

## Interview: Ricardo de la Espriella

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# Panamanian president: unity of the debtors would make itself felt

*Ricardo de la Espriella, the President of Panama, gave an exclusive interview to EIR correspondent Carlos Wesley in Panama City March 2. President de la Espriella took office on Aug. 1, 1982.*

**Wesley:** Mr. President, was the delegation that left today for the Non-Aligned Summit in New Delhi given any instructions to join with the other countries on finding a solution to the debt problem?

**De la Espriella:** What can the Non-Aligned do about the debt?

**Wesley:** Well, for one thing, they could establish a debtors' cartel. . .

**De la Espriella:** (laughing) About 95 percent of the world qualifies for membership in a debtors' cartel, and the other 5 percent does not have enough resources to solve the problem.

**Wesley:** On previous occasions you have stated that you favor the establishment of such a debtors' cartel, and you have also stated that you think that it is not a bad idea to bring about global renegotiations of the debt. Are you still of the same opinion?

**De la Espriella:** Everything that is a cartel carries weight, can make itself felt politically. That does not mean that a debtors' cartel is the solution, but we have a saying: "In unity there is strength."

## Interview: Juan José Amado

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# Panamanian foreign minister: we need a Central American solution

*In an interview with EIR correspondent Carlos Wesley, the foreign minister of Panama, Juan Jose Amado, expressed his opposition to reported plans to increase the number of American military advisers in El Salvador. During the interview in Panama City March 2, Foreign Minister Amado also stated his opposition to the formation of a debtors' cartel, and gave his views on the possibility of building a new sea-level canal through Panama. Excerpts from the interview follow.*

**Wesley:** Several countries in Ibero-America are now voicing the opinion that the Third World ought to band together in a debtors' cartel to bring about joint debt renegotiations.

**Amado:** It is difficult for us to look at global debt renegotiations, be it in the framework of joint action on the part of the Non-Aligned countries, or the Group of 77, or the Latin American countries, as an effective way to achieve immediate solutions.

What we can and should do is to make the international credit and financial institutions conscious of our needs, so that they make the length and terms of payments more realistic, more in keeping with the internal conditions of each country.

**Wesley:** What you are proposing has been proposed many times before. It has been proposed at many meetings of UNCTAD. It was also proposed at the Non-Aligned summit of 1976, which called for the establishment of a new world economic order. So far, what has resulted is a dialogue among the deaf. American economist Lyndon LaRouche, EIR's founder, has stated that the only way to force the international financial institutions and advanced countries to listen is to form a debtors' cartel, to use the threat of a debt moratorium as a weapon to obtain better terms of payments, and obtain financing for productive investments. . . .

**Amado:** I must insist, in all honesty, that it would be difficult for you to achieve a common position among the countries to deal with their foreign debts when there are intrinsic variations in each of those countries that do not allow for a unification of the criteria for repayment.

I don't know the situation of neighboring countries, either about their revenues, or their obligations.

I do know Panama's situation; and what we have to do to meet our obligations. But we cannot draw any generalizations from that, nor force general conditions that are not in keeping with the real situation of each country.

Panama could not at any time adapt its own conditions to that of the countries of South America, or to the other coun-

tries of Central America, or to the African countries, or to the Asian countries. Their reality reflects conditions that are unique to each of those countries. . . .

**Wesley:** Recently, Panama joined or became a catalytic element in the formation of what we would call the Pact of Contadora, made up of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama, which is working for a peaceful solution to the Central American crisis. What concrete steps are these nations proposing to solve the crisis, and where do your efforts stand at this moment?

**Amado:** First, let me state that the countries that met at Contadora [a Panamanian island-resort] did not constitute themselves as some sort of a pact, nor did we come up with any preconceived, and defined plan of action from the standpoint of a multilateral accord. It was simply an initiative which our countries undertook, as the result of our concerns about what is taking place in Central America, and in full awareness of our responsibilities as hemispheric nations, to promote a peaceful and permanent solution to those difficult conflicts that have cost so many lives. . . .

In the specific case of El Salvador, what we are trying to achieve is that the conditions are created so that the parties involved can sit down and discuss their differences and work out the best solutions for themselves. We are not looking for the mechanisms or solutions that Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, the United States, Cuba or any other nation, could impose, but to give the Salvadoran people a chance to exercise their own self-determination.

As regards any difficulties between Honduras and Nicaragua, we also want the parties to have the environment, the appropriate atmosphere, to sit down at the table to negotiate their differences. . . .

**Wesley:** Where does the Contadora initiative stand now?

**Amado:** We agree that there are certain issues that are very important to create the environment of understanding that is necessary to bring about a dialogue. Those are: that the flow of arms into the area must be brought under control, and that there must be a reduction in the existing levels of armaments in the Central American area. . . .

There is a move to, sometime in the near future, convene a meeting in the Dominican Republic of the five Central American nations—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—to start the search for solutions. The thinking is that maybe the working sessions would be joined by, obviously, the Dominican Republic, as the host country, and by Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama. So far, this is just an idea which has not been made concrete.

**Wesley:** According to press reports, the U.S. administration is thinking of sending more military advisers to El Salvador. What is Panama's stance regarding this issue?

**Amado:** The more military advisers are sent to any part of

the world, the more the fighting will increase.

**Wesley:** Will Panama make known this concern to the U.S. government?

**Amado:** Not necessarily, because we don't have at our disposal all the facts to make a judgment. . . .

There are those that claim that the United States has adopted this position in response to actions taken by other groupings, while there are others who claim that the other groupings are reacting to the unilateral U.S. arrogations. We have then a vicious cycle, and it is necessary that this vicious circle be broken one way or the other. . . .

**Wesley:** In an interview with *EIR* [to be published in a future issue], Fernando Manfredo, deputy administrator of the Panama Canal Commission, stated that usage of the current canal will reach its maximum capacity by no later than the year 2005. Clearly, if you are going to reach a level of saturation, you are going to need some other means of conveying traffic; and as he stated, a decision must be made long before you come face to face with the problem. What then, is Panama doing regarding the construction of a new canal?

**Amado:** I find that concern very, very interesting. Panama, in a responsible manner, together with the United States and Japan, has initiated a series of discussions to start working on the feasibility studies to see what would be the most viable, most profitable mechanisms to unite the two oceans, whether a sea-level canal, whether a third set of locks, whether a combination of the existing facilities, with some version of a sea-level canal. Which one of these is decided upon will be the result of the process of analysis that the three countries have initiated.

We estimate that the final studies on this question should be ready for the consideration of each of the nations involved before the end of the decade; and that we possibly might be able to make a decision then, so that we can start the implementation phase with enough lead time, so as to not be affected with the preoccupation that Fernando Manfredo rightly voiced.

**Wesley:** A few weeks ago, Colombia's president, Belisario Betancur, stated that there is a possibility that his country would build a canal through the River Atrato route. How does Panama view that possibility?

**Amado:** There have been many expressions of interest in building canals. Nicaragua has made similar statements, Mexico has built a "dry" canal, which is the container railroad [across Tehuantepec]. Colombia also has expressed interest. We believe that our conditions serve the best interests of the international community because of cost, distance, and other factors that are unique to Panama. However, all of this is within the framework of simplistic economic factors, of supply and demand, and we will try to make sure that the final decision provides the best results for the international community. . . .