

# Indian War in Nicaragua, Rivera Peace Initiative

by **Rudolph C. Ryser**

There is a war going on in Central America, and it is a war that will virtually decide the political future of Indian Peoples throughout the Americas. It is a war between the Indian Nations of the Atlantic Coast of Honduras and Nicaragua and the Government of Nicaragua. It is a war that began in 1981 when the Nicaraguan Government sent its military forces to invade the Indian territories of the Miskitu, Sumo and Rama Nations, and the Indian Nations organized their warriors with bows and arrows, machetes, hunting rifles and clubs to defend against the invasion.

The leader of the three Indian Nation coalition organization called MISURASATA, Brooklyn Rivera, came to the Daybreak Star Cultural Center on April 27 and 28 to meet with Indian leaders in Washington State and from Canada to consult with them on the war against Nicaragua and the peace initiative he began last fall. Rivera delivered an address before the Fifth Session of the Conference of Tribal Governments where he explained that the Miskitu, Sumo and Rama Indian Nations had been forced into a war with Nicaragua when the Nicaraguan Government would no longer talk about recognizing Indian political autonomy, Indian land rights and the right of Indian people to live in their homelands as they had for centuries. "When the Nicaraguan army invaded our homelands and our villages," Rivera said "our Indian people could see no other course but to defend our nations by force of arms."

The price being paid by the peoples of Miskitu, Sumo and Rama for defending their nations has been very high, according to Rivera. "Nearly half of our villages have been destroyed by Nicaraguan bombing or they were burned to the ground by Nicaraguan military, and more than one thousand of our civilians and Indian warriors have been killed." The Nicaraguan government destroyed all Indian fishing canoes, confiscated hunting weapons, killed Indian farm animals and set up military installations within Indian territory to prevent Indians from farmings, hunting and fishing. Nicaragua's internal security system was extended into Indian villages to control the distribution of government issued food and to control Indian civilians. Nicaraguan forces have attacked Indian villages to prevent the Indian warriors, the MISURASATA Indian warriors from being supported by Indian village people.

But, despite the Nicaraguan invasion, and despite the burning of villages and the bombing of villages, the MISURASATA Indian warriors have not lost a battle against Nicaraguan military forces in four years. They continue to fight for the defense of their people with the support of their people.

## **A Just Peace and Indian Autonomy**

Rivera told Indian leaders that MISURASATA and its warriors only seek to defend their territory and remove the invading forces from Indian territories. He said that MISURASATA does not seek to overthrow the government of Nicaragua; his coalition organization seeks only to establish normal relations with Nicaragua and secure a "just peace" that ensures the political autonomy of the Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Nations. As a demonstration of this commitment, Rivera began a peace initiative in the Fall of 1984 to arrange peace talks between MISURASATA and the Nicaraguan government. Senator Ted Kennedy assisted MISURASATA by arranging a secret meeting between Rivera and Nicaragua's president Daniel Ortega in New York. That meeting became the basis for the MISURASATA/Nicaragua Autonomy Peace Talks, which began in December with the government of Colombia serving as the host for the talks in Bogota. After three rounds of talks (the most recent was in Mexico City in April) efforts to agree to an accord on principles and establishing a ceasefire have not been successful. Efforts to define the basis for a peace treaty have not been successful.

But, after three rounds of talks, both sides agreed that it would be "helpful to the peace process" if

MISURASATA and the Nicaraguan government could demonstrate their mutual good-faith by agreeing to a limited accord "which deals with immediate and concrete measures". On April 22, negotiators for MISURASATA and the Nicaraguan government agreed to a joint communique and a limited "demonstration of good-faith" agreement which provided for the "humanitarian delivery of food and medicine to Indian villages along the coast" a "reduction in hostilities around those villages to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid" and the "release of all civilian and Indian warrior prisoners" held in Nicaraguan prisons.

On April 29, the Nicaraguan government released Indian prisoners to MISURASATA. At this date no humanitarian aid has been delivered, though Rivera has indicated that hostilities around certain villages appear to have been reduced.

MISURASATA's peace initiative has only just begun to show some concrete results, but it is too early to say if it will be successful. The war goes on, and Indians and Nicaraguans are still being killed. A fourth round of peace negotiations will be conducted in Bogota, Colombia on May 25 and May 26 if the "demonstration of good-faith" is fully realized.

The MISURASATA/Nicaragua Autonomy Peace Negotiations is the only serious effort at peace in Central America. Its success or failure will determine if the Nicaraguan revolution begun in 1979 is successful, if the Miskitu, Sumo and Rama Indian Nations survive and if there is a chance the Indians in the Americas can truly achieve what all strive to achieve: The freedom to choose their own political, economic and social future without the interference of a state or several states who seek to dominate Indian nations. We shall see. Brookly Rivera and MISURASATA, along with Daniel Ortega and the Nicaraguan Government have set the stage for clear alternatives for Fourth World peoples, the indigenous people and Third World peoples, the states struggling for themselves to be free from external control. We shall see.

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