

Rights Action

Day 41, Honduran Coup Resistance, August 7, 2009
(Alert#43)

AUGUST 11th: GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR HONDURAS

BELOW:

- cross nation marches, in Honduras, leading to August 11th “day of action”
- interview with Salvador Zuniga, co-founder of COPINH and a strong leader of the National Front Against the Coup

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The illegitimate coup regime hangs on to its power through its wealth and use of repression.

The onus increases on the “international community” to take direct actions against the military backed coup regime, particularly those countries and entities (private companies and banks, the “development” banks) that maintain financial and commercial relations, and military relations with the pro-coup sectors in Honduras.

- 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/>
- To donate funds to pro-democracy movement in Honduras: see below

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AUGUST 11th: GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR HONDURAS

A National March began yesterday in Honduras. People from all over the country will walk for 7 days, covering roughly 15 km/day with the goal to arrive in two major cities, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. This March will demonstrate to the coup government the capability of the Honduran people to mobilize and demand the return to constitutional order in Honduras, despite the repression.

Campesinos, unions, individuals and organizations, including many that Rights Action has worked with for years, are participating in the march.

During the walks, protests will continue in Tegucigalpa as people in the two destinations await the arrival of the people from all regions of the country.

On August 11, the expected arrival date, the Honduran people are calling out to the international community to participate in a "Global Day of Action for Honduras."

Rights Action calls upon all people in solidarity with the people of Honduras to participate in the Global Day of Action. A much stronger response from the Canadian and US government are needed to stop the repression, violence and deaths caused by the militarization of the country by the Micheletti regime.

Events nationally and internationally will be announced as August 11th approaches.

INTERVIEW WITH HONDURAN INDIGENOUS LEADER, SALVADOR ZUNIGA

By Toni Solo, for Tortilla con Sal (Full article:

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0908/S00033.htm>)

"If they get away with this coup we are heading back to very bloody times in Latin America"

BACKGROUND:

On July 29th Tortilla con Sal managed to talk to Salvador Zuniga, veteran leader of the indigenous peoples' movement in Honduras. Zuniga talked about what is currently happening in Honduras. At the time of the interview, Zuniga and other leaders like Bertha Caceres and the garifuna Miriam Miranda were in temporary encampments in Nicaragua set up to give some respite to Hondurans from the fierce military repression in Honduras, especially along the frontier with Nicaragua.

The sudden influx over the weekend of July 25th-26th of over 4000-5000 people dissipated in subsequent days so that as of Monday August 3rd perhaps only 250 or so Hondurans remained at the frontier in Nicaragua. People headed back to Honduras as the army there relaxed the State of Siege measures along the Nicaraguan frontier. People returned in part because Manuel Zelaya's strategy of a negotiated return to Honduras via the frontier at Las Manos had clearly failed. In part too they returned because humanitarian support beyond initial relief was simply not available.

In this interview, Zuniga discusses the military repression and relates the march carried out by 300 indigenous people to the frontier - only a group of 40 managed to complete the journey. He speaks of the grave danger of what is happening in Honduras not just for the Central American region but for all of Latin America.

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INTERVIEW with Honduran indigenous leader Salvador Zúñiga, a co-founder of COPINH (Counsel of Popular and Indigenous Organizations in Honduras)

"If they get away with this coup we are heading back to very bloody times in Latin America" (Salvador)

Posted: 04 Aug 2009 09:59 PM PDT
Interview by Toni Solo for Tortilla con Sal

TORTILLA CON SAL: We are here now with Salvador Zuniga. What is your organization and what is happening in Honduras?

SALVADOR ZÚÑIGA: what is happening is a war against an unarmed people, against a people that is simply insisting on the reinstatement of the President they elected four years ago.

In this war, they imprison people. They have reached the point where every day they are jailing up to 300 people. In El Paraiso the holding cells overflow so they take people to the local stadium.

They have murdered people, just like the death squads who, after people go to a demonstration, they abduct them, torture them to death and cut their throat and then they dump the body nearby the demonstration. That was what happened to Pedro Magdiel (Muñoz Salvador). That was how they captured him.

We see the army fire on a demonstration producing many wounded and then when there is a death, the Human Rights Ombudsman, the coup supporter Ramon Custodio Lopez, says they were firing rubber bullets. But it has been proven that they are M-16 rounds. There is persecution throughout the country.

They (the coup leaders) have always violated the Constitution of the Honduran Republic. They abused it when there was the presence in Honduras of the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries, the presence of US

troops, when they disappeared people in the 1980s - all these things are violations of the Constitution.

The Constitution states that in Honduras there should be no privileged classes, but even so these powerful elitist groups are taking over rivers to make dams to sell electricity for their private benefit. They get an annual subsidy from the State of 20,000,000 lempiras (about US\$1m) - the rich, the elite groups, the powerful people who run things.

They violated the Constitution when they installed a President of Panamanian nationality, whom they imposed, Ricardo Maduro. That was an abuse of the Constitution.

VOTE FOR A FOURTH BALLOT

And simply for an opinion poll initiated by Manuel Zelaya, President of the Republic, which was non-binding, but rather a vote to discover what Honduran people thought, to see whether or not they agreed with the installation of a fourth ballot in the November elections.

There's a ballot to vote for mayors, another for parliamentary deputies, another for the presidency and that fourth ballot was for the reply to a question that would have said "do you agree with the calling of a national constituent assembly? Yes or no?"

In the republican democratic system, the sovereign is not a king or a queen because there is no king or queen. In a democratic system it is not an autocratic State that is, as it were, God's representative, as one supposes the Pope, or someone similar to be, that holds sovereignty.

Our Constitution says that the people is sovereign. And so then, why a coup d'etat? They say it was because Mel (Manuel Zelaya) wanted to abuse the Constitution of the Republic. But the Constitution establishes precisely that sovereignty belongs to the people. But it also says that among the President's functions is to comply with and to facilitate compliance with the Constitution of the Republic and with international treaties. And there are international treaties that establish that we, the people, have the right to express ourselves.

So then it was simply a question, a consultation and that set off a tremendous persecution.

In order to receive our President whom the Honduran people elected for four years we came with 300 people and they impeded us, stripping away

our right to freedom of movement. Then they confiscated our buses and when we set off on foot they came after us.

TO THE BORDER ON FOOT

Tcs: Where did they take away the buses?

SZ: Leaving Tegucigalpa just by the turn off for Tatumbula.

TcS: But that's barely outside Tegucigalpa's Central District!

SZ: Right. And we set off from there, walking, walking, walking. We came to the second military roadblock in Zamorano and got round it. We reached the third in Ojo de Agua and got round that one too. We reached another one further on at Las Crucitas and got round it. Then another in Arenales. The First Lady of our country was there. We got round that one too and from that point the chase began to stop us going any further. We came via the highway but then took a diversion to fool them (the soldiers), because they were up ahead and then they opened fire.

TcS: With live rounds?

SZ: With live rounds, sure. And so from there to here we began walking not along streets or roads but through open hill country. When we came that way they could no longer see us and we lost them.

Along the way they no longer pursued us by land but they began using Tucans, military attack planes, to come after us. These are warplanes, for killing us there, then, in the hill country, people beaten up and suffering.

On the way we passed through a town called San Matias in El Paraiso. Right there were the police, to observe that we were arriving that way, because there were people there who said "there they are..."

TcS: Informers?

SZ: Yes, police spies. So we had to head down river so as to reach a place called Santa Rosa. But imagine, that is a really dreadful march, at night without lights. And we made it to Santa Rosa and the chase began again because people again informed on us. So we had to head back again towards El Paraiso. There we were able to take part in a demonstration blocking the main highway and we got some encouragement from the people there. We stayed the night there.

Then next day we carried out the manoeuvre that brought us here to Nicaragua. Seventy of us were caught going one way and the others were captured going another way. The group of seventy were surrounded by the army at gunpoint - understand? - and taken to the army holding cells

in El

Paraiso. Then they were thrown into container trucks, locked inside and sent to Tegucigalpa.

A few others of us had stayed in the demonstration, the next day they too were surrounded, captured and also thrown into container trucks. They were taken to San Pedro Sula. People were almost suffocating. Almost suffocating, something terrible, insane.

That is to say, it was not an armed column. The people didn't even have a machete to cut through the forest there with the army on top of them, all because they were coming to receive the President and protest against the coup d'etat.

We had again to pass through the hills until we reached here in Nicaragua and from here to see how to help the President's return to Honduras.

WE HAVE REGRESSED 30 YEARS

But what is happening in the country is something incredible. We have regressed 30 years. We thought coups d'etats were something long out of date. Much less did we think they were going to use the armed forces with all their weaponry, with warplanes, to repress the population.

It is something completely senseless. But if you head in that direction just a little way, right there now are the army posts and that is happening throughout the country. Throughout the country people are disappeared, they grab them, they capture them and they disappear them - they don't come back.

There are a number of people in San Pedro, they disappeared two members of the Unificacion Democratica party of the Popular Bloc. And there are people there with gunshot wounds, grazes, because that's how it is in the street, people are shot and left there.

So one ends up saying "what can this be? It is not possible." Against democratic change. And they (the coup leaders) say that this is communism, that Chavez is going to come. Lies! Lies! That's their excuse for the repression. But one cannot imagine what we have been through. And still look, here we are and we are content because we have a roof and are able to sleep.

Up in the hills, in the mud, with rain and all that. And it was not just us who in the end, after 300 has set out, only 40 or so of us could get here. The

majority were detained. Even today they detained another dozen, ten garifuna who came with their drums and two of COPINH.

One asks, "But what is going on?" Something completely insane. Practically a state of war. The curfew is not from 6.00pm to 6.00am as it was in El Salvador during the war there. In Honduras the State of Siege is continuous.

COUP REGIME CRIMES

I left the column of the little group in which we came, several times to go and buy food - and people were there with that fear, that shock. People are not permitted to go to El Paraiso to buy things because they have imposed a criminal curfew night and day. People can be detained in Tegucigalpa, anywhere.

There were two deaths yesterday at a football match. Motagua was playing Olimpia, they are two of the most well known teams in Honduras. So when people left the stadium, the police were there and people got angry, they were overcome with the tension of the coup d'etat and began to shout "Coup-mongers out! Coup-mongers out!" The police started shooting and there were two deaths, young people with all their life ahead of them.

One asks, "what has happened to our country?" in such difficult circumstances. We have reached the point where everything has been lost. We have gone back years and years and years and years. In that sense we therefore have a very dark outlook ahead because even if the President is reinstated, we don't want the negotiations to permit impunity, that they allow an amnesty for crimes committed against civilians.

It is different with crimes that are political in character, but crimes like these, shooting at unarmed people. And in this, there is no doubt at all that there is a major intervention by the Venezuelan ultra-right who were the ones that first began working on this coup d'etat - Robert Carmona and Otto Reich - to turn Honduras back into what it has almost always been, playing the role of a terrorist base to attack democratic processes.

This is a coup d'etat not just against Honduras, it is a coup d'etat against the Central American region and against Latin America. If they get away with this coup d'etat, one may see that Guatemala follows suit, or maybe El Salvador. And so once more the army, the armed forces are going to begin to take decisions of active policy making in Latin America. And we

are going to return to the era of the guerrillas too, to the era of bloody savagery Civil war?

In Honduras we are doing all we can to overthrow the dictatorship without resorting to the use of a single weapon, not even a nail cutter. And although it may be illusory to think that it is possible to defeat them with ideas, with mobilization, with civic resistance, it would be very sad if this failed and a level of armed confrontation were reached.

It is a scenario that is not far off, the scenario of a civil war, an outcome that unfortunately always means suffering for the impoverished, for children and for everyone. Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

However the international community also have to play their part. Our people are fighting an unequal struggle, a struggle of unarmed people against people fully armed, of non-violent people against very violent people.

There is a sinister person in our country's history called Billy Joya Mendola. He and Alexander Hernandez and other people like Juan Evangelista Lopez were the ones who disappeared people. This government has Billy Joya as a ministerial adviser on security matters. He is the one waging the dirty war of torture and disappearances.

And now who is also on the other side directing operations? Tiger Bonilla (Colonel Arturo Corrales) one of the most terrible individuals who was also in the era of the death squads.

It is incredible! Imagine, look in El Salvador for example, the confrontation was armed. The people had to arm themselves and had to fight. But in Honduras, people are completely defenceless. And people are fighting.

Every day they are mobilizing, There hasn't been a single day since June 28th without resistance action: Every day despite what they (the coup leaders) have wanted.

But simply when we were coming here, when we all met up in the southern highway (out of Tegucigalpa) at Plaza Villas del Sol, we were there with our flags and everything since we were on our way here and there were fighter planes over the demonstration. One asks "Could it be that they are thinking of using them?" Because the simple fact that they fly over us amounts to psychological warfare.

Now people are afraid. They are afraid there in Danlí. Now just the sight of them (the military) makes people tremble. They say "Be careful". People are in a very difficult situation. When they go to the demonstrations they are active and so on. But then when they are alone they feel a situation of panic.

THE SOLDIERS

There are many soldiers falling sick and also they are unpaid for the month of June and they are denied weekend leave. The psychological operation they are running includes a dose of pills that they give to the soldiers. That pill makes their eyes go red and increases their aggression and they take a powder that they use at the military posts, a powder that is a bit like the powder used in a tear gas round and they apply it to the troops and it makes them weep. Then they put them doing exercises and manoeuvres. But they are not eating well and that pill they give the troops quells hunger pangs.

Plenty of the kids in the army want out, they are in a war situation against an enemy that is the ordinary people. It makes no sense to wage war against unarmed civilians against whom they are ordered to open fire.

At that football stadium, when Ramon Custodio Lopez said they were rubber bullets, those were live rounds, 5.56 from an M-16. So the situation of the military is an abuse of their own human rights, because keeping them drugged up all the time so as not to have to feed them - that's something really serious.

And yesterday Billy Joya came to the area to do an appraisal of the operational situation and to prepare more repressive operations against the population. A soldier even raised a pistol to Xiomara (the President's wife) when she was at one of the roadblocks. Things that are quite incredible.

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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.

AMERICANS AND CANADIANS SHOULD CONTACT YOUR OWN MEDIA, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, SENATORS & MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, EVERY DAY, DAY AFTER DAY, 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
reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

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