

Defectors diagram ways Managua woos sympathy

By James Morrison
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Defectors from the Sandinista government in Nicaragua say it routinely manipulates some American human rights groups whose allegations of guerrilla atrocities are fueling congressional opposition to U.S. aid for the rebels.

The defectors, who include former high-ranking Sandinistas, say the Nicaraguan government controls the visits of foreign human rights delegations, plants government agents to pose as victims of rebel atrocities and sometimes commits human rights abuses that are blamed on the rebels.

Several of the groups, including the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and Americas Watch, are also listed as sympathetic to Nicaragua's ruling communist Sandinista Party in a new book, called the "Big Red Diary," published by the London-based Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign.

WOLA and Americas Watch representatives said the listing of their organizations in the book was unauthorized. They also deny that any of their reports were manipulated by the Sandinista government.

The Sandinistas financed one human rights report that was later presented in Washington as independent research, the defectors said.

The influence of the groups, which recently have focused more on charges of rebel atrocities than on government human rights abuses, was evident in Sunday's Democratic response to President Reagan's speech urging \$100 million in military and humanitarian aid for the rebels.

Tennessee Sen. Jim Sasser, who delivered the televised Democratic response, said Sandinista atrocities "pale beside those of the Contras which tragically are being subsidized by your tax dollars."

Alvaro Jose Baldizon Aviles, perhaps the best-known Sandinista defector, told The Washington Times that the Sandinistas "consider several human rights organizations to be docile and able to be manipulated. Logically they work best with organizations that are in solidarity with the Sandinistas."

A former high-ranking official in the Interior Ministry, Mr. Baldizon has told the State Department that when a delegation wants to visit certain areas, the police lock up people who might speak out against the government and frequently send special government teams to pose as victims of rebel abuses.

Interior Ministry agents also infiltrate some visiting delegations by posing as photographers or reporters for pro-Sandinista newspapers. The government agents monitor the groups' activities, Mr. Baldizon said.

Alberto Gamez Ortega, the former penal prosecutor and vice minister of justice, said, "The organizations promoting respect for human rights, whose representatives come to Nicaragua in order to investigate human rights abuses, are admirably manipulated by the Ministry of Justice."

Mr. Ortega, who appeared earlier this week at a White House forum on Nicaragua, told of his defection and of Sandinista abuses in a statement given to the newly established human rights commission of the United Nicaraguan Opposition, the umbrella group of anti-Sandinista rebels.

Visits of human rights groups are "scheduled for selected places such as the Open Structure Penitentiary System in the agricultural farms or to certain prisons which show only what they wish to be known. Visitors are not shown El Chipote, the punishment cells or the clandestine cells."

Wesley Smith, an independent researcher, said in a new report on Sandinista abuses, that inmates of El Chipote, which contains mostly political prisoners, are severely brutalized, systematically tortured and kept in tiny, dark punishment cells.

Mr. Ortega also implied that Juan Mendez, Washington director of Americas Watch, received special

treatment when he visited the capital of Managua to investigate human rights abuses.

Another defector, Mateo Jose Guerrero, who served as director of the Sandinista human rights organization, said that he was ordered to "take charge" of Mr. Mendez, "providing him with a car and arranging his interviews with government entities."

Mr. Mendez said the help he received involved only arranging interviews with government officials so he could bring human rights abuses to their attention.

Another defector, Bayardo de Jesus Payan, former finance officer for the government human rights commission, testified before Congress last year that he was ordered to pay the expenses of a human rights team in 1984 and provide them with office space.

The report later formed the basis of a follow-up investigation by WOLA and the International Human Rights Law Group and is cited as evidence of rebel abuses in the latest WOLA report.

Mr. Payan said the Sandinista government "manages and controls all contact with the international press and foreign visitors who come to Nicaragua, making them believe that abuses are committed only by the rebels and that the government is a model of respect for freedom and rights of the citizens."

The new WOLA report was conducted by what critics charge is a pro-Sandinista, quasi-religious

group called Witness For Peace. Many of the report's researchers live in Nicaragua.

Seven of the researchers on the WOLA report were members of a Witness For Peace team that claimed it was kidnapped by rebel forces last year. The peace activists deliberately sailed boats into a war zone as a protest and knew beforehand they were endangering themselves. Witness For Peace members have said in various interviews.

The new report lists their capture as an example of a rebel atrocity. But other investigators have revealed that the stretch of the San Juan River that divides Nicaragua from Costa Rica was under Nicaraguan army control, not rebel control, during their voyage.

Alejandro Bolanos, president of the Nicaraguan Information Center in St. Charles, Mo., quoted Sandinista-owned newspapers to show that the Nicaraguan army had driven rebels out of the area and that the point where the protesters were captured, the Machuca Rapids, had been "under total and absolute Sandinista control since early June," two months before the protest.