

Rights Action

July 15, 2009

Honduras Coup Alert #25 – Various articles

- by IPS news agency
- well-funded pro-coup lobbying efforts in Washington
- US-military links to Honduras military
- Canadian mining interests in Honduras compromise Canadian government

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(General Update from Honduras)

HONDURAS: COUP OPPONENTS ANNOUNCE NEW STAGE OF PROTESTS

By Thelma Mejía, Inter Press Service News Agency, Tuesday, July 14, 2009,

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47644>

TEGUCIGALPA, Jul 13 (IPS) - The sectors opposed to the regime that ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya on Jun. 28 announced a new stage of resistance, while Costa Rican President Oscar Arias is planning a second round of talks, as peace broker.

Arias, winner of the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end civil wars raging at the time in several Central American countries, told the press over the weekend that within the next week a new round of talks should be held by the representatives of Zelaya and the de facto regime headed by Roberto Micheletti. The two sides now have a week to "reflect" before sitting down to dialogue "more calmly," said Arias.

The first round of talks, held Jul. 9-10 in the Costa Rican capital, produced no results. Zelaya and Micheletti refused to get together face-to-face,

each meeting separately instead with Arias, who said afterwards that "miracles" don't happen overnight and that things would take longer than expected.

Former chief justice of the Honduran Supreme Court Vilma Morales, who formed part of Micheletti's delegation, told IPS that "we are optimistic about the next meeting, because we are all Hondurans and we should look for solutions to the conflict among ourselves, in the framework of our laws, our constitution and the rule of law." Morales said the next meeting would take place on Saturday, Jul.18.

Rafael Leiva, an analyst who specialises in international law, said Arias "cannot afford to let the mediation fail; he will find a way to overcome the obstacles that emerge, in order to reach a solution. This problem must be resolved by Hondurans themselves, with the support of the rest of Central America."

In his conversation with IPS, Leiva pointed to Arias' ability to "unblock disagreements with his wisdom and insight" during the Central American peace processes that culminated in peace accords in the 1980s and early 1990s. "We believe he will not allow this situation to get out of hand. He also has the approval of Washington, which has confidence in his peace brokering skills," he said.

Meanwhile, the so-called Resistance Front Against the Coup d'Etat announced a new, more radical phase of protests this week aimed at securing Zelaya's return. Congressman Marvin Ponce of the leftist Democratic Unification (UD) party said he believes the talks in San José are merely aimed at "buying time, while the Micheletti regime gets established, and we won't let that happen. We think they are only trying to drag this situation out, when things here are clear: there was a coup d'etat and Manuel Zelaya should be reinstated.

"As of this week we are going to take more radical action," he told IPS. "We are calling all of the organisations that make up the Resistance Front to an assembly Tuesday where we are going to propose a nationwide general strike as well as more radical actions. If what it takes is civil war, then that's what we'll do. "The people owe Honduras a revolution, and if the legitimate president, Manuel Zelaya, is not reinstated, there will be a confrontation between social classes. What I can say is that the days of peaceful resistance, like we have had until now, are numbered," said Ponce, visibly exhausted from the last two weeks of protests.

JULY 5TH REPRESSION: There have been media reports and footage of harsh crackdowns on pro-Zelaya demonstrators, and two protesters were reportedly killed in a clash with security forces at the airport in Tegucigalpa when the leader's attempt to return to Honduras was thwarted by the military on Jul. 5.

TWO POLITICIANS KILLED: In addition, two of Ponce's fellow UD politicians have been murdered in murky circumstances: Roger Bados was killed over the weekend at his home in Rivera Hernández, a violent slum in the northern city of San Pedro Sula, while Ramón García was murdered while riding in a bus to the capital from the western city of Santa Bárbara.

The deaths of the two UD social activists have not been expressly linked to the crisis triggered two weeks ago, when at least 200 military troops surrounded Zelaya's residence early in the morning on Sunday, Jun. 28, pulled him out of bed at gunpoint and put him on a plane to Costa Rica. The situation surrounding the two murders is "strange and hazy. We need more information before we can comment on" the deaths, said Ponce. In the view of Erasto Reyes, a leader of the Bloque Popular that forms part of the Resistance Front in San Pedro Sula, the murders "have increased the fear and sense of insecurity in this tense context in which social activists move. But we are not going to let down our guard, regardless," he told IPS.

On Sunday, the Micheletti government lifted the nighttime curfew in place since the coup, an attempt to show the international community that things were returning to normal in Honduras, in the wake of wide condemnation of the suspension of constitutional guarantees. Labour and business activity began to return to normal last week, while marches by pro- and anti-Zelaya demonstrators have continued since Jun. 28.

TEACHER'S UNION: The most affected sector has been education. On Monday, one faction of the teachers' unions called for a return to the classroom, while the rest decided in an assembly to continue the strike. Lina Pineda, leader of one of the five factions that agreed to continue the strike, told IPS that "besides suspending classes, we are going to block roads, because the resistance will continue. We are completely united, and we are not going to stop until the coup-mongers leave."

PRESIDENT ZELAYA RETURNING - ???: In statements from the Dominican Republic, Zelaya announced that he would return to the country this week, in line with remarks by his ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who said Sunday that the Honduran leader would reenter his country at a point "where he is least expected."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA OUSTED: Chávez made his comments after a team of journalists from the Caracas-based regional television network Telesur, which belongs to several Latin American countries, were detained and held for several hours by the Honduran police, accused of driving a stolen vehicle. The Telesur reporters said that although they were not physically mistreated by the police, they were the target of verbal abuse. Several of them left Honduras Sunday because their visas had expired, the local press reported. The Venezuelan Embassy said it was considering lodging a formal complaint over the journalists' arrest.

DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION: No government has recognised the regime in Honduras, which is facing total isolation. The coup was condemned by the United Nations General Assembly and the Organisation of American States, both of which called for Zelaya's immediate return to power. The Non-Aligned Movement, to which Honduras belongs, is preparing to do the same on Thursday.

COUP DENIAL: But within Honduras, influential voices continue to deny that what happened was a coup. In an interview with an Argentine newspaper, Catholic cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez complained that the international community "has eyes and does not see, has ears and does not hear, has a tongue and does not speak." Rodríguez insists that Zelaya was removed in accordance with the steps outlined by the constitution. "If you see the steps taken, they are the ones established by the constitution. It would have been a coup if the head of state and the ministers were military officers and Congress or the Supreme Court had been dissolved. Some of the previous government's ministers are even still in the cabinet. What the army did was enforce a judge's order." (END/2009)

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(Pro-Honduras Coup Lobbying Efforts in Washington)

ORRICK'S LANNY DAVIS LOBBYING AGAINST DEPOSED HONDURAN LEADER

By Brian Baxter, 07-14-2009,

<http://www.law.com/jsp/law/LawArticleFriendly.jsp?id=1202432217017>

TheHill.com reports that Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe's Lanny Davis is leading a lobbying effort against deposed Honduran President Manuel Zelaya.

According to The Hill, Honduran business leaders are hiring Washington lobbyists to convince members of Congress that they should support the removal of Zelaya, who was ousted in a military coup two weeks ago. The Honduran branch of the Business Council of Latin America (CEAL) has hired Davis, a former White House special counsel and well-known supporter of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. The organization is a network of Latin American business leaders that is akin to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Davis, who did not immediately respond to a request for comment, told The Hill that he had not called Clinton to set up a meeting between Honduran government officials and had no plans to do so. Davis said the business group he represents wants to restore order to the Central American country, which was thrown into crisis when Zelaya tried to alter the constitution against the wishes of the military and other branches of the Honduran government.

Since then, The Hill reports that Davis has been busy orchestrating a "lobbying blitz" by buying ads in D.C.-area papers and setting up meetings between former high-level Honduran officials and congressional aides. Davis and other Orrick lawyers are also reportedly working with Guillermo Pérez-Cadalso, a former Honduran foreign minister and supreme court justice, on testimony he intends to give before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Bloomberg reported on Friday that the power struggle in Honduras was splitting Democrats and Republicans, with Zelaya being lauded for his social reform programs by some, but criticized for his anti-business initiatives by others. The Obama administration, perhaps mindful of past U.S. policies that didn't engender goodwill in the region, has come out in support of Zelaya.

Davis told The Hill that his clients are completely behind Secretary Clinton's efforts to broker an end to the crisis through talks between Zelaya and coup backers. Costa Rican president Oscar Arias is mediating the negotiations.

The Honduran army foiled Zelaya's attempts to return to the country last week when it blocked his plane from landing in the capital of Tegucigalpa.

(This article first appeared on The Am Law Daily blog on AmericanLawyer.com)

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(U.S. military ties to coup plotters and perpetrators)

U.S. CONTINUES TO TRAIN HONDURAN SOLDIERS

<http://ncronline.org/news/global/us-continues-train-honduran-soldiers>

Published on National Catholic Reporter

A controversial facility at Ft. Benning, Ga. -- formerly known as the U.S. Army's School of the Americas -- is still training Honduran officers despite claims by the Obama administration that it cut military ties to Honduras after its president was overthrown June 28, NCR has learned.

A day after an SOA-trained army general ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya at gunpoint, President Barack Obama stated that "the coup was not legal" and that Zelaya remained "the democratically elected president."

The Foreign Operations Appropriations Act requires that U.S. military aid and training be suspended when a country undergoes a military coup, and the Obama administration has indicated those steps have been taken.

However, Lee Rials, public affairs officer for the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the successor of SOA, confirmed Monday that Honduran officers are still being trained at the school. "Yes, they're in class now," Rials said. Asked about the Obama administration's suspension of aid and training to Honduras, Rials said, "Well, all I know is they're here, and they're in class."

The decision to continue training the Hondurans is "purely government policy," he said, adding that it's possible that other U.S. military schools are training them too. "We're not the only place." Rials did not know exactly how many Hondurans were currently enrolled, but he said at least two officers are currently in the school's Command and General Staff course, its premier year-long program.

"I don't know the exact number because we've had some classes just completed and some more starting," he said. "There's no more plans for anybody to come. Everything that was in place already is still in place. Nobody's directed that they go home or that anything cease."

The school trained 431 Honduran officers from 2001 to 2008, and some 88 were projected for this year, said Rials, who couldn't provide their names. Since 2005, the Department of Defense has barred the release of their

names after it was revealed that the school had enrolled well-known human rights abusers.

COUP MILITARY LEADERS

The general who overthrew Zelaya -- Romeo Orlando Vásquez Velásquez -- is a two-time graduate of SOA, which critics have nicknamed the "School of Coups" because it trained so many coup leaders, including two other Honduran graduates, Gen. Juan Melgar Castro and Gen. Policarpo Paz García.

Vásquez is not the only SOA graduate linked to the current coup or employed by the de facto government. Others are:

Gen. Luis Javier Prince Suazo, the head of the Honduran air force, who arranged to have Zelaya flown into exile in Costa Rica;

Gen. Nelson Willy Mejía Mejía, the newly appointed director of immigration, who is not only an SOA graduate, but a former SOA instructor. One year after he was awarded the U.S. Meritorious Service Medal, he faced charges in connection with the infamous death squad, Battalion 3-16, for which he was an intelligence officer.

Col. Herberth Bayardo Inestroza Membreño, the Honduran army's top lawyer who admitted that flying Zelaya into exile was a crime, telling the Miami Herald that "In the moment that we took him out of the country, in the way that he was taken out, there is a crime," but it will be justified.

Lt. Col. Ramiro Archaga Paz, the army's director of public relations, who has denied harassment of protesters and maintained that the army is not involved in internal security.

Col. Jorge Rodas Gamero, a two-time SOA graduate, who is the minister of security, a post he also held in Zelaya's government.

The ongoing training of Hondurans at Ft. Benning is not the only evidence of unbroken U.S.-Honduran military ties since the coup. Another piece was discovered by Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois, the founder of SOA Watch, while on fact-finding mission to Honduras last week.

Bourgeois -- accompanied by two lawyers, Kent Spriggs and Dan Kovalik -- visited the Soto Cano/Palmerola Air Base northwest of Tegucigalpa, where the U.S. Southern Command's Joint Task Force-Bravo is stationed.

"Helicopters were flying all around, and we spoke with the U.S. official on duty, a Sgt. Reyes" about the U.S.-Honduran relationship, Bourgeois said.

"We asked him if anything had changed since the coup and he said no, nothing."

The group later met with U.S. Ambassador Hugo Llorens, who claimed that he had no knowledge of ongoing U.S. military activity with the Hondurans, Bourgeois said. The ambassador also said that he himself has had no contact with the de facto government.

That has apparently changed. Christopher Webster, the director of the State Department's Office of Central American Affairs, said Monday that Llorens has in fact been in touch with the current coup government, according to Eric LeCompte, the national organizer for SOA Watch.

LeCompte met with Webster Monday along with other representatives of human rights groups and three Hondurans -- Marvin Ponce Saucedo, a member of the Honduran National Congress, Jari Dixon Herrera Hernández, a lawyer with the Honduran attorney general's office, and Dr. Juan Almeyda Bonilla, director of the Center for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Treatment of Victims of Torture.

Webster told the group that Llorens and the State Department are engaging the coup government to the extent necessary to bring about a solution to the crisis.

Webster "told us that military aid had been cut off, and that the return of Zelaya as president is non-negotiable although the conditions under which he returns are negotiable," LeCompte said.

Herrera Hernández, the lawyer with the Honduran attorney general's office, told Webster that the coup government has disseminated misinformation by claiming the coup was legal because the court had issued an arrest warrant for Zelaya for pushing ahead with a non-binding referendum on whether to change the Honduran constitution.

However, the order to arrest Zelaya came a day after the coup, he said. And contrary to coup propaganda, Zelaya never sought to extend his term in office, and even if the survey had been held, changing the constitution would have required action by the legislature, he said.

Whatever legal argument the coup leaders had against Zelaya, it fell apart when they flew him into exile rather than prosecuting him, the attorney said. The legal system has broken down, he added, for if this can happen to the president, who can't it happen to?

[Linda Cooper and James Hodge are the authors of Disturbing the Peace: The Story of Father Roy Bourgeois and the Movement to Close the School of the Americas.]

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(Canada's Complicated Complicity With Pro-coup Sectors)

SHAME ON CANADA, COUP SUPPORTER: WHY HAVE WE SIDED WITH THE HONDURAN MILITARY? MINING PROFITS

By Ashley Holly, <http://thetyee.ca/Views/2009/07/09/ShameOnCanada/>, TheTee.ca July 9, 2009

For the first time in decades, the world's eyes are on Honduras, a tiny country many Canadians know for those little stickers on exported bananas and the surplus of coffee it floods onto the global market each year. The world is less aware of the ongoing role that the Canadian government and Canadian mining companies play in pushing many Hondurans further into poverty.

Now that the world is watching, it's a good time to reveal these secrets.

On Saturday, July 4, at the impromptu meeting of the Organization of the American States, Canadian Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas Peter Kent suggested President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya not return to Honduras. It's an interesting stance for Canada to assume, considering that most of the international community has condemned the coup in Honduras.

Moreover, following violent clashes between the military police and demonstrators awaiting Zelaya's return this past Sunday, Kent held Zelaya responsible for the deaths of two demonstrators by the military government.

Prior to these comments, Canada had remained relatively silent on this issue. But while most other countries have cancelled their aid to Honduras in protest of the coup, Canada has not. Why is our democracy suddenly in the business of supporting a military coup?

CAPITALIZING ON HURRICANE DEVASTATION

The answer begins with Canada's reaction to the last crisis in Honduras. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch swept through much of Central America and especially ravaged Honduras, where thousands of people were killed and millions were displaced. Already the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Honduras was now struck with over \$3 billion in

damages, a loss of social services such as schools, hospitals and road systems. Seventy per cent of its agricultural crops were destroyed. Nothing so devastating had ever hit Honduras.

Canada was quick to respond to the cries for help following Hurricane Mitch, with a 'long-term development plan'. Canada offered \$100 million over four years for reconstruction projects. These grandiose aid packages made Canada look like a savior.

However, attached to this assistance was the introduction of over 40 Canadian companies to Honduras to assess opportunities for investment. This hurricane offered a strategic economic opportunity for Canadian investment in Honduras.

The Canadian government, as it officially stated this year, considers mineral extraction by Canadian mining companies one of the best ways to "create new economic opportunities in the developing world".

Shortly after Hurricane Mitch weakened the Honduran state, Canada and the United States joined to establish the National Association of Metal Mining of Honduras (ANAMINH), through which they were able to rewrite the General Mining Law. This law provides foreign mining companies with lifelong concessions, tax breaks and subsurface land rights for "rational resource exploitation".

'WE HAVE LOST EVERYTHING'

"They crave gold like hungry swine," Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano has written of multinational mining firms. I thought of those words on a recent drive through the open pit San Andres mining project, recently sold by the Canadian company Yamana Gold to another Canadian company, Aura Minerale. When I'd finished my tour, I was convinced the social, economic, environmental and health costs of open pit mining practices far outweigh the supposed benefits, and that the resource exploitation practiced by certain Canadian companies is anything but rational.

I got chills driving through the abandoned village of San Andres. What were once homes and schools had been bulldozed into mounds of crushed adobe and rock. Where ancient pine trees stood, there now were deep craters, accessible by the nicest highways I had seen in Honduras.

But a local resident at the end of one of those roads told me: "We have lost everything." The mine had displaced him from his home, and he was now without clean water to drink or fertile land to sow.

Currently, Canadian companies own 33 per cent of mineral investments in Latin America, accumulating to the ownership of over 100 properties. Export Development Canada contributes 50 per cent of Canadian Pension Plan money to mining companies, which offered upwards of \$50 billion in 2003.

Goldcorp alone has received nearly one billion dollars from CPP subsidies. Although EDC is responsible for regulating Canadian industry abroad, it has been accused of failing to apply regulatory standards to 24 of 26 mining projects that it has funded.

In February 2003, nearly five hundred gallons of cyanide spilled into the Rio Lara, killing 18,000 fish. The mine in San Andres uses more water in one hour than an average Honduran family uses in one year. In that same year, mining companies earned \$44.4 million, while the average income per capita in Honduras in 2004 was just \$1,126USD.

ZELAYA'S ANTI-MINING STANCE: PAYMENT DUE

As the man at the end of the road tried to explain to me, mining is not development for people who live around these mines. He speaks for thousands of others -- a base of support aligned with the ousted President Zelaya. In 2006, Zelaya decided to cancel all future mining concessions in Honduras.

Which would appear to explain, at least in large part, why Canada stands virtually alone in the hemisphere in supporting the Honduran military's ousting of Zelaya. The Canadian government, and its friends in the mining industry, are using the coup as an opportunity to plant their feet deeper into the Honduran ground.

In his role as minister of state for foreign affairs, Peter Kent once declared that "democratic governance is a central pillar of Canada's enhanced engagement in the Americas."
Apparently, his instructions from Ottawa have been revised.

(Ashley Holly is a Canadian student conducting research in Honduras.)

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WHAT TO DO:

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

- unequivocal denunciation of the military coup
- no recognition of this military coup and the 'de facto' government of Roberto Micheletti
- unconditional return of the entire constitutional government
- concrete economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup regime
- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- application of international and national justice against the coup plotters, and
- reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

2- FUNDS ARE NEEDED FOR THE 'PRO-DEMOCRACY', EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN HONDURAS:

Rights Action staff in Honduras are providing emergency relief funds, every day, to community development, campesino, indigenous and human rights organizations for: food and shelter, transportation and communication, urgent action outreach and human rights accompaniment work.

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