

# Ortega latest leader to meet with Castro

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HAVANA --

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega met with Fidel Castro for four hours Saturday, the third leftist head of state to visit Cuba's ailing "Maximum Leader" in little over a week.

The pair discussed Nicaragua's recent energy crunch, which has included blackouts and a shortage of basic materials, as well as a literacy drive in the Central American country and how the use of biofuels can combat global warming, according to a Cuban government statement.

Ortega was joined in the closed-door meeting by his wife and presidential spokeswoman, Rosario Murillo, the statement said.

"Fidel was very satisfied with the meeting with Daniel," the statement said, adding that Castro thanked Ortega for publicly denouncing Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles, an anti-communist warrior and former CIA operative. Cuba accuses Posada Carriles of terrorism but he is free in the United States after a judge dismissed immigration fraud charges against him.

Ortega arrived Friday in Havana as part of a tour that has taken him to Venezuela, Algeria, Libya and Iran. The statement said that earlier Saturday, Ortega and Murillo met with Fidel's brother Raul, Cuba's acting president, to discuss the already friendly relationship between Nicaragua and Cuba.

Fidel Castro has not been seen in public since July 31, when he stunned Cubans by announcing he had undergone emergency intestinal surgery and was stepping down in favor of a provisional government headed by the 75-year-old Raul, the defense minister.

Life on the island has changed little under Raul Castro. Meanwhile, Fidel's condition and exact illness are state secrets, though in recent weeks he has penned a series of essays on international topics and has looked stronger and more lively in official photos and video clips meant to illustrate his recovery.

Castro appeared for nearly an hour in a previously recorded interview with state television which aired June 5, speaking slowly but clearly and apparently looking well enough for his friends in the region to begin accepting Cuban government invitations to visit.

Two days after the interview aired, Bolivian President Evo Morales made an unannounced visit to Havana, meeting with Castro for three hours and saying

the convalescing leader looked well. On June 12, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived and talked for six hours behind closed doors with Castro.

Chavez later referred to Castro as his "father" and said his friend and ally had "recovered his fastball of 90 miles an hour" but was still "warming up his arm" and was "not yet ready to take the diamond."

Ortega's visit was not formally announced beforehand, though Chavez had hinted the Nicaraguan president was on his way to Cuba.

It was Ortega's first trip to the island since retaking Nicaragua's presidency in January. He was still president-elect when he visited Havana in December, part of a contingent of leftists who attended a belated celebration marking Castro's 80th birthday.

A former Marxist who battled U.S.-backed Contra rebels in the 1980s, Ortega was defeated at the polls in 1990, but was elected anew in November.