

Rights Action

Day 110, HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

(October 15, 2009, Honduras Coup Alert#80)

BELOW:

2-part "Fault Lines" news report about Honduras:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYY4vj9ROC0&feature=player_embedded
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upMu_oR2YUU&NR=1

Article: "Honduras: civil rights still suspended as talks stall (again)", by Jeremy Kryt

NEEDED: FUNDS FOR THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

Thank-you everyone who has donated funds. It is the Honduran people's movement, with support from the people's "international community", that is holding this oligarchic-military regime at bay. To donate tax-deductible funds to the pro-democracy movement in Honduras – see below.

NEEDED: DELEGATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS, JOURNALISTS

The Honduran people's movement continues to call for international delegations, human rights accompaniers and journalists to go to Honduras to observe and bear witness to their peaceful pro-democracy movement.

Please re-distribute this information

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

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

FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFORMATION: Grahame Russell, Rights Action, 1-860-352-2448, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

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FAULT LINES News Report – "100 Days of Resistance"

Watch a 2-part "Fault Lines" news report about Honduras:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYY4vj9ROC0&feature=player_embedded
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upMu_oR2YUU&NR=1

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HONDURAS: CIVIL RIGHTS STILL SUSPENDED AS TALKS STALL (AGAIN)

October 14, 2009, By Jeremy Kryt, jkryt@aol.com

(For original article, with photos:

http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/dispatch_from_honduras_widespread_persecution_continues/)

Tegucigalpa, Honduras – Martial law continues to exact an increasingly heavy toll on both human rights and the economy in this already impoverished nation. The de facto regime is still hedging on its promise to restore civil liberties, and in recent days has actually gone the other way, passing legislation that allows the permanent closing of independent media outlets that refuse to broadcast official propaganda.

“If this government had the social base to support it, they wouldn’t need to censor the media, or prohibit freedom of movement,” said top resistance leader Juan Barahona, in a cell phone interview yesterday. “The military-backed regime is trying to keep itself in power at whatever price.”

MARTIAL LAW VS. NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

Peaceful protests against the government are still being prohibited in the capital and elsewhere. Participants in the marches of the pacifist anti-coup movement are regularly gassed or sprayed down with powerful chemicals, rubber bullets, and even live rounds. Hundreds have been illegally detained, and scores more wounded. At least four unarmed civilians were killed by police and soldiers in the last month alone. According to human rights groups, about 16 people have died since the military-backed coup that deposed President Mel Zelaya on June 28.

Despite the smear campaign to discredit him, Zelaya remains an economic centrist who was ousted for taking on the far-right elements which have traditionally ruled Honduras. He returned to the country in a surprise move about three weeks ago, and has been sheltered since then in the Brazilian Embassy.

Roberto Micheletti, a wealthy transportation magnate and the de facto president, has threatened Zelaya with arrest, and the Embassy remains heavily guarded. Food, water and visitors are highly restricted.

Zelaya has given October 15 as the deadline for discussion, saying that if he isn’t restored by then, he and his followers will boycott the crucial presidential elections in November.

But the police in charge of the former president’s captivity don’t seem fazed by his machismo. “We have 100 police officers, and 380 soldiers, ‘protecting’ Señor Zelaya,” said Inspector Molina, official spokesman of the national police, when I

spoke to him in front of the barricaded Embassy. “His powers to disrupt the peace are very limited,” Molina said.

In a recent cell phone interview, Zelaya had told me journalists were being deliberately kept away from the compound— and not for his protection.

Micheletti himself had announced such allegations were false, and stated in public that anyone could enter the Embassy. Inspector Molina, after verifying my credentials, revealed that the truth was, as with so many things in Honduran politics, somewhere in between. “You can’t go in unless you’re authorized by the government,” Molina said. “You have to have President Micheletti’s special permission.”

A number of calls and emails I sent to Mr. Micheletti’s office did finally yield permission for an interview – but with Micheletti himself, instead of Mel Zelaya.

ZELAYA DELEGATE RESIGNS IN PROTEST

On Tuesday of this week, Juan Barahona, one of Zelaya’s top three representatives at the peace talks, walked out of the meetings in protest, citing major philosophical differences with the nascent proposal. “I can’t put my name on a document that would prohibit a referendum on constitutional reforms,” he said to the thousands of nonviolent demonstrators gathered in front of the hotel where the talks are being held in the capital. Barahona has a silvered beard and fiery eyes, and can be a vibrant speaker. He has been one of the leading figures in the movement to restore Zelaya to power, helping to lead protest marches in the street every day since the coup. “We will never abandon our struggle for a better Honduras,” he told the cheering crowd, after announcing his resignation.

Amending the outdated Honduran constitution is a touchy subject, and was one of the main reasons for Zelaya’s ouster. When I spoke to him on the phone, Barahona, who remains a leading figure in the peaceful resistance, said that forming a more participatory national charter (and by extension a more democratic national government) are the touchstones of his movement. But so far, he said, the delegates had been able to make little headway in their negotiations with the Micheletti government.

“The coup plotters are not really interested . And so we can’t find a solution to this conflict,” said Barahona. “There is a dialogue, yes. But there is not enough will power to resolve the conflict. There is no political desire for an arrangement.”

Another top resistance leader, Rafael Alegria, the director of the powerful farmer’s union Via Campesina, echoed Barahona’s sentiments, but said he still thought a diplomatic solution could be reached. “If wants to aid the immediate crisis ... we’re ready to talk,” Alegria said. “Where there is a dialogue there is hope.”

Alegria also made clear that the resistance would continue its nonviolent marches and rallies, whether or not Zelaya was restored to office. “There is enormous discontent in various public sectors,” The cowboy-hatted union boss told me. “The people are unhappy with their government.”

“DYSTOPIAN” CRACKDOWN ON THE MEDIA

The suspension of civil rights and the new law limiting independent media are both of great concern to many advocates of free speech in Honduras. According to Rigoberto Paredes, a retired professor of literature, who had served as Minister of Culture under Zelaya: “A fundamental shift in Honduran society occurred after the coup. A truly healthy culture requires liberty. And we don’t have that now.”

Paredes, who was fired from his post by Micheletti, said that since the coup his articles and essays are no longer accepted by the reviews that used to publish him regularly. “This is a new sickness,” he said, when we met in the small bookstore and café Paredes owns with his wife. Speaking of the far-right philosophies that seem to have taken hold in certain sectors, he said: “A few families now control basically everything in this country. There is not room for articles or plays or paintings that contradict them. By censoring the media, they are seeking to control our very thoughts.”

Paredes said that after years of teaching books like *Prision Verde* and *Brave New World* to his classes, he now feels as though his country, “has become its own, unique dystopia.”

Paredes blames the people’s acceptance of such an undemocratic system on widespread poverty and poor educational opportunities. Not coincidentally, these two issues top the list of things Barahona and Alegria’s resistance movement would like to see addressed.

“WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY IS THIS?”

I watched from a few blocks away as officers pistol-whipped an eighteen-year-old student across the back of the skull. I saw bystanders aid a paramedic in hustling the victim of random police violence into an ambulance. The student lost consciousness shortly before the paramedics arrived. Doctors later reported a severe concussion and scalp lacerations.

Random beatings and other mass-control techniques have become common in the weeks since President Zelaya’s surprise return. “Many people believe [the de facto regime] wants a civil war,” said Pablo Diaz, 47, who owns a small welding business in Tegucigalpa. “A war would force the world to recognize the government,” Diaz said, “because they would be responsible for our safety.”

The welder offered dire prophecies for the future, if the tensions don’t ease. “The Honduran Army can field less than twenty thousand active soldiers,” said Diaz,

himself a former infantryman, who wore a Chicago Bulls cap when we met. “But there are hundreds of thousands in the reserves,” Diaz said, “and almost all of them support Zelaya.” He went on to tell me that, although the reservists were not armed, an AK-47 costs only about 1,000 lempira (about 53 U.S. dollars) on the Honduran black market. The reservists, Diaz said, were all well trained. “So far, the resistance has been peaceful. And it should stay that way. But it’s a mistake to push the people too far.”

Among the leadership of the movement, however, calmer heads still prevail. Juan Barahona, like Alegria, stated clearly that the resistance movement will adhere to its nonviolent ethics. “For Micheletti to maintain power, he must try to silence the opposition,” Barahona said. “He has to crackdown on the country, to use weapons and arms to suppress the people, because that’s the only way he can remain in office ... But what kind of democracy is this? In fact, it’s a dictatorship. Bloody and repressive.”

The political negotiations, currently being administered by the Organization of American States (OAS), have so far met with little enthusiasm from either party. Zelaya has repeatedly stated that he doubts the sincerity of the coup-plotters. For its part, the Micheletti government still balks at a central aspect of the accords – Zelaya’s return to a limited presidency.

That kind of hard-line stance has many wondering how free and fair the November presidential election could possibly be. When I spoke about the upcoming ballot vote with Rigobertes Paredes, the former Minister of Culture wasn’t very optimistic. “This is a conservative country,” said Paredes, and again mentioned crippling poverty and the lack of education. “The people are not politically prepared for critical elections.” Paredes also cited control of the press, and the constant bombardment of pro-right propaganda, as inhibiting democracy in Honduras. “If elections do happen in November,” he said, “a great number of people will end up voting against their own best interest.”

(Jeremy Kryt, a graduate of the Indiana University School of Journalism and the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop, is writing his first novel.)

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LETTER TO U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

Please forward this letter to your Representative and ask them to sign this letter, calling on Pres. Obama to denounce human rights abuses in Honduras.

Current Signers: Grijalva, Serrano, Stark, D. Davis, Shakowsky

From: Daniel Z. Brito, Legislative Assistant, Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (gree-HAHL-vah)

1440 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515, 202.225.2435,
daniel.brito@mail.house.gov

October 13, 2009

HONDURAS: MICHELETTI DICTATORSHIP CRACKS DOWN ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA - AGAIN

"The new decree is simply aimed at silencing us once and for all." (Channel 36 director Esdras Lopez)

Dear Colleague:

Since the return of Manuel Zelaya, recognized by the Obama Administration as "the democratically elected and constitutional leader of Honduras," the de facto regime in that nation has intensified its assault on Hondurans demanding a return to democracy.

Dictator Roberto Micheletti suspended the constitution on September 27 in Executive Decree PCM-M-016-2009 and forces loyal to the regime then attacked and shut down the last independent media in the country, leaving the junta firmly in control of what Hondurans see and hear.

Despite widespread reporting that the Decree has been "rescinded," the rescission STILL has not been printed in La Gaceta, meaning the Decree is still legally in effect, and de facto, it is still being enforced with brute violence by the coup regime.

Also, the Micheletti dictatorship published on Saturday, October 10, another decree granting themselves the power to shut down independent media. "The new decree is simply aimed at silencing us once and for all," said Channel 36 director Esdras Lopez.

The New York Times last week finally reported on the widespread rights abuses occurring under the Micheletti dictatorship: "Eleven people have been killed since the coup, according to the Committee for Families of the Disappeared and Detainees in Honduras, or Cofadeh.

"[...] The groups describe an atmosphere of growing impunity, one in which security forces act unhindered by legal constraints. Their free hand had been strengthened by an emergency decree allowing the police to detain anyone suspected of posing a threat.

"In the 1980s, there were political assassinations, torture and disappearances," said Bertha Oliva, Cofadeh's general coordinator, in an interview last week, recalling the political repression of the country's so-called dirty war. "They were

selective and hidden. But now there is massive repression and defiance of the whole world. They do it in broad daylight, without any scruples, with nothing to stop them.”

Please join me in writing to President Obama to ask that his administration finally and firmly denounce these human rights abuses and join the consensus in the Americas regarding the scheduled elections.

To sign this letter, please contact Daniel Brito via email or at x. 5.2435.

Sincerely,

Raúl M. Grijalva, Member of Congress

Jose E. Serrano, Member of Congress

* * *

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you regarding an urgent situation where lives are at stake and action on your part may prevent further tragedy.

Since the return to Honduras of President Manuel Zelaya, the de facto regime has taken further repressive measures, in addition to the previous violations of basic rights and civil liberties which have been recognized and denounced by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and all of the key Honduran human rights NGOs, among others.

According to reports from the media and rights organizations, the coup regime violently dispersed a gathering of Hondurans in front of the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa with tear gas, clubs and rubber bullets, resulting in numerous casualties, including several reported fatalities.

While the siege of the Embassy is a serious violation of the Vienna Convention, more disturbing is the broad assault against the Honduran people unleashed by the coup regime.

On September 22, the Americas director at Human Rights Watch, Jose Miguel Vivanco, stated that “given the reports we have received, and the poor track record of the security forces since the coup, we fear that conditions could deteriorate drastically in the coming days.” That same day, the Americas

Director for the London-based rights organization Amnesty International, Susan Lee, has stated that “the attacks against human rights defenders, suspension of news outlets, beating of demonstrators by the police and ever increasing reports of mass arrests indicate that human rights and the rule of law in Honduras are at grave risk.”

The international community has also spoken out regarding the worsening human rights situation in Honduras. On September 22nd, Mexico released a statement in the name of 23-member Rio Group demanding that the de facto government stop carrying out “acts of repression and violation of human rights of all Hondurans.” The following day, the Presidency of the European Union seconded the Rio Group statement.

Mr. President, we were glad to hear State Department spokesman Ian Kelly on September 22 reaffirm the position of the Administration that Manuel Zelaya is the “democratically elected and constitutional leader of Honduras.” But unfortunately, the mixed messages that have characterized the Administration’s response persist.

The head of the US delegation to the Organization of American States Lewis Amselem represented our nation in that body by saying “Zelaya’s return to Honduras is irresponsible and foolish and it doesn’t serve to the interest of the people nor those who seek the restoration of democratic order in Honduras [...] Everything will be better if all parties refrain from provoking and inciting violence.”

Not content to place equal blame on both the victims of the violence and the perpetrators, he then chose to personally insult Mr. Zelaya, saying “The president should stop acting as though he were starring in an old Woody Allen movie.” State Department spokespersons have declined numerous opportunities to distance your administration from Amselem’s words.

We note that, unlike the coup leaders, President Zelaya has indicated his openness to dialogue and has accepted the San Jose agreement that emerged from the US-backed mediation process led by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica.

The suspension of rights announced by the junta on September 27 in Executive Decree PCM-M-016-2009 is still being enforced, according to numerous reports, with independent media outlets like Radio Globo and Canal 36 already having been raided and had their equipment stolen.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has declared that “the suspension is a violation of international law, as it was adopted to sustain the illegitimate government that arose from the rupture of the democratic institutional order, which took place on June 28, 2009.” The IACHR also expressed “deep concern over this decree, whose provisions arbitrarily restrict fundamental human

rights and contain vague regulations that grant absolute discretion to the authorities, especially the Army and the Police forces.”

Though we commend the administration for having strongly stated their support for the restoration of democracy in Honduras, we are concerned that neither you nor the Secretary of State has denounced these serious human rights abuses in a country where US influence could be decisive.

It is now more urgent than ever to break this silence. It is critical that your Administration immediately clearly and unequivocally reject and denounce the repression by this illegitimate regime. We can say sincerely and without hyperbole that this action on your part will save lives.

Furthermore, the vast majority of our neighbors in the region, including Brazil and Mexico, have clearly indicated that they will not recognize the results of elections held under the coup regime.

On September 29, Costa Rican President and US-appointed mediator Oscar Arias noted the regime’s continued rejection of the San Jose accords, and warned that Honduran elections cannot be recognized by the international community without a restoration of constitutional order. Arias said, "the cost of failure of leaving a coup d'etat unpunished is setting up a bad precedent for the region. [...] You could have remembrances of a bad Latin American past, insisting on elections under these circumstances and overlooking items in the San Jose Accord.”

It is time for the administration to join this growing hemispheric and international consensus and unambiguously state that elections organized by an undemocratic government that has denied critics of the regime the right to free speech, assembly, and movement, cannot and will not be considered free and fair by our government.

We feel it is imperative that the administration step up its efforts to bring about a prompt restoration of democracy in Honduras, together with other regional leaders.

We eagerly await your reply.

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WHAT TO DO

FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFORMATION: Grahame Russell, Rights Action, 1-860-352-2448, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

to support Honduran organizations and people working with the National Front Against the Coup. 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.

AMERICANS & CANADIANS should contact

our members of congress, senators & members of parliament every day, day after day, send copies of this information, and demand:

Public pressure for release of all political prisoners

Public and unconditional support for the return of the constitutional government of President Zelaya

Unequivocal pressures from international community for regime to relinquish power

No recognition of the November 2009 elections, that candidates from the dominant Nationalist and Liberal parties are campaigning for, even as the country is militarized and repression is widespread

Suspension of all international funds and loans to the regime, 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 of harms and damages (including loss of life, torture, rape) committed by regime

SPEAKING TOURS: “RESISTANCE TO MILITARY COUPS & GOLD MINING DEVASTATION IN HONDURAS & GUATEMALA”

In October, activists with Rights Action will be on speaking tours in Ontario, Quebec and eastern Canada, and north-east USA, showing slides and short documentaries and speaking about the on-going pro-democracy, anti coup movement in Honduras and about indigenous and community resistance to Goldcorp Inc.’s open-pit, cyanide leach mines in Guatemala and Honduras.

Karen Spring (spring.kj@gmail.com) in Ontario

Francois Guindon (francois.guindon@gmail.com) in Quebec and eastern Canada

Grahame Russell (info@rightsaction.org) in north-east USA

Thank-you for your on-going support for our work and for this amazing struggle.