

Rights Action

DAY 154, Honduras Coup Resistance

(November 28, 2009, Coup Alert#97)

Illegal detentions continue ... before the election farse

Below

- Report from Honduras, by Tanya Brannan: Merlin Eguigure illegally detained
- Report from Honduras, by Jackie McVicar: Military regime violence against Honduran women

FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFO FROM HONDURAS: Grahame Russell, 011-504-9488-1959, info@rightsaction.org & Karen Spring, 011-504-9507-3835, spring.kj@gmail.com

Rights Action is one of a number of organizations that have international human rights observer missions in Honduras. These are NOT election observing missions. We do not recognize the validity of these elections. For reasons set out in many previous Alerts (found at www.rightsaction.org), a majority of Honduras and most of the so-called "international community" know the November 29th elections (for President, Congress members, and Mayors) are neither free nor fair in any way.

Not only will these "elections" not resolve any of Honduras' serious problems due to the military oligarchic coup regime, any recognition of them will only make matters worse.

WHAT TO DO: see at bottom

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

* * *

THE ILLEGAL DETENTION OF MERLIN EGUIGURE

(Report by Tanya Brannan, National Lawyers Guild, brannanlaw@comcast.net, here with Rights Action delegation)

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS, November 27, 2009

This morning we received a call from COFADEH, the Comité de Familiares Detenidos y Desaparacidos de Honduras. Merlin Eguigure, age 46, (see photo, above) founder and coordinator of the Movimiento de Mujeres Visitacion Padilla

and a central figure in the Honduran women's movement, was detained late last night and was being held in a detention center in the center of Tegucigalpa.

Because so many of the women resistance leaders have been raped while in detention, the presence of international human rights workers can literally keep her alive and safe. So accompanied by COFADEH press representative Marvin Palacios, we went immediately to the Jefetura Metropolitana Numero 1 where Merlin is detained, only to find the street blockaded by police and surrounded by women of the Movimiento in their brilliant purple shirts.

After intense negotiations on several levels, we were able to enter only because I am a human rights lawyer and Julie Webb-Pullman is an independent journalist from New Zealand. We walked into the bleak detention center and were taken to her cell.

This is a facility for men only, with no provision for women. As we entered, Merlin sat alone in a dark cell with only a concrete slab for a bed. She told us she had only recently been moved to the cell because we were coming, but had spent the night pacing back and forth along the opposite wall and sitting in a child-sized school desk. There was no place to lie down on the filthy floor.

Merlin reported that she was arrested last night around 11 p.m. along with two male companeros as they left a restaurant. Police stopped their car on the pretext that a car resembling theirs had been reported to be defacing government signs. Police took them from the car, then searched it. In the search they found spray paint which they explained had been used to paint banners for the demonstration the group had held earlier in the day in observance of the international day against Violence Against Women.

The three were then arrested and charged with damaging state property and belonging to an illicit organization and taken to the police station in Barrio Manchín. There the police prepared a report of the events, which she refused to sign. She never made a statement. Later she was transferred to the Jefetura.

We asked about her health and about conditions there. "No hay condiciones aqui," she replied. There aren't conditions here. She said she was given no food or no water. The one time she was taken to the bathroom the sight and smell of it sickened her. There was no toilet paper or water to wash her hands. Fortunately, she had been able to call the COFADEH lawyers, who had brought food and water. And even more fortunately, she had not yet been beaten or raped.

As we ended our interview, we asked Merlin if she had a message for the scores of her sisters who surrounded the detention center, refusing to leave until they saw her leave there safe and sound.

“Tell them not to worry about me. This is just one more test in a struggle that has seen many tests,” she said. “I have no fear because I did nothing.” I asked her about the state of Honduran people. “All of us are afraid, but we will continue the struggle. We can’t leave our country in this situation. This is an illegal, repressive non-government, and we cannot rest until we have our country back.”

As we left the detention center, the fifty or so women in the street gathered around to hear Merlin’s message with tears in their eyes. Soon afterward, attorney Karol Cardenas emerged from the court. She said they had presented evidence, including photographs of the women painting banners and making props for the demonstration. Three witnesses had testified, and the case was taken under advisement.

Cardenas still had no idea when Merlin would be released. “This is not a court proceeding so much as it is a political proceeding,” she said. “This is a minor charge – a misdemeanor, and in normal times the charges would be dropped or at least she would be released on bail,” she continued. “But now the leaders of the resistance are arrested in order to intimidate and to disrupt their work; the charges are amorphous, and the detentions can last days or weeks.”

As of now, the status of the companeros arrested with Merlin is still unknown.

Bertha Oliva Guifarro, founder and General Coordinator of COFADEH, expressed her concern for Merlin’s well-being. “It is urgent that she be released. We are particularly concerned about her being infected with AIDS while she is in detention. With the detention center filling up as the elections near, the danger to her only increases.”

* * *

NI GOLPES DE ESTADO, NI GOLPES A LAS MUJERES!

(Report by Jackie McVicar, jmcvicar@gmail.com, Breaking the Silence, in Honduras with a Quixote Center delegation, www.quixote.org)

November 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women

The brutal assassination of the Mirabel Sisters on November 25, 1960 marked a horrific day for women political activists and those struggling against oppression at the hands of their State. The three women, Patria Mercedes, Maria Argentina and Antonia Maria Teresa paid the ultimate price for fighting against a dictatorship in the Dominican Republic where they were tortured, incarcerated and later executed.

Women political activists in Honduras are also paying a price for speaking the truth against a regime that has raped, disappeared and murdered women since the coup d’état on June 28 that ushered in a military and oligarchy backed

regime. The Honduras based Center for Women's Rights – CDM reports serious violations that women have suffered in the past five months. In their recent publication of "Time to Read", distributed widely on November 25 throughout Tegucigalpa, some horrifying examples were outlined.

"During the repressions executed by the policy and the armed forces by order of the de facto President Roberto Micheleti and his team, women have been victims of a distinct kind of violence that is aimed directly at our female body. We are victims of sexual abuse, they beat our breasts, hips, buttocks and vulva; they put batons in our crotch, they threaten us with rape and other types of sexual aggression in a clear demonstration of contempt of this society towards the body and the integrity of women."

According to CDM, 51 women were murdered during the first month after the coup d'état, a number which is much higher than the 18 registered monthly in the months before the coup. In three and half months following the coup, 147 women were killed. At the same time, the number of women denouncing domestic violence has dropped. CDM speculates that it's because women have lost the trust in public institutions, like the police, to whom these cases must be reported, according to the law.

This is why many Honduran women won't be going to the polls on November 29: "There isn't enough trust," says Gilda Rivera, Director of the CDM, affirmed at a press conference held November 25 in Tegucigalpa. "There has been a series of events that have caused us fear." The Center has gathered testimony from women throughout Honduras and bravely spoke out against the violence.

"In the confusion I got lost from the group," states one of the testimonies. "Four police officers raped me. Then they insulted me, and they raped me with the black thing that the police hit with."

"They spit on me," describes another woman. "They kicked dirt and stones at me with their shoes, they beat me with their baton in my arms and body. I fell in a ditch from being hit so much and they fractured my left foot. While they were hitting me they were yelling, 'Daughter of a bitch, we're going to leave you crippled so that you stop fucking us around.'"

Others say the reason women won't be going to the polls is because they don't want to value the process, which, according to Bertha Oliva, isn't an election, rather, "a public act that they [those of the coup d'état] have convened."

Bertha is the Director of the Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) and has spoken out loudly against the coup. "There isn't an environment of freedom of civil rights. Our political rights are not being guaranteed," she added. COFADEH reports that to date, 21 people have been killed in Honduras as a direct result of the coup and military regime.

Among these are three women: Wendy Araceli Avila, Olga Osiris Ucles and Vicky Hernandez Castillo. Other women are intimidated, monitored and persecuted, especially those involved in organizations that are part of the resistance movement.

When the press conference ended, and questions were taken from the floor, an aging woman stood up to say, "I sell little cakes. I am a humble woman who is suffering. I am sad. It breaks my heart to know that my President is not free." She went on to say that if he is guilty for what he is accused, why wasn't he charged? Why wasn't there a legal process to judge him?

Leonel Casco with the Lawyers Front Against the Coup asks the same thing: if Zelaya was doing something illegal, why wasn't there a legal process to indict him or formally charge him for his crimes? Why haven't his constitutional rights been guaranteed, like right to innocence until proven guilty, right to defense? Casco says that Honduras is in a state of defenselessness. "There are no legal or constitutional guarantees and we are living in a militarized state.

There are not conditions here for free elections" he says. The Lawyers Front Against the Coup represents over 650 lawyers working to defend the rights of citizens who are being illegally detained and charged for bogus crimes since the de facto regime took power.

Violence against women is, unfortunately, a tool for repression and to generate fear used throughout the world. The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women will be commemorated in Canada on December 6, on the anniversary of the 1989 École Polytechnique Massacre, in which 14 women were singled out for their gender and murdered. In addition to vigils, there are political advocacy campaigns planned while ongoing questioning of how to strengthen public institutions and society as a whole to support women and deconstruct systems of patriarchic oppression against them continue.

The assassination of the Mirabel Sisters had the opposite affect that the Dominican Republic's dictator Trujillo hoped for: instead of getting rid of the problem by ordering the Sisters murder, it only served to cause major uprising and strengthen popular resistance to the dictatorship, which fell only six months later.

Five months into Micheletti's de facto regime, the voice of Honduras' women continue to be heard: My body is mine! Ni golpes de estado, ni golpes a las mujeres!

* * *

ACTION NEEDED

WRITE NOW, RIGHT NOW

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, CONGRESS-PERSON, SENATOR, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE WHITE HOUSE & THE STATE DEPARTMENT, AND DEMAND:

- The unconditional return of President Zelaya and his government to full constitutional power and authority
- No recognition of the November 29 elections
- Justice for the plotters and perpetrators of the military coup, and
- Reparations for the victims of the regime repression

TO DONATE FUNDS

Please continue to financially support the pro-democracy, anti-coup movement in Honduras. This extraordinary struggle, to defeat the oligarchic-military regime and to remake their constitution and country, will continue well into 2010. 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 provide a report of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFO FROM HONDURAS: Grahame Russell, 011-504-9488-1959, info@rightsaction.org & Karen Spring, 011-504-9507-3835, spring.kj@gmail.com