

## Rights Action

### Day 130 of HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

(November 4, 2009, Honduras Coup Alert#85)

#### **Rights Action commentary: President Zelaya Still ‘Imprisoned’ By Military Regime**

#### **“Statistics And Faces Of The Repression” - Violations Of Human Rights In The Context Of The Coup D’état In Honduras**

Report by COFADEH

**BELOW:** A powerful and important letter and summary report from COFADEH (committee of family members of the disappeared in Honduras), the leading human rights group. (Thanks to the Quixote Center [www.quixote.org](http://www.quixote.org) for sending it around)

Over the past 2 weeks, there has been a flurry of activities and statements from the “international community” about how a negotiated solution has been reached.

Don’t hold your breath. President Zelaya is still living in the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa (capital city of Honduras), surrounded by hundreds of Hondurans soldiers, tanks and chain linked fences. The country remains militarized, repression continues daily, and the military-oligarchic coup regime is logically and bluntly delaying his ‘return to power’ until the last possible moment.

The regime’s actions continue to expose the fundamental lack of political will or interest of most governments in the Americas – the so-called “international community” – to fully and properly restore President Zelaya and his government to power.

The people’s struggle in Honduras remains crucial in its own right, and as a vital struggle today in the Americas, a people’s struggle against the tyranny and impunity of the wealthy elites and high command of the armed forces (and their international backers), a people’s struggle in favour of real democracy and of building a just and fair society.

**TO DONATE FUNDS: See at bottom.** Please help continue to support community based organizations and groups working with the National Front Against the Coup.

**HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATION TO HONDURAS**, November 24–December 1, 2009: Consider joining a Rights Action delegation to Honduras. For information: Grahame Russell, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 1-860-352-2448.

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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**“STATISTICS AND FACES OF THE REPRESSION” - VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COUP D’ÉTAT IN HONDURAS**

By Bertha Oliva, General Coordinator of COFADEH, Tegucigalpa, Honduras -  
October 22, 2009

[Thanks to Quixote Center [www.quixote.org](http://www.quixote.org) for distributing this information from COFADEH]

I am a veteran human rights defender. As I prepared the second human rights report since the coup in Honduras, “Statistics and Faces of the Repression - Violations of Human Rights in the context of the coup d’état,” I have felt profound distress. Perhaps because I had begun to think that during the long process of the last decades, we had made some small advances in the area of human rights.

Perhaps it is because I look to the past in order to see the future, and to evaluate and to value the present - that today, over 100 days since the fateful coup on June 28th, I realize that something has shaken the Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras, COFADEH to the core, and nothing is the same. Immediately after the coup we knew that we had regressed 25 – 30 years, maybe more.

As the impact of the blow set in, we realized that we are now in the midst of a modern Military Coup d’état in the 21st Century. Unfortunately, we are well versed in the effects of military dictators and we understood that what we were witnessing was not an isolated act but an entire strategy to seize and hold power for the long term; in other words, the dictatorship intends to stay in the Region.

We realized that if such an offense could be committed against the person who holds the highest office in the country, what would happen to the rest of the population. We began to prepare ourselves. The military dictatorship wasted no time.

Today, just as in the past, we are the depository for tears, anguish, pain and hopelessness.

The military dictatorship that we live under today is very similar to that of the decade of the 1980s, however, there is an important difference. During the 1980s, those who repressed the people hid their faces and their names. Today, those who repress the people have names, faces and uniforms: “blue-green – olive and white.”

In our second human rights report we have focused our concerns on the actions that the X Battalion, based in Marcala (La Paz), has carried out against members of the throughout the zone, including the region of Colomoncagua. Similar levels of persecution are also being suffered by people in the Department of Santa Barbara on the part of authorities of the de facto regime in this Department.

Another of our primary concerns is the strategy employed by the military dictatorship against teachers in the country which includes illegal and arbitrary retention of salaries, profiling, legal suits brought against them by the Public Ministry, persecution, illegal detentions and even assassination.

With indignation and pain we must condemn and repudiate the persecution unleashed on the youth of our country. To some we have had to say, “until we meet again in another country” in order to prevent them becoming victims of kidnapping, torture and assassination...And to other young people we have said, “goodbye, we will meet again in the next world.”

Based on proof and documentation in our possession, we affirm to the world that we are living a situation of NATIONAL EMERGENCY in Honduras. We appeal to the International Community to stay vigilant and observant in order to assume the challenge of bringing those who perpetrate crimes against humanity to justice.

Bertha Oliva de Nativi, General Coordinator  
COFADEH - Barrio La Plazuela, Avenida Cervantes, #1301, AP 1243,  
[mail@cofadeh.org](mailto:mail@cofadeh.org), [www.cofadeh.org](http://www.cofadeh.org)

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## **CONTEXT**

### **THE ACCELERATED DETERIORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COUP D'ÉTAT**

The coup regime continues and is consolidating with the goal of remaining in government beyond the defacto government. This process relies on the use of excessive force on the part of military and police, control of the media and closure of media outlets that are not allies of the regime, use of paramilitaries to intimidate, threaten and kidnap those opposed to the coup, and the emission of illegal decrees that suspend the exercise of fundamental rights.

This process also employs methods that have impacted not just the population in general but the very economic class that promoted the military coup, disrupting their lucrative businesses and creating institutional paralysis in support of the policies of the defacto government.

It is clear that a repressive apparatus is being mounted to intimidate and annihilate resistance to the coup. In the 115 days since the coup, thousands of human rights violations have been registered that reflect the evolution of state violence and the rupture of institutionality. As of June 29th, COFADEH began to register violations of human rights directly related to peaceful demonstrations on the part of the population. This violence has taken different forms and patterns: generalized violence, violence targeting particular sectors, and selective violence targeting journalists and leaders of the resistance. In addition, judicial intimidation is being used as a tool to demobilize the opposition. Over 114 people have been charged with political crimes between July and October.

As the resistance gains strength and becomes a social force in opposition to the coup, the defacto government has resorted to old forms of repression and also implemented new methods and weapons, including the use of chemical and sound weapons which have caused injuries and deaths due to intoxication by gas. Among the old methods employed, bombs have been exploded in buildings in the capitol and others were disarmed in the Supreme Court and the SETCO building. Communication outlets and social organizations have been attacked with grenades and machine guns. At least four social organizations were attacked and two received aggressive threats. Human rights organizations have been under constant surveillance by police patrols that intimidate people coming to denounce human rights violations. Psychological warfare tactics have included the rumored detonation of bombs containing toxic chemicals.

At the same time, a national security plan called "Peace and Democracy" is being carried out which gives the Armed Forces the role of guaranteeing interior security with the logic of creating internal and external enemies in a counterinsurgency framework. Various mechanisms are employed including detention, infiltration, criminalization and fracturing social expressions. Repression is carried out in different modalities; open, direct, massive and selective. Beatings, torture, sexual violation, assassination and persecution continue to be used systematically.

The national security plan incorporates old paramilitary structures linked to death squads. A new component of which less is known is the utilization of mercenaries to carry out actions for political purposes. A series of deaths registered in the last two months present characteristics of these patterns.

Peaceful protests have been militarized with hundreds of police, military, helicopters, tanks with pepper spray and machine guns deployed against the people, resulting in thousands of detained, hundreds of wounded and dead. To prevent protests, military check points have been mounted in 16 departments of the country, illegal states of siege have been declared, airports closed and the tires of buses have been flattened with bullets.

The political allegiance of the Armed Forces was unmasked when the Joint Chief of Staff head General Romeo Orlando Vasquez appeared in a public gathering in the Central Park of Tegucigalpa organized by the business people and churches that back the coup.

Since the 24th of July, violations of human rights have intensified and deepened in response to growing social protest and political opposition. The military presence in the streets and strategic points along the thoroughfares of principal cities has been permanent, at times with greater intensity. The militarization of public institutions has been reinforced with the appointment of retired military officers. State Universities and schools have been attacked by security forces, violating autonomy and sowing panic among students. The Rector of the National Autonomous University of Honduras stated that when the institution was attacked on August 5th that all that could be heard were screams and things falling and exploding. An elementary school teacher stated that her students began to cry because a police contingent seized the school.

The plan to criminalize public protest began the very day of the coup d'état with the illegal suspension of Constitutional guarantees and the denial of the right of the population under Article 3 of the Constitution. However, as of July 30th, the de facto regime announced and publicly threatened to take a series of measures to forcibly disperse protestors and to apply article 331 of the Penal Code to those who attend protests, meetings and public marches that generate "disorderly brawls."

COFADEH has received testimony regarding the infiltration of peaceful marches in order to generate violent acts which are used to justify intervention on the part of security forces to disperse protests.

Security forces have not respected negotiations, for example in Comayagua and Duranzo on July 30th, Santa Rosa de Copan on July 31st and August 14th in Choloma. As a result, state violence is responsible for serious human rights violations ranging from irreparable injuries to bias on the part of officials in the judicial system by order of the defacto regime.

Once again, judicial power is used for political purposes to intimidate, distract and demobilize dissidents. Judicial power is not only used against protestors but was also used as a tool against the cabinet of President Zelaya in the weeks following the coup when cases against functionaries of the executive branch and municipal mayors which had been filed prior to the coup were reactivated, dissent members of Congress were persecuted and arrest orders were issued.

The recourse to Habeas Corpus guaranteed under the Constitution to the population and detainees is delayed and in the cases when judges have been diligent in complying with the law, they have been mistreated by police officers. In the months of July, August and September, security forces in

combined operations staged massive detentions of hundreds of people who were held in police headquarters from 5 to 36 hours. While the law does permit detention for 24 hours, the cases in question are illegal detentions and violate due process.

In conclusion, the backbone of the repression is based on the criminalization of demonstrations, media control, and elimination of opposition media and the illegitimate suspension of constitutional guarantees.

Two decrees have been issued to suspend rights neither of which meets the requirements for legitimacy and legality mandated by the constitution.

This accelerated process of lack of respect for the fundamental rights of citizens was open and generalized in the first weeks following the coup. A month later it was sectoralized, targeting social groups clearly identified with the resistance and in the last four weeks, the repression has become selective, using death threats as a form of intimidation. Both the forms and location of the repression has changed in the last few months, shifting to barrios and neighborhoods of different cities, municipalities, and villages where demonstrations against the coup take place.

Campaigns to harass and persecute members of the resistance have been mounted. In the context of confrontation and polarization that characterizes the country at this moment, the institutions responsible for guaranteeing the restitution and reparation of violations of human rights have ceased to fulfill their role, are ineffective and support the repression on the part of the state.

In response to the new offensive and implementation of war strategies against peaceful demonstrations which extended to the diplomatic community, the international community responded with concern especially in response to the security plan presented to Mr. Micheletti by high ranking officials of the State Security Forces. After the second round of negotiations in Costa Rica failed, Washington announced the suspension of aid to the de facto government and the cancellation of visas to members of the usurping government. The European Union froze \$65.5 million Euros in aid to Honduras.

The intensification of crisis and imposition of curfews and a state of siege the 24th of July, prompted the visit of an International Human Rights Mission composed of fifteen independent professionals to verify violations of human rights occurring in Honduras during and after the June 28th coup d'etat in order to present observations and recommendations to the OAS, UN, the European Union and its member States.

At the same time, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, after repeated requests, was finally able to obtain an invitation to visit the country from the National Congress and the Supreme Court of Justice. For one week the

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights met with authorities, civil society, human right organizations and victims, confirming violations of human rights by the de facto government of Honduras.

One week later the International Federation for Human Rights, Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón and a representative of the International Criminal Court, visited the country and confirmed that human rights violations were intensifying and occurring on massive scale as a result of the coup d'etat. They cited “a deterioration of the human rights situation” in the country, characterized by “systematic and generalized political persecution against all those in support of President Zelaya, or who protest or mobilize against the coup d'etat.”

Amnesty International also sent a delegation to Honduras that interviewed people who had been detained and beaten at police stations. Weeks later they published a report with photographs and testimonies of the victims of repression.

While international and regional organizations verified violations of human rights, a mission of Chancellors from seven Latin American countries failed in their objective of convincing the de facto government that it must restore constitutional order. On the contrary, the de facto government announced the start of the electoral campaign for the November elections and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal asked the Public Ministry to conduct an investigation against leaders of the Resistance for calling for a boycott of the elections.

With the opening of the electoral campaign, human rights violations intensified. The political parties and the Mayor of Choluteca allowed their followers and the police to repress those who opposed the electoral process, considering it to be illegal. Over 15 people were wounded in Choluteca on September 6th, and four people were accused of sedition. In this context paramilitary commandos were involved, for example the Álvarez Martínez Commando that threatened 14 social leaders. This type of action occurred during the 1980s, as part of the psychological warfare that accompanied physical repression against the political opposition.

Individuals responsible for violations of human rights during this period, from the American Anticommunist Alliance, commonly known as the Triple-AAA and the Intelligence Battalion 3-16, are once again part of the repressive apparatus of the coup d'etat as well as Special Operations Forces specialized in psychological warfare, the Honduran Civic Organization and the Movement for Solidarity with Central America (MOSCA), the Constitutional Democratic Civic Committee, the Red Brigades and White Hand (Mano Blanca).

On the 23rd of September, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights asked the President of the Congress and the Supreme Court of Honduras for permission to conduct an “urgent visit” to the country, in response to a new

decree that suspended constitutional guarantees for 45 days, following the return of President Zelaya to Honduras, and reception at the Brazilian Embassy.

The intensification of repression in this new context again extended to the diplomatic community when, Mr. Micheletti gave an ultimatum of “no more than ten days” for Brazil to define the status of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, and announced that Honduras would not receive Ambassadors from Spain, Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela. In a declaration aired on radio and television Micheletti added that, he was also prepared to take additional measures which he did not specify.

Executive Decree PCM-16-2009 imposed the state of siege again; suspending freedom of movement, prohibiting public meetings not authorized by the police or the armed forces, impeding freedom of expression, and authorizing the suspension of any radio or television stations that offended government officials or expressed opposition to government resolutions.

The decree containing these threats was emitted on September 22nd. It was not published until the 26th but became effective at 4 p.m. on September 21st, when a curfew was set that extended from the 21st to the 23rd at 10 am and was again reactivated at 5pm that same afternoon. On September 28th the military closed down Channel 36 and Radio Globo, seizing their transmission equipment and taking it to the Battalion of Communications, as ordered under the Executive Decree and resolution OD 019/09 from the 28th of September. The day before, OAS members Jessica Benitez, Adam Blackwell, and Claudia Barrientos were detained at the airport in Tegucigalpa for six hours and then expelled.

The Executive Decree expired on October 17th, however Decree 124-2009 authorizing the National Commission for Communications to cancel the use of CONATEL titles to the operators of radio and television media, effective as of October 7th resulted in the cancelation of contracts with social organizations; at least three programs have been canceled based on this decree.

In summary, the repression has taken various forms and manifestation, involving different parts of the State, private sector and media. And there is no government entity providing oversight of the State to guarantee the timely investigation of these violations.

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**FUNDS NEEDED** to support organizations and people working on human rights issues and 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

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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)

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**FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFORMATION:** Grahame Russell of Rights Action, 860-352-2448, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)