

Rights Action

Honduras Coup, Day 19 of Resistance, July 16, 2009

Alert #26 – Repression yesterday against women's march & articles

BELOW:

- Summary of July 15 violence against a women's march, By Jonathan Treat
- Washington Post article by Juan Ferero, **In Deeply Split Honduran Society, a Potentially Combustible Situation**

FOR INFORMATION FROM HONDURAS, CONTACT:

Grahame Russell (Rights Action): info@rightsaction.org, [504] 9507-3835, 9630-9507

Sandra Cuffe (independent journalist): lavagabunda27@yahoo.es, [504] 9525-6778

Please re-distribute this information all around.

To get on/ off Rights Action's email list:

<http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3/>

* * *

JULY 15 REPRESSION AGAINST WOMEN'S MARCH

(Prepared by Jonathan Treat)

In Tegucigalpa, Honduras there is palpable tension after a yesterday's demonstrations by thousands of pro-democracy/pro-President Zelaya protestors in front of the Honduran Women's Institute, and then in front of the National Congressional building.

At the protest in front of the women's institute, local television station Channel 36 filmed one anti-riot police officer load what appeared to be a tear gas canister and point it at a woman at close range. Channel 36 film crews also interviewed several women who told of being attacked by the police—showing their bruises and lesions as proof. There were also unconfirmed reports of rubber bullets being fired at protestors.

Shortly after broadcasting that footage, Channel 36 was taken off the air — a common censorship strategy utilized by the de facto government since the military coup on June 28. When the station returned to the air

and again attempted to broadcast the repression in front of the National Women's Institute, the broadcast was again cut off.

The next few days may be critical, as an end to the ongoing stalemate is anticipated. President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya has vowed to re-enter the country in hopes of retaking the presidency and government. De facto leader Roberto Micheletti today offered to step down, but only on the condition that President Zelaya not be allowed to resume power, which of course is acceptable to no one in the coup resistance, pro-democracy movement.

Meanwhile, widespread mobilizations have been planned for today. Leaders of the pro-democracy movement have called for the closure of major north and south arteries into Tegucigalpa. Labor unions in Nicaragua and El Salvador have vowed to close their borders as well, in solidarity with the pro-democracy movement here.

The Micheletti regime has repeatedly imposed nighttime curfews since the imposition of the military-backed government, and there are rumors that it may impose a pre-dawn tomorrow in effort to stop the planned popular mobilization.

Many in the popular movement here say that action from other governments in the Americas — not just words — to support the reinstatement of President Zelaya and his entire government is critical if the country is to avoid a potentially violent explosion.

* * *

In Deeply Split Honduran Society, a Potentially Combustible Situation

By Juan Forero, Washington Post, Wednesday, July 15, 2009

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/14/AR2009071403320.html>

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras -- To many poor Hondurans, deposed president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya was a trailblazing ally who scrapped school tuitions, raised the minimum wage and took on big business. "He met with us -- the taxi drivers could go to the presidency and talk to him, the poor farmers, the women's groups," said Berta Cáceres, 38, an Indian rights activist who has been organizing pro-Zelaya rallies since his ouster last month. "The people liked him -- liked him because he said things they knew were true but that no other president had said before."

But among the country's small but influential establishment, what Zelaya did and said were cause for alarm. That sentiment fueled not just the military coup that removed the populist leader from power June 28 but also solidified the de facto government's now intractable stance against any effort to reinstate him.

"I don't want Mel Zelaya back in our country because of all the damage he did to our country," said Alan Licona, 42, an engineer who has rallied for the de facto government.

Licona said Zelaya had been taking Honduras on a socialist path similar to that of Venezuela, whose president is a close ally of Zelaya's. "Honduras has lived in peace and democracy all these years," Licona said, "and we want to continue to live in peace and democracy."

The two diametrically opposed views underscore the deep divisions and simmering anger evident in Honduras, where those who support Zelaya are generally poor and those who oppose him tend to come from the middle and upper classes. That has created something of a powder keg here as Costa Rica's president, Oscar Arias, mediates talks between Zelaya and the de facto government.

The caretaker president, Roberto Micheletti, has said that November's presidential election could be moved up to defuse tensions but that his government considers Zelaya's ouster legal and non-negotiable.

Zelaya has said that if the de facto government does not agree to reinstate him at the next round of talks Saturday, he will resort to "other measures" to find his way back to power. In Guatemala on Tuesday, he called for "an insurrection," and diplomats say more violence of the type that has left at least one protester dead is possible.

"I see a society profoundly polarized and divided," José Miguel Insulza, secretary general of the Organization of American States, said this month. "Without a doubt, there is a division. There is lots of tension."

Honduras is one of the poorest and most inequitable countries in Latin America. A 2008 U.N. report on poverty and social exclusion in Latin America said seven of 10 Hondurans were living in poverty, the highest poverty rate among 18 countries surveyed.

They are people like the family of Isi Obed Murillo, a 19-year-old Zelaya supporter shot and killed by soldiers at a raucous rally at the Tegucigalpa

airport when the deposed president tried to return from Washington to regain power.

Murillo's family members live in shabby hillside districts where streets are unpaved, roofs leak and hopes faded long ago.

Rebeca Murillo, 22, said that she and her siblings saw the possibility of a new beginning with Zelaya -- and that that is why she, Isi and two other brothers went to the airport to rally for him. Gunfire then rang out, she said, and the next thing she recalls was seeing Isi's lifeless body.

"Mel Zelaya wanted to improve things. He asked us what we wanted and what we did not want," she said. "What divides us here is money, and we saw Zelaya as the guy who could take us out of our misery."

Eduardo Maldonado, a popular television and radio commentator who supports Zelaya, said he thinks that the ousted president had been hoping to change the constitution to make it more inclusive.

"The coffee exporters have congressmen, the bankers have congressmen, the fast-food interests have congressmen," Maldonado said. "That's why the country has been in these difficult conditions . . . because there is not a congress that permits people to participate."

Wealthier Hondurans opposed to Zelaya are easy to find in the capital, a world of glitzy shopping malls, Miami-style high-rises and broad avenues filled with so many American fast-food outlets -- expensive eating for the poor -- that they appear to have been plunked down from some U.S. suburb.

Adolfo Facussé, an investor long tied to government officials, said that although Zelaya's rhetoric resonated with the poor, his policies did little to help lift them out of poverty. Facussé said that raising the minimum monthly wage by 60 percent led to the firings of 170,000 people and that increasing the pay of teachers hit the treasury hard.

Facussé said he and other Hondurans also became alarmed as Zelaya built an alliance with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez that they thought was more ideological than economic. Facussé said the last straw came when Zelaya moved ahead with plans to hold a referendum that could have paved the way for his reelection, a move the Supreme Court and the National Congress opposed.

"To us, Zelaya is Chávez, and we don't want Chávez here," Facussé said.

Political commentators, analysts and diplomats say Zelaya, whose family made its fortune from logging, remained friendly to some power brokers. But his drift to the left soon alarmed the conglomerates that own hydroelectric plants, the established media, coffee interests and the influential fast food market.

The de facto government and its supporters say Zelaya's populist measures were designed to build support so he could manipulate the constitution and remain in power. But those who support him say he was justified in moving forward against the wishes of those whom Cáceres, the rights activist, called "the perfumed ones."

"He broke with those old schemes," she said. "That gave confidence to the people that he broke with the traditional side and came closer and closer to the social movements."

* * *

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.

Make tax deductible donations 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>