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Nicaragua: Sandinistas, MISURASATA and the Rights of the Miskitos,  
Sumus and Ramas

Historical Background

Before 1513, when the Spanish explorer Nunez de Balboa entered Central America, the region was wholly occupied by indigenous nations including the Maya and the peoples now known as the Miskitos, Sumas and Ramas. For about 150 years the Spanish established colonies and companies among the original inhabitants, enslaving many to suit the economic needs of the various settlements. The Spanish claimed the aboriginal territories as their own without other European interference until 1678 when, after a decade of colonial exploration in the region by the British, their buccaneers established a settlement in what is now Belize. In that year the British proclaimed a "quasi-protectorate" over the "Miskito" peoples located on a coastal strip running from what is now the northern coast of Honduras to the present day boundary between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The Miskitos (the present name is a corruption of "musket" so applied because the aboriginal population helped the buccaneers "run muskets and other weapons" in support of British attacks on the Spanish who were working to remove the British presence from the East coast of Central America). By "formal treaty," <sup>in Jamaica,</sup> the British Crown agreed to protect the Miskitos from attacks by the Spanish and insure Miskito sovereignty over their traditional territory. "The reserve territory of the Miskitos" was ruled by a series of Miskito kings for 216 years until 1894 when Spanish Nicaragua invaded Miskito territory and asserted dominion and control. Until this time ~~the~~ the Miskito "protectorate" had lived in quiet coexistence with Nicaragua (which had achieved independence from Spain in 1821). Jose Santos Zelaya, President of Nicaragua at the time, directed the invasion

of the Miskito protectorate. From 1894 to the present day all succeeding Nicaraguan governments have claimed the "Miskito Protectorate" as a part of Nicaragua. (Indeed some Miskito Occupied territory in Honduras to the north remains a contested area). Zelaya's rein as President was a period during which great wealth and control over plantations was concentrated in the hands of the President and his associates. <sup>PP</sup> When two American (U.S.) adventurers were executed by Zelaya's private police in 1909 the United States used this event as the reason to intervene diplomatically and <sup>militarily</sup> ~~militarily~~ into Nicaragua's internal affairs. Zelaya left the country to become an exile-leaving the country in a state of "near-anarchy" and economic depression. From 1909 to 1933 the United States <sup>literally</sup> ~~literally~~ governed Nicaragua and controlled every part of its economy. It was during this time that the British completely withdrew its political influence in connection with the Miskito Protectorate in recognition of the United State's dominating influence in the Region. The United States claimed that its "Manifest Destiny" included all of Central America with particular emphasis being placed on what would become the Panama Canal, and U.S. concessions (agreed to with the Nicaraguan Government; for the right to build a future canal through the area which now includes the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican boundary). The Miskito and their friends the Sumus, and Ramas were lost in the "gunboat diplomacy" of the United States and the weakening power of the United Kingdom.

<sup>PP</sup> Since the turn of the century, the Miskitos have sought to maintain a distance from the various Nicaraguan governments (centered in the West; <sup>at managua</sup>) through efforts of accomadations and <sup>(SP)</sup> please for their idenpendence. The Miskitos, Sumus and Ramas had not politically participated in the Nicaraguan governments until <sup>shortly after</sup> ~~they were invited~~ to do so following <sup>the</sup> July 20, 1979 establishment of the Sandinista

junta. It was as a part of the MISURASATA coalition (Miskito, Sumo, Rama, Sandinista Asla Takanka Wayah, Mayangna, Rama Bandino Balma Karahk, and Aslah Kalahna PacPa Sumukitna Rama Sanino Umusik) which was formed shortly after the junta assumed governmental control, that the Miskito became participants in the Nicaraguan Government.

*Tribal political neutrality toward Nicaragua's system had been altered.*

During the period of 1933 to 1979 the following chronology of events occurred to contribute to the present political circumstances surrounding the Miskito, Sumu and Rama peoples:

1933: After nearly 21 years, U.S. Marines occupying Nicaragua are withdrawn. To ensure stability the United States trains, equips and structures the Nicaraguan National Guard. Its first commander, hand-picked by the U.S. ambassador, is ~~the current Nicaraguan President's younger brother~~, Anastasio Somoza Garcia. General Augusto César Sandino, refuses continuing involvement of US in Nicaraguán internal affairs, carries out guerrilla attacks to oust US presence. "Regarded ~~as the~~ by many Nicaraguans as their sincerest patriot, Sandino was applauded by Latin Americans generally, who took pious satisfaction in the 'bandit' who eluded the American marines,

1934: After Sandino had finally laid down his arms, he was treacherously shot by officers of the guardia. His death removes the last armed obstacle to the establishment of dictatorial rule by whom-ever controls the "nonpartisan" National Guard.

1936: A suspect election ratifies the inevitable: Somoza Garcia assumes the presidency and remains commander-in-chief of the National Guard. Civilian politicians appeal ~~to~~ the United States to reinstate a democratic process, but to no avail.

1937: Somoza gradually extends his power by putting many essential state services--including postal, communications, and customs--under command of his National Guard. Control of these enterprises enables Somoza to establish a lucrative spoils system for his top officers, thus assuring their support.

1947: Strong internal opposition, combined with U.S. political and diplomatic pressure after years of indulgence, force Somoza not to run for reelection. His successor surprises everyone by trying to "truly act as president." After less than one month Somoza -- who still controls the Guard -- stages a coup and installs an uncle as provisional president. Miskito, Sumu and Rama populations are largely ignored except for their cheap labor. The benefits from coffee and sugar exports are controlled by Somoza and a number of top officers in the guardia. Political power and control over area's agricultural economy is further consolidated in the west. Miskitos accommodate Somoza as long as there is no direct government intervention into Atlantic coastal tribal affairs.

1951: Absorbed by the "Cold War" with Russia, the United States does not ~~participate~~ as Somoza regains the presidency. He uses two tactics that become fixtures of Nicaraguan politics: fraudulent elections overseen by the guardia and political pacts between ruling economic and political/military families.

1954 - 1957: <sup>x</sup> Somoza Garcia is assassinated in the town of Leon. His eldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, is immediately designated president. Using the same family political structure ----

1. Somoza exploits U.S. fears over ostensible communist subversion in Central and South America. He demonstrates his allegiance by allowing the US CIA to operate from Nicaragua during its successful effort to overthrow a democratically elected "progressive" government in Guatemala. In return Nicaragua receives more U.S. military aid per capita than any other Central American or South American country.

----Somoza Debayle is elected to a full term in 1957. General Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the second eldest son and a West Point graduate, assumes command of the National Guard.

1961: Nicaragua is again used as a CIA staging ground, this time in an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro, but the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba fails. The CIA relies heavily on monitoring points located in Miskito territory -- particularly at the strategic village of Puerto Cabezas -- and the northeastern coast which is located a short distance from the southern coast of Cuba. Nicaraguan presence in Miskito territory (along with US CIA and other US military) increases Miskito concerns and minor clashes begin to emerge. Cuban revolutionary successes inspire the belief that Miskitos can regain control over their territory.

1962: Followers of opponents to US presence in Nicaragua begin to organize. Miskito opposition to Somoza Nicaraguan presence in Miskito territory builds. Miskito demand that their rights to their territories be respected. Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is formed in Havana and receives money, arms and training from Castro. An increase in U.S. military (counter-insurgency) aid helps the Guard inflict heavy losses on the FSLN, which fails to attract much active support among the populace. Cuban backing wanes. *Miskitos begin to organize local land rights organizations - Somoza nationalizes some Miskito lands and resources*

1967: Miskito, Sumu and Rama organize public demonstrations and while other Nicaraguan public demonstrations are put down violently by the Guard. The highest military and civilian posts are once again combined, this time in the person of General Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Miskito opposition leaders discuss collaboration with the FSLN. A major condition of agreement is that Miskito territory will be ruled by Miskitos as a separate state with representation in a new government once Anastasio Somoza is overthrown. *Miskito tribal meetings are disrupted by the Guardia - leaders arrested as separatists.*

1972 As his term in office ends, Somoza negotiates another pact with the established opposition including elements of the FSLN to "share the presidency." Somoza still remains commander-in-chief of the National Guard. The triumvirate rules until December, when an earthquake demolishes the commercial center of

*the first nation wide tribal organization Alpromisk*

*separatists.*

Managua. More than 18,000 persons are dead and 170,000 more are left homeless. The National Guard assumes control during the state of emergency. More than \$170 million in food, medical supplies and reconstruction aid arrives. The supplies first go to members of the guardia and their families, and what is left of the damaged goods is sold to the poor.

1973 - 1974: European donors eventually cut off funds, convinced that earthquake aid is being mismanaged and diverted to Somoza and wealthy families. Somoza, rules by decree and his cronies engage in unprecedented speculation, blackmarketeering and other corruption during the slow rebuilding of Managua. Somoza runs for a second presidential term with little or no opposition. A few Sandinistas shock the country and Somoza by holding several members of the regime hostage with demands for \$1 million in ransom, and the release of some FSLN prisoners and free passage on a flight to Cuba. Somoza accepts the conditions and subsequently declares a "state of siege." Many Miskito leaders have acquiesced to Somoza. some opposition still remains in abeyance.

1975 - 1976: US increases military aid to the Somoza Regime by 100 percent. Somoza counter attacks against the Sandinistas and a wave of country-wide repression commences. The press is censored and scores of persons allegedly sympathetic to the Sandinistas are arrested including a few Miskitos. Many Miskitos are murdered and buried in mass graves. The Sandinistas suffer heavy losses including the death of their founder, Carlos Fonseca Amador. To preserve Miskito, Sumu and Rama communities tribal leaders affirm their support of the Somoza Regime, while some Miskitos individually support the Sandinista insurgents.

1977: Efforts are made in the US Congress to cut off military aid to the Somoza regime after Catholic bishops in Nicaragua accuse the National Guard of "humiliating and inhuman treatment ranging from torture and rape to summary execution." Many Miskitos --referred to as peasants--are described in this denunciation as having been targets. The military aid attempts fail in part because the Carter administration opposes the cut-off and Somoza hires a public relations firm to lobby in Washington against it.

Confident that the Sandinistas have been eliminated as a threat Somoza lifts martial law in September. In October a reinvigorated Sandinista organization attacks five guardia outposts. These attacks mark the emergence of the Insurreccional Tendency, a faction which advocates unifying all forces opposed to Somoza regardless of class. Important elements of the Miskito, Sumu and Rama communities have won agreement with the Sandinistas that their territory will be under their rule following the overthrow of Somoza. Miskito communities are somewhat fragmented, but overwhelmingly support efforts to remove Somoza and his regime.

1978: Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a newspaper editor and prominent opposition leaders, is assassinated and spontaneous riots erupt throughout the country, including towns and villages in Miskito territory. Business leaders call for a nationwide strike to last until Somoza submits his resignation. While about 80% effective the strike fails to force Somoza's resignation. Business leaders privately appeal to the United States to ease Somoza out which it refuses to do. Instead the Carter administration calls for a "dialogue" between Somoza and the opposition. The number of

Miskitos and Nicaraguans who rally in support of the Sandinistas and reject U.S. intervention, ~~increases.~~

After months of sporadic violence throughout Nicaragua and Miskito territory the BSLN seizes the National Palace, taking 1500 hostages. Somoza is embarrassed and forced to allow the Sandinistas safe passage to Panama and "thousands of Nicaraguans cheer the procession to the airport!" Strikes and mass violence erupts in the largest cities. Hundreds of persons, particularly teen-age boys, are summarily executed by the National Guard. The Carter Administration cuts off all military aid.

1978: Under the auspices of the Organization of American States the Carter Administration arranges talks to bring an end to the crisis, but the administration's aim is to prevent any takeover that includes the FSLN. FSLN delegates walk out of the negotiations, leaving the largely discredited representatives of the traditional opposition to negotiate with Somoza. Somoza uses the time of negotiations to rearm and regroup his forces with aid from some South American countries like Argentina and the purchase of black-market military hardware. Private gun runners are selling weapons and other armaments from Florida, Honduras and Costa Rica. Many of the armaments originate with Israel, Brazil, United States, West Germany, the Soviet Union and are sold through private concerns on the blackmarket.

1979: Negotiations between Somoza and the traditional opposition collapse and Somoza vows to serve out his full term. By March both sides are preparing for another round of fighting. The FSLN announce unification of all factions under a joint command, and committees of defense in every major city prepare for war. A Provisional government representing FSLN factions is formed in Costa Rica. The Sandinistas launch their "final offensive" with the result that their forces controlled 20 cities and virtually all of the countryside by June. The Organization of American States calls for Somoza's resignation, and five Central and South American countries including Costa Rica ~~call~~ break diplomatic relations with the Regime. The US abandons its opposition to FSLN participation in a new government but attempts to dictate changes in the provisional junta that has been formed in Costa Rica. US intervention delays Somoza's departure and prolongs the war for weeks. Somoza is finally forced to flee the country. His successor refuses at first to resign in favor of the new government; he finally relents under intense pressure from US Ambassador, but not until the National Guard disintegrates in confusion. The forces of the FSLN enter Managua, followed by the provisional government on July 20. During the weeks and months that followed a new constitution was formulated which included participation in the government for elected officials representing each of the departments. The Miskitos, Sumus and Ramas were to be represented through a coalition organization created under the constitution with the acronym MISURASATA.

## Demographics of the reserve Territory of the Miskitos

The boundaries of the Miskito Reserve Territory are the same as the Department of Zelaya which makes up about 2/3 of the entire area of Nicaragua which has an area of 57,143 square miles. Miskito territory (not including parts of Honduras) contains about 30,000 square miles-- an area about the size of the state of Indiana.

The Miskito's territory has a population of about 200,000 people. One hundred-twenty thousand people are Miskitos, 10,000 are Sumus, 1,000 are Ramas, 58,000 are descendents of Arawaks, Africans and Antillians; and 30,000 are mestizos. The indigenous populations live in 250 communities ~~from the~~ all along the coastal strip and toward the interior up to the mountains

According to MISURASATA statistics provided in 1981 only 13% of the Miskito, Sumu, Arawak/African/Antillian, and Rama population are literate. Native languages are spoken within each group though the majority speak English or Spanish or both. Most of the indigenous communities have subsistence economies dependent on agriculture and fishing.

The principle agricultural products produced in the Miskito Territory include bananas, cotton, fruit and yucca. Shellfish, turtles, and assorted ocean going and freshwater fish are taken. Large deposits of gold, silver, and oil are located in the northern part of the territory while soft and hard wood forests cover the tropical plains.

### Village organization:

The 250 indigenous villages and towns are each organized with a two tier decision making structure. The older people are heads of families or family groupings. It is the older people who hold the principle decision making power. The influence of these people over community affairs is both significant and wide ranging. The "educated" young (ranging in age from about 25 to 35 years) are the most active in external political organization and deal with Nicaraguan officials. Education of the few had given rise to suspicion about their motives among villagers and the more traditional elements of the communities. The younger educated members of various communities have tended to play an active role in the "liberal/conservative" politics of the Nicaraguans while the older, more traditional people have tended to occupy themselves with community and family politics.

### MISURASATA: Its relationship to communities and the Sandinista Junta

Following the assumption of power by the Sandinista Junta on July 20, 1979 the Miskito, Sumu and Rama leadership demanded a political role in the new government. This demand was in keeping with earlier understandings made between Sandinista (FSLN) organizers and Miskito activists in the years before the overthrow of Anastasio Somoza. Within months following assumption of governmental control, the Sandinista leadership agreed to authorize the creation of a Miskito, Sumu and Rama coalition organization MISURASATA which would have one representative who would sit in the legislative assembly of the new government. MISURASATA would function as the social, economic and political link between the new government and the villages of Zelaya. MISURASATA announced its goals to include the social, economic

and cultural development of the indigenous peoples of the department of Zelaya. MISURASATA was structured to include five administrative regions as follows: Northeast ~~Region~~ Region, headquartered in Puerto Babezas; Rio Coco Region, headquartered in Waspan; Mine Region, headquartered in Rosita; South Region, headquartered in Bluefields; and Raudale Region, headquartered in Raiti. representatives from each of the 250 indigenous villages participated in the organization through each of the regional administrative units. Until February 1981 Steadman Fagoth Muller was the principle leader of MISURASATA.

The international Relations coordinator of the organization (as of February 18, 1981) was Norman Cambell Smith. Armond Rojas Smith was the representative from the Miskito Territory to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples until he was removed in the Fall of 1980.

The roots of MISURASATA can be found <sup>in</sup> the establishment of local Indian organizations along the Coco River in the early 1960s. In 1967 the first national Indian organization, ALPROMISU, was formed to protect "the Indians' right to land and natural resources" against the moves toward "nationalization" of Indian lands and natural resources by the Anastasio Somoza regime. Before the 1960s the principle external presence in the Atlantic coastal region of the Miskitos was United States timber and mining companies. The most recent of these companies was the U.S. Nicaragua Longleaf Pine Lumber Company (NIPCO) which opened large-scale lumbering activities on extensive pine forests in northeast Zelaya Department. Within a few short years the pine forests were completely depleted, and plans for reforestation were dropped by the company in favor of paying a higher export tax to the Somoza regime. Indians were removed from the now depleted forest ranges giving rise to complaints against the Somoza regime by the Indian population. *Somoza "nationalized" these lands and forests.* Alpromisu was formed to reverse the adverse impact of Somoza's nationalization programs inside Indian territories. Charging Alpromisu with anti-government activities, separatism, regionalism and associating with foreign enemies Somoza's guardia frequently disrupted Alpromisu meetings and frequently jailed Alpromisu officials. During the intervening years until 1979, Indian leaders continued to demand that Indian land rights be preserved and that the Nicaraguan government of Somoza not attempt to extend its economic and political authority over Indian territories. *After 20 July* 1979 Miskitos, Sumu and Rama leaders were unwilling to give up their local organizations so they replaced Alpromisu with a new national organization called MISURASATA (which means: Miskito, Sumu, Rama and Sandinistas working together). Through MISURASATA the new government began to promote opportunities for bilingual education, agricultural assistance and representation within the Sandinista Council of State. In August of 1980 the Sandinista Junta announced new plans for nationalizing lands on the Atlantic Coast. MISURASATA quickly obtained the Council of State's approval to postpone any nationalization until Indian land claims were settled. In September of 1980 MISURASATA obtained a grant of funds from the US based organization, Cultural Survival, for a study of Indian community land rights on the Atlantic Coast. The research was completed in January 1981 and was submitted to the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), the National Institute of Natural Resources and the Environment (IRENA), the National Forestry Institute (CORFOB) and the Nicaraguan Institute of Mines (CONDEMINA).

These organizations were responsible for helping to determine the nature and extent of the Indian communities' rights to natural resources.

MISURASATA's efforts to protect Indian land rights and a degree of community control have been interpreted by non-Indian Nicaraguans as evidence of the (historical antipathy of the Miskitos toward Nicaragua's Spanish speaking population. Nicaraguans have charged the Miskitos as being racist and separatist and therefore a threat to the revolution. As some indigenous observers and others have noted: the Miskito reaction to the proposed nationalization of their lands and resources was not a product of some historic opposition to "Spaniards" but rather, "it was a response to a perceived threat against their subsistence security and their status as equals in relations with nation-states."

As MISURASATA worked to ensure Indian community rights to land and natural resources in January of 1981 accusations of racism, separatism and an incipient regional revolt became more widely heard. In February 1981, such accusations led to the arrest of 33 MISURASATA leaders by the Nicaraguan security forces.

In Mid-May Steadman Faith Muller, who was arrested along with other MISURASATA officials, was released from prison and fled to Honduras where he was joined by an estimated 3,000 Miskitos. During the Summer of 1981, the Sandinista Government declared the "integration of the Atlantic Coast a priority." The Sandinistas have now apparently made new efforts to work with the new provisional leadership of MISURASATA to reduce tensions with the Indian populations. In December of 1981 the Sandinista Government made efforts to secure international support for their efforts with the Miskitos by requesting support of their revolution from organizations like the International Indian Treaty Council and The World Council of Indigenous Peoples. The ITC announced its public support for the Sandinista Junta while the WCIP offered no public comment either in opposition or support.

In late December 1981 reports were circulated in the international press stating that the Sandinista government had sent troops across the border into Honduras to disrupt "anti-revolutionary" training camps set up by former members of Somoza's guardia. Some of the reports indicated, though not confirmed, that five hundred Miskitos were killed before the Sandinista forces withdrew.

Newspaper reports in January and February of 1982 within the United States showed increased interest in relations between the Miskitos and the Sandinista Junta. This interest was in part due to two stories developing in Nicaragua and in the United States. On February 10 there was a report that the Sandinista Junta "resettled" between 8,500 to 10,000 Miskitos from the northeastern part of Zelaya Department (in the area of Puerto Cabezas to camps toward the interior. The Sandinistas released a statement saying that resettlement was necessary to protect the tribal members from raids and assaults being initiated by former Somoza Guards located across the border in Honduras. Reports that the MISURASATA Organization released a communique on February 14 stating that the Indians had been subjected to "armed aggressions by counterrevolutionary bands and that 31 communities had been burned have not been confirmed.

On February 26th newspaper reports described Stedman Fagoth Muller as having traveled to Washington D.C. to conferr with US State Department officials and present testimony before a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee and the House International Affairs subcommittee. Fagoth charges the Sandinista Junta with committing grave humanrights violations against the Miskitos saying in part that, Indians are being "murdered, burned and buried alive" by government troops. Fagoth further alledged that the Sandinista Junta "have viciously attacked these Indian tribes, killing many." He further stated to a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations that Miskito anti-government activity had "started when the Sandinistas first took power.

Elliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights stated on February 25th that troops of the Sandinista regime have "viciously attacked these Indian tribes, killing many." Abrams was quoted as having agreed with Fagoths reports in news conferences on the 26th of February.

Upon the occasion of a meeting with Nicaragua's new ambassador to the United States, Francisco Fiallos Navarro, Ronald Reagan condemed Nicaraguan policies toward the Miskitos and scolded the Sandinistas for "inviting alien influences and philosophies into the hemisphere."

During the week ending March 5 newspapers and electronic media in the United States were reporting, with greater intensity, charges against the Sandinistas being ~~levelled~~ leveled by Fagoth.

Secretary of State Haig, the US President and Assistant Secretary Abrams have become increasingly vocal about the situtation of the Miskitos -- largely based on remarks made by Fagoth.

# Tribal Rights Focus: Miskito, Sumu and Rama

## Summary Analysis:

The Miskito, Sumu and Rama populations have had a long history of relative isolation from Nicaraguan and Central American politics until the period beginning twenty years ago. The Miskitos have been a dominant force on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras and Nicaragua for more than three hundred years operating during the majority of the time as a protectorate of Britain and a semi-autonomous state from 1909 until 1961. As a fiercely independent people, they have ward off attempts by the British, Spanish and the Nicaraguans to encroach upon their territory. But, during the 1960s Nicaragua made its first attempt to extend political power over the use of Miskito land and natural resources. Anastasio Somoza attempted to "nationalize" Miskito lands and certain natural resources--- a move which was roundly opposed by Miskito leaders. To counter Somoza's nationalization policies Miskitos formed local community organizations in 1963 to push for tribal land and natural resource rights. The first national indigenous organization ~~was~~, ALPROMISU, was established in 1967 for the purpose of promoting Indian land and natural resource rights. Somoza countered the Indigenous organization by charging that it was racist and separatist in its policies. He sought to forcibly disrupt the organization through arrests of Indian leaders and intimidation by the guardia.

MISURASATA, the successor organization of Alpromisu, has attempted to pursue the same <sup>tribal rights</sup> policies under the Sandinista Regime which was established in 1979. Miskito leaders were charged with being racist and separatist by the Sandinistas, and in ~~February~~ February of 1981 the organizations leaders were jailed as counter-revolutionaries.

The controversy between MISURASATA and the Sandinista Regime has recently become a political football in the intensified propaganda "war" between the United States and Nicaragua. This has come about in large measure as a result of public statements made by Stedman Fagoth Muller, the former head of MISURASATA ~~who~~ who has lived in exile in Honduras since the Spring of 1981. Fagoth has aligned himself with former Somoza National Guardsmen in Honduras, Guatemala, California and Florida. His comments in the United States have, as a consequence, been given wide press coverage and extensive attention by US officials.

Since 1894 the Miskito, Sumus and Rama peoples have been caught in the midst of Nicaraguan political intrigues. Their historic practice has been to ignore the political conflicts between land owners, generals and politicians as long as these controversies did not touch on indigenous interests and concerns. The Miskito population is now caught in a much wider web of political intrigue involving the "protectionist" maneuvers of the United States in the Caribbean and Central America and the "revolutionary" activities of the Sandinista Regime.

The policies and practices of the Sandinista government ~~are not~~ toward the indigenous populations of the Atlantic Coast are not markedly different from the predecessor governments of Somoza and Jose Santos Zelaya. Unlike predecessor governments, the Sandinistas are attempting to develop an "assimilationist" ~~policy~~ social policy (characterized by bilingual language programs and agricultural technical assistance programs) combined with efforts aimed at "integrating the Atlantic Coast as a priority." Like

Anastasio Somoza Regime before it, the Sandinistas have attempted to nationalize Miskito territory in the face of Miskito opposition. The Sandinistas have come to recognize that the potential for "industrial development" of Nicaragua depends on the minerals, oil and timber located in Miskito territory. Without these resources Nicaragua is seen as unable to pay its foreign debts and attract foreign investment capital. While their approach to "development" of these natural resources is somewhat different than Somoza's the Miskitos see the same threat to their territory coming from the Sandinistas as they saw coming from Somoza. The issues of greatest concern to the Miskito, Sumu and Rama is indigenous land and natural resource rights, and the increasing presence of the ~~Militia~~/Nicaraguan Military in their communities.

*Atlantic coast*  
Most indigenous people do not have a full understanding of the political change in Managua; nor do they seem to be attracted to any ~~part~~ of the ideologies endorsed by the combatants in the West. Some educated Miskitos have aligned themselves with ideologies among the Sandinistas, while others have aligned themselves with supporters of Somoza. In practice, the Miskitos, Sumus and Ramas seem to reject either so-called "left and right" attempts to assimilate them -- they reject all intrusions into their territory and communities. Despite the tendency to seek isolation from conflicts around them, the Miskito, Sumu and Rama have become a central focus of attention because of their rich lands (Sandinistas) and their use as a political football in the propaganda war between Washington D.C. and Managua. *and the strategic importance of their territories in relation to commercial air lanes and*  
The Miskito, Sumu and Rama peoples are faced with a serious dilemma: The assimilationist policies of the Sandinistas are repugnant to MISKITO social, cultural, economic and political interests just as the Somoza policies were because both governments fail to recognize and endorse indigenous land and natural resource rights. The Miskito territory is regarded by the present regime in Nicaragua and the United States as being strategically important to each country because it fronts an area of the Caribbean which controls the main shipping lanes to and from the Panama Canal, and the Miskito territory is economically significant for its raw materials -- many of which were being developed by US companies but which are seen now as the economic foundation of future development plans of the Sandinista government. The Miskitos and their territory are at the focal point for former Somozaite encroachments to establish a counterrevolutionary stand against the Sandinista Regime. In the face of Nicaraguan policies of assimilation, conflict between Somozaite and Sandinistas, and conflicts between the United States and the Sandinista regime which has become a part of the broader confrontation between the US and the USSR how can the Miskito, Sumu and Rama peoples maintain their own cultural, political and ~~economic~~ territorial integrity? How can they maintain their relative independence as a people?

*East-west interests throughout the Caribbean.*

The National Congress of American Indians is being drawn into the propaganda "war of words" between the United States and Nicaragua. This has become an increasing reality due to the recent disclosures about Sandinista/Miskito relations delivered in the last two months by the former MISURASATA leader Stedman Fagoth Muller who receives backing from the Somozaites in Honduras and Florida. The US is increasingly focusing on the recent relocation of Miskitos from the Puerto Cabezas region of Zelaya Department as a justification for increased US presence in Central America and the coastal waters off Miskito territory. Because the NCAI is being drawn into the controversy and because NCAI has established a new policy to assist Indigenous peoples outside the US by direct means and through the World Council of Indigenous Peoples we are compelled to consider initial options to deal with the crisis faced by the Miskito, Sumu and Rama peoples.

Option 1.

NCAI could remain neutral toward US, Nicaraguan and Miskito conflicts and hope the Miskitos will emerge relatively unscathed.

Option 2.

NCAI could respond to Sandinista ~~pl~~ request that we publicly support the the revolution, oppose US intervention in Central America and the Caribbean and encourage the Nicaraguan Government to withhold its intentions to integrate the Atlantic coast, and instead implement a policy of semi-autonomy for Miskito Territory as a protected state for a period of ten or twenty years. The Nicaraguan government may be encouraged to sign a pact of non-aggression and provide military defense of the territory with the consent of the Miskito in exchange for Miskito willingness to organize their own militia to oppose Somozaites encroachments from Honduras, Guatemala and Florida.

Option 3.

NCAI could agree to meet with the Sandinista Junta, the US State Department and the Miskito leadership (inside and outside) in an effort to persuade all parties to accept the establishment of Miskito territory as a military free zone. While such efforts are under way NCAI could present its findings to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and the Central American Regional Council and request international intervention into the conflict.

Option 4.

*accommodating approach*  
NCAI could take the initiative to meet with Stedman Fagoth, Miskito leaders in Miskito territory and seek to establish a *accommodating approach* between them and then offer to facilitate negotiations between them and the Sandinista government to formalize an agreement of non-aggression. This effort would be followed by NCAI pronouncement regarding the situation in Nicaragua through the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, calling for indigenous participation in negotiations for a cease-fire in all or parts of Central America in line with President Portillo's proposed plan for negotiated settlement of conflicts.