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TITLE: SUBJECT: SHARP REACTION TO NEWS OF US VISAS DENIED TO
- COLOMBIAN POLITICIANS

RELEASED IN PART B3 INA, B3 CIA
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SUMMARY

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SUBJECT: SHARP REACTION TO NEWS OF US VISAS DENIED TO
- COLOMBIAN POLITICIANS

SUMMARY

1. (C) SUMMARY - NEWS BROKE ON SEPTEMBER 20 THAT THE
USG HAD DENIED VISAS TO COLOMBIAN CONGRESSMEN FOR
SUPPOSED CONNECTIONS TO NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, PRODUCING
A SHARP REACTION IN CONGRESS. THE LOWER CHAMBER CALLED
ON FOREIGN MINISTER LONDONO TO CLARIFY REPORTS OF VISA
DENIALS THE US EMBASSY; THE SENATE REQUESTED LONDONO AND
GOVERNMENT MINISTER VASQUEZ VELASQUEZ TO TESTIFY ON THE
SITUATION WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27. THE LIST OF THOSE
DENIED, THOUGH REPORTED SLIGHTLY DIFFERENTLY BY
DIFFERENT MEDIA SOURCES [REDACTED] IT IS
GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT THE DENIALS ARE FOR NARCO
CONNECTIONS. [REDACTED] FOUR SENATORS,
WHO HAVE PUBLICLY ADMITTED THAT THEY LOST THEIR VISAS,
DEMANDED A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SENATE IN AN ATTEMPT
TO TURN THE ISSUE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONDEMN THE
U.S. AND THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-NARCOTICS CAMPAIGN. END
SUMMARY

B3 INA

NEWS CAUSES STIR IN CONGRESS

2. (U) AT MIDDAY ON SEPTEMBER 20 NEWS REPORTS ANNOUNCED
THAT ABOUT ELEVEN COLOMBIAN CONGRESSMEN HAD BEEN DENIED
VISAS DURING THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF. IT WAS FRONT
PAGE NEWS IN COLOMBIA'S PRINT MEDIA ON THE SEPTEMBER 21
AND 22. THE REACTION IN CONGRESS, ESPECIALLY AMONG

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper, Senior
Reviewer

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THOSE WHOSE VISAS HAD BEEN DENIED, WAS IMMEDIATE AND SHARP. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LOWER HOUSE PASSED A RESOLUTION CALLING ON FOREIGN MINISTER LONDONO TO ASK THE US EMBASSY IF A "BLACK LIST" EXISTED AND, IF SO, THE REASONS FOR THE DENIALS. LONDONO CALLED THE CHARGE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SEPTEMBER 22 TO DELIVER A LETTER REQUESTING THE EMBASSY CLARIFY THE MATTER. THE SENATE REQUESTED THAT LONDONO AND GOVERNMENT MINISTER VASQUEZ VELASQUEZ APPEAR BEFORE IT ON WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 27 TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION.

[REDACTED]

3. (C) NAMES OF POLITICIANS REPORTEDLY DENIED VISAS WERE PUBLISHED BY NATIONAL DAILY "EL TIEMPO". APPEARING ON IT FROM THE SENATE ARE: ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO BOTERO (LIBERAL, TOLIMA, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE); BERNARDO GUERRA SERNA (LIBERAL, ANTIOQUIA); JUAN SLEBI SLEBI (LIBERAL, ATLANTICO); ARCESIO SANCHEZ OJEDA (LIBERAL, NARINO). FROM THE HOUSE: ENRIQUE RAFAEL CABALLERO ADUEN (LIBERAL, MAGDALENA); JAIRO ORTEGA RAMIREZ (LIBERAL, ANTIOQUIA); SAMUEL ALBERTO ESCRUCERIA MANZI (LIBERAL, NARINO); RAFAEL ENRIQUE PEREZ MARTINEZ (CONSERVATIVE, BOLIVAR); JAIME VARGAS SUAREZ (LIBERAL, ATLANTICO); VICTOR EDUARDO DANGOND NOGUERA (LIBERAL, MAGDALENA); AND GILBERTO FLOREZ SANCHEZ (LIBERAL, PUTUMAYO). ANOTHER LEADING DAILY, "EL ESPECTADOR", REPORTED THAT 25 POLITICIANS WERE ON THE "LIST," BUT NAMED ONLY 12, ADDING PATRIOTIC UNION SENATOR PEDRO ALCANTARA AND LOCAL LIBERAL POLITICIAN DAVID NAME TERAN (BROTHER OF ATLANTICO SENATOR JOSE NAME TERAN), AND LEAVING OFF JAIME VARGAS SUAREZ [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

FOUR SENATORS REACT

4. (U) FOUR SENATORS -- SANTOFIMIO, GUERRA, SANCHEZ, AND SLEBI -- ARE THE ONLY ONES TO ADMIT THEY WERE DENIED VISAS AND THEY WERE HIGHLY VOCAL TO THE PRESS. SANTOFIMIO AT FIRST CLAIMED THAT HE NEVER KNEW THAT HE

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WAS ON SUCH A LIST AND THAT HE STILL HAD A VISA IN HIS PASSPORT. HE SAID THAT THE SITUATION HAD HURT THE DIGNITY OF THE CONGRESS AND MYSTERIOUSLY ADDED THAT HE WOULD MAKE SOME REVELATIONS ABOUT NARCO-TRAFFICKING IN COLOMBIA ON WEDNESDAY. IN LATER INTERVIEWS HE IMPLIED THAT THE DEA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GALAN'S DEATH. HE ADDED THAT SEVERAL YEARS AGO HE HAD HAD A "BRIEF" CONTACT WITH PABLO ESCOBAR THAT ENDED WHEN ESCOBAR'S BACKGROUND BECAME KNOWN.

5. (U) SENATOR GUERRA CLAIMED TO HAVE NEVER RECEIVED AN EXPLANATION FOR THE VISA DENIAL. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THE DENIAL WAS BASED ON A SPEECH FAVORING DIALOGUE WITH NARCOS THAT HE HAD MADE BEFORE THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 1988. HE WONDERED WHY THIS ISSUE HAD COME TO LIGHT NOW WHEN HIS VISA HAD BEEN DENIED OVER EIGHTEEN MONTHS

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AGO. HE NOTED THAT THE LIST CONTAINED ALMOST ALL LIBERALS, AND WONDERED IF THE LIBERALS WERE UNDER ATTACK BY THE UNITED STATES.

6. (U) SENATOR SANCHEZ FIRST SAID THAT HE WAS NOT EMBARRASSED TO SAY THAT HE HAD MADE UNNAMED ALLIANCES AND "RECEIVED HELP" TO BE ELECTED TO CONGRESS. SANCHEZ CLAIMED THAT HIS VISA WAS NOT REVOKED FOR INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND CALLED ON THE EMBASSY TO MAKE PUBLIC THE REASONS FOR THE DENIAL. HE SPECULATED THAT IT MIGHT BE BECAUSE HE IS A NATIVE AMERICAN.

7. (U) SENATOR SLEBI AFFIRMED THAT HE WOULD DENOUNCE BEFORE CONGRESS ON WEDNESDAY THE "WAVE OF TERROR AND

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PANIC" THE USG WAS CAUSING. HE CONTENDED THAT THE CONSUL HAD TOLD HIM AT THE TIME OF THE VISA DENIAL THAT IF HE (SLEBI) WOULD SUPPORT EXTRADITION IN CONGRESS, THE DECISION COULD BE RECONSIDERED. (COMMENT: NO SUCH OFFER WAS MADE.) SLEBI SAID HE WOULD NEVER SUPPORT EXTRADITION AND THAT THE WAR ON NARCOS COULD NOT BE WON THROUGH REPRESSION AND MILITARY AID; HE FAVORED LEGALIZING DRUGS. HE PROCEEDED TO DENOUNCE THE US FOR SUPPORTING MERCENARIES THAT HAVE MURDERED LEFTISTS IN COLOMBIA. SLEBI SAID HE WOULD DENOUNCE NARCO CONNECTIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND OTHER POLITICIANS, BUT THAT HE HIMSELF WAS INNOCENT.

EMBASSY REFUSES TO DISCUSS THE CASES

8. (U) THE EMBASSY ISSUED A STATEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 21, QUOTED IN THE MEDIA, SAYING THAT IT NEVER DISCUSSES INDIVIDUAL VISA CASES AND DENYING THE EXISTENCE OF A "BLACK LIST" OF COLOMBIAN POLITICIANS

OTHER REACTIONS

9 FREDERICO ESTRADA VELEZ, A PROMINENT ANTIOQUIAN SENATOR AND APPARENTLY FREE OF NARCO CONNECTIONS, TOLD THE CHARGE AND POLCOUNS ON SEPTEMBER 21 THAT HE WAS CONCERNED THAT THE REVELATIONS OF VISA DENIALS WOULD BE PERCEIVED AS AN INSULT TO THE HONOR OF THE CONGRESS AND WILL STIR UP CONSIDERABLE ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT. HE SAID THE U.S. SHOULD MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE BY TAKING ACTIONS FAVORABLE TO COLOMBIA ON ECONOMIC ISSUES. HE STRESSED IN PARTICULAR THE NEED FOR A RESUMPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COFFEE AGREEMENT. SEVERAL OTHER LIBERAL POLITICIANS CONTACTED BY POLOFFS ON SEPTEMBER 21 WERE LESS CONCERNED THAN WAS ESTRADA OVER THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF REVELATIONS OF THE VISA DENIAL. HOWEVER, THEY SAID THAT THE POLITICIANS REPORTEDLY DENIED VISAS FOR NARCO CONNECTIONS WOULD EXPLOIT THE ISSUE TO THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE EXTENT TO MINIMIZE DAMAGE TO THEIR POLITICAL CAREERS.

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COMMENT

9. (C) MOST COLOMBIANS AGREE THAT MANY IN CONGRESS ARE
TAINTED BY NARCO CONNECTIONS. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] NEVERTHELESS, THE ISSUE WILL STIR UP
NATIONALIST SENTIMENT AND MAY DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE
FIGHT AGAINST THE NARCOS THEMSELVES. THE COUNTRY'S
LEADING NEWSPAPER, EL TIEMPO, RAN A BLUNT EDITORIAL
SEPTEMBER 25 ACCUSING SANTIFIMIO AND FRIENDS OF FALLING
INTO THE OLD LATIN AMERICAN PRACTICE OF BLAMING THE
NORTH AMERICANS -- USUALLY THE CIA, NOW THE DEA -- WHEN
THEY ARE TRYING TO COVER THEIR OWN FAULTS. MCLEAN

END OF MESSAGE

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[REDACTED]

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