

## **Rights Action**

### **Day 46, Honduran Coup Resistance, August 12, 2009 (Alert#46)**

#### **BELOW:**

- Op-ed piece in New York Times: President Obama doing nothing to challenge the coup regime
- 16 Members of Congress send letter to President Obama, urging stronger action

The illegitimate coup regime in Honduras hangs on to power due to the wealth of the elite sector backers and state repression.

The onus is directly on the “international community” – particularly the USA and Canada - to take direct actions against the 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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### **More of the Same in Latin America**

August 12, 2009, New York Times, Op-Ed Contributor, By MARK WEISBROT

There were great hopes in Latin America when President Obama was elected. U.S. standing in the region had reached a low point under George W. Bush, and all of the left governments expressed optimism that Obama would take Washington's policy in a new direction.

These hopes have been dashed. President Obama has continued the Bush policies and in some cases has done worse.

The military overthrow of democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras on June 28 has become a clear example of Obama's failure in the hemisphere. There were signs that something was amiss in Washington when the first statement from the White House failed to even criticize the coup.

It was the only such statement from a government to take a neutral position. The U.N. General Assembly and the Organization of American States voted unanimously for "the immediate and unconditional return" of President Zelaya.

Conflicting statements from the White House and State Department emerged over the ensuing days, but last Friday the State Department made clear its "neutrality." In a letter to Senator Richard Lugar, the State Department said that "our policy and strategy for engagement is not based on supporting any particular politician or individual," and appeared to blame Mr. Zelaya for the coup: "President Zelaya's insistence on undertaking provocative actions contributed to the polarization of Honduran society and led to a confrontation that unleashed the events that led to his removal."

This letter was all over the Honduran media, which is controlled by the coup government and its supporters, and it strengthened them politically. Congressional Republicans who have supported the coup immediately claimed victory.

On Monday, President Obama repeated his statement that Mr. Zelaya should return. But by then nobody was fooled.

Mr. Obama has said that he "can't push a button and suddenly reinstate Mr. Zelaya." But he hasn't pushed the buttons that he has at his disposal, such as freezing the U.S. assets of the coup leaders, or canceling their visas. (The State Department cancelled five diplomatic visas of members of the coup government, but they can still enter the United States with a normal visa — so this gesture had no effect).

With Clinton associates such as Lanny Davis and Bennett Ratcliff running strategy for the coup government, the Pentagon looking out for its military base in Honduras, and the Republicans ideologically tied to the coup leaders, it should be no surprise that Washington is more worried about protecting its friends in the dictatorship than about democracy or the rule of law.

But it doesn't make Mr. Obama's policy any less disgraceful. And Washington has remained silent about the dictatorship's human rights abuses, which have been condemned by human rights organizations worldwide.

In addition to its failure in Honduras, the Obama administration raised concerns last week among such leaders as President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Michelle Bachelet of Chile with its decision to increase the U.S. military presence in Colombia. Washington apparently did not consult with South American governments — other than Colombia — beforehand. The pretext for the expansion is, as usual, the “war on drugs.” But the legislation in Congress that would finance this expansion allows for a much broader role. No wonder South America is suspicious.

Mr. Obama also has not reversed the Bush administration's decision to reactivate the U.S. Navy's Fourth Fleet in the Caribbean, for the first time since 1950 — a decision that raised concerns in Brazil and other countries.

President Obama has also continued the Bush administration's trade sanctions against Bolivia, which are seen throughout the region as an affront to Bolivia's national sovereignty. And despite President Obama's handshake with President Hugo Chávez, the State Department has maintained about the same level of hostility toward Venezuela as President Bush did in his last year or two.

President Obama's policies have drawn mostly only mild rebuke because he is still enjoying a honeymoon. But he is doing serious damage to U.S.-Latin American relations, and to the prospects for democracy and social progress in the region.

[Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington]

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## **CONGRESSMAN RAUL GRIJALVA'S OFFICE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, August 11, 2009

Contact: Natalie Luna, (520) 622-6788 office, (520) 904-0375 cell; Ruben Reyes (520) 940-7752 cell

Tucson, AZ – Congressman Raul M. Grijalva (D-AZ), together with 16 other members of Congress, recently delivered a letter to President Obama

urging him to denounce human rights violations in Honduras and take further measures against the Honduran coup regime.

Over a month has now passed since democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya was deposed and deported to Costa Rica by the Honduran military and, despite widespread international condemnation and diplomatic sanctions, the de facto regime remains firmly in place. As time wears on, the human rights situation in Honduras grows increasingly worrying, with a growing quantity of reports of violent repression of anti-coup protests, extrajudicial killings reminiscent of the death squad era of the early 80s and arbitrary arrests of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators. These violations have been accompanied by far-reaching media censorship and the beating, arrest and intimidation of independent journalists by military and police.

The U.S. administration has taken important measures against the coup regime, such as halting military aid and other forms of non-humanitarian assistance to Honduras, but it is clear that further action is necessary to ensure that democracy is restored and the civil rights of Honduras' citizens are respected.

The co-signers of the letter to president Obama believe, therefore, that it is time for the U.S. administration to send a clear signal that the human rights violations that are being perpetrated under the coup regime in Honduras are unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue. The letter also considers that the U.S. administration should take measures that directly target those responsible for the coup.

Revoking the A-1 diplomatic visas of a few key coup officials, as the State Department did on July 29th, is a step in the right direction, but clearly not sufficient as this does not prevent those targeted by the decision from continuing to travel to the U.S. on tourist and other visas. The letter strongly urges president Obama to deny those involved in the coup entry to the United States and immediately instruct the Treasury Department to freeze their U.S.-based assets.

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**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 and 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 of President Zelaya  
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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See Rights Action's previous Honduras Coup Alerts: [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)

