

Rights Action

DAY 68 – HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

[Alert#56 / September 3, 2009]

BELOW: Interview with Berta Caceres, leader of COPINH and National Front Against the Coup:

“Honduran constitutional mbly would be a step toward the emancipation of women”

RIGHTS ACTION Commentary:

In Rights Action, we are honored to be supporting the struggle of the Honduran people with our *grano de arena*, our grain of salt.

At once, this is a struggle for a new and different Honduras – as Berta discusses below – and it is a struggle *de las Americas*, similar to struggles going on from Argentina to Canada, from the local & community levels to national levels.

Take heart from Berta's interview, take heart from this courageous and on-going struggle ... that may well be on-going for a long-time to come. The “success” or “failure” of this movement does not depend on whether President Zelaya and his government are returned to power before the next Presidential elections, November 29, 2009.

While the return of President Zelaya and his government is a principal, short-term goal, the oligarchic-military regime is already manipulating the lead up to the November elections. In a next Alert, we will send out critical information about these elections, arguing the electoral democracy is likely to be impossible in these militarized and repressive conditions.

Thank-you for your on-going trust in and support for the people's peaceful, pro-democracy, anti-coup movement in Honduras.

Watch also: a REALnews report contrasting complicit role of the so-called “international community” with the inspiring and heroic Honduran people's movement:

http://therealnews.com/t/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=4149

AT BOTTOM:

- to donate tax-deductible funds to the people's peaceful pro-democracy movement in Honduras
- more information & what to do?
- 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/>

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HONDURAN CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD BE A STEP TOWARD THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

(By Laura Carlsen and Sara Lovera, (August 19, 2009), Translated by: Jessica Shao, <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6392>, Americas Program, Center for International Policy (CIP): americas.irc-online.org)

Interview with Bertha Cáceres, COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organization of Honduras) and the National Front Against the Coup d'etat.

HOW ARE THE WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THE MOVEMENT?

Even in spaces that are known as progressive, for women it continues to be hard because we are confronted with patriarchal domination and domestication, and the organizations within the movement are no exception.

I think the participation and the support of the women, despite this, has broken the pattern of domination in a very important way — from the participation and the leadership demonstrated in the National Front Against the Coup at a national level, to the outstanding and strong women in the north, the west, the center, the Atlantic coast, and here as well.

We also see women participating directly in the struggle. In the marches and mobilization, we see more than half are women and especially in the marches where there has been the most repression.

This is something we've been saying. There is strong participation on the part of the women, heroic participation, not just in the marches, but also in defending themselves and responding to the repression. For example, it has been women—especially indigenous women—who have directly confronted the military, faced with threats and cases of the forced recruitment of young people.

Through this, one can see how women are participating in different spaces: in communication, education, publicity, in all of the strategies of the front, in defining the situation, in the debate on how to proceed, and in contributing to a collective analysis of different scenarios that could present themselves in this country.

HOW ARE WOMEN INCLUDED IN THE PROCESS? IF I WERE A HONDURAN WOMAN, WHY WOULD I FIGHT FOR THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY?

First, it means confronting a dictatorship, a dictatorship based on different forms of domination. We have been saying all along that it is not just predatory capitalism, not just racism that has increased under this dictatorship, but also patriarchy. So, we feel that fighting against this dictatorship is to go beyond that toward a more strategic vision. In the long term, it is the fight for our country.

A national constitutional assembly, I feel, is fundamental for women. For the first time, we would be setting a precedent for taking a firm step toward the emancipation of women, to begin to break the roots of domination.

The fact is that the current constitution does not mention women anywhere, not even once. To establish a constitution that addresses our human rights, our reproductive, sexual, political, social, and economic rights—this is really taking on the current system of domination.

So, for us women, we want to actively participate toward this end—not to be observers, or an isolated sector, enclosed in a sterile and incomplete analysis, but to be major actors in deciding and contributing to the debate.

I believe this debate will be one of the hardest, because it must confront fundamentalist and reactionary sectors. So we need to be aware that this is a big challenge for women: that we will not allow others to decide for the majority of poor women.

Because this is also a struggle between the rich and the poor, between poor women and rich women—it's that clear. ...

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM THAT WOMEN MUST DEFEND?

Patriarchy is not exclusive to the capitalist system, right? Nor is it just inherent in one culture or another ... We need to move toward a new constitution, a process of redefining our thinking. It is to begin to dismantle

this belief that others have the right to make decisions about our bodies, to start guaranteeing that women are the owners and have autonomous rights to their bodies. It is a political act; a political proposal.

The ability to have and guarantee access to land, territories, cultures, health, education, art, dignified and decent employment for women, and many other things, are elements that we must guarantee in this process of a new constitutional assembly that leads to a real process of liberation.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO WOMEN IN THE PAST 52 DAYS OF THE COUP?

Like in any dictatorship, repression bolsters these kinds of violations and violence against women, and it's clear that Honduras is no exception. We have seen among the women—especially the rural, indigenous, and black women—how their right to freedom of movement has been violated. We have even seen a case in which Garífuna women were prohibited from leaving La Ceiba by the military, in the northern part of the country. They were told they could not come here and had to remain confined to La Ceiba.

The violation of human rights is incredible and one can see it clearly in this case where the military personnel just saw a bus filled with Garífuna women and the racism came out immediately. One of the soldiers got on the bus and said, "No, they must get off, turn them around—they are prohibited from going to Tegucigalpa. They cannot move from here."

The indigenous and elderly women who were detained and locked up in illegal for detention facilities, were told repeatedly—while they were roughed up and touched in ways that affected them physically and mentally—they said, "We have to see your vagina (in other words) ... That is where your weapons are."

Or, for example, in San Francisco Opalaca, an indigenous municipality, where the army cornered and threatened people, especially women, saying that if they left town for the march, their children would be recruited. It was a way to extort, intimidate, and corner the indigenous women. The army knows that the women are the first to confront them when it comes to this.

In Honduras, there was a fight against forced recruitment. The women and young people were the leader's protagonists in abolishing the mandatory military service in 1992.

There have been many human rights violations—the persecution of our families and organizations, interventions in our communications, constant and systematic threats. This is a reality that we see in this country and that's why the Inter-American Commission (on Human Rights) is here, to see the situation firsthand, and see that what is happening is not a made-up story.

HAVE YOU SUFFERED FROM VIOLATIONS PERSONALLY?

Three days before the coup—I lived in La Esperanza with my family, my mom and my son —and my house was surrounded by guys in civilian clothing, armed, with walkie-talkies, and cell phones. They were harassing us, circling the house for many hours, day and night.

On several occasions, the police and the army have gone to my house, knowing that only my mother and my young children were home. There has been constant vigilance and one realizes that in a dictatorship this is inevitable. We believe that this is a repressive dictatorship, as was expected, but we will continue to fight here because we are not intimidated.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PRESENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HERE HAS TO OFFER?

We equally value all delegations that come, but we know that these sectors are more involved, they have a commitment, a natural and strategic alliance with us. They are our compañeras—not some foreigners that come to observe, but they are aware of why we are fighting back, what the cause is, what the commitment is, and they come not only to observe but to join us in this fight as well. This is very important to us.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NOW THAT THE MEDIATION SEEMS TO HAVE FAILED?

I make a distinction among the international community. One side is the formal international community—like the OAS, the UN, national governments—and we demand that they remain consistent with the democratic discourse, the discourse of the OAS and UN, and that they remain consistent with the decisions that have already been made. The responsibility to save this country, to return to institutionalism and initiate a new process of fledgling democracy is also the responsibility of the international community.

We have seen direct participation from governments like the United States, actors from the Pentagon, the CIA, and all of the terrorist agents they've deployed—counter-revolutionaries, and the ones that destabilize states and people's governments—with the clear objective of starting a tendency toward coups against our continent, directed toward the south.

They were wrong when they thought that Honduras was the weakest link, because here a process of participation had already begun, of incorporation into ALBA, greater relationships with the south and the Caribbean in our continent.

They were wrong here, they miscalculated. They said it would be two days of resistance, and they were wrong.

This population has demonstrated that we are capable of not just 52 days, but a much longer struggle.

And we demand the international community take responsibility and not view the problem of Honduras as a secondary item on its agenda.

We are also aware that what happened to Haiti could also happen to us, where there was a brief moment of attention in the international media and then the situation in Haiti was silenced.

On the other hand, we are asking for an international solidarity movement, to be active alongside us, accompanying us. For us, any action from this movement is just as important as these marches we have here every day. The international movement needs to pressure the OAS and their own governments to sanction the coup regime and comply with the OAS and UN resolutions. To help us get the word out through autonomous, independent media. This is very valuable to us, because remember we are living with the terror and manipulation of the media in our country.

Any action—sending a letter, sending a delegation—all of this is helpful. That's why we distinguish between the two. We know that this social and political movement will always be with us.

THE FEMINIST DELEGATION WILL BE SUBMITTING A REPORT. WHAT WOULD BE MOST IMPORTANT VIOLATIONS OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS FROM THE PAST 52 DAYS TO REPORT ON?

I believe that violations of physical and emotional integrity, of women's sexuality, the use of women's bodies—this is where the army has shown its strongest repression.

Also the restrictions on our rights to express ourselves—to me, this is one of the worst violations of our human rights. We can't go to any of the coup-controlled media to express our positions.

Also freedom of movement and organization, freedom of assembly: we can be arrested at any time and harassed even when we're in our own organizations.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM THIS?

We expect to strengthen the Honduran movement, beginning with a stage of building the bases. What does this mean? It is the work to be done in municipalities and departments. The people are teaching us a great lesson—they are forming the Front at the municipal level. But in many places it has not been done. This is a priority in the new stage of the National Front Against the Coup. We believe this is great and we hope to achieve sustainability of the movement, which is a long-term movement.

WHAT IS THE AGENDA FOR WOMEN AT THIS STAGE?

For us, it is to intensify our demands because these are historical demands. Here we're seeing the historical demands of diverse sectors, organizations, and movements. I believe that we have to put forward our demands as women more than ever before, to get them into the debate of the Honduran people in an open manner. Feminist or not, this agenda for discussion has to be included in the debate to continue building the contents of what could be a new constitution.

[Laura Carlsen and Sara Lovera are members of the international delegation for Women's Human Rights in Honduras]

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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 the peaceful, people's 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:

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NORTH AMERICAN SPEAKING TOURS: Contact Grahame at info@rightsaction.org, for information about whether our Speaking Tours are coming to your region of Canada and the United States