

Rights Action

DAY 60 – HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

[Alert#53 / August 26, 2009]

BELOW: Article by Margaret Thompson: “First military coup of 21st century reverses Honduran women’s gains in human rights”

“Irma Villanueva ... said the police grabbed her, forced her to lie face down in a pickup truck, and took her to a remote location. Four officers then raped her, shoved a police baton into her vagina, and left her lying on the ground. They were shouting insults about how she would learn to not be in places where she doesn't belong (in a street demonstration).”

AT BOTTOM:

- to donate tax-deductible, urgently needed funds to pro-democracy movement in Honduras
- what to do?
- more information

Please re-distribute & re-publish this information all around

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

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

* * *

Margaret Thompson: “Below, is an article about how women's rights are being eroded with the military coup and violent repression in Honduras. I wrote this for FIRE -- Feminist International Radio Endeavour (www.radiofeminista.net) after traveling with an international delegation to Honduras, August 16-22, 2009 for a feminist observatory to document women's human rights abuses and strategies of feminists against the repression. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Margaret Thompson, FIRE & Associate Professor, Mass Communications & Journalism, University of Denver, 303-871-3947, mthompso@du.edu”

FIRST MILITARY COUP OF 21ST CENTURY REVERSES HONDURAN WOMEN'S GAINS IN HUMAN RIGHTS, August 24, 2009, By Margaret Thompson

Tegucigalpa, Honduras – The military coup d'état in Honduras on June 28th has seriously eroded democratic institutions and hard-fought gains in women's human rights and human rights in general.

Setbacks include the takeover and militarization of the National Institute of Women (INAM) by the defacto coup administration, the suspension of 25 people including 18 women from their jobs at INAM, and violent repression by security forces of feminists who were protesting in front of the ministry, ordered by the defacto appointed Minister of Women.

Furthermore, as violence against women rises, the number of formal complaints filed with police has dropped to zero.

According to Gilda Rivera, director of CEM-H (Women's Studies Center of Honduras), the coup resulted in the devastation and militarization of democratic institutions such as the National Institute for Women (INAM), which was established in 1998 based on international agreements made in 1995 with the UN Fourth World Conference on Women.

Also, as feminists and other women have been front and center in all of the massive peaceful daily marches in opposition to the regime of Roberto Michelletti, military and police have responded with ever more violent repression, including increased sexual aggression and torture of women, according to Honduran feminists and activists.

Xiomara Castro Zelaya, first lady of Honduras and wife of ousted President Manuel Zelaya said she was surprised that more women than men are participating in many marches, and that "it's hard to see people in the demonstrations repressed so brutally."

The first lady spoke to an audience of about 120 mainly women at a Forum of the Coalition of Resistance on August 17th, which included an international delegation from Central America, Mexico, Canada, Spain and the United States participating in a Feminist Transgressional Watch. The group of 22 journalists, human rights legal experts and activists visited Honduras for Women's Human Rights Week, conducting a feminist observatory of violations of women's human rights, and feminist strategies of resistance to the military coup.

Among several visits to human rights organizations and the InterAmerican Court, the international delegation met with 18 women who were fired recently from INAM because they are feminists and also expressed their opposition to the coup. Rivera noted that men and women throughout the country have been fired from their jobs or received threats against

their families for speaking out in opposition to the coup, a violation of their right to free expression and their right to work.

MILITARIZATION OF INAM

One of most blatant violations of women's human rights occurred on July 15th, when several members of the Feminists in Resistance group staged a peaceful protest at INAM as a symbolic action, with banners, chants and songs. Their intention was to declare that decades of struggle by women to create democratic institutions such as the Institute of Women should not be lost to the ultra right wing including Opus Dei, a very conservative Catholic group which opposes many rights for women, and has backed the military coup.

The aggressive response by the defacto Minister of Women María Marta Díaz who called in security forces is also very symbolic of the loss of respect for democratic institutions and human rights since the coup, according to Regina Fonseca, a human rights lawyer at CDM (Women's Rights Center).

This erosion is also evident with the violent response by police to the feminist protestors at INAM, who were chasing and beating the women protestors for almost 20 minutes, hitting them with batons on their backs and buttocks, screaming verbally aggressive comments such as, "Whores! Go back to your homes!" Gilda Rivera of CEM-H noted that she had never heard of police hitting male protestors on the buttocks with their batons.

Leaders of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean organizations who were passing by as part of a peaceful march against the coup came to support the feminists in the attack.

The militarization of INAM is all too evident according to Kenya Irías, a technical director in INAM, who noted that the de facto Minister Díaz is a close associate of Billy Joya Améndola, named a military advisor by Roberto Michelletti, the current de facto president. In the 1980s, Joya was one of the leaders of the infamous Intelligence Battalion 3-16, charged with the kidnapping, disappearance, torture and murder of numerous political opponents, and founder of the death squads "Lince" and "Cobra."

Irías said that the destruction of democratic institutions such as INAM was the consequence of this military and political coup, supported by the large national TV and radio corporations, the Catholic and Evangelical

churches, and Opus Day, which have all become stronger in recent years.

RISING LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & FEMICIDE

Feminist and human rights groups report that violence against women overall and also femicide (murder of women for being women) has greatly increased since the coup, which often occurs in armed conflicts and wars, according to Alda Facio, an international human rights lawyer from Costa Rica who was part of the delegation. It becomes an undeclared war or a type of coup d'etat against women, noted Facio.

Women's groups have collected a vast number of complaints about violations of women's human rights by the current coup regime in the past six weeks, and have conducted formal interviews to get testimonies of 18 women so far, according to Rivera. For the entire year of 2008, there were 312 femicides in Honduras, which amounts to nearly one per day. In contrast, during the month of July following the coup, there were 51 femicides reported in the two largest cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, which is a 60% increase.

As part of the feminist observatory, human rights lawyers and activists worked with Honduran feminists to present a preliminary report to the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights, which was visiting Honduras at the same time to document human rights violations since the military coup. The feminist observers plan to present a full report to the Commission in October.

Despite the growing number of violations of women's human rights since the coup, women have filed very few formal legal complaints with police about these incidents, nor complaints about domestic violence for a number of reasons. Sara Rosales, a human rights lawyer with CEM-H (Center for Women's Studies – Honduras), noted that women are afraid to report any violence since they would need to do so with the very same police who are in part responsible for the brutal repression. Many women also perceive such efforts as futile, assuming that nothing will come of it.

After years of national and global campaigns about domestic violence, complaints filed by women had been increasing in recent years, says Rosales, also a member of Feminists in Resistance in Honduras.

There were 12,000 complaints filed with police in Honduras denouncing violence against women in 2007, and 20,000 reports last year, noted Rosales. But since the coup there have been no complaints filed, which

clearly demonstrates the connection between domestic violence and violence against women in armed conflict, both of which have increased in recent weeks. This also illustrates the challenge of documenting violence against women during armed conflict or a coup.

VIOLENT & SEXUALIZED AGGRESSION OF SECURITY FORCES TOWARD FEMINIST DEMONSTRATORS

As popular resistance to the military coup continues with massive daily street marches, military and police officials are becoming more aggressive with both female and male demonstrators, beating them with clubs, shooting into crowds with tear gas and (rubber, wood or regular) bullets, conducting large scale arrests or detentions, torture, and four assassinations, little of which has been covered in many national or global media reports, said Indyra Mendoza of Cattrachas.

Mendoza has videotaped some of these incidents directly or has testimony of witnesses. Hospitals and clinics are filled with young people in particular, with broken arm or leg bones, head injuries, and (rubber) bullet wounds.

Women appear to be targeted in a specific more sexually aggressive ways, ranging from verbal obscenities and threats to being grabbed or beaten on their breasts or buttocks, had batons jammed between their legs, to more extreme forms of torture and rape while in detention centers, noted Rivera.

In the Forum of the Coalition of Resistance in Tegucigalpa, Yadida Minero reported that she had just taken a young woman to a radio station to denounce her gang rape and torture by police who detained her at a protest march in Choloma.

Irma Villanueva (she stated her name in her declaration on the radio) said the police grabbed her, forced her to lie face down in a pickup truck, and took her to a remote location. Four officers then raped her, shoved a police baton into her vagina, and left her lying on the ground. They were shouting insults about how she would learn to not be in places where she doesn't belong (in a street demonstration).

“Women are playing a different role in society, breaking the traditional order,” noted Daysi Flores, a young member of Feminists in Resistance of Honduras. “Since the coup we're in the streets, we're more visible, we call ourselves feminists, we occupy spaces and carry out political actions, all of which is represents a more serious breach” of traditional social norms.

PROPOSAL FOR "VOLUNTARY" DRAFT OF HONDURAN MEN AND WOMEN BY DE FACTO GOVERNMENT

Feminists and women's rights activists expressed their concern to the international delegation of the feminist observatory about the announcement by the defacto regime that it may implement an executive order for "voluntary" military service for all young men and women. However, the fine print in the order contains various incentives which in the present economic and social crisis basically amounts to a forced draft, according to Rivera.

Honduras is the most impoverished country in Latin America with 68 percent of the population living in poverty (earning less than \$2 daily), according to the UN Human Development Index.

Rivera said that the implications of this plan for a military draft are alarming for several reasons. Firstly, it implies that the current struggle against the coup regime may evolve into armed conflict, which is much opposed by the massive popular resistance movement.

Feminists are also greatly concerned because if women are included in the draft, they would face greater risks of sexual assault and harassment which confronts women soldiers worldwide. Such aggressions against women would obviously be more intense in a crisis situation such as in Honduras.

But above all, Rivera notes that feminists overall are strongly opposed to the accelerated militarization of Honduras, which is a reversal of the demilitarization process that began in the mid-1990's. Instead they advocate abolition of the military as a way to work toward peace.

In the meantime, women including Feminists in Resistance are continuing to be front and center in the marches. "No more coups (golpes), and no more golpes (beatings) of women!" shout the women as they take to the streets. "Quien somos? Somos Feministas en Resistencia!"

* * *

WHAT TO DO

AMERICANS & CANADIANS SHOULD CONTACT OUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, SENATORS & MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT EVERY DAY, DAY AFTER DAY, SEND COPIES OF THIS INFORMATION, AND DEMAND:

- unequivocal denunciation of the military coup

- no recognition of this military coup and the 'de facto' government of Roberto Micheletti
- an end to police, army and para-military repression and respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- no recognition of the November 2009 elections, that candidates are campaigning for, even as the country is militarized and repression is widespread
- 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 and perpetrators
- reparations to the victims for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

TO DONATE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE FUNDS TO PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS, MAKE CHECK 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>

For foundations and institutional donors, Rights Action can – upon request - provide a full proposal of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & TO GET INVOLVED:

Karen Spring (Rights Action) in Honduras: [504]9507-3835,
spring.kj@gmail.com

Grahame Russell (Rights Action), in USA: 1-860-352-2448,
info@rightsaction.org

See Rights Action's previous Honduras Coup Alerts: www.rightsaction.org