

Rights Action

Day 31 of Honduran Coup Resistance
July 29, 2009, Alert #37

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Karen Spring (Rights Action), in Honduras, spring.kj@gmail.com, [504] 9507-3835
- Sandra Cuffe (journalist), in Honduras: lavagabunda27@yahoo.es, [504] 9525-6778
- Grahame Russell (Rights Action), in USA: info@rightsaction.org, 1-860-352-2448

See previous Honduras Coup Alerts at: www.rightsaction.org

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SUMMARY OF SOME KILLINGS AND OTHER CASES OF REPRESSION

(Weekly News Update on the Americas, Issue #999, July 26, 2009:

weeklynewsupdate@gmail.com,

<http://weeklynewsupdate.blogspot.com/>)

HONDURAS: PROTESTER MURDERED, LEADER DETAINED

Hundreds of people attended the burial of murdered Honduran bricklayer Pedro Magdiel Muñoz Salvador on July 26 in the El Durazno cemetery, about 5km north of Tegucigalpa.

"Blood of martyrs, seed of freedom," chanted the mourners, who said the police had killed Muñoz for his role in a July 24 demonstration near the border with Nicaragua, where protesters had been trying to join up with deposed Honduran president José Manuel Zelaya Rosales.

During the burial ceremony, mourners seized two police agents from the General Directorate of Investigation, beat them and set their vehicle on fire. According to witnesses, campesino leader Rafael Alegría rescued the agents from the crowd. Alegría, who heads the local branch of the international group Vía Campesina ("Campesino Way"), has been a spokesperson for the grassroots movement resisting the military coup that removed Zelaya from office on June 28.

Muñoz, a 23-year-old Tegucigalpa resident, was found dead with signs of prolonged torture on the morning of July 25 near a police post in Alauca municipality, about 12km from the Las Manos border post in the southern department of El Paraíso. On the afternoon of July 24, hundreds of protesters had confronted soldiers and police in nearby El Paraíso municipality in an attempt to reach Zelaya, who was trying to enter Honduras at Las Manos from the Nicaraguan side. Witnesses said Muñoz was active in building a large, smoky bonfire near the soldiers who were blocking the protesters.

A police official acknowledged that agents arrested Muñoz that afternoon but said the arrest was for smoking marijuana, not for protesting. The police said they released him at 6:30 am on July 25, but a medical examiner said in the presence of witnesses—including representatives of the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees in Honduras (COFADEH), an independent human rights organization—that Muñoz had died several hours before that. (Qué (Spain) 7/26/09 from unidentified wire services; La Jornada (Mexico) 7/26/09 from AFP; Honduras Laboral (7/26/09) from Frente de Resistencia Popular de Honduras)

MUÑOZ'S MURDER APPEARS TO BE PART OF A PATTERN OF INCREASED REPRESSION AGAINST OPPONENTS OF THE COUP

On the night of July 24, unidentified people fired on a car near Tegucigalpa's Toncontín international airport, wounding Juan Carlos

Trochez, who was hospitalized with wounds in the chest and the lower body.

He had been returning to the capital after participating in an anti-coup demonstration in the western department of Santa Bárbara with his older brother, César Darío Trochez.

Their father is Rodrigo Trochez, a legislative deputy from Santa Bárbara for the center-right Liberal Party, whose membership includes both President Zelaya and de facto president Roberto Micheletti, a leader of the coup. Deputy Trochez is one of the minority of Liberal legislators who opposed the coup; he had been in Washington since July 19 with six other deputies to talk to US officials and Congress members. He told the Italian wire service ANSA that he thought the attack was a reprisal for protesting against the de facto regime. (ANSA 7/25/09)

MASS DETENTIONS

Campesino leader Rafael Alegría was detained along with driver Gustavo Adolfo Suazo and the Austrian writer Leo Gabriel in Las Manos around 1 pm on July 25. The police refused to say where Alegría had been taken, but the independent Spanish journalist José Carlos Gallaga located him with about 45 other detained protesters—including 18 women and 11 minors—in El Paraíso in departmental police station number 7. The police assaulted Gallaga, but finally released the protesters at around 6 pm. (Honduras Laboral (7/26/09) from Común Noticias)

BOMB EXPLODES IN UNION

On July 26, shortly before the burial of Pedro Muñoz, a small bomb exploded in a bathroom in the Tegucigalpa offices of the Union of Workers of the Brewery Industry and the Like (STIBYS). There was material damage but no injuries. The union has been a meeting place for the resistance, and the explosion came at the end of a strategy meeting. (Qué (Spain) 7/26/09 from unidentified wire services; La Jornada (Mexico) 7/26/09 from AFP)

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MISSION

A mission of delegates from international human rights organizations released a preliminary report on July 23 in Tegucigalpa charging “serious and systematic violations” of rights in Honduras following the June 28 military coup. The mission’s 15 members included representatives from the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), and the Peace and Justice Service (SERPAJ).

The report listed five killings that appeared to be politically motivated: the death of an unidentified man whose body was found in Tegucigalpa on July 3 in a t-shirt supporting the “fourth ballot box” (a reference to a proposed poll on a constitutional reform that precipitated the coup); the shooting death of protester Isis Obed Murillo Mencias by soldiers during a July 5 demonstration at the Toncontín airport; and the murders of journalist Gabriel Fino Noriega and two activists from the leftist Democratic Unification Party (PUD), Ramón García and labor leader Roger Iván Bados [see Update #997].

The report also listed one apparent homophobic murder. Vicky Hernández Castillo (Sonny Emelson Hernández Castillo) was shot and strangled San Pedro Sula during the nightly curfew the de facto regime imposed after the coup.

The Honduran human rights group COFADEH listed 1,155 human rights violations since June 28, of which 1,046 were illegal detentions, mainly for violating the curfew or for participating in protests. Oscar Raúl Matute, governance secretary in the de facto government, denied the human rights groups’ accusations on July 23. “You can travel freely around the country,” he said. “There are no persecutions; there are no political prisoners.” (La Jornada 7/24/09 from AFP, DPA, Reuters; Upside Down World 7/23/09; Equipo Nizkor 7/24/09)

ARMY BLOCKS THOUSANDS OF PROTESTERS

According to both resistance organizers and international wire services, thousands of Hondurans headed to the border with Nicaragua when they learned that President Zelaya would try to re-enter there at the Las Manos border post in El Paraíso department on July 24. The military responded by deploying a large number of troops to stop the movement toward the border. The de facto regime also imposed a round-the-clock curfew on the department.

Witnesses reported 14 to 20 military roadblocks along the 100km route from Tegucigalpa to Las Manos. Protesters were also detained when they tried to come from Choluteca and Olancho departments. Two teams of investigators from COFADEH headed by the group’s general coordinator, Bertha Oliva, were stopped at Arenales, 7km from Danlí, El Paraíso.

Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the president’s wife, was also stopped there for several hours, along with the couple’s daughters and the president’s mother, Hortensia Rosales. Protesters who managed to get through some roadblocks found themselves trapped by others; they were unable to go forward or back, and had to sleep outdoors. The military also blocked

food shipments and medical supplies. A number of protesters were sick from exposure, while others were suffering from the effects of tear gas or beatings by the police.

The Reuters wire service reported that by July 26 many protesters were discouraged and were trying to head for home. "We're tired and there's no food," protester César Castro told Reuters. "We're going to withdraw to Tegucigalpa, where most of the people are," Lilian Ordoñez, a school teacher, explained. "We have to change our strategy." (Minga Informativo de Movimientos Sociales 7/25/09 from Vía Campesina, 7/25/09 from Común Noticias; Prensa Latina 7/26/09; La Jornada 7/26/09 from Reuters)

But others were circumventing military roadblocks by cutting across the countryside. Four resistance leaders--Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres from the Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), and Miriam Miranda and Alfredo López from the Honduran Black Fraternal Organization (OFRANEH)--set out with a group of about 230 protesters to reach the Las Manos border post through the mountains during the weekend of July 25. Supporters lost cellular contact with the four at about 6 am on July 26 and reported them missing, but they were contacted in the evening and said they were still trying to get to Las Manos.

According to the Mexican daily La Jornada, in the 1980s the rugged terrain at the border around Las Manos was the site of encampments by some 20,000 US-backed contra fighters seeking to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist government of the time. The de facto Honduran government's foreign minister, Carlos López Contreras, was foreign minister then too, from 1986 to 1990; one of his jobs was denying that the contras were operating in Honduran territory, which led many to call him "Carlos López Contras." In his current position as foreign minister, he has been demanding that foreign governments "respect sovereignty." (LJ 7/26/09 from Notimex, 7/27/09 from correspondent)

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July 28, 2009

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RIGHTS GROUP WELCOMES COMPANY STATEMENT ON HONDURAN COUP; ASKS WHY MORE COMPANIES HAVEN'T SPOKEN OUT

TORONTO – Apparel brands with production in Honduras, including Adidas Group, Nike Inc. and Gap Inc., have released a joint letter sent to US

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton “calling for the restoration of democracy in Honduras” following the June 28th military coup.

The brands urged “an immediate resolution to the crisis” and asked that “civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association be fully respected.”

The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), a Toronto-based labour rights NGO with strong ties to worker and women’s groups in Honduras, welcomes the statement but asks why other major international brands and manufacturers with a presence in Honduras have remained silent.

“Until now, businesses and business associations – including those in the textile and apparel industries, which account for the majority of Honduras’ exports – have publicly supported the coup, lobbied against trade sanctions, or remained silent and carried on business as usual under the military-imposed regime,” says Lynda Yanz, Executive Director of MSN. “This letter from major sportswear and apparel brands breaks that silence and calls unequivocally for the restoration of democracy in Honduras. These international brands are not taking sides on internal politics in the country. They are saying that political differences must be resolved democratically.”

“Unless companies doing business in Honduras speak out in favour of democracy,” says Yanz, “we can only assume that they agree with the position of the business associations to which they belong that have either supported the coup or called for business as usual.”

“Business as usual is not an option,” says Yanz.

“Honduras is a country where the democratically elected president has been removed from office, civil society leaders have been assassinated, journalists are being detained, offices of trade union and civil society organizations are being broken into and robbed, legal demonstrations have been tear-gassed and broken up, and media critical of the new regime is being silenced.”

“Thankfully,” says Yanz, “the brands that signed this statement are taking seriously their responsibility to Honduran workers and their rights and civil liberties. The question that remains is: Where are the other companies that are doing business in Honduras, including the three largest foreign investors in the country’s apparel sector -- Fruit of the Loom/Russell Corporation, Hanesbrands and Gildan?”

[The Maquila Solidarity Network is a labour and women's rights organization that supports the efforts of workers in global supply chains to win improved wages and working conditions and a better quality of life. A copy of the letter to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is available at: <http://www.nikebiz.com/responsibility/2009SecretaryClintonHondurasLetter.html>. Maquila Solidarity Network / Ethical Trading Action Group, 606 Shaw St., Toronto, ON, M6G 3L6, 416-532-8584, www.maquilasolidarity.org]

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VISAS REVOKED

WASHINGTON – The Obama administration has revoked the diplomatic visas of four Honduran officials working in its interim government and is reviewing the visa status of other officials and their families, the State Department said Tuesday. Spokesman Ian Kelly said the revocations and the review affect Honduran officials who were serving the government of ousted President Manuel Zelaya before he was deposed on June 28, but now work for the "de facto regime" of interim President Roberto Micheletti.

"We don't recognize Roberto Micheletti as the president of Honduras," he told reporters. "We recognize Manuel Zelaya. And so, in keeping with that policy of nonrecognition, we have decided to revoke official diplomatic visas, or A-Visas, of four individuals who are members of (Micheletti's) regime."

Kelly would not identify the officials whose visas were revoked but said they are not currently in the United States. He could not say how many others were being reviewed.

* * *

Some are saying these are the people who had their visas revoked:

1. Roberto Micheletti
2. El comisionado nacional de los Derechos Humanos, Ramón Custodio López
3. General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, dirigente de las fuerzas armadas de Honduras
4. El nuevo titular del Congreso del gobierno ilegal- José Alfredo Saavedra

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LIBERAL PARTY MEMBERS

[From: Roz Dzelzitis, May I Speak Freely Media, 617-460-3895,
roz@mayispeakfreely.org, www.mayispeakfreely.org]

It has been widely reported that the Honduran Congress unanimously supported the coup and endorsed Micheletti as interim president. According to a delegation of Congress members in DC this week, numerous diputados were excluded from the extraordinary Sunday session of Congress where the actions against Zelaya were endorsed, and the session was known of in advance by coup supporters and attended by illegally voting non-members of Congress.

Many Congress members have since spoken out against the actions publicly, saying that they risk life and limb to do so, and that many others have not dared speak out because of a fear for the safety of their families. Some, including Javier Hall, report being been targeted by military agents "for their defense of the democratic process."

The following is a partial list of outspoken coup opponents in the Honduran Congress, provided by Liberal Party congresswoman Elvia Argentina Valle.

Liberal Party

1. Erick Mauricio Gavarette
 2. Elias Arnoldo Guevara
 3. Edna Carolina Echeverría
 4. Eleazer Juarez
 5. Rodrigo Trochez
 6. Manuel de Jesús Velásquez
 7. Javier Hall Polio
 8. Norma Calderón
 9. Gladys del Cid
 10. José Simon Azcona
 11. Edmundo Orellana
 12. Julio Santos (diputado suplente)
 13. Olman Maldonado (diputado suplente)
 14. Dayana Burke
 15. Victor Cubas (diputado suplente)
 16. Francis Hernandez (diputado suplente)
 17. Elvia Argentina Valle
 18. José de la Paz Herrera
- Democratic Unification Party (UD)
19. Silvia Ayala
 20. Marvin Ponce
 21. Oscar Mejía

22. Marleny Paz
23. César Ham
24. Tomás Andino (diputado suplente)

* * *

SOA WATCH

**NOVEMBER 20-22, 2009
CONVERGE ON FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
MASS MOBILIZATION TO SHUT DOWN THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS**

Please forward this email widely

The military coup by SOA graduates in Honduras has once again exposed the destabilizing and deadly effects that the School of the Americas has on Latin America. The actions of the school's graduates are unmasking the Pentagon rhetoric and reveal the anti-democratic results of U.S. policies. It is time for a change towards justice.

From November 20-22, 2009, thousands will vigil at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, to stand up for justice, to shut down the School of the Americas and to end the oppressive U.S. foreign policy that the school represents. The campaign to close the SOA is in a crucial phase right now. Despite promising comments from President Obama during his election campaign, the SOA/ WHINSEC is still in operation and the Pentagon is moving forward with plans for new U.S. military bases in Colombia.

With a Democratic administration in the White House, it appears that some Democrats in Congress are becoming timid when it comes to opposing the Pentagon. It is up to us to keep up the pressure and to hold them accountable. People power is going to win over Pentagon lobbying!

It is tremendously important that we have a strong showing at the gates of Fort Benning for the annual vigil and nonviolent direct action, in order to demonstrate that we won't go away until the SOA is shut down and the U.S. government has stopped turning to "military solutions" (or political-economic interventions) to enforce its oppressive foreign policy in Latin America. Too many people have suffered and died at the hands of SOA graduates.

Contact your local unions, universities, workers centers, social justice organizations and faith communities and ask them to re-commit to the struggle to close the School of the Americas.

info@soawatch.org / www.SOAW.org

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LETTER TO PETER KENT, CANADIAN Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas)

3333 University Way, Prince George, B.C., Canada V2N 4Z9
Dr. Catherine Nolin, Tel: (250) 960-5875
Associate Professor, Geography Program, E: nolin@unbc.ca

28 July 2009

Dear Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas) Peter Kent,

I am writing as a professor of geography with a 15+ year connection to Central America. I am also a long time member of the Guatemala Canadian Solidarity Network (GCSN, Northern BC branch), a researcher of Guatemala's political violence & connections to Canada through refugee movements, and a colleague of several grassroots organizations in Guatemala and other parts of Central America.

I am writing today to express my deepest concern regarding the military coup in Honduras and specifically Canada's position on the coup. I am deeply concerned that the people of Honduras are experiencing police, army & para-military repression. I urge Canada to take strong action to reject this military coup in Honduras.

The Canadian government has quietly condemned the coup, but I urge that you demand the immediate and unconditional reinstatement of legitimate Honduran President, Manuel Zelaya, as our Latin American & European allies have already done.

No negotiating with a coup leader.

Honduras is the largest recipient of Canadian aid in the Central American region. I also urge that all Canadian assistance is cut from the de facto military government, including military aid. Canada must immediately back up its words with actions to further isolate the illegal government in Honduras. I stand in solidarity with the thousands of Hondurans risking their

lives in the streets for the past 30 days to demand that their voices and their votes be respected. I join the Honduran and other Latin American communities in Canada who demand the following:

- an end to police, army and para-military repression;
- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans;
- 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 and targeted economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup plotters and perpetrators;
- application of international and national justice against the coup plotters, and
- * reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest possible convenience and encourage your immediate action on the above items.

Submitted respectfully,
Catherine Nolin, PhD

Cc: The Tyee, Prince George Citizen, Prince George Free Press

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ARTICLE:

“FROM ARBENZ TO ZELAYA: CHIQUITA IN LATIN AMERICA”, By NIKOLAS KOZLOFF

When the Honduran military overthrew the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya two weeks ago there might have been a sigh of relief in the corporate board rooms of Chiquita banana.

Earlier this year the Cincinnati-based fruit company joined Dole in criticizing the government in Tegucigalpa which had raised the minimum wage by 60%. Chiquita complained that the new regulations would cut into company profits, requiring the firm to spend more on costs than in Costa Rica: 20 cents more to produce a crate of pineapple and ten cents more to produce a crate of bananas to be exact.

In all, Chiquita fretted that it would lose millions under Zelaya's labor reforms since the company produced around 8 million crates of pineapple and 22 million crates of bananas per year.

When the minimum wage decree came down Chiquita sought help and appealed to the Honduran National Business Council, known by its Spanish acronym COHEP. Like Chiquita, COHEP was unhappy about Zelaya's minimum wage measure. Amílcar Bulnes, the group's president, argued that if the government went forward with the minimum wage increase employers would be forced to let workers go, thus increasing unemployment in the country.

The most important business organization in Honduras, COHEP groups 60 trade associations and chambers of commerce representing every sector of the Honduran economy. According to its own Web site, COHEP is the political and technical arm of the Honduran private sector, supports trade agreements and provides "critical support for the democratic system."

The international community should not impose economic sanctions against the coup regime in Tegucigalpa, COHEP argues, because this would worsen Honduras' social problems. In its new role as the mouthpiece for Honduras' poor, COHEP declares that Honduras has already suffered from earthquakes, torrential rains and the global financial crisis. Before punishing the coup regime with punitive measures, COHEP argues, the United Nations and the Organization of American States should send observer teams to Honduras to investigate how sanctions might affect 70% of Hondurans who live in poverty.

Bulnes meanwhile has voiced his support for the coup regime of Roberto Micheletti and argues that the political conditions in Honduras are not propitious for Zelaya's return from exile.

CHIQUITA: FROM ARBENZ TO BANANAGATE

It's not surprising that Chiquita would seek out and ally itself to socially and politically backward forces in Honduras. Colsiba, the coordinating body of banana plantation workers in Latin America, says the fruit company has failed to supply its workers with necessary protective gear and has dragged its feet when it comes to signing collective labor agreements in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras.

Colsiba compares the infernal labor conditions on Chiquita plantations to concentration camps. It's an inflammatory comparison yet may contain a degree of truth. Women working on Chiquita's plantations in Central

America work from 6:30 a.m. until 7 at night, their hands burning up inside rubber gloves. Some workers are as young as 14.

Central American banana workers have sought damages against Chiquita for exposing them in the field to DBCP, a dangerous pesticide which causes sterility, cancer and birth defects in children.

Chiquita, formerly known as United Fruit Company and United Brands, has had a long and sordid political history in Central America.

Led by Sam "The Banana Man" Zemurray, United Fruit got into the banana business at the turn of the twentieth century. Zemurray once remarked famously, "In Honduras, a mule costs more than a member of parliament."

By the 1920s United Fruit controlled 650,000 acres of the best land in Honduras, almost one quarter of all the arable land in the country. What's more, the company controlled important roads and railways.

In Honduras the fruit companies spread their influence into every area of life including politics and the military. For such tactics they acquired the name los pulpos (the octopuses, from the way they spread their tentacles).

Those who did not play ball with the corporations were frequently found face down on the plantations. In 1904 humorist O. Henry coined the term "Banana Republic" to refer to the notorious United Fruit Company and its actions in Honduras.

In Guatemala, United Fruit supported the CIA-backed 1954 military coup against President Jacobo Arbenz, a reformer who had carried out a land reform package. Arbenz' overthrow led to more than thirty years of unrest and civil war in Guatemala.

Later in 1961, United Fruit lent its ships to CIA-backed Cuban exiles who sought to overthrow Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs.

In 1972, United Fruit (now renamed United Brands) propelled Honduran General Oswaldo López Arellano to power. The dictator was forced to step down later however after the infamous "Bananagate" scandal which involved United Brands bribes to Arellano. A federal grand jury accused United Brands of bribing Arellano with \$1.25 million, with the carrot of another \$1.25 million later if the military man agreed to reduce

fruit export taxes. During Bananagate, United Brands' President fell from a New York City skyscraper in an apparent suicide.

GO-GO CLINTON YEARS AND COLOMBIA

In Colombia United Fruit also set up shop and during its operations in the South American country developed a no less checkered profile. In 1928, 3,000 workers went on strike against the company to demand better pay and working conditions. At first the company refused to negotiate but later gave in on some minor points, declaring the other demands "illegal" or "impossible." When the strikers refused to disperse the military fired on the banana workers, killing scores.

You might think that Chiquita would have reconsidered its labor policies after that but in the late 1990s the company began to ally itself with insidious forces, specifically right wing paramilitaries. Chiquita paid off the men to the tune of more than a million dollars. In its own defense, the company declared that it was merely paying protection money to the paramilitaries.

In 2007, Chiquita paid \$25 million to settle a Justice Department investigation into the payments. Chiquita was the first company in U.S. history to be convicted of financial dealings with a designated terrorist organization.

In a lawsuit launched against Chiquita victims of the paramilitary violence claimed the firm abetted atrocities including terrorism, war crimes and crimes against humanity. A lawyer for the plaintiffs said that Chiquita's relationship with the paramilitaries "was about acquiring every aspect of banana distribution and sale through a reign of terror."

Back in Washington, D.C. Charles Lindner, Chiquita's CEO, was busy courting the White House. Lindner had been a big donor to the GOP but switched sides and began to lavish cash on the Democrats and Bill Clinton. Clinton repaid Lindner by becoming a key military backer of the government of Andrés Pastrana which presided over the proliferation of right wing death squads.

At the time the U.S. was pursuing its corporately-friendly free trade agenda in Latin America, a strategy carried out by Clinton's old boyhood friend Thomas "Mack" McLarty. At the White House, McLarty served as Chief of Staff and Special Envoy to Latin America. He's an intriguing figure who I'll come back to in a moment.

THE HOLDER-CHIQUITA CONNECTION

Given Chiquita's underhanded record in Central America and Colombia it's not a surprise that the company later sought to ally itself with COHEP in Honduras. In addition to lobbying business associations in Honduras however Chiquita also cultivated relationships with high powered law firms in Washington. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Chiquita has paid out \$70,000 in lobbying fees to Covington and Burling over the past three years.

Covington is a powerful law firm which advises multinational corporations. Eric Holder, the current Attorney General, a co-chair of the Obama campaign and former Deputy Attorney General under Bill Clinton was up until recently a partner at the firm. At Covington, Holder defended Chiquita as lead counsel in its case with the Justice Department. From his perch at the elegant new Covington headquarters located near the New York Times building in Manhattan, Holder prepped Fernando Aguirre, Chiquita's CEO, for an interview with 60 Minutes dealing with Colombian death squads.

Holder had the fruit company plead guilty to one count of "engaging in transactions with a specially designated global terrorist organization." But the lawyer, who was taking in a hefty salary at Covington to the tune of more than \$2 million, brokered a sweetheart deal in which Chiquita only paid a \$25 million fine over five years. Outrageously however, not one of the six company officials who approved the payments received any jail time.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF COVINGTON

Look a little deeper and you'll find that not only does Covington represent Chiquita but also serves as a kind of nexus for the political right intent on pushing a hawkish foreign policy in Latin America. Covington has pursued an important strategic alliance with Kissinger (of Chile, 1973 fame) and McLarty Associates (yes, the same Mack McLarty from Clinton-time), a well known international consulting and strategic advisory firm.

From 1974 to 1981 John Bolton served as an associate at Covington. As U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations under George Bush, Bolton was a fierce critic of leftists in Latin America such as Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Furthermore, just recently John Negroponte became Covington's Vice Chairman. Negroponte is a former Deputy Secretary of State, Director of National Intelligence and U.S. Representative to the United Nations.

As U.S. Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985, Negro Ponte played a significant role in assisting the U.S.-backed Contra rebels intent on overthrowing the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Human rights groups have criticized Negro Ponte for ignoring human rights abuses committed by Honduran death squads which were funded and partially trained by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Indeed, when Negro Ponte served as ambassador his building in Tegucigalpa became one of the largest nerve centers of the CIA in Latin America with a tenfold increase in personnel.

While there's no evidence linking Chiquita to the recent coup in Honduras, there's enough of a confluence of suspicious characters and political heavyweights here to warrant further investigation.

From COHEP to Covington to Holder to Negro Ponte to McLarty, Chiquita has sought out friends in high places, friends who had no love for the progressive labor policies of the Zelaya regime in Tegucigalpa.

[Nikolas Kozloff is the author of *Revolution! South America and the Rise of the New Left* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008) Follow his blog at senorchichero.blogspot.com]

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ARTICLE:

“WAITING FOR ZELAYA”, By Greg Grandin, July 28, 2009

The military coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya has drawn strong condemnation from President Obama and the world. But will the US government offer its unconditional support for his return to power?

The push to restore Honduran president Manuel Zelaya-- dragged out of bed a month ago by soldiers and bundled onto a plane to Costa Rica-- has reached a tense deadlock. After negotiations between coup leaders and Zelaya's representatives brokered by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias broke down last week, the deposed leader vowed to return to his country over land, setting out from Managua, Nicaragua, in a jeep.

He arrived at the border on Friday, symbolically stepping foot on Honduran soil before returning to Nicaragua, where he remains camped just a few feet from Honduras.

For his part, Roberto Micheletti, Honduras's de facto president, has vowed to arrest Zelaya if he tries to enter the country again. Soldiers have set up a cordon on roads leading to Nicaragua and have aggressively sought to contain Zelaya supporters, launching tear gas into gathering crowds and detaining hundreds.

On Saturday a protester captured by troops the day before turned up dead. A twenty-four-hour curfew for southern Honduras remains in effect. About 500 Zelaya supporters have avoided the main roads, however, entering Nicaragua over mountainous paths to join the ousted president.

It's a dramatic showdown, a fight for which Zelaya, who goes by the name Mel and likes to dress in a white shirt, black leather vest and white cowboy hat, seems perfectly cast.

No one knows how it will end--rumors are swirling in Tegucigalpa that the military is pressuring Micheletti to agree to Arias's proposal to allow Zelaya to return as president, as head of a reconciliation government--but it does feel that the monthlong fight to win over public opinion is coming to a head.

Honduras's new regime has gone to great lengths to present itself to the world as democratic and constitutional, in line with the values of an open society.

Micheletti and his backers claim to have acted procedurally, intervening on behalf of the courts to stop Zelaya's Hugo Chávez-like lunge for power.

The coup's business backers even hired Lanny Davis, a former adviser to Hillary Clinton, to lobby his old boss to recognize the new regime. "This is about the rule of law. That is the only message we have," Davis said.

But in Honduras, paranoia reigns, redolent of a time when death squads ruled and anti-communism justified widespread murder. Then the perceived threat was Moscow. Today it is Caracas.

"I'm against the way Zelaya was forced out of the country," said one prominent television host the other night, "but I'm also against Hugo Chávez coming here and conscripting my son to serve for six years in his army."

Then there's Fernando--a.k.a. Billy--Joya, a former member of Honduras's infamous Battalion 316, a paramilitary unit responsible for the deaths of hundreds in the 1980s. Joya had previously fled the country on charges of,

among other atrocities, having kidnapped and tortured six university students in 1982.

But he's resurfaced as "special security adviser" to Micheletti's government. He's been seen walking side by side with Micheletti in a pro-coup "March for Peace and Democracy," and he's appeared on local talk-shows as an "international analyst," justifying the overthrow of Zelaya by invoking his admiration of Augusto Pinochet (lucky for Lanny Davis, Joya stays off CNN).

And none other than Pinochet's daughter Lucia has endorsed the coup, praising Micheletti for continuing her father's legacy, fittingly so since the International Observation Mission--made up of representatives from fifteen European and Latin American human rights organizations--has warned of ongoing "grave and systematic" political persecution.

At least nine people have been assassinated or disappeared in the past month, with one body dumped in an area used by death squads in the 1980s as a clandestine cemetery. Among the executed, disappeared and threatened are trade unionists, peasant activists and independent journalists.

They include Gabriel Fino Noriega, a reporter for Radio Estelar, in the department of Atlantida, shot dead leaving his work, and Roger Ivan Bados, a former union leader turned reformist politician, pulled off a bus following a pro-Zelaya demonstration and killed.

Progressive Catholic priests have likewise been targeted, including Father José Andrés Tamayo Cortez, a prominent advocate of environmental and social justice, who went into hiding after receiving death threats following his participation in an anti-coup protest, in the department of Olancho. The Jesuit Ismael Moreno, director of the independent provincial Radio Progreso, has also been harassed by the military.

A member of the International Observation Mission told me that the number of killings and disappearances are likely higher than documented, as security forces reign with impunity in some remote, rural areas, making it nearly impossible to report such crimes.

The army has also taken advantage of the crisis to conduct "forced conscriptions," kidnapping the teenage sons of peasant families--a practice that was commonplace throughout Central America through the 1980s, during the dark days of oligarchic rule, and only recently abandoned in Honduras.

One of the first to be killed was Vicky Hernandez Castillo, previously known as Sonny, a transgendered activist in San Pedro Sula's LGBTB community. Hernandez left her home on the night of the coup, apparently unaware that the new government had decreed a curfew. She was found dead the next morning, shot in the eye and strangled. Just one month before her killing, Human Rights Watch had issued a report titled "Not Worth a Penny: Human Rights Abuses Against Transgender People in Honduras," which documented seventeen unsolved murders of transgendered people in the past five years, as well as sustained police violence against them.

The details of Hernandez's killing are unknown, yet her activism highlights the expansion of oppositional politics that has taken place in Central America since the end of the cold war, to include issues concerning sexual rights. That she was the first person killed suggests how the fundamentally antidemocratic nature of the coup is aimed at all challenges to hierarchy, not just those defined in economic terms.

Reading the major Honduran newspapers or watching news on Honduran TV is like entering a time warp back to the censorious days of the cold war, with one story after another trumpeting Micheletti's virtues.

After Honduran troops shot and killed a 19-year-old protester, La Prensa, a major daily, ran a doctored photo of the boy's limp body, with the blood that was still pouring out of his head airbrushed away.

Billboards with smiling faces of well-fed peasants (more than 40 percent of Hondurans live on a dollar a day) thanking Micheletti for defending democracy adorn major thoroughfares.

Alternative media outlets--mostly radio and television stations in the provinces, not owned by a coup-supporting family--have been occupied and threatened.

CNN was shut down for a period, and Telesur, the Spanish-language news network sponsored by, among other countries, Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia, is off the air (in covering the border standoff, CNN in Spanish is primarily using video feed from Telesur, which highlights the importance of that network as an information source).

Every evening, the government takes over cable and broadcast channels to announce the hours of the next day's curfew.

What specifically did Zelaya do to conjure these malevolent spirits of the cold war past? The US press has focused on his efforts to build support for a constitutional assembly, mis-representing the effort as a power grab when in fact the proposal to revise the Constitution was broadly supported by social movements as an effort to democratize Honduras's notoriously exclusive political system.

The business community didn't like Zelaya because he raised the minimum wage. Conservative evangelicals and Catholics--including Opus Dei, a formidable presence in Honduras--detested him because he refused to ban the "morning-after" pill.

The mining, hydroelectric and biofuel sector didn't like him because he didn't put state funds and land at their disposal.

The law-and-order crowd hated him because he apologized on behalf of the state for a program of "social cleansing" that took place in the 1990s, which included the execution of street children and gang members.

And the generals didn't like it when he tried to assert executive control over the military. Similar to the armed forces in Guatemala and El Salvador, the Honduran military after the cold war diversified its portfolio, with its officers investing heavily in both legitimate and illegitimate businesses, such as the narcotics trade, illegal logging, and illicit adoptions.

In 1993 the general who carried out the coup, Romeo Vasquez Velasquez--trained in the School of the Americas--had been arrested and charged with running a car-theft ring.

Zelaya likewise moved to draw down Washington's military presence; Honduras, alone among Central American countries, hosts a permanent detachment of US troops at the Soto Cano air force base, a holdover from the Contra war.

Zelaya's government also picked at cold war wounds not yet healed. Among his top advisers are Milton Jiménez Puerto--who in the 1980s was one of the students tortured by Joya--and Patricia Rodas, daughter of Modesto Rodas Alvarado Zamora.

In the 1960s Rodas Alvarado represented the developmentalist wing of the Liberal Party, and in 1963 he was prevented from becoming president in a coup Hondurans insist was engineered by the CIA.

Zelaya himself comes from a family with a deep history in the cold war: some in Honduras speculate that his reformism stems from a desire to atone his father's involvement in the 1975 massacre of fifteen activists, mostly peasants and two priests--one from Colombia, the other from Madison, Wisconsin--on his family's hacienda, in the northeastern department of Olancho.

In the 1980s, an anti-coup activist told me, Zelaya was one of the few Liberal Party members to speak out against the Contra war, which the CIA organized and ran from Honduras. "History is pushing Mel," a journalist, critical of Zelaya during his tenure for a certain degree of demagoguery yet firmly in favor of his return, told me.

[Greg Grandin, a professor of history at New York University, is the author, most recently, of *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (Metropolitan). He serves on the editorial committee of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)]

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WHAT TO DO

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

- an end to police, army and para-military repression
- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- 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 and targeted economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup plotters and perpetrators
- application of international and national justice against the coup plotters, and
- reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

TO DONATE FUNDS TO PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS, 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>

Upon request, Rights Action can provide a proposal of which organizations and people, in Honduras, we are channeling your funds to and supporting.