

## Rights Action

### Day 123 of HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

(October 28, 2009, Honduras Coup Alert#84)

### Rights Action commentary: Stay the course

#### Articles

- “The Lonesome Death of Pedro Munoz”, by Jeremy Kryt. A young Honduran activist was almost certainly tortured and killed by the military
- “Manuel Zelaya undergoes strange siege inside Brazilian embassy”, by Fabiano Maisonnave

On July 1, 2009, a plenary session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States “reaffirm[ed] that President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales is the constitutional President of Honduras and [demanded] ***the immediate, safe, and unconditional return of the President*** to his constitutional functions.”

([http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press\\_releases/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-216/09](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press_releases/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-216/09))

Dear friends,

We repeat what the Honduran people are doing - STAY THE COURSE. From the day of the coup, June 28, 2009, the extraordinary pro-democracy, anti-coup movement has peacefully and insisently demanded “*the immediate, safe, and unconditional return of the President to his constitutional functions.*”

The imposed “negotiation” process has stalled. The illegal coup regime, headed by Roberto Micheletti and General Romeo Vasquez, are clinging logically and ferociously to power, waiting for the November 29 presidential elections.

At this point, there are absolutely no conditions in militarized, repressive Honduras, to hold elections. Democratically-elected President Zelaya is living in the Brazilian embassy with some 50 supporters, surrounded by a chain link fence and hundreds of heavily armed troops.

It is hard to predict how this situation will get unstuck. Much more pressure has to be brought to bear on the economic and military elites of Honduras by the USA, Canada and the powerful countries of Latin America.

But, what we can count on is the dignity and courage of the Honduran people who are not giving into the killings and repression of the oligarchic-military regime.

**At bottom:** How to make a donation and help us and the pro-democracy movement in Honduras to STAY THE COURSE.

**BELOW:**

- “The Lonesome Death of Pedro Munoz”, by Jeremy Kryt. A young Honduran activist was almost certainly tortured and killed by the military
- “Manuel Zelaya undergoes strange siege inside Brazilian embassy”, by Fabiano Maisonnave. A journalist holed up with the ousted Honduran president describes life on the inside of a surreal political standoff

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**THE LONESOME DEATH OF PEDRO MUNOZ: A YOUNG HONDURAN ACTIVIST WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY TORTURED AND KILLED BY THE MILITARY**, By Jeremy Kryt, October 27, 2009, published in In These Times: [http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/5096/the\\_lonesome\\_death\\_of\\_pedro\\_munoz](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/5096/the_lonesome_death_of_pedro_munoz)

[Photo: A life-sized sketch of Pedro Munoz, in the offices of COFADEH; surrounding placards depict other victims of government violence. Such signs are carried by the nonviolent resistance during marches and rallies as a tribute to the fallen. (All photos by Jeremy Kryt) The only clues left by Munoz's assailants were footprints—tracks identified as belonging to military-style combat boots were found in the rain-freshened mud around the body.]

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS — Despite the intense repression that has plagued Honduras since the military-backed coup in June — including random beatings and sexual assaults by cops and soldiers, and the gassing and shooting of peaceful demonstrators — there is still one case that stands out above the rest, unique in its grisly details and implications.

For many in the pacifist, anti-coup resistance movement, the story of the detention, torture and killing of a young protester named Pedro Munoz in July has become a powerful inspiration to continue the struggle. For others, it is a grim reminder of the lengths the coup regime will go to as it struggles for hegemony.

“The police put this man through agony before they killed him — that was done to send a message, about the price of involvement in the Resistance,” said Mery Agurcia, the human rights case worker in charge of the ongoing investigation into Munoz’s death, when we spoke in her office. “But, of course, nothing can be proven against those who did it. Since the coup, there’s no longer any kind of transparency in the government.”

The turmoil in Honduras began last June 28, when democratically-elected President Mel Zelaya was forcibly sequestered and exiled by the military, which

traditionally serves the country's economic elite. Zelaya had been pushing for political and economic reforms intended to combat poverty and promote democracy, but such amendments threatened the ruling class's hold on power.

Since the coup, a nonviolent resistance movement has sprung up, uniting various sectors of Honduran society, and demanded civil rights amendments to the national charter of this impoverished but rapidly growing nation. (Zelaya slipped back into Honduras on September 21, but remains effectively imprisoned in the Brazilian Embassy.)

The de facto regime has imposed martial law several times, shuttering independent media and violently dispersing peaceful anti-coup marches and rallies. Human rights groups report that thousands have been detained, and hundreds more hospitalized for wounds received from soldiers and riot police. At least 17 people have died, including one 24-year-old construction worker turned hapless martyr, Pedro Magdial Munoz.

#### 'THEY WANT US TO BE AFRAID'

Mery Agurcia is a patient, humble woman, just entering middle age, who heads up the research department for the Committee for the Families of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH). "From here, I have two views of Tegucigalpa," she said, looking out the window of her musty, cluttered, third-floor office on the day I came to talk about the Munoz killing. "The rich are over there," she said, pointing to the sprawling downtown, with its banks and hotels. "And over here are the poor," she said while gesturing out the other window to a maze of crowded streets and ramshackle houses.

Agurcia said that Pedro Munoz's mangled body was found nearly three months ago, after a resistance march near the town of El Paraiso, on the Nicaraguan border. COFADEH's investigation is ongoing, but the Munoz case, with its implications that authorities were involved in torture, has already attracted international recognition.

Paolo Carozzo, former president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), heard testimony concerning the Munoz incident while on a fact-finding visit to Honduras in late August. During a recent phone interview, Carozzo said he found the details of the young man's death to be "moving and disturbing," and that he had no doubt the authorities were responsible for his murder. "Whoever is controlling the state has to be limited," he said, adding that, under current conditions, "most of the population of Honduras is being victimized."

For many members of the resistance movement, Munoz has become a symbolic, even heroic figure. His name is often invoked during rallies, and his images of his face appear on placards and cardboard "coffins" which peaceful crowds carry in the street during daily marches.

“We all knew that [Munoz’s killing] was a warning to the rest of us,” said Gilda Batista, an anti-coup resistance organizer based in Tegucigalpa, the capital. “It’s something still practice, the way they tortured him. That’s why Billy Joya was brought in,” Batista said, referring to a top advisor of de facto Honduran President Roberto Micheletti with links to an 1980s-era death squad. “They want us to be afraid.”

#### A SHORT-LIVED POLITICAL LIFE

According to those who knew him best, Pedro Magdial Munoz was a quiet, hard-working young man who liked to play football on the weekends and was hoping to marry his high-school sweetheart. He lived his whole life in the desperately poor barrio of San Francisco, located just outside the capital.

The barrio was always a harsh place, but the local economy worsened rapidly after the coup, as Zelaya’s anti-poverty initiatives were canceled by the far-right regime. Munoz — a thin, brown-eyed young man with a clear complexion — did not become politically active until Zelaya was kidnapped and exiled. He immediately joined the nonviolent resistance.

On Friday, July 24, Munoz traveled by bus with a group of friends to the Nicaraguan border to march in support of an earlier return attempt by deposed President Zelaya. When a combined force of riot police and soldiers attacked the unarmed marchers along a remote stretch of country road, Munoz and his friends were separated.

“Everyone was running and screaming. I ran too,” said Ernesto Cerna, a childhood friend of Munoz, and one of the last to see him alive. “The last time I saw Pedro, he looked to be unconscious, and the police were dragging him away by the shirt.”

Unwilling to abandon their companero, Cerna and the others spoke to police, who assured them Munoz would be released the next afternoon. The friends spent the night camped out near the road with some other demonstrators, although it was raining hard. Around dawn, when the rain stopped, a woman walked out from the road to urinate, and found the bloody body of Pedro Munoz sprawled in the low weeds.

“I knew it was him right away. Even before I saw him,” said Cerna, a nineteen-year-old who worked as a mechanic, until the economic backlash from the coup cost him his job. I met Cerna in the offices of COFADEH, and several times, as he spoke about that day in July, his memories left him speechless, sobbing. “As soon as they said a body had been found, I knew who it would be,” he said.

According to the coroner’s report, Munoz’s corpse showed signs of brutal and thorough torture. The young man’s right hand and fingers had been smashed, and his head, neck and torso were riddled with 42 carefully-placed puncture

wounds, most likely from a bayonet. (The official coroner's photos are also available on the Internet, but readers should be warned that the images are uncensored and graphic.) The cause of Munoz's death is listed as "failure of vital organs and/or severing of the carotid artery."

The only clues left by his assailants were footprints; tracks identified as belonging to military-style combat boots were found in the rain-freshened mud around the body.

#### 'HE WANTED A DIFFERENT HONDURAS'

Micheletti's office did not respond to repeated phone calls for an interview, but an official statement issued by the regime has indicated there will be no government investigation into Munoz's death. The police and military have both denied responsibility.

But Cerna said that's hard to believe. "Of course they would lie," he said, again fighting back tears. "When I asked the commanding officer where Pedro was, the officer told me they would hold him for 24 hours. That was at three in the afternoon. But his body was found at dawn the next day. So who else could have done it?"

A number of people I spoke to regarding the investigation also pointed out that, on the day Munoz was arrested, a strict curfew was in place after 3 p.m. Armed troops patrolled all the local roads that night, because the regime feared Zelaya's imminent return.

"The troops and soldiers were the only ones to be able to move around during the night," said Agurcia, the COFADEH case worker. "How could someone have been out there torturing Pedro, without the patrols seeing it?"

Although there seems to be little plausible doubt that Munoz died while in the custody of Honduran authorities, there is some mystery concerning the motives behind the particularly brutal methods of torture used on him. Agurcia told me some eyewitnesses claimed Munoz was taking photos of an ambulance from El Paraiso, which was illegally ferrying tear-gas shells for the police. Munoz's cell phone was found a short distance away from the corpse, but all photos had been erased.

Others tell still a different story. "One very reliable witness testified that Pedro threw a stone, from about three or four meters away, that struck a soldier in the face," said Agurcia. She believes that might account for the torture and violent death, as the Honduran military is infamous for such overblown retaliations.

But both Cerna, Munoz's best friend, and resistance organizer Gilda Batista refute the notion that he hurled a stone. "Pedro was a calm man, a gentle man," Batista said. "He wouldn't have been throwing things."

If a trooper was hit in the face with a rock, it couldn't have been too serious a blow: there are no records of the military reporting even a minor casualty that day.

"We'll probably never know the details," admitted Agurcia, who maintains several bulging manila folders with documents and photos relating to the case. "I killed my friend horribly, like an animal," Cerna said, touching a small, hand-carved wooden cross Munoz had given him for luck on the same day he died. "But Pedro was a patriot who lost his life for his country. That is how I would like him to be remembered."

Batista believes a mixture of outrage and compassion at Pedro Munoz's intense suffering had helped unite the Resistance. "He wanted a different Honduras, a better Honduras. That's why he died," she said. "Sometimes, when I'm very tired, I remember the sacrifice he made, and it motivates me... When I want to rest, it keeps me going."

(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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## **MANUEL ZELAYA UNDERGOES STRANGE SIEGE INSIDE BRAZILIAN EMBASSY**

A journalist holed up with the ousted Honduran president describes life on the inside of a surreal political standoff

By Fabiano Maisonnave, October 26 2009, The Guardian,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/25/honduras-manuel-zelaya-embassy-siege>

It was just past 2am when the music blasted us from our sleep. Honduran soldiers had placed high-powered speakers just outside the embassy compound for a night-long, deafening serenade.

One song in particular, Two-legged Rat, was repeated again, and again, and again. The lyrics are not subtle: "Filthy rat/crawling animal/scum of life/ill-made monstrosity/subhuman/mirror image of hell/damned louse/how much damage you've done to me."

When the Mexican singer Paquita la del Barrio performed it she was addressing a former lover, but the Honduran military had a different target in mind: Manuel Zelaya, the ousted president.

A military-led coup toppled him in June but on 21 September he sneaked back into Honduras to lobby for his reinstatement and, to the chagrin of the army and the de facto government led by Roberto Micheletti, found refuge in the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa.

Zelaya's return galvanised domestic and international protests against the new regime, which found itself confronting a public relations nightmare.

#### LIFE INSIDE

It has returned the favour by making the leftist leader's life a living hell. In the first two days electricity, water and telephones were cut off, and the embassy remains isolated from the rest of the Honduran capital by heavily armed soldiers and police. Initially Zelaya and more than 300 supporters crammed into 400 sq metres' of mansion. Now that number has dwindled to 46, mostly followers and aides but also five journalists and a Brazilian diplomat.

It is a strange siege. The de facto government dares not storm the embassy and Zelaya dares not leave, knowing he would be arrested. Talks between the two sides have collapsed and no resolution is in sight. Access to the building is restricted, with only UN officials; a local human rights organisation, which delivers food; embassy staff; and three Zelaya envoys allowed to regularly come and go.

The interim government only allows certain kinds of food and goods. Forbidden items include cigarettes, new clothes, sleeping bags, pillows, footballs, batteries, iPods, televisions, cell phones, refrigerators, raincoats, prescription drugs: things, in other words, which could improve the quality of life.

Sniffer dogs are used to check that food does not contain drugs. Sometimes police keep soft drinks and desserts for themselves. Zelaya's food comes separately and is prepared by his daughter because he fears being poisoned.

Three weeks ago, checks took so long that the food went off. Thirty people had diarrhoea, clogging up the embassy's six toilets. Three toilets are reserved for Zelaya, his wife and closest aides.

There are arbitrary rules. For example, fruit outside of meals can only enter with medical prescriptions, and a new lamp can only be exchanged for an old one.

"The Brazilian embassy is a neo-Nazi concentration camp," said Zelaya.

It's an exaggeration, but his daily life here is far from being that of a president recognised by the EU and the US and who is received with honours by heads of state in countries like Brazil and Mexico. Due to security, Zelaya, 57, sleeps on an airbed in the tiny but secluded library. The window faces the backyard, beyond the range of snipers, and at least four security personnel keep guard in the living room next door.

In the first weeks, Zelaya was sleeping in the much larger office of ambassador, but then he thought the room was too vulnerable. He claims he is being subjected to an "electron bombardment with microwaves" which produces "headache and organic destabilisation".

To try to protect from these alleged attacks, all windows of the office where Zelaya spends much of his time with his closest aides or on the phone were covered with aluminium foil, creating a sort of low-budget sci-fi movie set.

This office is also used for meals, the most relaxed moment of the day. Zelaya is always accompanied by his wife, Xiomara, his closest aides and the Brazilian diplomat Lineu de Paula. All use plastic utensils and dishes for meals served in Styrofoam containers. "Zelaya is always in good humour, even in the most critical days. He always chooses a victim for his jokes, but his favourite target is the press secretary, Luis Galdamez," said De Paula, who sleeps in the embassy.

Besides the microwave bombardment, Zelaya also complains about the devices blocking mobile phone signals. On Saturday, he was forced to climb the small hill in the yard of the embassy, the only place where the connection is not cut off after a few seconds.

#### COWBOY HAT

One of the few presidential-like rituals to continue concerns Zelaya's white cowboy hat. One of his bodyguards, Eduardo Muñoz, has the specific function of holding it in the palm of both hands like a crown whenever he takes it off.

Life is harder for Zelaya's followers. Most of them took refuge in the embassy on the second day, after police dispersed a gathering in front of the building. In the beginning, they had to share even the few toothbrushes available, and most of them still sleep on cardboard in the open car park (only Zelaya's top aides and journalists were allowed to bring air mattresses).

The siege is becoming more intense. On 8 October the police set up mechanical platforms across the street with armed guards on top. One week later, those platforms were moved within two metres of the embassy's wall. At the same time, two powerful floodlights were switched on.

The worst days were between 16 and 21 October 16, when army troops and police officers broke the silence in the night with loud noises. In addition to music, they used horns and imitated the screaming of animals, including cats, dogs, horses and cockerels, waking up almost everybody inside.

Last week the Permanent Council of the Organisation of American States (OAS) condemned "the hostile action by the de facto regime against the embassy of Brazil in Tegucigalpa and the harassment of its occupants through deliberate



actions that affect them physically and psychologically and violate their human rights."

As Munoz, Zelaya's hat-holder, observed: "In Honduras, there is a saying that the leather will one day break, either in the thicker or in the thinner side. But one day it will break."

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**FUNDS NEEDED** to support organizations and people working with the National Front Against the Coup. Make your tax-deductible 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.

**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.

**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)

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