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**Rights Action**

**June 28, 2010**  
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FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF MILITARY-OLIGARCHIC COUP IN HONDURAS

THE COUP IS NOT OVER: MARKING A YEAR OF RESISTANCE IN HONDURAS

by Joseph Shansky, 28 June 2010

Rights Action (and the Quixote Center & La Voz de Los de Abajo) are all leading international delegations in Honduras as the Honduran people's movement carry out public demonstrations and activities in commemoration of the first anniversary of the 2009 brutal military/oligarchic coup against the government of President Zelaya.

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To support the Honduran people's pro-democracy, anti-coup movement, see below

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by Joseph Shansky, 28 June 2010 (fallow3@gmail.com)

<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/2565-the-coup-is-not-over-marking-a-year-of-resistance-in-honduras>

At one point during the military coup in Honduras last year, a US representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) joked that Hondurans were living in a state of "magical realism", a

folkloric literary genre blurring reality and the surreal, often in the historical or political context of Latin America.

He wasn't far off, despite the bizarre comparison: A democratically-elected president is overthrown by an elite conspiring against him, forced out of the country, the military takes over, the people revolt in massive opposition, while governments across the world refuse to recognize the new regime and withdraw their ambassadors.

Only the United States, the most powerful of all countries, remains on the fence, then hops off onto the side of the golpistas (coup-makers) while presenting a straight face of diplomacy.

Yes, the story of how elected president Manuel Zelaya was violently removed from power under the guise of legal proceedings would make great fiction, but sadly remains the true story of the first successful Latin American military coup in decades.

[Rights Action comment: We must never forget or ignore the brutal and "successful" second coup against the democratic government of Haiti in 2004]

Honduras burst into the international news last summer when on the morning of June 28th, Hondurans awoke (in more than one sense) to a dismantled government and a military takeover of their country. The Honduran Congress had just issued the trumped-up charge that Zelaya, of the Liberal Party, had violated the law by attempting to assess the interest of the general population in potentially rewriting the outdated Constitution to include new progressive reforms. Hondurans were scheduled to vote that day in a non-binding referendum.

Instead, the president was flown out of the country by military troops operating under the orders of Congressional head Roberto Micheletti (of the same party), who then became de-facto president. The people took to the streets in protest. The police

and military, acting under Micheletti's command, responded with violence, and a saga began which continues to this day, despite a new administration.

It quickly became apparent that many of the leaders of the military establishment which seized Zelaya and spent the past year ensuring that Hondurans lived in perpetual fear, had in fact been trained at the infamous School of the Americas one thread of many leading back north.

Enter the United States, whose intervention in the region is unfortunately not limited to the history books. From the beginning of the coup to the most recent headlines on Honduras, the shadow of the U.S. has loomed large. The US mainstream media is always eager to disregard Latin American social movements demanding autonomy as motivated by the presumably sinister leftist influence of Hugo Chavez and other leaders in the region. Zelaya came into power by no means a radical, but he gradually worked to enact common-sense progressive measures.

Some examples: a higher minimum wage, agrarian reform, an idea to convert the US military base in Soto Cano to a civilian airport, a rejection of recent IMF agreements, etc. These changes were seen as a threat by a ruling oligarchy both in Honduras and elsewhere, who viewed their business and economic interests as in jeopardy.

When Zelaya was forced out, Barack Obama verbally wrist-slapped the golpistas, but refrained from using the legal language necessary to trigger more drastic measures against the coup government, such as economic sanctions, freezing assets, or withdrawing his ambassador, as so many other countries did immediately.

The most significant result of all of this is the popular uprising which has been under the threat - and reality - of violence since its inception. June 28, 2009 marked the birth of a truly grassroots movement formed out of the simple premise that the electoral process which brought Zelaya into power by popular support must

be respected and defended to its legal end.

Day after day last summer, around the country in both rural and urban zones, Hondurans marched to demand Zelaya's return and the re-establishment of democratic order. As I participated with the marchers, it was a glorious domino effect to witness - families walking proudly down the road, beckoning others peering cautiously out doors and windows to join the crowds, whose numbers grew exponentially each day.

Meanwhile, the theatre continued and the performances, especially by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Embassy, in particular Ambassador Hugo Llorens, were impeccable.

I had the opportunity to meet with the Ambassador in August 2009, as part of a delegation monitoring human rights. He was sympathetic ("You're preaching to the converted" and "We condemn the regime, and think that they're thugs"), but despite several references to the urgency of the situation, he turned out to be a master at extending the "diplomatic process" until it was too late for many.

The amount of recorded evidence of illegal abuses directly connected to the Micheletti and Lobo governments is overwhelming. So is the number of hours of tape which has State Department representatives finding new ways to avoid addressing this topic when pressed.

In general, the US continued to disregard the increasingly threatening measures taking place - activists, media, and government figures opposed to the coup were targeted, resulting in account after account of kidnapping, torture, and murder. A February report by the Committee for the Families of the Disappeared and Detained in Honduras (COFADEH) lists 40 confirmed Resistance-related deaths, though that number continues to grow since then.

In addition, there was an almost-total blackout of the independent media outlets which much of the country relied on to get their

news. All of this went on as backdrop to the run-up of new elections. The US eventually brokered an agreement leading to the installation of the Lobo government, by means of approving an election cycle in a climate of fear and intimidation, where press freedom was severely restricted.

As more people went missing, were detained at random, were found in ditches with signs of torture, as horror stories emerged daily, certain individuals and organizations on the front lines became more vulnerable.

In hindsight we can see now just how risky it was - and still is - to be in visible opposition to the golpistas. During the days of street repression, the state violence was uncontrolled, unleashed against groups that always appeared physically united in the streets.

Now, in contrast, the Resistance movement, led by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP), simply referred to as the Resistance, has become more physically fragmented, and thus more vulnerable. Now the disappearances and killings are targeted. Those who put their life on the line last year continue to pay the price. Family members of activists are at risk as well. The most brazen acts are still being seen today. All we need to do is look at those who have suffered the most for being at the front lines.

Out of all sectors of the Honduran population, the gay and lesbian community has seen the highest number of victims. Usually they have been connected directly to opposition circles, and the majority of incidents have happened since Pepe Lobo took office in January. The most notorious case remains that of Walter Trochez, a beloved organizer who was captured, escaped, and then killed a week later.

Journalists - Nine have been killed in the country so far this year alone, with the great majority working for news outlets opposed to the coup. The Committee to Protect Journalists has listed Honduras as one of the most dangerous countries in the world in

regard to their mission.

Unions - Throughout the coup, the offices of the Honduran Union of Industry Workers of Soft Drinks and Similar Beverages (STIBYS) became shelter for the Resistance and their allies. The union was targeted by armed forces during the coup, and its leaders have been subject to constant assault and persecution. STIBYS president (and former Honduran presidential candidate) Carlos H. Reyes was badly beaten during a protest last year. Earlier this month, the brother-in-law of STIBYS Vice President Porfirio Ponce was killed in an attack when armed men stopped his car at a traffic light, also wounding Ponce's father and sister.

Farm workers - Outside the cities, agricultural and rural organizations have been under threat as well. There is an almost constant military presence in rural areas where farmers and peasants are fighting for land reform. In the Aguán region, where Zelaya's efforts to redistribute land were most at stake, tensions have exploded into what has been described as "clashes", but is in essence a war against the campesinos, in particular the United Campesino Movement of Aguán (MUCA). Eight campesinos have been killed since December 2009, when workers moved to retake the land they had been stripped of in the chaos of the coup.

While writing this, I receive notice of another campesino killing, a 16 year old boy. Gruesome photos showing his torture are attached. Five others have been arrested. These incidents have become common.

What allows us to receive this tragic news only a few hours after the fact is a dedicated network of support in both the US and around the world. Despite the constant familiar dread of opening bad news emails, it's been a pleasure to witness such solidarity. Previously isolated organizations, many of whom sent delegations to Honduras or were actively monitoring the coup, have united into what is now formally known as the Honduran Solidarity Network.

The HSN has evolved to a level of professionalism and

consistency that would be difficult to maintain for many, involving participants spread over various countries. Member groups hold conference calls weekly, with updates coming directly from FNRP connections. Twice they have pooled funds to publish full-page ads in major Honduran newspapers declaring international support for the Resistance and opposition to the Lobo government.

These actions are increasingly important as the violence in Honduras continues to remain under the radar.

All causes and effects of the coup are still alive, but President Lobo is now going through the motions to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a mission statement that couldn't be more vague ("to ensure peace, harmony and tranquility for the Honduran people"), and which has no teeth. It is not legally binding and it does not take into consideration accounts by any of the human rights organizations that would clearly offer the most critical perspectives when it comes to investigating these crimes.

In response, six key human rights organizations have come together to create an alternative commission, to be launched on the first anniversary of the coup, and headed by respected figures such as Nobel laureates, writers, and priests. Among other mandates, the "Comisión de la Verdad" will make a point to hear the testimonies of victims, and be in will line with United Nation standards.

Details on both Commissions, including backgrounds of members, can be found [here](#).

To this day, no U.S. State Dept. spokesperson has acknowledged the thousands of human rights violations committed under the Micheletti and Lobo governments. The US continues to maintain the absurd claim that reconciliation has come to the country, recently seen in Hillary Clinton's efforts to persuade the OAS to re-admit Honduras. And on June 18, Llorens announced that the Honduran government would be receiving \$20 million from the US

to enhance "security".

Thankfully not all US politicians have responded this way. Some have been strong allies of the opposition movement. A new letter signed by 27 US Representatives, addressed to Clinton, makes for the strongest wording yet, written to "...express our continuing concern regarding the grievous violations of human rights and the democratic order which commenced with the coup and continue to this day."

A year old now, the Resistance has grown into a widespread political body. As Los Necios put it, it "has shifted from short-term action to the structures and strategy to take power and change the country". They imagine a different Honduran society, with an eye to the project Zelaya had begun to take initial measures on- the reformation of the Honduran Constitution, or *constituyente*.

Zelaya himself, still in exile, recently affirmed his commitment to the project in a letter dated June 11:

"I am a liberal in permanent resistance and I will continue being so, of those that practice their true doctrine, opposed to military dictators and antidemocratic regimes...The homeland in this moment calls us to struggle for unity and for the *Constituyente*...the suffering of the victims of this crime against humanity, with the loss of lives of our martyrs who condemned the coup d'Etat, cannot be in vain, nor pass into oblivion."

What happened in Honduras is worth revisiting a year later, if only to understand that despite all rhetoric by both the US and Honduran governments, the coup is not over. June 28 marks the anniversary of the tragedy it brought.

But this date should also be celebrated as the birth of a movement that has united diverse forces from around the country. It offers hope and inspiration for a new Honduras in which the people have a voice over their own destinies- some would say a magical story, becoming more real each day, still being written.

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FUNDS ARE NEEDED:

Since the coup, June 28, 2009, Rights Action has sent over \$100,000) to community based Honduran organizations doing a range of work: community development education and organizing; human rights defense and promotion; media (radio, publications and internet); human rights accompaniment; reporting; emergency support for victims or repression and human rights violations; transportation; communication (phone, internet); camera work (film and still); travel to forums and negotiations; etc..

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

To support the Honduras pro-community development, pro-democracy, anti-military coup movement and to support the real Truth Commission, make check payable 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>

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CREATE YOUR OWN email and mail lists and re-distribute our information

RECOMMENDED DAILY NEWS: www.democracynow.org /

www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca

RECOMMENDED BOOKS: Eduardo Galeano's "Open Veins of Latin America"; Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States"; Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"; Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"; Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who"

EDUCATION IN YOUR HOME COMMUNITY: Contact us to plan educational presentations in your own community, school, place

of worship, home (info@rightsaction.org)

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATIONS TO CENTRAL AMERICA: Form your own group or join one of our delegations to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles (info@rightsaction.org)

BOOK: "CODE Z59.5: There Is Only One People Here", by Grahame Russell. Code Z59.5 is a series of diary excerpts (comments, facts, quotes, etc.) from the 1990s and 2000s, related to the author's work in Central America, Mexico and North America, in defense of human rights. (To order: info@rightsaction.org)

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