

CRISIS IN HONDURAS: Democracy in the Balance

The Honduran Armed Forces are in the street, as thousands of citizens mobilize peacefully to defend democracy and the presidency. Repression is feared.

BELOW: an update of the crisis, by Rights Action, and two on-the-spot updates (en español) by COPINH. COPINH is a long-time partner of Rights Action, and a powerful community based organization involved in these pro-democracy and reform efforts. A Rights Action activist-staffer is in Honduras working with COPINH.

Please re-distribute this info all around. To get on/ off Rights Action's email list:
<http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3/>

WHAT TO DO: see below.

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WHAT HAPPENS IN HONDURAS TODAY WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY, AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Democratic rule is on the line, a military coup is feared, but tens of thousands of Hondurans rushed to the defense of the President, filling and surrounding the presidential palace. The crisis is a tipping point in a political transformation of the country that has taken shape during Manuel Zelaya's presidency.

Months ago, "Mel", as Hondurans refer to their president, proposed that this Sunday, June 28, a national referendum be held to present Hondurans with the question whether a ballot box (the Cuarta Urna) should be established during the November 29, 2009 national elections in which Hondurans could vote whether or not to convoke a Constituent National Assembly (CNA) to write a new constitution in Honduras. For background info: http://www.rightsaction.org/articles/Copinh_052905.html

The current constitution was written in 1982 in the midst of repression and State terrorism that blanketed Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's. Honduras was controlled, at that time, by a US-backed military regime; the United States had 14 military bases in Honduras.

The Honduran Armed Forces initially pledged support to the President and commander in chief, and provide logistical support for Sunday's referendum, to be administered by the National Statistics Institute.

Then, on Tuesday June 23, the Honduran army informed the president they would not support the referendum. The president fired the head of the armed forces, General Romeo Vasquez, and the Minister of Defense resigned.

Fearing for the safety of the President, thousands of Hondurans surrounded the Presidential Palace.

The National Congress is strongly opposed to the referendum, and today met to draft a letter of resignation for the President. The Congress has also called upon the OAS to withdraw the elections observers currently arriving to observe Sunday's referendum, and

entertained initiatives to block their entry to the country. Efforts to intimidate the voters include public statements by influential political figures claiming that if voters participate in Sunday's referendum, they could face 10 to 15 years in prison.

Around midday today, June 25, President Zelaya and thousands of civilian supporters left the presidential palace in city buses and headed to the Air Force base and successfully -
! - recovered the ballot boxes needed for Sunday's referendum.

The proposal to draft a new constitution, via the establishing of a CNA, is the culmination of a series of positive measures undertaken during "Mel's" presidency, including: a raise in the minimum wage; measures to re-nationalize energy generation plants and the telephone system; signing a bill that improves labor conditions for teachers; joining the Venezuelan Petrocaribe program which provides soft loans for development initiatives via petroleum sales; delaying recognition of the new US ambassador after the Bolivian government implicated the US embassy in supporting fascist paramilitary groups destabilizing Bolivia, and others.

In the measure that popular support has grown, with a reported 80% of population in support, opposition has grown in the economically and politically powerful minority sectors. The president has been blocked from the press, and important events have gone virtually unreported.

ON-THE-SPOT UPDATES FROM COPINH (IN SPANISH)

Sent: Thursday, June 25, 2009 4:44 PM

To: copinhonduras@yahoo.es

Subject: URGENTE reporte Honduras

ESTAMOS TRANSMITIENDO EN VIVO DESDE LA CAPITAL ...
PARA ESCUCHAR CLICK AQUI: <http://208.43.218.127:8070/>

Reporte 13:00hrs

Hay desplazamiento de contingentes populares hacia la capital de la República, aún no se sabe el nivel de respuesta que tendrá el llamado del presidente Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, a la movilización popular en defensa del régimen constitucional, aún ahora el General Romeo Vázquez Velázquez ex jefe del estado mayor del ejército reclama ser reinstalado en el puesto, y hay militares en las calles, esta es una prueba de fuerza, se miden potencias y capacidades para dar el siguiente paso, anexo, envío una entrevista que le hice por la madrugada a la ministra de trabajo del gobierno constitucional, Mayra Mejía, espero que sea de su interés y la puedan reenviar o reproducir porque hay que difundir lo que acá sucede. Seguimos en contacto. Ha comenzado el discuso de Mel... tic, tac...

From: copinh honduras [mailto:copinh@copinh.org]

Sent: Thursday, June 25, 2009 10:10 PM

To: copinhonduras@yahoo.es

Subject: HONDURAS: reporte 4 pm

REPORTE 4PM

La coyuntura se mueve, el pueblo ha salido a la calle y junto con el presidente de la

República han viajado desde la casa presidencial en buses, camiones de pasajeros urbanos (él, viajó en el estibo llamando al pueblo que se suma a la caravana, porque la Corte ordenó que se confiscaran las urnas), en los audios encontrarán la crónica de esta caravana insólita, pues de pronto, el ejército estaba en las calles, intimidando, y el pueblo entró al cuartel de la fuerza aérea a sacar las urnas para la consulta del domingo por la determinación de exigir ahora el establecimiento de una asamblea nacional constituyente... el pueblo, en medio de un lodazal, dentro del recinto de la fuerza armada saca ahora las urnas...van cinco camiones que salen... una convicción se comparte, se puede cambiar, a pesar de embarrarse de lodo, hay que ensuciarse un poco para limpiarle la cara al país... sí. sin duda... el mundo al revés y desde acá, se ve menos mal que antes...

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FUNDS ARE NEEDED to support Honduran community organizations that are defending their democracy and rule of law. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

* UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

* CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

Share this information with media, that you know of, and concerned organizations in Canada and the USA.

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