

Rights Action

RECOGNITION OF HONDURAN ELECTIONS EQUALS LEGITIMIZATION OF THE MILITARY COUP & REPRESSION

BELOW: 3 pieces related to Canada's position vis-à-vis Honduras:

- Statement by Canadian Minister of State Peter Kent (with interspersed comments by Grahame Russell, Rights Action)
- New release, from the CCIC (Canadian Council for International Cooperation): "Canada urged to reject 'controversial elections' in Honduras"
- Article by Rick Arnold, "Message to Ottawa: Nov. 29 Honduran 'Elections' are a Threat to Democracy in the Hemisphere"

FOR INTERVIEWS & MORE INFO: Grahame Russell of Rights Action (in Honduras): 011-504-9488-1959, info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

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STATEMENT:

"CANADIAN MINISTER OF STATE KENT CALLS FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS"

(No. 360 - November 27, 2009 - 8:45 p.m. EST)

The Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), today issued the following statement in advance of the presidential and legislative elections to be held Sunday in Honduras:

[Rights Action: The title is disingenuous. As far as Rights Action knows, the Canadian government has not once denounced the well documented repression committed systematically by the military regime since the June 28 coup - repression that continues through to the day of the elections! (See our recent Alerts). Given these last 5 months of repression, by an illegal regime, by definition the elections are not "peaceful", free or fair.]

"Canada is disappointed with the lack of progress on the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord, signed by both parties on October 30. Unfortunately, this has meant that Canada could not provide support for the electoral process.

[This statement is misleading as to what has been the one problem with all the "negotiations". The "lack of progress on the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord" (as well as all previous "negotiations") is due to the refusal of the coup-regime, headed by Roberto Micheletti/ General Romeo Vasquez, to relinquish power and enable the return of the constitutional order (that they broke) by refusing to allow President Zelaya and his government to return to power.]

"Although the elections will be watched closely by the international community and members of civil society, there will be no formal observation missions from the Organization of American States or the UN.

[Moreover, the following have not sent election observers: European Community; the Carter Center; all governments of the Americas, except for the United States and Panama. All of the above, including the OAS and the UN, have NOT sent election observers because they recognize there are no conditions to hold free and fair elections.]

"The peaceful conduct of the November 29 elections will be an important step in moving out of the current political

impasse. For the sake of all Hondurans, we urge that they be run freely and fairly, in a safe and secure environment. Although the circumstances under which elections will take place are less than ideal, Canada calls strongly for a peaceful electoral process free from violence.

[The constant repetition of this mantra - "The peaceful conduct of the November 29 elections will be an important step in moving out of the current political impasse" - will not and cannot make it happen. It bears repetition: -a- Since June 28, Honduras is controlled by an illegal military regime that has used systematic repression throughout the country; -b- since June 28, the legal/constitutional order of Honduras has been broken. A country cannot hold legal elections, let alone "peaceful elections" under the boots of a repressive, illegal regime; -c- the holding of these illegal elections, in conditions of 5 months of on-going repression, moves Honduras further away from a peaceful, law-based solution of this so-called "political impasse" (ie, a country controlled by an illegal, repressive coup regime).]

"Once the elections have taken place, I urge all parties in Honduras to focus anew on the full implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord to enable Honduras to return to democratic rule and constitutional order."

[Mr. Kent again distorts what is happening and what has happened since June 28. All the "negotiation" efforts - from the OAS efforts that called, on July 2nd, for the "immediate and unconditional" return of President Zelaya and his government, to the San Jose Accords, to the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accords - are premised on the return of President Zelaya and his government to full power. This had to happen before the "elections". Recognition of these elections will simply legitimize the coup - and 5 months of repression - and do nothing to restore the constitutional, legal and democratic order.]

"Presidential and legislative elections are held every four years in Honduras. The new president is scheduled to be inaugurated on January 27, 2010."

"For further information, media representatives may contact: Eleanor Johnston, Senior Special Assistant (Communications), Office of the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), 613-947-8981. Foreign Affairs Media Relations Office, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 613-995-1874"

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NEWS RELEASE

From: CCIC - CCCI [jvezina@ccic.ca]
Sent: November 27, 2009 1:26 PM

CANADA URGED TO REJECT 'CONTROVERSIAL ELECTIONS' IN HONDURAS

A coalition of Canadian development, church, labour and human rights organizations are calling on the Canadian government not to join the US in recognizing the controversial elections to be held in Honduras on November 29-and are calling for further action to strengthen democracy in the Central American nation.

"The June coup d'état in Honduras - which overthrew a legitimately elected President - represents the most serious crisis in recent years for democratic governance in the hemisphere," said Gerry Barr, President CEO of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC). "In the short term, Canada must call unequivocally for a return to constitutional order, and back up this position with sanctions. In the longer term, Canada must stay the course to strengthen forces for democracy in the country, particularly the critical role played by civil society organizations and human rights groups."

President Zelaya of Honduras was awoken at gunpoint on June 28, 2009 and forced out of the country in a military-backed coup d'état. The coup was quickly denounced by the United Nations General Assembly, the Organization of American States (OAS) and numerous other international bodies. Since the coup, the situation in the country has deteriorated rapidly. Security forces have attacked individuals, organizations and social movements opposed to the coup, and the coup regime has suspended the country's independent media.

The Honduran human rights group COFADEH (Families of the Disappeared) has documented over 4,000 rights violations, including 21 extrajudicial killings related to the coup, 3,033 illegal detentions, and 818 cases involving violations of the right to physical integrity. These numbers are believed to represent only the tip of the iceberg, as victims are often too terrified to report abuse.

"The coup in Honduras has had a tremendous impact on our partners in Honduras," says Steve Stewart, Education Program Director of CoDevelopment Canada. "Seven members of the teacher colleges we work with, all active opponents of the coup, have been assassinated. Security forces have beaten or jailed many of the teachers we have worked with for years, and we have had to suspend our education programs due to a lack of security for the educators carrying them out."

Efforts to broker an agreement, which would have reversed the coup and established a transitional government until a new president takes office in January 2010, fell apart in early November. Still, the de facto Honduran government under Roberto Micheletti has insisted elections will go ahead on Sunday. Most countries and international bodies have stated that they will not recognize the elections or send observers, including the United Nations, the European Union, 25 countries of the Rio Group, and the OAS.

Canada has sent mixed signals on the Honduran crisis. At the outset, Canada joined others in denouncing the coup, but it

has failed to impose sanctions and has been quiet about the impending elections.

"Hondurans are now bracing to go to the polls, without a return to constitutional order in elections overseen by the same military that has acted brutally to repress opposition to the coup. Canada must be clear that these elections do not represent a democratic process," says Fiona Meyer Cook of the Americas Policy Group at the CCIC.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Fiona Meyer-Cook, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 613-241-7007 Ext. 333, 613-697-7710 (cell), fmeyercook@ccic.ca, Steve Stewart, Co-Development Canada, 604-708-1495 ext 115 (w), 604-220-4009 (cell), sstewart@codev.org

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MESSAGE TO OTTAWA: NOV. 29 HONDURAN 'ELECTIONS' ARE A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY IN THE HEMISPHERE, by Rick Arnold

Just after dawn on June 28 of this year, Manuel Zelaya, the democratically-elected President of Honduras, was awakened at gunpoint by soldiers and flown out of the country. Behind this putsch lay a tiny minority of wealthy land owners, textile tycoons and media barons who opposed Zelaya's efforts to change the face of one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Zelaya's 'crimes' included raising the minimum wage by 60 per cent (to nine dollars a day), setting up financial aid for students, building a Honduran social security net, and legislating controls over rampant and exploitative mining and logging practices.

In the five months since the military-backed coup thousands of Hondurans opposed to the de facto regime have been arrested and many beaten and tortured. Well over a hundred opposition figures have been assassinated, and the independent media

muzzled or shut down completely. In late September, after diplomatic efforts by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias to resolve the conflict were stone-walled by the de facto regime, President Zelaya slipped back into Honduras and took refuge in the Brazilian Embassy. Over 400 hundred soldiers and riot police then surrounded the Embassy compound and have virtually imprisoned Zelaya and dozens of his supporters. The UN has documented the use of chemical and sonic weapons against those inside.

Midst this brutal repression the dictatorship holds an 'election'. Should other countries recognize the results of such an election to be held on November 29? Latin America says absolutely not. On November 5, the 25 nations of the Rio Group, which includes virtually all of Latin America, declared that they would not recognize the results of the Nov. 29 election if President Zelaya were not first restored to office.

Will Canada be recognizing these elections? All signs indicate that the Harper government will try and get away with arguing that it was a free and fair exercise of the will of the people, and that it is the only route open to restoring peace and stability. If Canada recognizes these elections it will not only be turning its back on the long suffering people of Honduras who are now well organized and will continue to resist after November 29, but will also be distancing itself from most other countries in our hemisphere.

Why is it that Latin American governments can recognize this threat to democracy in the region when Ottawa cannot? One reason is that the Presidents of Brazil and Chile were imprisoned and maltreated by military dictators in the 1970s and 80s. The Presidents of Bolivia, Argentina, Guatemala, and others have all lived through the repression of right-wing dictatorships. If Canada goes ahead and recognizes the elections in Honduras it would also be helping to reverse a trend that has seen democratic governments installed in every country from Alaska to Argentina. Earlier this month the President of Paraguay, Fernando Lugo, had to fire most of the

military leadership because of credible evidence that they were conspiring to bring him down, similar to what has happened to President Zelaya.

The Honduran regime has just issued a decree declaring a nationwide State of Emergency empowering the military command to oversee all activities related to the Nov. 29 elections. For its part the military has sent a letter to every mayor in the country instructing their offices to compile lists of inhabitants in the municipality who have been working against the coup. Hundreds of candidates both for Congress and for mayoralty office have now pulled out of these elections in protest. The case for democracy being denied could not be clearer!

The Harper government says that it is focusing on the Americas as a policy priority for Canada with the promotion of democracy as a key pillar. If Canada goes ahead and recognizes these illegal elections it would be illustrating that democracy and human rights count for zero in the political calculations of this administration. Such a stand by Ottawa would serve to embolden the de facto regime, betray a lengthy negotiation process, and endanger the lives of millions of Honduran citizens who will boycott elections they consider to be illegal. Canada needs to step up and do the right thing by not recognizing the Nov. 29 elections in Honduras.

(Rick Arnold, Common Frontiers-Canada, T: 905-352-2430. CF is sponsoring a delegation from Canada that is accompanying Hondurans during this difficult moment in their history.)

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**ANY RECOGNITION OF THE HONDURAN ELECTIONS
EQUALS LEGITIMIZATION OF THE MILITARY COUP &
REPRESSION**

RIGHT NOW – WRITE OR CALL ...

Rights Action is one of a number of organizations that have human rights delegations in Honduras (Quixote Center, Common Frontiers, Breaking the Silence, School of the Americas Watch, National Lawyers Guild, ...). These are NOT election observing missions. We do not recognize the validity of these elections.

For reasons set out in this alert (and previous Alerts found at www.rightsaction.org), a majority of Hondurans and most of the international community have concluded the November 29th elections (for President, Congress members, and Mayors) are neither free nor fair in any way.

Please contact your own politicians (members of parliament, congress members and senators) and insist on:

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

EMERGENCY FUNDS NEEDED

Since the day of the coup, June 28, Rights Action has been providing funds to organizations working in the pro-democracy, anti-coup movement, and to victims of repression and family members of victims of repression. 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: Grahame
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