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TITLE: SUBJECT: PARA-MILITARY LEADER DONATES LAND AND ARMS IN
PEACE GESTURE

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SOURCE: STATE

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TEXT:

TAGS: PTER, PGOV, SNAR, PHUM, ELAB, CO

SUBJECT: PARA-MILITARY LEADER DONATES LAND AND ARMS IN
PEACE GESTURE

1. (U) SUMMARY: FIDEL CASTANO, A RIGHT-WING
PARA-MILITARY LEADER SUSPECTED OF MASTERMINDING SEVERAL
PEASANT MASSACRES OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, HAS TURNED
OVER SOME OF HIS ARMS TO THE GOC AND DONATED OVER 1,000
HECTARES OF LAND TO PEASANTS IN URABA. CASTANO IS STILL
WANTED BY THE AUTHORITIES FOR HIS PART IN THE MASSACRES
AND REMAINS A FUGITIVE. END SUMMARY

2. (U) ON NOV. 25 PARA-MILITARY LEADER FIDEL CASTANO
DONATED OVER 1,000 HECTARES OF LAND TO LOCAL PEASANTS IN
A GESTURE DESIGNED TO APPEASE LOCAL RESIDENTS AND EASE
LAW ENFORCEMENT PRESSURE AGAINST HIM. THE TRANSFER TOOK
PLACE IN THE TOWN OF LETICIA IN CORDOBA DEPARTMENT, AN
AREA THAT SAW SOME OF THE WORST POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN
COLOMBIA IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. CASTANO IS SUSPECTED OF
MASTERMINDING SEVERAL PEASANT MASSACRES IN THE
VIOLENCE-RIDDEN URABA AREA, AS WELL AS TAKING ON MURDER
CONTRACTS FOR THE MEDELLIN CARTEL. HE IS CONSIDERED TO
BE A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF PABLO ESCOBAR.

3. (U) CASTANO TURNED OVER 225 TITLES OF PROPERTY, PLUS
SOME FARM EQUIPMENT, TO THE FUNDACION PARA LA PAZ DE
CORDOBA (FUNDAPAZCOR). FUNDAPAZCOR IS A REGIONAL PEACE
ORGANIZATION REPORTEDLY CREATED BY HIM TO MANAGE THE
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND TO AREA PEASANTS. THE FUNDAPAZCOR
MANAGER VALUED CASTANO'S GENEROSITY AT 16 BILLION PESOS,
(NEARLY THREE MILLION USD AT CURRENT EXCHANGE RATES).
PARTICIPATING IN THE LAND TRANSFER WAS CONGRESSMAN
ANDRES LOPEZ MEZA, A MEMBER OF THE M-19 ALLIANZA

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper, Senior
Reviewer

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DEMOCRATICA, AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION OF MODERATE LEFTISTS LED BY EX M-19 GUERRILLA ANTONIO NAVARRO WOLFF. LOPEZ HAS PREVIOUSLY ACTED AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND THE GUERRILLAS, AND WAS SPECIFICALLY CHOSEN BY CASTANO'S FAMILY TO MEDIATE THE LAND TRANSFER.

4. (U) THE NEXT DAY CASTANO SURRENDERED OVER 300 WEAPONS PLUS AMMUNITION. THE ARMS WERE RECEIVED FROM CASTANO'S REPRESENTATIVES BY THE GOVERNOR OF CORDOBA DEPARTMENT, OFFICIALS OF THE PROCURADURIA AND MEMBERS OF FUNDAPAZCOR. CASTANO HIMSELF DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE DONATION, AND HIS WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN.

5. (U) ACCORDING TO MEDIATOR LOPEZ, CASTANO HAS NO INTENTION OF TURNING HIMSELF IN, AS HE BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFER OF LENIENCY UNDER DECREE 2047 APPLIES ONLY TO THOSE WANTED FOR EXTRADITION TO THE US. LOPEZ ALSO SAID CASTANO EXPECTS NOTHING FROM THE GOVERNMENT IN RETURN FOR HAVING DONATED THE ARMS AND LAND.

6. (C) COMMENT: THIS IS NOT THE FIRST "PEACE OFFER" FROM CASTANO, WHO, DESPITE CLAIMS TO THE CONTRARY, OBVIOUSLY EXPECTS SOME KIND OF GOVERNMENT CLEMENCY IN RETURN FOR HIS DONATIONS. WHEN CASTANO MADE A SIMILAR DONATION FOUR MONTHS AGO, HIS REPUTATION FOR RUTHLESS VIOLENCE WAS STILL FRESH IN THE MINDS OF THE PEASANTS, MOST OF WHOM REFUSED CASTANO'S GENEROSITY OUT OF FEAR. THE CLIMATE OF RECONCILIATION BROUGHT ON BY THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY CAMPAIGN AND THE MOST RECENT EXTRADITABLES' SURRENDER OFFER MAY HAVE EMBOLDENED THE CAMPESINOS THIS TIME AROUND.
MCNAMARA

END OF MESSAGE CONFIDENTIAL

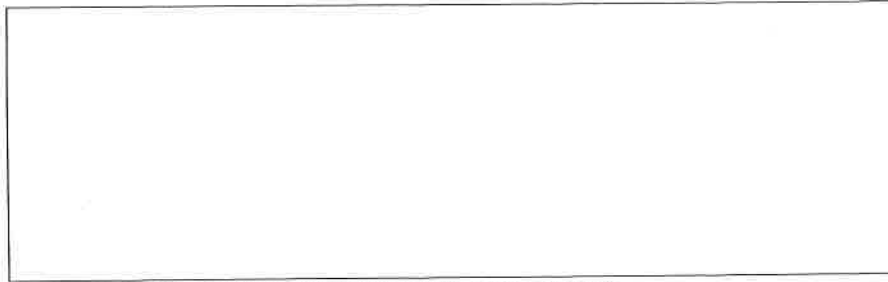


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