



Foreign and Commonwealth Office *Nilloch*

London SW1A 2AH *Managua*

12 March 1982

Prime Minister

*You expressed interest in this. The information
looks to me too insubstantial for public use.*

A.J.C. 15/2

Dear John,

A.J.C. 21/3

You asked about the Norwegian Prime Minister's reference to Nicaraguan Government atrocities against the Indians and his surprise at the lack of publicity. You may find a little background helpful.

During the period of British expansion in the Caribbean in the last century, what amounted to an unofficial British protectorate grew up along the East (Miskito) Coast of Nicaragua. The population had little in common with the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the Western (Pacific) Coast of Nicaragua. After the British Government formally gave up all claim to the Miskito Coast, the people of the area were left to develop on their own by the rulers of Nicaragua based in Managua close to the Pacific Coast. However, following the overthrow of President Somoza in 1979, the Sandinista Government decided to place a greater emphasis on the development of the region. Port facilities were developed to cope with a greater flow of shipping from Cuba. The influx of Cuban advisers to the area created much friction among the local population.

This resulted in riots which were put down brutally by the Sandinista authorities. A number of local leaders were arrested and imprisoned. In consequence many Miskito Indians moved across the northern boundary of Nicaragua into Honduras, where they had made contact with groups of members of the National Guard of the defeated President Somoza. Several raids, possibly involving Miskito Indians, were made into Nicaraguan territory in 1981, resulting in the deaths of some Cuban advisers and casualties among the Nicaraguan forces.

In January this year the Nicaraguan Government decided to resettle those Miskito Indians living close to the Honduran border further into the interior of Nicaragua ostensibly to protect them from these raids. Some 9,000 have been moved so far and the villages they once occupied destroyed. We do not know how many Indians were killed resisting these moves but almost certainly some deaths occurred. We have seen no evidence, however, to verify recent claims made by the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Mrs Kirkpatrick, that many thousands were killed. It seems unlikely that the casualty rate should be so high but the area is remote and the Nicaraguan



Government do not encourage visits to it. It is therefore hard to know exactly what is happening there.

Considerable publicity has been given to this in the press, mainly in the US but also here. Secretary Haig is reported to have produced photographs which purported to show Miskito corpses but it has subsequently been claimed that these pictures were in fact of Sandinista guerrillas killed by President Somoza's forces before the 1979 revolution. There is a danger that the US Administration may have exaggerated their claims.

Yours ever

John Holmes

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Private Secretary

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