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39718147

TITLE: SUBJECT: RUCKUS OVER PRIEST ACCEPTING ESCOBAR FARM

ORIGDATE: 199110042004

SOURCE: STATE

DOCNO: BOGOTA 15469

TEXT:

TAGS: SNAR, SOCI, KJUS, CJAN, CO

SUBJECT: RUCKUS OVER PRIEST ACCEPTING ESCOBAR FARM

RELEASED IN PART B1,25X6,B3 CIA
PERS/ORG

1. (U) 83-YEAR-OLD CATHOLIC TV-PRIEST RAFAEL GARCIA HERREROS, ASKING HIS VIEWERS FOR GUIDANCE, ANNOUNCED OVER THE AIR ONE SEPTEMBER EVENING THAT HE HAD DECIDED TO ACCEPT THE DONATION FROM JAILED NARCO KINGPIN PABLO ESCOBAR OF A 400-HECTARE FARM IN A RURAL AREA OF MEDELLIN. FATHER GARCIA SAID HE PLANNED TO TURN THE FARM INTO A BOYS' HOME FOR WAYWARD CITY KIDS.

2. (U) IT WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME FATHER GARCIA VIOLATED HIS PUBLIC PROMISE, MADE AT THE START OF HIS EFFORTS TO ARRANGE ESCOBAR'S SURRENDER, THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT NO NARCO GIFTS, AS MUCH AS HIS MANY COMMUNITY-SERVICE PROJECTS NEEDED THE ASSISTANCE. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, GARCIA ADMITTED HE HAD ACCEPTED A PRIZE HORSE FROM THE OCHOA BROTHERS' FATHER, A WELL-KNOWN ANTIOQUIA BREEDER. GARCIA SAID HE SOLD THE HORSE TO RAISE MONEY FOR HIS CHARITIES. MEANWHILE, AFTER ESCOBAR'S SURRENDER IN JUNE, FATHER GARCIA MADE A PITCH FOR THE 500-MILLION PESO REWARD THE GOVERNMENT HAD OFFERED FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE DRUGLORD'S CAPTURE. THE GOVERNMENT TURNED THE PRIEST DOWN BECAUSE ESCOBAR SURRENDERED RATHER THAN BEING CAUGHT.

3. (U) MEANWHILE, THE ELDERLY PRIEST'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE ESCOBAR FINCA SPLIT THE SEPTEMBER 16-17 EXTRAORDINARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COLOMBIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE. CONFERENCE PRESIDENT CALI ARCHBISHOP PEDRO RUBIANO SAENZ, SPEAKING OFFICIALLY FOR THE COLOMBIAN CHURCH, SAID IT COULD NOT APPROVE THE DONATIONS MADE TO FATHER GARCIA BY PERSONS CONNECTED TO DRUG TRAFFICKING. HOWEVER, MANY BISHOPS, INCLUDING PEREIRA BISHOP DARIO

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper, Senior
Reviewer

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1

Classification Extended on : 08/12/2014 ~
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CASTRILLON HOYOS (UNTIL LAST APRIL PRESIDENT OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPAL COUNCIL, CELAM), ARGUED THAT GARCIA IS A "SAINT" WHOSE "HANDS CAN'T BE STAINED" BY NARCO GIFTS.

4. (U) THE ISSUE WAS REVIVED LAST WEEK WHEN THE PRESS REPORTED THAT EX-JUSTICE MINISTER ENRIQUE PAREJO GONZALEZ, A FOE OF PRESIDENT GAVIRIA'S NARCO POLICY AND A SURVIVOR OF AN ESCOBAR-PAID-FOR-ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT, HAD WRITTEN TO PROCURADOR GENERAL CARLOS GUSTAVO ARRIETA DEMANDING AN INVESTIGATION INTO WHETHER ESCOBAR BOUGHT THE FARM WITH ILLICIT FUNDS, WHICH WOULD MAKE THE DONATION ILLEGAL, SINCE ESCOBAR CURRENTLY IS UNDER CRIMINAL PROSECUTION. ARRIETA RESPONDED TO PAREJO IN A LETTER OF HIS OWN THIS WEEK, IN WHICH HE PROMISED THAT THE DONATION WOULD BE INVESTIGATED.

5. (C) MINISTER OF JUSTICE FERNANDO CARRILLO TOLD AMBASSADOR AND POLCOUNS ON OCTOBER 3 THAT THE GOVERNMENT OBVIOUSLY REALIZES ESCOBAR BOUGHT THE PROPERTY WITH ILLICIT FUNDS, BUT NEEDS U.S. HELP TO PROVE IT. THE PLEA BARGAINING DECREES UNDER WHICH ESCOBAR SURRENDERED WOULD THEN ALLOW THE GOC TO CONFISCATE THE PROPERTY.

25X6
B1

6. (C) COMMENT: THIS IS A COLOMBIAN VERSION OF A BELTWAY STORY. WHILE WE AGREE [REDACTED] WITH PAREJO THAT THE DONATION IS PROBABLY ANOTHER SMART PUBLIC RELATIONS MOVE BY ESCOBAR, FATHER GARCIA, FOR HIS LIFETIME OF SERVICE TO THE POOR, IS THE MOST LOVED MAN IN COLOMBIA, AND, AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC IS CONCERNED, CAN DO NO WRONG. PAREJO'S CONTINUES TO BE A MINORITY VIEW; THERE IS NO PUBLIC CLAMOR FOR THE PADRE TO RETURN THE FINCA. END COMMENT.
BUSBY

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END OF MESSAGE

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DEA FOR AD, AO, AX, DO, OC, OF, OIOA CINCSO AND CINCLANT ALSO FOR POLAD ROME PLEASE PASS TO
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RUEHNA/DEA WASHDC
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4