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QXW1332/86EN

Written Question No. 1332/86

by Mr Horst Langes (PPE - D)

to the Commission of the European Communities

Subject: Development aid in Nicaragua

In view of the abduction in May 1986 by the armed opposition (Contras) of eight German development workers, which ended without serious consequences, and the deaths of three development workers from France, Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany at the end of July 1986 in Nicaragua, I should like to ask the Commission the following questions.

1. Is the Commission sending its own experts, development workers and people with special skills to Nicaragua?
2. If so :
 - (a) in which parts of the country, on what projects and under what sponsorship (State or NGO) are they working;
 - (b) in the Commission's estimation were the people mentioned under (1) at any time in physical danger or danger of death or is this now the case;
 - (c) what precautions has the Commission taken - or what agreements has it concluded with the Nicaraguan Government - to protect these people?
3. Is it true that the drinking water project in Wicoili, in an area of civil conflict on the Nicaraguan frontier with Honduras, on which the three Europeans who were killed were working, was jointly financed by the Commission, if so what was the amount involved?
4. How many projects, under whose sponsorship, in which areas of Nicaragua and with how many European development workers, are currently (1985/1986) being jointly financed by the Commission and to what extent?
5. According to what criteria is this aid given?
6. In granting aid does the Commission take into account the exceptional dangers arising from the civil war situation in Nicaragua?
7. What impact does the Commission think recent events in Nicaragua will have on the planning of its future projects and the granting of aid?

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Answer given by Mr Cheysson
on behalf of the Commission
(17 October 1986)

1. Specialists appointed by consultancy firms are assigned to development projects financed by the EEC in cooperation with the Nicaraguan authorities, as part of financial and technical cooperation with Latin American and Asian developing countries (Article 930).

The EEC also cofinances schemes with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nicaragua, under budget headings 941 (cooperation with NGOs) and 936 (aid towards self-sufficiency for refugees and displaced persons), but is not involved in the assignment of expatriate staff for these projects.

2. (a) The consultancy firm specialists have been assigned to rural development projects located chiefly in areas II (Léon), IV (Masaya and Carazo), V (Boaco and Chontales) and VI (Matagalpa). They all live in Managua.

The NGO schemes, which cover a large variety of development fields, are scattered throughout the country.

(b) and (c) The Commission has taken the necessary steps to ensure the safety of experts working on financial and technical aid schemes. Consultants who were previously living in project areas in which fighting has developed have been transferred to Managua or withdrawn from the project. Given the recent spate of incidents, all experts have received formal instructions to avoid all travel in areas where they could be exposed to danger in the course of their work.

The Commission has also asked the Nicaraguan authorities to do everything necessary to protect persons assigned to cooperation projects supported by the EEC. In this connection, the Commission welcomes the Nicaraguan Government's statement that it intends to withdraw all foreign experts and volunteers to safe areas. The Commission considers that the measures it has taken will reduce as far as possible the risks incurred by the staff concerned.

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3. It is true that the Commission is cofinancing, through a contribution of DM 175 987, the NGO project to provide drinking water to Wicoili.

4. The Community is currently financing in Nicaragua, in cooperation with the Nicaraguan authorities (Ministry of Agriculture and the Nicaraguan Food Programme), four rural development projects, the total EEC contribution being 23.2 million ECU.

Eight experts, appointed by Community consultancy firms, are currently assigned to these projects in the areas mentioned above (paragraph 2(a)).

In addition, 32 projects involving cofinancing with some 20 NGOs were approved in 1985-86, the total Community contribution amounting to 3.8 million ECU. The Commission does not know how many Europeans are working on these projects, as recruitment is handled by the NGOs.

5. The project aid is approved, after being endorsed by the Committee on aid to Latin American and Asian developing countries, consisting of representatives from the Member States and the Commission, on the basis of the criteria laid down in the Regulation governing this type of aid and the general guidelines determined annually by the Council. These criteria concern the project's contribution towards improving the living conditions of the neediest sections of the population and improving food production.

With regard to cofinanced NGO projects, the Community contributions are made on the basis of well-defined and published criteria and conditions.

6. The Commission sees to it that the projects in Nicaragua on which a financing decision is required contain the necessary guarantees for the safety of persons and property assigned to the projects.

It has to be remembered, however, that the security situation in the country is changing constantly and that the specific circumstances are such that a correct assessment will not invariably be made of the risks entailed.

7. As a result of the recent incidents, the Commission will be following the security situation in Nicaragua even more closely and will take due account of this where future aid to Nicaragua is concerned.

