

Honduras Coup Alert #11

Canadian government weakening position of “international community”

Rights Action, July 3, 2009

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Below, another article – NYT – about the visit of the Organization of American States (OAS) to Honduras to try and help peacefully re-establish the constitutional order. In the OAS, Peter Kent, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, is insisting this is not a simple one-sided problem, “that Mr. Zelaya was a highly polarizing figure who clashed with the Supreme Court, Congress and army. “There has to be an appreciation of the events that led up to the coup.””

This equivocal position of the Canadian government must be rejected. There is and can be no justification for the Honduran military coup and militarization of the country.

Of course there were problems in the country; of course President Zelaya had differences of opinion with many sectors. Many sectors that are demanding his return today never voted for him and disagree with his policies.

But these are separate issues.

Canadians in particular, on this one, must contact their politicians and Peter Kent's office, to demand that Canada insist on the unconditional return of President Zelaya and all members of his government ... See demands below.

WHAT TO DO: see below. Please re-distribute this information all around.
To get on/ off Rights Action's email list:
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ENVOY PREPARES TO VISIT HONDURAS, WARNING OF OBSTACLES
By MARC LACEY and GINGER THOMPSON, New York Times, July 3, 2009

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras — The hemisphere's chief envoy for the crisis in Honduras offered a bleak assessment on Thursday of the diplomatic

efforts to restore its ousted president, warning that it would be “very hard” to head off a more severe break with the nation and that he was prepared to call for sanctions if he failed.

The comments by the envoy, José Miguel Insulza, secretary general of the Organization of American States, were the clearest signal yet of the overwhelming odds against a swift resolution to the standoff. Beyond facing stiff resistance from the Honduran government, Mr. Insulza has also had a hard time keeping his coalition of 33 other countries united over how to bring an end to the crisis.

American, Canadian and O.A.S. officials said Thursday that while they all stood behind the reinstatement of the Honduran president, a wide range of disagreements had jolted the coalition — over how much Mr. Insulza should negotiate when he arrives in Honduras this week, whom he should meet with and even who should accompany him on the trip. By the end of Thursday, it was simply agreed that Mr. Insulza would travel alone.

O.A.S. officials acknowledged that he would talk to members of Congress and the Supreme Court, both of which played a part in the president's removal. But Mr. Insulza insisted that he “was not going to Honduras to negotiate.” Instead, he said, he was going to urge the new government to relent and reinstate the ousted president, Manuel Zelaya, before the O.A.S. made good on its threat to suspend Honduras from its ranks.

Some diplomats argue, however, that the negotiations must also be willing to acknowledge that Mr. Zelaya played a role in his own downfall. “The coup was certainly an affront to the region, but there is a context in which these events happened,” said Peter Kent, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, noting that Mr. Zelaya was a highly polarizing figure who clashed with the Supreme Court, Congress and army. “There has to be an appreciation of the events that led up to the coup.”

Other countries do not believe that should be a point of the negotiations at all, and at a news conference in Panama, a defiant Mr. Zelaya insisted that he remained the country's president even though the military had forced him from the country by gunpoint and Congress had named a new leadership. They removed him over fears that he was trying to undermine the Constitution and extend his tenure.

“We may not have the institutions, but the street is ours,” he said, urging his followers to turn out peacefully. “That's the people's place.”

The Obama administration has ardently opposed Mr. Zelaya's removal, so much so that the president's wife and son are now taking refuge at the American ambassador's residence here. American officials are also studying whether Mr. Zelaya's ouster on Sunday fits the legal definition of a coup, a determination that could lead to a cutoff of millions of dollars in American aid. That decision could come as early as Friday.

The leaders who organized Mr. Zelaya's ouster have refused to allow him to return to power and said they would promptly arrest him if he set foot on Honduran soil. Government officials have also expressed concern that Mr. Zelaya's attempts to go back to the country could set off bloodshed if his supporters turned out in large numbers and clashed with security forces.

Mr. Zelaya's supporters and foes continued with demonstrations Thursday, with several thousand of his backers marching through the streets of the capital and another group backing the new president, Roberto Micheletti, rallying in San Pedro Sula, the second largest city.

Many Hondurans have a limited view of the crisis since the interim government has interrupted television transmissions and closed some stations loyal to Mr. Zelaya since his ouster. Local journalists have claimed harassment, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, citing the army's brief detention of seven international journalists on Monday, has asked the authorities to allow all media "to report freely and without fear of reprisal."

Mr. Micheletti, in a news briefing on Wednesday, said media restrictions were put in place to control public order because some organizations were urging Mr. Zelaya's backers "to go and do what they did, breaking windows, hitting people, assaulting."

But Esdras Amado López, the owner of a television station, Channel 36, called the government hypocritical: "This is against the Constitution that the new government says it is protecting. I have a license. I have a right to inform the people. This is an unconstitutional order."

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FUNDS ARE NEEDED FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN HONDURAS

Rights Action staff are in Honduras working with the pro-democracy organizations and Frente. Funds are being given directly to pro democracy community development and human rights organizations for: food and shelter, transportation and communication costs, urgent action outreach and human rights accompaniment work.

Make tax deductible donations to Rights Action and mail to:

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AMERICANS AND CANADIANS SHOULD CONTACT YOUR OWN MEDIA, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, SENATORS & MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, TO DEMAND:

- unequivocal denunciations of the military coup
- no recognition of this military coup and the 'de facto' government of Roberto Michelletti
- a return of the constitutional government

- the gradual and public implementation of economic and military sanctions

- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- justice and reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup