIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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STATE FOR INL, ARA/AND, L/LEI
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DIALOGUE WITH THE GOVERNMENT DELAYED

5. (U) THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED TALKS WITH INTERIOR MINISTER SERPA
HAVE NOT MATERIALIZED. A COMMISSION DESIGNATED BY GUAVIARE
GOVERNOR EDUARDO FLOREZ THAT HAS TALKED WITH CAMPESINO LEADERS
INFORMED THE PRESS THE CAMPESINOS PREFER NOT TO TRAVEL TO BOGOTA
FOR TALKS WITH THE INTERIOR MINISTER. THE HEAD OF THE GOVERNOR'S

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DELEGATION, LUIS BETANCOURT, INFORMED THE PRESS THAT HE WOULD INSIST THAT SERPA COME TO SAN JOSE. BETANCOURT CHARACTERIZED PROTESTERS IN LOCALITIES OTHER THAN MIRAFLORES AND SAN JOSE AS BEING "IN RETREAT" BUT NONETHELESS "ON THE ALERT." THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE IS SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE TO INVESTIGATE REPORTS OF SHOTS FIRED POSSIBLY BY COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES IN EL

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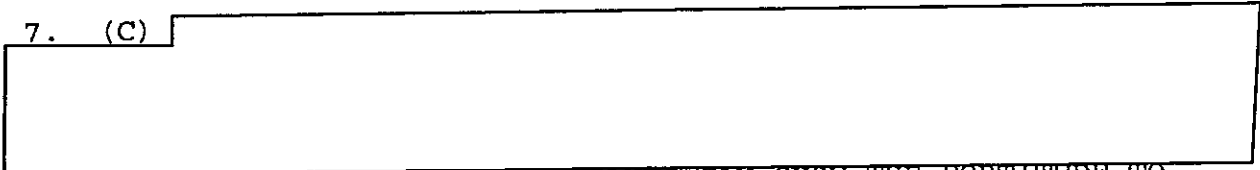
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RETORNO, AND LOCAL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS HAVE BEGUN TO TAKE TESTIMONY FROM THE WOUNDED.

THE CHURCH PUSHES FOR SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

6. (U) MEANWHILE, CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADERS FROM COCA-GROWING REGIONS MET JULY 23 IN BOGOTA WITH HECTOR MORENO, DIRECTOR OF THE GOC'S CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAM KNOWN AS PLANTE. LED BY BISHOP BELARMINO CORREA OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF GUAVIARE, THE PRELATES AGREED TO SUPPORT CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAMS DEVELOPED BY PLANTE. ACCORDING TO THE "EL ESPECTADOR" ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING, THEY AGREED AS WELL TO WORK TO SENSITIZE THE POPULATION TO THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN ILLICIT CROP CULTIVATION. AS A RESULT OF THE TALKS WITH PLANTE, THE CHURCH WILL FORM A COMMISSION TO MONITOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACCORDS WITH PLANTE AND THE END-USERS' GOOD-FAITH USE OF THE RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROVIDED BY PLANTE. BISHOP BELARMINO CORREA, WHO AT ONE TIME ADVOCATED LEGALIZING COCAINE, TOLD "EL ESPECTADOR" THAT COOPERATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OFFERED THE BEST HOPE FOR THE REGION.

COMMENT

7. (C)



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IF THE ARMY AND THE DANTI CAN SHOW THE FORTITUDE TO WEAR THE PROTESTERS DOWN WITH TIME RATHER THAN TO TAKE OFFENSIVE

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ACTION AGAINST THEM, THEY MAY SUCCEED IN SHUTTING MIRAFLORES DOWN. THIS WOULD CRIPPLE COLOMBIA'S CHIEF COCA PRODUCTION CENTER

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AND. WOULD STRIKE AT NARCOTRAFFICKERS AND GUERRILLAS WITH ONE BLOW. IN THE EVENT THAT GUERRILLAS LAUNCH AN ATTACK ON MIRAFLORES, INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE ARMY WOULD COUNTERATTACK WITH COMMENSURATE FORCE THAT WAS LACKING WHEN THE POLICE WERE OVERRUN IN AUGUST 1995. THIS SCENARIO, TOO, WOULD RESULT IN MAJOR DAMAGE TO NARCOTRAFFICKERS AND GUERRILLAS IN GUAVIARE.



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