

## Rights Action

### Day 121 of HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

(October 26, 2009, Honduras Coup Alert#83)

Rights Action commentary: U.S. and Canadian-backed regime has no interest in relinquishing power

#### Articles:

- “Honduras: a time of no time”, by Tom Loudon
- “Casualties of the ‘bloodless’ coup”, by Jeremy Kryt

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#### **RIGHTS ACTION Commentary:**

If it was not completely apparent from Day 1 of the coup regime, it should be now – this oligarchic-military regime, that seized power on June 28, 2009, through an illegal military coup, has no interest in relinquishing power.

Deposed President Zelaya – living in the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa – and his legitimate government continue to try and ‘negotiate’ with the illegal regime, the Organization of American States continues to try and ‘broker’ a solution, but the illegal regime is playing out the charade of ‘negotiating’, while betting heavily on the November 29th presidential elections as the means to legitimize their illegal coup.

It is vital to continue supporting the pro-democracy National Front Against the Coup and it is crucial to ensure that no government in the Americas accept the slated November 29th elections as a valid exercise in democracy. Not until the full government of President Zelaya has been returned to full constitutional power, can and should an election date and electoral process be decided upon.

#### **BELOW:**

- Article: “Honduras: a time of no time”, by Tom Loudon
- Article: “Casualties of the ‘bloodless’ coup”, by Jeremy Kryt

**NEEDED: MONEY FOR THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT:** Without question, it is the Honduran people’s movement, with support from the people’s “international community”, that is holding this oligarchic-military (and its Honduran and international backers) to a stand-off. To donate tax-deductible funds to the National Front Against the Coup pro-democracy movement in Honduras – see below.

**HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATION TO HONDURAS, November 24–December 1, 2009:** Please consider joining a Rights Action delegation to Honduras. For information:

Grahame Russell, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 1-860-352-2448.

**FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFORMATION:**

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IN HONDURAS (english and spanish), Dr. Juan Almandares, [juan.almendares@gmail.com](mailto:juan.almendares@gmail.com), 504-2375700, cell phone 504-99854150

Please re-distribute this information. To get on/off Rights Action's email list: <http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3/>

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**HONDURAS: A TIME OF NO TIME**

By Tom Loudon (in Honduras, working with the Quixote Center, [www.quixote.org](http://www.quixote.org), [toml@quixote.org](mailto:toml@quixote.org)), October 19, 2009

For the last week and a half, negotiations between President Zelaya and the coup government have dominated the news in Honduras. Last week, it appeared that a negotiated solution might emerge. However President Zelaya’s ‘absolute deadline’ of midnight October 15th came and went and absolutely nothing changed.

The ‘negotiations’ have the entire country suspended in a sort of time warp. Everyone waits for an outcome from the talks, which never emerges. Zelaya’s first extension, which was to have ended on Friday the 16th, has now been extended to today. However, coup leader Micheletti is now refusing to recognize what had previously been accepted and continues his stalling game. It is hard to know what could change between now and Monday which would lead to a resolution.

It is beginning to appear as if, in fact, there never has been any interest on the part of the de facto regime in a real resolution. Rather, negotiations have served

to consume time, running the clock in the hope of using the November 29th elections to claim that a legitimate government has been elected.

This weekend, an unidentified person in the State Department is quoted promoting the notion that perhaps the U.S. would recognize the outcome of the elections even if Constitutional order is not restored, provided they are verified free of fraud by international observers. Although a certain number of countries may eventually go along with this approach, large sectors of people inside Honduras and most Latin American governments will not. Given the impasse on negotiations and failure to restore Constitutional order, the 13 ALBA countries have announced that they will not recognize the November elections and have resolved to promote that position among other countries.

The broad based national coalition against the coup [‘National Front Against the Coup’] in Honduras has issued a call for citizens to disrupt the elections. This weekend, Independent Presidential candidate Carlos H. Reyes began holding popular assemblies proposing to his supporters that they affirm his decision to withdraw from the race. Today, the left wing UD party also announced that if there was not a restitution of Manuel Zelaya to the Presidency, they would also withdraw from the elections.

Meanwhile, the repression has been ramped up, posing serious new challenges for the resistance movement. The first response to the resistance on the part of the coup regime was to launch uncontrolled violence and blanket repression against protesters, and anyone else in the vicinity. More recent tactics expose the highly sophisticated apparatus which is behind this coup and capitalize on the collective memory of torture, disappearance and terror that were practiced here not very long ago.

**POLICE STATE AND THE SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS**  
Executive Decree PCM-M-016-2009 eliminates freedom of speech and association, and allows police to enter private houses at will, without a warrant. In addition to giving police blanket authorization to attack and arrest anyone without cause, many of those arrested have been charged with sedition. Although Micheletti claimed to have lifted the decree prior to the negotiations, in actuality, it has remained in effect. Today there was an announcement that it had been revoked. Perhaps this time it may actually be more than a promise.

Three snapshots from culled from notes during a recent visit to Honduras, from the offices of COFADEH – Committee of Families of the Disappeared of Honduras - illustrate life under the current police state:

Agustina Caceres, a school teacher from La Esperanza , arrived at COFADEH after 21 days in prison. Agustina received the “Teacher of the Year” Award last year for excellence in teaching and is known for her community service with

youth gangs. She was sitting on a curb, waiting for transport back to her hometown after the celebration in Tegucigalpa to celebrate Zelaya's return, when police started beating her. They continued to beat her face after she was handcuffed. She was released from prison, after her teachers union posted over \$5000 in bail, and is charged with sedition.

Four people arrived who had been arrested on August 12, the day of a large protests and heavy repression. Two had never been involved in political activity and had not attended the protest. One had attended the protest earlier that day and was then arbitrarily pulled off a bus with his sister and another person while on their way home much later. The fourth voiced protest from a distance about a young boy who was being beaten by the police which provoked her arrest. All were arrested and beaten with long night-sticks or metal poles. They were held in a room laying face down on the floor with arms cuffed behind their backs. Police came by and deliberately stepped on their exposed toes. They were held for nine days. All have been charged with sedition though no evidence has been presented. They are awaiting trial.

A woman from a Tegucigalpa barrio arrived with a small son who had been shot in the stomach. She went to file a police report and was told that the shooting was her own fault because of the state of siege she should not have let him out of the house.

In addition to generalized police repression against the entire population, there is an increase in selective intimidation, threats and assassination.

This week, union leader Jairo Sánchez, president of the SITRAINFOP union, finally died after having been shot in the face on September 24th. It is said that he was first thrown to the ground, and then fired on a point blank range. Early this morning (October 19), Elisio Hernandez, director of a rural school in Macuelizo and anti-coup activist, was also murdered.

Because of the increased incidence of violence and intimidation many people who have been involved in the resistance are leaving the country or going into hiding internally.

#### “OPERATION SILENCE”

The forced and violent closure of independent national radio and TV stations (Radio Globo and Channel 36) has successfully cut off access to accurate information about what is really happening in Honduras. Three radio shows, which played once a week on a station owned by Ricardo Maduro (known to be sympathetic to the coup), were also suspended this past week.

Indirectly, these news outlets also served a coordination function for the resistance movement; assisting in the effort to conduct simultaneous actions in

different parts of the country and notify people where and when repressive actions were being carried out.

In a country with large percentage of rural inhabitants and scarce access to internet, "Operation Silence" has dealt an effective blow to the resistance movement.

Today, the day when a new human rights mission sent by the UN began its work, Radio Globo was allowed to re-open, but with a gag order. It was also thought that Channel 36 would re-open.

**SUDDEN ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN EARLY END TO THE SCHOOL YEAR**  
Social unrest and strikes since the coup have already resulted in major interruptions for public school students. This week, the government suddenly announced that the school calendar would be cut by one month. With less than one week of prior notice, classes were required to end on Friday October 16th and all school activities to end by October 30th – a full month before the school year normally ends.

This measure is understood as a move to demobilize teachers - an important sector of the resistance movement with a long history of struggle. Ending the school year early interrupts efforts which might emerge on the part of teachers to disrupt elections, as many of the polls are located inside of the schools. It also gives the army sufficient time to occupy the schools.

Previously the government has threatened reprisals against teachers who were participating in resistance activities. Teachers who are insisting on continuing the school year past the government cutoff are now being threatened for wanting to teach.

Although the regime may be enjoying short term success in suppressing the demand for restoration of Constitutional order, in the long term police state repression will not contain the huge numbers of people who will continue to struggle for economic and political justice.

Media hype to the contrary, the growing number of left wing governments being elected in Latin America is not the result of anything Hugo Chavez is doing, rather the efforts of people who are tired of poverty and social movement demanding change.

This week, for example, despite Micheletti's iron clad crack down, the resistance scored a major goal. The Honduran Soccer team qualified for the World Cup. Soccer in Honduras is like baseball and football combined in the U.S.

Micheletti, anxious to take full advantage of this event, declared a national holiday and held a ceremony to honor the winning players with special

medals. However, the captain of the team, Amado Guevara, refused to accept a medal from the illegitimate government and had his jersey smuggled inside the Brazilian Embassy to President Zelaya. Despite the media blackout, news of this open defiance of the dictator spread throughout the country. Later Amado Guevara denied that he had been involved in sending his jersey to the Embassy. Certainly the coup government found an effective way to threaten him, because his family is known to be vehemently anti-coup.

It is hard to predict where things are headed in Honduras. Unfortunately, the second deadline extension given by President Zelaya had not produced a negotiated settlement, rather another long weekend of suspended animation.

By late tonight, there was still no news of any agreement, just references by the coup government of the need to avoid placing a deadline on the negotiations. If Constitutional order is not restored quickly, a massive boycott of the elections is likely. Any candidate who chooses to remain in the race will be judged as illegitimate, leading to a further breakdown of order.

In this time of no time - the clock is running out.

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**CASUALTIES OF THE 'BLOODLESS' COUP:  
NO MATTER WHAT PROMINENT U.S. APOLOGISTS SAY, THE MILITARY  
TAKEOVER OF HONDURAS WAS — AND IS — VIOLENT AND UNJUST**  
By Jeremy Kryt, October 23, 2009, <http://www.inthesetimes.com/main/print/5084/>

Many apologists for the thuggish takeover of the elected government in Honduras still claim that what happened last June 28 was a "bloodless" coup. In a Wall Street Journal editorial on October 10, U.S. Senator Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) went one step further, denying there even is a political crisis here, and referring to the ousting of President Mel Zelaya as a "supposed military 'coup.'"

But the hundreds of peaceful demonstrators who have been brutally beaten since the putsch might disagree with adjectives like "supposed" and "bloodless." As might the family of Jairo Sanchez, the most recent victim of government-sponsored violence, who after weeks of drifting in and out of consciousness, died in the capital on Monday, October 19.

According to the report prepared by the Committee for the Families of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), Sanchez, a 38-year-old husband and father, was shot in the face during a police raid against unarmed marchers on September 30. Three other peaceful demonstrators were critically wounded in the same attack.

Apparently none of this well-documented violence made an impression on DeMint. The senator recently returned from a brief visit to Tegucigalpa, where he'd been the guest of the same political elites who worked with the military to orchestrate the putsch. "As all strong democracies do, after cleansing themselves, Honduras has moved on," DeMint opined.

During his visit, Honduras was under martial law, independent media were shuttered and police and soldiers attacked peaceful protestors just blocks from the Senator's hotel. Yet upon returning home, DeMint reported "there is no chaos there," that like the coup itself, this is all merely "supposed."

Honduras was plunged into this "supposed" chaos last summer, when soldiers exiled Zelaya and presented a false letter of abdication to Congress on national television. In the same ceremony, far-right political veteran Roberto Micheletti was installed as a puppet to head the civilian government.

Since then, riot police and soldiers have shown an increasing willingness to use violence against anyone who publicly opposes the coup. Truncheons, tear gas, rubber bullets and even live rounds are frequently employed to disperse peaceful demonstrations.

COFADEH estimates that since the coup, 17 people have died at the hands of authorities. DeMint, however, made no mention of such casualties in his editorial. Nor did he reference the political scandal his Honduran junket had caused back home. In order to show his support for the coup regime, DeMint had defied direct orders from John Kerry, head of the Foreign Relations Committee. Because Kerry refused to authorize the trip, the senator flew to Honduras in a military jet sent by the Pentagon, causing crucial Foreign Relations Committee meetings to be cancelled in his absence.

But that wouldn't be the first time the South Carolina Republican has been the source of a political log-jam. DeMint -- who was ranked by the National Journal as the most conservative of all U.S. Senators in both 2007 and 2008 -- is also holding up crucial votes on Obama's picks for assistant secretary of state for western hemisphere affairs (Arturo Valenzuela) and ambassador to Brazil (Thomas A. Shannon Jr.).

#### 'ARMED AGAINST THE UNARMED'

During a recent interview, COFADEH Director Bertha Oliva said, "are killing people...and it is selective. They are targeting the leaders of the resistance, just as they did in the 80s... And they can control the media, to help them accomplish whatever they intend."

Oliva said Zelaya had initiated some modern social reforms in Honduras, like raising the minimum wage, initiating social security and passing laws to conserve natural resources. But such bold moves threatened the power structure for the

nation's wealthiest families and the military. When the rancher-turned-president vowed to let the people vote on a referendum for broad constitutional reforms, troops seized Zelaya in his pajamas, hustling him out of the country at gunpoint.

"This is a struggle of the armed, against the unarmed," said Oliva, when I met in her downtown office, which was recently shelled with tear gas by police. "But the Resistance will not give up its peaceful principals."

Zelaya returned to the capital in a surprise move on September 21, but remains holed up in the Brazilian Embassy, under threat of arrest and surrounded by hundreds of troops. In addition to union leader Sanchez, others killed by authorities since Zelaya's return include a 67-year-old man, a newly-wed girl, a school teacher and a nurse. And that's just in the last month.

" ignores these casualties, because they would like to say that the Resistance does not exist," Oliva said. "But they will not be able to say it for much longer."

#### 'SLAVES TO A PIECE OF PAPER'

The coup-plotters in Honduras claim they acted to prevent Zelaya from extending his time in office and becoming a despot like Hugo Chavez. In his editorial for the Journal, DeMint also defended the legality of their actions, citing an August briefing from the U.S. Library of Congress. In fact, the U.S. Library of Congress report (PDF file) makes clear that the Honduran military's decision to exile Zelaya was "in direct violation of the Article 102 of Constitution."

DeMint also accuses Zelaya of defying the Honduran Supreme Court regarding the much-disputed constitutional referendum. But such accusations must be viewed in context. The Library of Congress brief says that when the Supreme Court first outlawed the referendum, Zelaya was willing to play along. He obliged the Court by suggesting a nonbinding poll so that, in the words of the report, "The Honduran people could express their opinion" on Constitutional reforms.

But the Supreme Court ruled even a simple poll to be inexplicably illegal. The judicial branch of the Honduran government was preventing a plebiscite, one of the basic tools of transparent, isocratic government.

The Court's injunctions were increasingly repressive, obviously designed to thwart much-needed reforms. According to Oliva, Zelaya was simply answering public demand by agreeing to a referendum on the Constitution. "In the current system, everything is rigged for the interests of the wealthy," Oliva said. "Zelaya wanted to give the people a voice."

DeMint, echoing the junta itself, claims that the nonbinding poll on political reforms would have somehow allowed Zelaya to extend his time as president. In fact, the proposed ballot question made no mention of term limits, and Zelaya was not even running in the upcoming elections.



"They are usurpers," Oliva said. "The only way they can hold onto power is by spreading lies and fear."

Dr. Valerio Gutierrez, Secretary of State under current de facto leader Roberto Micheletti, said in a recent interview that Zelaya had tried to subvert the authority of Congress and the Supreme Court, thus legalizing his own deposition. Yet Gutierrez admitted that "many people in Honduras want to change the constitution" and that this could be a good idea "if the majority voted for it." If such a vote is not allowed, said Gutierrez, the people would be little more than "slaves to a piece of paper."

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONTENTION

Near the close of his Wall Street Journal article, DeMint praises the Honduran Constitution, and likens its framers to our own Founding Fathers. But several legal experts I've spoken to in Tegucigalpa, including Honduran Congressman Marvin Ponce, admit that their national charter is deeply flawed, describing it as 'draconian' and 'outdated.'

The Honduran Constitution was written in 1982 under the auspices of Policarpo Paz Garcia, the last military junta to rule this beautiful but impoverished country. "It does not include rights for women, or for minorities, and it lends itself to exploitation by the elite sectors of society," said Ponce, who recently had his arm broken in three places when soldiers attacked him during a peaceful demonstration.

But in his editorial for the Journal, DeMint insisted on the connection between America's own patriotic heritage and the current peasant-killing, media-censoring de facto regime in Honduras. The Senator wrote that the Micheletti government had comported itself, "as our own Founding Fathers would have hoped."

When I asked Oliva why she thought powerful U.S. politicians like DeMint were backing the coup in Honduras, she answered using the Spanish word "golpista." Golpista translates literally as "putschist" – although today in Honduras, it has taken on a meaning closer to the English word "fascist."

"There are golpistas everywhere in the world," she said. "Not just in Honduras. It is a mindset. An ideology. Of course they would stick together."

(Jeremy Kryt is a graduate of the Indiana University School of Journalism and the University of Iowa Writers Workshop. He has been reporting from Honduras since August, and his coverage of the crisis there has appeared in The Earth Island Journal, Alternet and The Narco News Bulletin, among other publications)

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## WHAT TO DO

## **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.

## **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=EYY4vj9ROC0&feature=player_embedded)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upMu\\_oR2YUU&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upMu_oR2YUU&NR=1)

**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 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

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