

Rights Action

**Day 42, Honduran Coup Resistance, August 8, 2009
(Alert#43)**

**HONDURAN BISHOP SAYS WEALTHY ELITE WERE BEHIND OUSTER OF
PRESIDENT**, By Paul Jeffrey Catholic News Service

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The illegitimate coup regime in Honduras 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.

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**HONDURAN BISHOP SAYS WEALTHY ELITE WERE BEHIND OUSTER OF
PRESIDENT**, By Paul Jeffrey Catholic News Service

EUGENE, Oregon (CNS) -- A Catholic bishop in western Honduras said members of the country's wealthy elite were behind the ouster of President Manuel Zelaya. Bishop Luis Santos Villeda of Santa Rosa de Copan also said the country needs a dialogue between the elite and Honduras' poor and working-class citizens.

"Some say Manuel Zelaya threatened democracy by proposing a constitutional assembly. But the poor of Honduras know that Zelaya raised the minimum salary. That's what they understand. They know he defended the poor by sharing money with mayors and small towns. That's why they are out in the streets closing highways and protesting (to demand Zelaya's return)," the bishop told Catholic News Service.

In a July 30 telephone interview, he said it is misleading to consider Honduras a democracy, either before or after the June 28 coup. "There has never been a real democracy in Honduras. All we have is an electoral system where the people get to choose candidates imposed from above. The people don't really have representation, whether in the Congress or the Supreme Court, which are all chosen by the rich. We're the most corrupt country in Central America, and we can't talk about real democracy because the people don't participate in the decisions," he said.

While Bishop Santos has criticized Zelaya for forging too close an alliance with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the prelate said those behind the coup are not advocates of democracy.

"They are gangsters, but their game is up. They plot together over dinner one night but the next day pretend to have disagreements in order to deceive the illiterate. They don't care that children are dying of hunger, or that people die in hospitals without medicine," he told the Jesuit-run Radio Progreso July 29.

In the interview with CNS, the bishop said that after an appeal from Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of the ousted president, he had dispatched food and water to embattled protesters. "As a church, we continue offering humanitarian aid where it's needed," he told CNS. "And, taking into consideration our preferential option for the poor, we urge a dialogue between the unions, peasant groups and popular organizations on the one side and the economic powers behind the coup, which are linked to the transnational mining companies, the fast food chains and the petroleum distributors. The dialogue should be between these powerful groups and the poor and weak. ... The international community doesn't have anything to do with it.

"Who lives with the shocking misery here -- the lack of education and medicines, the lack of even sheets in the hospitals -- are the poor of Honduras. So national reconciliation needs to be between the poor, represented by their leaders, and these economically powerful groups," he said.

Bishop Santos' analysis of the political crisis appears at odds with that of Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. In a July 4 appearance that the interim government ordered all the country's television and radio stations to carry live, Cardinal Rodriguez urged Zelaya to remain outside the country, warning of violence should he attempt to return. We think that a return to the country

at this time could unleash a bloodbath in the country," Cardinal Rodriguez said. "To this day, no Honduran has died," he added, urging Zelaya to think about his actions "because afterward it will be too late."

One protester was killed by government soldiers July 5 when troops closed the Tegucigalpa airport to prevent Zelaya's plane from landing. At least one other pro-Zelaya demonstrator has been killed since.

Cardinal Rodriguez used the July 4 appearance to read a letter from the country's bishops' conference. The letter, which did not use the word "coup," argued that what had transpired was "in conformance with the law."

A source within the bishops' conference told CNS that a lively discussion took place during the meeting in which the letter was drafted, with the cardinal reading from a folder of legal documents provided by the interim government to bolster the case against Zelaya. Bishop Santos reportedly argued strongly for a different position, but finally conceded.

Most of the bishops in Honduras are foreigners and reportedly did not take an active part in the discussion.

Asked by CNS about the meeting, Bishop Santos, who often has differed publicly with Cardinal Rodriguez on political issues, declined to comment. Yet he did say the cardinal's position was not the only Catholic viewpoint. "The coup plotters took the appearance of Cardinal Rodriguez in the media as if it were the position of the Catholic Church. But in Honduras we have eight dioceses, and each bishop is autonomous legally and within canon law," he said.

He pointed out that in his diocesan cathedral July 2 he had read a statement from his diocesan council repudiating "the substance, form and style with which a new head of the executive branch has been imposed on the people."

Other Catholic groups, including the Central American province of the Jesuits and the region's Dominicans, as well as the clergy of the Honduran Diocese of Trujillo, have issued statements criticizing the change of government and calling for authentic democracy. The United Nations, the Organization of American States and the European Union have condemned the coup and demanded Zelaya's return.

Cardinal Rodriguez received a letter of support from leaders of the Latin American bishops' council, known by the acronym CELAM.

In an interview from the Nicaraguan-Honduran border, Zelaya told the independent news organization Democracy Now! July 30 that Cardinal Rodriguez "conspired with the coup leaders. He betrayed the people, the poor. He took off his robes to put on a military uniform. And with his words, he really contributed to the assassinations that have taken place in Honduras."

On July 28 a group of human rights activists filed a motion with the government's special prosecutor against corruption, asking that the courts charge Cardinal Rodriguez and former Honduran President Carlos Flores with the misuse of public funds. The accusation alleges that the government has paid a monthly stipend of 100,000 lempiras (US\$5,300) to the prelate since December 2002.

Repeated attempts by CNS to reach Cardinal Rodriguez at his office and residence were unsuccessful.

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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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