

## Duarte, rebels hold peace talks

LA PALMA, El Salvador—Government and rebel leaders sat down in a country church Monday to talk about ending El Salvador's war, a historic first meeting after five years of blood and bitterness.

The initial session in this isolated mountain town near the Honduran border produced no apparent breakthroughs. Pres. Jose Napoleon Duarte called on the leftist guerrillas to take part in Salvadoran elections. The rebels called for social reforms and war-crimes trials.

But the president said beforehand, "I'm not here to get

anything today. I'm here to open doors."

An estimated 20,000 Salvadoran workers and peasants thronging the church plaza and surrounding streets knew it was an important moment in their country's tortured history. They cheered announcements by the two sides and waved white flags and banners declaring, "Paz y Democracia" — Peace and democracy.

In the United States, Pres. Reagan called the La Palma talks a "momentous event for peace in Central America."

Although both sides had expressed concern about security surrounding the talks, the meeting took place without incident.

Duarte made his surprise offer for peace talks in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly in New York on Oct. 8. The leaders of the rebel groups — the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas and their political arm, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) — quickly accepted, saying Duarte's invitation was a response to suggestions they made through Roman Catholic Church intermediaries.

An estimated 59,000 people have been killed in El Salvador in the past five years as the leftist guerrillas struggled against U.S.-supported governments moving slowly from rightist military domination to democratic civilian control. Most of the dead were civilians

killed by right-wing death squads.

An hour after the closed-door talks began in this town 50 miles north of San Salvador, the capital, Duarte's seven pages of opening proposals were outlined by government spokesmen on national television and by loudspeaker to the La Palma crowd.

The president offered a blanket amnesty to the guerrillas if they accept the "democratic process," said he would propose legislative guarantees of the rebels' right to political association and safety from army reprisals, and proposed a joint commission of six members from each side to plan further negotiations.

Duarte stopped short of call-

ing for a cease-fire, and apparently offered the guerrillas no protection from underground right-wing death squads that have been blamed for thousands of political murders over the past five years.

The rebels then responded by circulating a document in La Palma containing their demands:

Cessation of military operations "against the civilian population"; general wage increases for workers and peasants; the right to "life, dignity, health and education for all Salvadorans"; release of rebel prisoners and an accounting of the missing, and justice for "criminals of war."

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