

Rights Action – May 26, 2011  
Honduras Impunity Watch

**BELOW: Two articles reflecting on the May 28<sup>th</sup> return of President Mel Zelaya to Honduras**

- “Political Realism & National Transformation in Honduras”, by Annie Bird
- “Agreement signed for democratic rights in Honduras”, by John Riddell & Felipe Stuart

**QUESTIONS, INFORMATION:**

Karen Spring and Annie Bird of Rights Action will in Tegucigalpa to bear witness to the return of Zelaya, as one more step in the struggle of Honduras' pro-democracy movement to re-found their nation and state: Karen (504-9507-3835, [spring.kj@gmail.com](mailto:spring.kj@gmail.com)), Annie ([annie@rightsaction.org](mailto:annie@rightsaction.org))

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**POLITICAL REALISM & NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN HONDURAS:  
MEL ZELAYA RETURNS TO HONDURAS, MAY 22 &  
THE OAS WILL MEET TO DISCUSS THE SUSPENSION OF HONDURAS, JUNE 1**

By Annie Bird, May 25, 2011

On Sunday, May 22, 2011, Honduras' last elected president, Manuel Zelaya, signed an agreement with the de facto Honduran president Pepe Lobo. The agreement was mediated by President of Venezuela Hugo Chavez and President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos, and was the culmination of a dialog process that started April 9 in Cartagena, Colombia.

Zelaya has sought to return to Honduras ever since the military coup that expelled him, but was prevented by criminal charges filed in Honduras' corrupt and internationally condemned 'justice' system. Undoubtedly, he is interested in returning for the June 28, 2011 launch of the constitutional convention process by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP).

Pepe Lobo and other coup backers have been desperate to lift the suspension of Honduras from the Organization of American States (OAS), and are particularly keen to participate in the June 7 annual meeting of the OAS.

However, the text of the agreement makes no explicit mention of a return to the OAS; and the charges against Zelaya which could be used as a pretext to imprison him, have not been fully dismissed; in the end of the day the agreement appears to be more than anything an expression of political will and good faith; the irony goes without stating.

The agreement's compliance will be overseen by a Verification Commission comprised of the two mediators, Presidents Santos and Chavez. The suspension of Honduras from Central America's regional diplomatic block, the System of Central American Integration, SICA, was immediately lifted in a meeting in which Zelaya called for the reintegration of Honduras to the OAS.

An extraordinary meeting of OAS General Assembly has been convened for June 1 to treat the suspension of Honduras, and hundreds of thousands of Hondurans are preparing to go the airport in Tegucigalpa on Saturday, May 28 to welcome their deposed president.

## A CONTROVERSIAL DIALOG

On April 9 President Chavez traveled to Cartagena, Colombia for dialog with President Santos on a range of issues including the 'Honduras crisis.' The world was surprised to hear that Pepe Lobo showed up for the meeting and the three called Zelaya to propose opening up a Venezuela/ Colombia mediated dialog.

Mel Zelaya is also the Coordinator – in exile - of the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP), the structured expression of the Honduran resistance movement. On April 16 the FNRP Sub Coordinator and other members of the FNRP national leadership visited Caracas to discuss their position in the mediation. Zelaya began participation in the dialog in representation of the FNRP, and the dialog proceeded along those lines for several weeks. However, in the end it is clear that Zelaya signed the May 22 agreement as the deposed president, not as Coordinator of the FNRP.

There is no doubt as to the legitimacy of Zelaya's leadership in Honduras, yet the FNRP is a highly structured representative political structure, as has been made abundantly clear in the FNRP assemblies. While the FNRP has an 'executive' body headed by Manuel Zelaya and Juan Barahona, there is an assembly of representatives whose decisions must be respected and whose approval must be obtained.

In the same way that neither Santos nor Chavez could legitimately commit to the reintegration of Honduras to the OAS, as such a decision is exclusively the function of the General Assembly of the OAS, and Lobo could not commit to dismissing charges against Zelaya as this is a function of the corrupt and internationally condemned Honduran judicial system, Zelaya could not unilaterally make commitments regarding some of the issues placed on the mediation table, issues that depended on the decisions of the FNRP authority structures.

Given the high degree of loyalty to Zelaya within the Frente, the distinction between Zelaya's signature as an individual or in representation of the FNRP may seem like splitting hairs, but since the coup Honduras has launched into a truly revolutionary social awakening. Hondurans from all backgrounds have put their lives on the line rejecting the coup, they have recovered their national dignity in not submitting to illegitimate authority and have engaged in an intense national debate that has awakened hearts and minds, "removing the blindfolds" that hid the structures of neo-colonial domination that today they seek to transform into a new nation based on popular participation in government. Hondurans will no longer permit their future be decided unilaterally by the powerful. Zelaya knows this, he has been a (principal) leader in this process.

## POLITICAL REALISM & NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The reality is that some of the issues placed on the mediation table are highly controversial within the FNRP, so obtaining approval within the FNRP undoubtedly proved very hard. The difficult balance between political pragmatism and transformational idealism is the subject of intense debate with respect to whether or not, or even how, to participate in the 2013 national elections, and the path to a new constitution.

While taking advantage of the massive resistance movement as a potential electoral force for the 2013 elections seems logical to many, others believe that the divisive spectacle of a traditional electoral process, still under a non-democratic framework, could turn back some of the advances made in the challenging process of creatively envisioning participatory routes to greater democracy. The agreement signed in Cartagena on May 22 affirms the right of the FNRP to register as a political party.

In the same way, for many the challenge of how to carry out a truly popular constitutional convention in the context of an ongoing military coup seems insurmountable and the recent reform of the Honduran constitution by the de facto congress provides a window of opportunity. Yet others believe that a constitutional convention cannot occur before the ongoing national dialog has progressed to the point of widespread consensus as to how the structures of domination that have maintained Honduras a colonial state can effectively be dismantled. The text of the agreement also affirms the right of the FNRP to use the plebiscite mechanism created in last year's modification of Article 5 of the Honduran constitution.

#### WILL THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS GROW?

While it is true that Honduras is in the midst of an ongoing military coup, Honduras is also in the midst of a non-violent, democratic revolution. The transformative nature and strength of this revolution explains why a de facto government, desperate for international legitimacy, has engaged in ongoing and extreme human rights abuses; the structures of power believe that violent domination is necessary to maintain their power.

The strength of this non-violent revolution also explains why, despite the extreme consequences many have suffered (torture, killing, rape, even the targeting of children and family) for participating in the resistance, the movement is still massive.

The reality of extreme violence to repress the demand for a new Honduras underscores the importance of taking human rights seriously. This is a big disappointment with the agreement signed on Sunday, the lack of any improved conditions to protect human rights. The text of the agreement vests responsibility for guaranteeing human rights in the hands of the Human Rights Ministry created by the Lobo administration, an agency which has already proved itself to be useless, and in the installation of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, an agency which generally holds extremely limited mandates and whose establishment had already been set into motion many months ago.

Ever since the "mediation" process started in April, Honduran and international human rights organizations have vocally expressed their concerns that ending the suspension of Honduras from the OAS would remove virtually the only leverage that exists to pressure for greater respect for the fundamental human rights of Hondurans. This remains true, even as Zelaya's return to Honduras may deepen the human rights crisis as reactionary structures dig in deeper and feel the need to go to even greater extremes to destroy the movement that threatens their hold on power.

#### "HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATION"

As COFADEH, the widely respected Committee of the Families of the Disappeared and Detained of Honduras, stated in their May 23 communiqué, "human rights are not subject to negotiation." The international community, every nation, has the obligation to guarantee the respect for fundamental human rights. No treaty or political pact can remove this obligation.

As the nations that comprise the General Assembly of the OAS prepare for the day when a meeting will be convoked with the objective of lifting the suspension of Honduras from the OAS there is no doubt that this obligation is clearly present in the hearts and the historic memory of at least some of the elected officials and many of the nations of the Americas.

The same day the Cartagena agreement was being signed, in Uruguay thousands marched in the annual silent commemoration of the disappeared; Chile was exhuming and forensically examining the remains of Salvador Allende; the Chilean people, like the Honduran, marched

protesting mega projects that threaten their beloved forests and wetlands; and Argentines continued their struggle for justice for the disappeared. Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay continue under heavy threat of coups. South Americans know first-hand the heavy price of the struggle for freedom and national sovereignty that they are only beginning to achieve.

The question, as South American nations approach a general assembly to welcome Honduras back to the OAS, is how much poison can they swallow in the name of pragmatism?

The 'Honduran crisis', that the mediation process aimed to resolve, has not ended. The human rights violations may well increase, the struggle for a new constitution is still a struggle, the debate over the role of electoral politics in social change is still a debate. The international community maintains its obligation to demand the respect of human rights.

The role of the international community - the political agenda of big blocks like the US–Canada–Colombia 'security' armed alliance, or that of the ALBA nations seeking to construct economic autonomy; or the complex political alliances between nations forged through a very painful and still recent history, even current events - is still being defined.

Former client states, rebuilding after decades of US backed military governments, are decisive actors in history; and the obligations that history and humanity place on nations may still transcend political realism, determining new paths in which the international community may assist in the transformation of the ongoing Honduran coup.

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## **AGREEMENT SIGNED FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN HONDURAS**

By John Riddell & Felipe Stuart Cournoyer, May 24, 2011

On May 22, Honduran president Porfirio Lobo Sosa and former president José Manuel Zelaya Rosales signed an agreement 'For National Reconciliation and the Consolidation of the Democratic System in the Republic of Honduras.'

Lobo was elected in November 2009 in a rigged vote organized by the regime installed through the June 28, 2009 military coup that overthrew Zelaya. The majority of Latin American and Caribbean nations refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Lobo government, despite the strong support it received from the United States and Canada.

The present agreement, finalized in Cartagena, Colombia, also bears the signatures of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and Venezuelan Foreign Minister Nicolás Maduro (on behalf of President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías) as witnesses.

This agreement opens the door to significant changes in the Central American political landscape and to the re-entry of Honduras into the Organization of American States (OAS) and SICA (Central American Integration System).

An earlier article on this website, "Freedom for Joaquín Pérez Becerra!" discussed the context that led Colombia and Venezuelan presidents to join in sponsoring this initiative.

### **THE RESISTANCE WELCOMES THE AGREEMENT**

In a May 23 statement, the Political Committee of the National Front for People's Resistance (FNRP), the main organization coordinating popular resistance to the coup inside Honduras, noted that "this agreement for international mediation enables us to put an end to our exile

[and] reinforce our process for the refoundation of Honduras." It issued a "call to all members of the resistance inside and outside Honduras to unite in a great mobilization to greet and welcome our leader and the General Coordinator of the FNRP, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, at 11 a.m., May 28, 2011, at the International Airport." The statement noted that the agreement complied with the four conditions set by the FNRP.

The FNRP also expressed "thanks for the process of international mediation" carried out by the Venezuelan and Colombian presidents.

#### TERMS OF THE ACCORD

By the terms of the Cartagena agreement, the signatories commit themselves to:

- Guarantee the return to Honduras in security and liberty of Zelaya and all others exiled as a result of the crisis. (Over 200 other exiled leaders of the resistance are also now able to return under the terms of the agreement.)
- Assure conditions in which the FNRP can gain recognition as a legal political party.
- Reaffirm the constitutional right to initiate plebiscites, particularly with respect to the FNRP project of convening a National Constituent Assembly. (It was President Zelaya's move to hold a non-binding plebiscite on calling a Constituent Assembly that the organizers of the 2009 coup cited to justify their action.)
- Create a Secretariat of Justice and Human Rights to secure human rights in Honduras and invite the UN Human Rights Commission to establish an office in Honduras.
- Constitute a Monitoring (Verification) Commission, consisting initially of the Colombian and Venezuelan presidencies, to help assure the successful implementation of the agreement.

#### U.S. DISRUPTION ATTEMPT

Notably absent from discussions leading to the Cartagena Agreement was the United States, which has long been the arbiter of Honduran politics. Washington kept silent on the Cartagena mediation process, while in fact attempting to torpedo it.

Alexander Main, an analyst for the Center for Economic and Policy Research, noted on May 19 that when, as part of the mediation process, Honduran courts dropped charges against Zelaya, the U.S. State Department issued an "exuberant statement" the following day calling for the suspension of Honduras from the Organization of American States (OAS) to be "immediately lifted" – a move that would have cut short the Cartagena mediation process.

This suspension, enacted in protest against the coup, was one of the factors driving the illegitimate Honduran regime to seek mediation. (See "What Now for a Post-Coup Honduras") "For good measure," Main says, "the [U.S.] statement noted that 'since his inauguration, President Lobo has moved swiftly to pursue national reconciliation, strengthen governance, stabilize the economy, and improve human rights conditions.'"

In fact, according to the Committee of Family Members of Disappeared Detainees in Honduras (COFADEH), politically motivated killings have taken the lives of 34 members of the resistance and 10 journalists since Lobo took office. No killers have been prosecuted either for these crimes or for the 300 killings by state security forces since the coup.

#### SHOWDOWN AT THE OAS

The U.S. canvassed energetically among Central and South American countries subject to its influence for support for immediate reinstatement of Honduras – prior to the conclusion of the mediation process. "In mid-May these divisions came to a head when a diplomatic tussle took place at the OAS," Main reports.

In Main's opinion, "the U.S. is not prepared to accept a political mediation in Honduras in which it doesn't play a leading role. The U.S. has traditionally been deeply involved in the internal affairs of Honduras," and "the country continues to be of great strategic importance to the U.S."

The OAS Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, called a meeting of the OAS Permanent Council that was to consider readmitting the de facto Honduran regime. According to a reliable source at the OAS, Main reports, several Latin American countries, apparently including Colombia, demanded cancellation of the meeting on the grounds that it was "premature." Within hours, the meeting was cancelled.

The failure of this U.S.-inspired maneuver opened the road for the signing of the Cartagena agreement nine days later.

#### REGIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

The Cartagena agreement, and the process that facilitated it, marks an important victory for the Honduran resistance. More broadly, it reinforces the process of Indo-Latin American and Caribbean efforts to shape their own national and regional policies free from imperialist domination. (See "Honduras se reintegra al CA-4.") It developed outside the OAS framework, and will help to strengthen and consolidate the new Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) that will meet this coming July in Caracas, Venezuela, under the joint chairmanship of that country and Chile.

The Cartagena accord's impact in Central America was immediate and far reaching. Lobo and Zelaya flew from Cartagena to Managua the same day of the signing ceremony for a special meeting of the SICA (Central American Integration System) at which Honduras was welcomed back by three other Central American presidents – Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Mauricio Funes (El Salvador), and Alvaro Colom (Guatemala). At the meeting Ortega announced the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Nicaragua and Honduras.

In a joint statement, the four presidents called on the OAS to re-admit Honduras, and new agreements were also announced regarding a Customs Union of the four countries. These measures mark a defeat for those forces in Central America inimical to the regional integration process, including the Costa Rican government and its hostile campaign to isolate Sandinista Nicaragua diplomatically and economically.

#### NEED FOR CONTINUED SOLIDARITY

Whether the Honduran government will fully carry out the Cartagena agreement remains to be seen. In particular, the coup has produced an entrenched pattern of systematic repression and unrestrained operation of death squads in Honduras. Experiences in other countries, including Colombia, show that such right-wing repression can run rampant, with under-the-table support from security forces, despite formal statements of government disapproval.

The establishment of the Colombia-Venezuela monitoring commission will be vital to keeping the pressure on the Lobo government. Friends of Honduran democracy in North America will need to do some monitoring as well, as an expression of continued solidarity with the Honduran people.

Further reading: Toni Solo, "Varieties of Imperial Decline: Another Setback for the U.S. in Latin America," May 23, 2011; Ida Garberi, "El regreso de Mel Zelaya es un deber, el retorno de Honduras en la OEA es indigno," May 24, 2011

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