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Corruption discussed during visit to Finland of Nicaraguan President. Tuesday 22.10.2002

Corruption was one of the main themes of discussion when Nicaraguan President **Enrique Bolaños** met with President **Tarja Halonen** on Monday. Bolaños is in Finland on a working visit from Sunday to Wednesday.

In Monday's press conference, Bolaños openly blamed his predecessors for Nicaragua's current problems. Bolaños has headed the country, the poorest in Central America, since the beginning of this year. He mentioned corruption as one of the most important reasons for his country's plight, with the majority of the population suffering from malnutrition.

Nicaragua is largely dependent on foreign financial aid. Bolaños commented that despite receiving billions of dollars of aid over the past twenty years, Nicaragua and many of her people are faring only worse, as the aid has been misused.

Bolaños's predecessor **Arnaldo Alemán** has been charged with fraud and misuse of public funds. However, as the current National Assembly president, Alemán enjoys immunity. Bolaños expressed his confidence in Alemán eventually standing trial.

The possible direct budget aid that Finland could give to Nicaragua was also discussed in Bolaños's meeting with Halonen.

Second Minister of Finance **Suvi-Anne Siimes**, who is responsible for development cooperation, stated that a direct injection of two million euros into the Nicaraguan budget could be possible, if Finnish experts can be certain that the aid will reach its target. Finland's primary goal is to alleviate poverty.

Finland's current practices do not include direct budget aid, but according to Siimes, a change in this policy would signify that Finland is confident the current Nicaraguan government is taking the battle against corruption seriously.

Halonen observed that she is glad the Central American states have begun to emphasise the importance of integration.

In a separate radio interview on Monday, President Halonen commented that there is currently no need to discuss a referendum on NATO membership, as Finland has not yet decided to apply for membership in the alliance.



Tarja Halonen



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Speech by the President of the Republic of Finland at a dinner in honour of the President of Nicaragua on 22 October 2002

Señor Presidente, when Finns visit your beautiful country, they are struck by the way in which people know how to enjoy life in the middle of everyday problems. Nicaraguans' singing and rhythmic dancing are captivating, and dance is a key part of present Nicaraguan culture. The well-known Spanish chronicler Fernández de Oviedo talked about this same thing already when he described the culture of the Nicarao tribe, which arrived from Mexico and settled along the Pacific coast of present-day Nicaragua in the late 15th century.

In a similar way, reciting poetry has played a key role in Finnish folk culture. The finest example of this is the Kalevala, our national epic collected by Elias Lönnroth.

The tribes of Nicaragua were also praised for their crafts. "The black ceramic dishes are smooth as velvet and would make a good gift for a prince," notes Oviedo, who even took some with him to Santo Domingo. The Güetares in the east were known for goldsmith skills.

In Finland crafts and design are still very strong. In the Kalevala the smith Ilmarinen fashioned the Sampo, a kind of magic mill which produced meal, salt and money out of nothing. Real craftsmanship and industrial design!

The Chorotegas and Nicaraos had their own writing system and wrote books with black and red ink on long sheets of parchment about the width of a hand which were folded into books. Trails, forests and rivers were also carefully marked in these. The assumption is that they wanted to be ready for future conflicts. Between friends, however, we can draw the conclusion that descriptions of nature were an early proof of the Nicaraguans' poetic turn of mind.

We are all familiar with the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, who revived poetry in Spanish and whose influence also extended to France. From an early age Darío turned his gaze to Europe, where he spent many years later on. I am glad that Darío's heritage is kept alive in today's Nicaragua and that the field of vision has been expanded and now reaches us here in the North.

The Nordic countries understood early on that culture is not just for a small upper class but for the whole nation. Folk art has an important place alongside monument building and high culture. It is also essential for social equality that everyone receives an education - Educación para todos! As a member of the European Union Finland is striving to promote these values: the right to education and the right to culture. Within the EU Finland can work more effectively for the things it considers worthwhile.

I believe that Nicaragua is in a similar situation with regard to its neighbours. Small countries can make themselves heard better in a group; there is strength in cooperation. The countries of Central America began the process of integration a long time ago, before the countries of Europe, but cooperation has run into obstacles. I hope that these obstacles can be overcome and that the region can enjoy the fruits of integration, stability and economic prosperity.

I am especially glad that the European Union and the countries of Central America will at the beginning of next year start negotiating a political agreement to deepen cooperation between these two regions. This was agreed at the summit in Madrid last May, which we both attended.

In Finland it is often said that the world has become one big village as a result of globalisation. The people of this



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village now have more contacts with one another and their welfare is increasingly dependent of the welfare of others. Threats such as environmental pollution and international terrorism are shared by all of us. We also share opportunities for a better life.

In this global village it is important that the rules of cooperation are clear and just. Every house must have a firm foundation. Democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law provide a sustainable foundation for building one's own house and cooperating with others.

Yesterday and today we have talked a great deal about the need for good governance and especially the fight against corruption. Corruption can destroy a house and a nation. Corruption always hurts the poor and the weak most of all.

Finland is striving through its own measures to reduce poverty in the world, including Nicaragua. The purpose of our assistance is to help and strengthen your country so that it can build a better future for itself. You have said during this visit that what you need is a fishing rod rather than fish. This is also the purpose of our aid: to help Nicaragua and its people take care of themselves.

Although our countries are far from each other, we have more connecting factors than one might imagine. Our populations are roughly equal and we have both been through difficult times. Consequently we understand the significance of peace in a concrete way. Both countries want to promote peace and international cooperation. Peace is also a precondition for a flourishing culture. Resources invested in culture and education are, in our opinion, the fastest way to development.

We have much in common and yet I must say that I like Nicaragua particularly because we are so different! You are outgoing and know how to enjoy everyday pleasures, while we here in the North are reserved and sometimes melancholy. We can learn a lot from each other, and this is the secret of the friendship between our nations.

Mr President, I would like to thank you for the honour you have accorded me and propose a toast to you and to the people of Nicaragua.