

Vigil held to support treaty to bring peace to Central America

By B.J. Thomsen

Of the Emerald

Under the backdrop of an immense banner made from 10 bed sheets and supported on eight poles held by a dozen volunteers, a local group gathered Wednesday in front of the Federal Building in support of the proposed Contadora peace treaty.

The Council for Human Rights in Latin America organized the 90-minute vigil in memory of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who stood in opposition to the violence in that region and was assassinated in 1980, said Chris Orsinger, a vigil organizer.

A different group has met on the steps of the Federal Building each Wednesday for the last month as part of a nationwide series of events through the season of Lent to focus attention on the problems in Central America. Other groups who have met on the steps are Clergy and Laity Concerned and Witness for Peace.

Orsinger, a member of the council, spoke at the gathering, giving a brief update on the Contadora peace process and noting that U.S. support of the treaty is critical to its success.

One key provision of the treaty would prohibit U.S. support of the Contra rebels.

"The United States has given lip service to Contadora while continually undermining it," Orsinger said. He noted that as long as the United States is giving military support to the Contras in Nicaragua, the Contadora treaty cannot succeed.

"Contra aid results in the death and suffering of civilians, health workers, educators and children," Orsinger said.

While the treaty would end U.S. intervention, it also would end Soviet intervention, he said, noting that all aspects of the treaty would be confirmed by an international corps of inspectors.

The proposed Contadora peace treaty has been presented to the five potential signatories, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua three times since 1984 and has failed each time.

Nations in the region trying to make peace between the signatories include Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and four other South American countries.

Volunteers took turns during the vigil handing out fliers on the Contadora peace effort to passing motorists.



David Bowman (top) hands out fliers promoting the Contadora peace process in Central America to passing motorists; Freddie Vilches plays the guitar (left) and Armando Morales plays the bongos to raise spirits at the rally.

Photos by Sherlyn Bjorkgren

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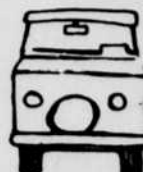
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