

## **ALERT #7 - Military Coup in Honduras, June 30, 2009**

**BELOW:** 3 articles: SOA Watch, National Catholic Reporter, The Nation

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On Behalf Of Hendrik Voss, SOA Watch  
Sent: Tuesday, June 30, 2009 4:26 PM  
Subject: Denounce the Human Rights Abuses in Honduras

The situation in Honduras turned violent when over 10,000 people gathered in the streets to protest the coup Monday evening. Using tear gas, high-powered water and guns (it is still not clear whether soldiers were armed with rubber bullets or otherwise) many people were wounded and there has been one confirmed death in the capital, Tegucigalpa.

In the capital, pro-coup marches are occurring, defended by the police and national guard. As of Tuesday morning, the resistance movement to the coup is gathering in Tegucigalpa, to determine how and where to take to the streets. Therefore, there is anticipation of violence today, as soldiers are expected to react violently today to protesters as they did yesterday.

Violence has also broken out outside of Tegucigalpa. In the interior of the country, especially in the state of Olancho, the military has been conducting home invasions in order to capture and detain youth. Many youth have fled to the mountains, and their whereabouts are unknown.

The military is violently disbursing pro-Zelaya marches, and many protesters are missing. The local media is refusing to air any comments about the violence and human rights abuses taking place in the country, insisting that nothing is amiss.

An international news crew from TeleSur was detained and beaten while broadcasting the oppression of protesters by the military.

Yesterday in a meeting of the Rio Group, President Zelaya reiterated that he is the only president of Honduras, and that he has not stepped down. He declared his plans to return to Honduras on Thursday, mostly likely accompanied by the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza. Argentine president Cristina Fernandez also plans to accompany Zelaya on Thursday.

The coup in Honduras has been unanimously condemned throughout the Western Hemisphere, and has also been condemned by the United Nations and European Union. Zelaya spoke on Tuesday in front of the United Nations.

Notably, two army battalions have refused orders from the coup government. They are the Fourth Infantry Battalion in the city of Tela and the Tenth Infantry Battalion in La Ceiba (the second largest city in Honduras), both located in the state of Atlantida.

The coup leaders include several well-known human rights abusers, such as the retired Captain Billy Fernando Joya Amendola, who was a member of the CIA-trained 3-16 batallion from 1984-91, one of the most notorious battalions noted for human rights abuses during that time.

Bertha Oliva, of COFADEH, calls the coup advisers a line-up of the "Galley of Terror".

Furthermore, two coup leaders, Air Force Commander General Luis Javier Prince Suazo and Army General Romeo Vasquez Velasquez, were trained at the School of the Americas (SOA, renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), a US army school located in Fort Benning, GA, whose graduates have been linked to some of the largest human rights atrocities in Latin America's history.

COFADEH (Comité de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos en Honduras or the Honduran Committee of Families of the Disappeared or Detained), a leading Human Rights group in Honduras, has gone hospital to hospital attempting to document the cases of violence and human rights abuses. They are conducting this documentation work because the national Human Rights Commission, headed by Ramon Custodio and the Fiscal (Attorney General), Sandra Ponce, have thus far refused to document and denounce human rights abuses since the coup began Monday morning and are fully supporting the coup government.

One of the first moves of the army and de facto government was to cut electricity and telephone lines throughout most of the country. Later

Monday two television channels were re-established, both of which maintained that Zelaya had voluntarily resigned, the change of power was constitutionally legitimate and that the new President had the support of the majority of the Honduran people.

Through TeleSur, a transnational South American television news station, the public in South America has been able to see on the ground footage of protests in Honduras as well as streamed footage from the Honduran pro-coup news stations.

Hondurans within their country are much less informed than larger Latin America because the coup government has been able to stop TeleSur from broadcasting. Information is arriving to Honduran people about the whereabouts of President Manuel Zelaya and the vast international support he has by way of people from outside Honduras calling to cell phones of friends and family inside who are inside the country. The biggest issue now are human rights abuses inside the country.

COFADEH calls on the international human rights community to denounce the blatant disregard of human rights abuses by Ramon Custodio and Sandra Ponce.

Bertha Oliva, of COFADEH, is available for interviews (in Spanish) by the media. She can be reached in Honduras at 011-504-8991-0259 (cell) or 011-501-222-7144 (land line).

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### **Honduran coup leader a two-time SOA graduate**

Published on National Catholic Reporter (<http://ncronline.org>), June 29, 2009, By Linda Cooper and James Hodge

The general who overthrew the democratically elected president of Honduras is a two-time graduate of the U.S. Army School of the Americas, an institution that has trained hundreds of coup leaders and human rights abusers in Latin America.

Gen. Romeo Orlando Vásquez Velásquez toppled President Manuel Zelaya in a pre-dawn coup on Sunday, surrounding the presidential palace with more than 200 soldiers and tanks and tear-gassing a crowd outside. The president was abducted and taken to an Air Force base before being flown to Costa Rica. The overthrow followed a showdown over a controversial term-limit referendum that was to have taken place the day of the coup.

The military moved quickly against media outlets in an attempt to stem the flow of news about the ouster and the protests that followed.

Jesuit Fr. Joe Mulligan provided NCR with a copy of an email he received about the media crackdown from fellow Jesuit, Fr. Ismael Moreno, director of Radio Progreso, the order's radio station in Honduras.

The station was transmitting news about the coup Sunday morning when about 25 military troops stormed the building and ordered them to cancel their programming, the email said. While the soldiers were inside the station, a large group of people gathered outside to support the station's personnel. The standoff was apparently resolved without violence, but the station had not resumed operations by Monday night.

Meanwhile, protests were growing in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, and strikes were being planned by Zelaya supporters.

The events came as no shock to Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder of SOA Watch, which has sought for years to shut down the Army school, which was closed in 2000 and re-opened as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

"We're not surprised. Vásquez is one of the key players, an SOA grad" who's keeping alive the school's nickname, "School of Coups."

The overthrow is re-fueling the latest effort by US peace activists to shut the school once and for all. Eric LeCompte, the national organizer for SOA Watch, said there are two pieces of legislation that are gaining support.

One is Rep. Jim McGovern's House Bill 2567, which calls for suspending operations at the SOA/WHINSEC and investigating the torture manuals and human rights abuses associated with the school.

The second is an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2010, which would force the release of the names of the school's graduates, including their rank, country of origin and the courses they've taken.

While the Defense Department promised transparency when it re-opened SOA as WHINSEC, LeCompte said it has refused to release the names of the instructors and the graduates since 2005 — after it was revealed that the school was enrolling well-known human rights abusers.

One — Salvadoran Col. Francisco del Cid Diaz, a 2003 graduate — was cited by the 1993 U.N. Truth Commission for commanding a unit that dragged people from their homes and shot them at point-blank range.

Last week the House approved the amendment, but the measure still has to survive a House and Senate conference committee later this summer.

In overthrowing the government Sunday, Vásquez Velásquez joins two other Honduran SOA graduates who deposed heads of state, Gen. Juan Melgar Castro and Gen. Policarpo Paz Garcia.

Melgar Castro ruled the country from 1975 to 1978, the years when two of his SOA underlings — Maj. Jose Enrique Chinchilla and Lt. Benjamin Plata — conducted an operation that tortured and executed two priests, Michael Cypher and Ivan Betancur.

The priests' bodies were thrown in a well along with two women and five peasants who were baked alive in bread ovens. The massacre took place on the Los Horcones hacienda, which was owned by the father of Manuel Zelaya, the Honduran president ousted Sunday.

Melgar was overthrown in 1978 by fellow SOA graduate, Paz Garcia, whom the U.S. Army installed into SOA's "Hall of Fame" ten years later. Paz Garcia's tenure was also marked by brutal military repression and the formation of Battalion 3-16, a military death squad that worked closely with the CIA in targeting suspected leftists in the '80s.

Paz Garcia's military commander was another SOA grad, Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, who ran 3-16 and ordered the execution of Fr. James Carney, a U.S. missionary to Honduras.

The three Honduran generals fit into the larger picture of coup leaders trained by the U.S. Army school, which used to boast about how many of the school's graduates had become heads of their countries.

The boasting, which stopped after the graduates' undemocratic paths to power became better known, celebrated such figures as:

\* Argentine Gen. Leopoldo Galtieri, who seized power in a bloody coup, bringing down another SOA grad, Gen. Roberto Viola, who came to power during Argentina's Dirty War.

\* Guatemalan dictator Gen. Efraim Rios Montt, who seized power in a coup in 1982 and conducted a scorched earth campaign against the Mayan Indians.

- \* Ecuadoran dictator Gen. Guillermo Rodriguez, who overthrew the elected civilian government in 1972.
- \* Bolivian dictators Gen. Hugo Banzer Suarez, who seized power in a violent coup in 1971, and Gen. Guido Vildoso Calderon, who grabbed power in 1982.
- \* Peruvian strongman Gen. Juan Velasco Alvarado, who in 1968 toppled the elected civilian government.

In ousting the Honduran president Sunday, Vásquez Velásquez had the help of other SOA graduates, including Gen. Luis Javier Prince Suazo, the head of the Honduran Air Force.

Another two-time SOA grad, retired Gen. Daniel López Carballo, told CNN that the coup was justified because Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez would be running Honduras by proxy if the military had not acted.

Records show that Vásquez Velásquez took a basic combat arms course at SOA in 1976 and another course on small military units in 1984, while Prince Suazo took a 1996 course on joint operations.

President Zelaya — whom the Honduran Congress replaced Sunday with Roberto Micheletti — was a businessman who had leaned to the right when he was elected in 2006. Zelaya surprised many when he started to loosen the strong ties Honduras has had with the United States, which has controlled the country to such a degree that it was once called the U.S.S. Honduras.

Zelaya enjoyed wide support among the poor and union leaders, but increasingly drew the wrath of the powers that be and clashed with foreign oil companies and the U.S. Embassy when he sought to reduce the price of oil for Hondurans.

Restricted by law to a 4-year term, he attempted to have a referendum that would ask voters to change the constitution and permit a second presidential term. Zelaya said a single term makes it impossible to address long-standing poverty issues in a country where half of the residents live on less than one dollar a day and have little voice in how the government operates.

The controversy heated up when Zelaya dismissed a Supreme Court ruling that held that the referendum was illegal. "The court," he said, "offers justice for the rich, the powerful and the bankers, but only causes problems for democracy."

Zelaya had also replaced Vásquez Velásquez as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces after he refused to give logistical support for the referendum.

The coup has brought wide-spread condemnation by world leaders, and the Organization of American States called for Zelaya's reinstatement. U.N. General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann "categorically" condemned what he called "the criminal action by the army" and asked the U.N. to find a way to restore the president to power.

D'Escoto also called for President Obama to condemn the coup, noting that Obama announced a new policy toward Latin America at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad last month. But he added, "Many are now asking if this coup is part of this new policy as it is well known that the army in Honduras has a history of total collaboration with the United States."

The U.S. has sent mixed signals about the coup. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the US was not insisting that Zelaya be restored to office. But later, Obama stiffened his stand, calling for his return to power. Still, he stopped short of calling for sanctions or threatening a cut off of U.S. aid to the country.

[Linda Cooper and James Hodge are the authors of *Disturbing the Peace: The Story of Father Roy Bourgeois and the Movement to Close the School of the Americas.*]

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### **DEMOCRACY DERAILED IN HONDURAS**

The Nation, June 30, 2009, Greg Grandin

When Honduran president Manuel Zelaya--who was roused out of his bed on Sunday morning by a detachment of armed soldiers and forced into exile still in his pajamas--took office in early 2006, unionists, peasant activists and reformers expected little of the center-right politician, a rancher and member of the establishment Liberal Party.

Neither did the handful of elite Honduran families who, bankrolled by foreign finance, control their country's media, banking, agricultural, manufacturing and narcotics industries. "You are only temporary, while we are permanent," they told him soon after his inauguration, according one report, reminding Zelaya that he served at their pleasure.

But the realities of governing in a country as poor as Honduras--more than 60 percent of its population live in poverty, more than 50 percent in extreme poverty--tends to reinforce a left-wing slant. Perhaps it was the imperious and imperial behavior of George W. Bush's ambassador to Honduras, described by Zelaya as "barbarous."

Or maybe it was the fact that the Central American Free Trade Agreement, rather than delivering promised development, worsened his country's trade deficit with the United States while driving low wages even lower, as Honduras competed with its equally impoverished neighbors for investment.

Or perhaps it was the US Food and Drug Administration's unilateral ban of Honduran cantaloupes because they were supposedly tainted with salmonella, though the FDA offered no proof of the charge, a move Zelaya called "unjust."

Whatever the reason, Zelaya shifted course, and over the past two years he has adopted a progressive agenda. As a solution to the disastrous "war on drugs," which has turned Central America into a well-traversed trans-shipment corridor for narcotraficantes--profitable for some, deadly for many--he has proposed the legalization of some narcotics.

Earlier this year at the Summit of the Americas, he took the lead in pushing Barack Obama to normalize relations with Cuba. And he has steered his country into both the Bolivarian Alternative to the Americas and Petrocaribe, two regional economic alliances backed by Venezuela meant to wean Latin America off its extreme dependence on the US market.

This left turn is less ideological than pragmatic. Honduras is so broke it "can't even build a road without getting a loan from the World Bank," Zelaya once complained. But that money comes in "dribbles, held up years by paperwork" and often accompanied by onerous terms.

In contrast, he said, Petrocaribe financing for infrastructure investment came all at once, at extremely low interest, with no conditions, which helped free up other scarce funds for social services.

Through Petrocaribe, Venezuela also provides Honduras with 20,000 barrels of crude oil per day, also on very generous terms.

For those who presume to rule behind the scenes, Zelaya took a step too far when he began to push for the convocation of a constituent assembly

in order to democratize Honduras's notoriously exclusionary political system.

Expectedly, these efforts were opposed by the national Congress and the Supreme Court, both of which are controlled by an inbred clique of career politicians and judges invested in keeping Honduran politics restricted—including members of Zelaya's Liberal Party.

For its part, the US media seem intent on reporting on events in Honduras through the prism of its obsession with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. The New York Times, for instance, ran an op-ed by free-market ideologue Alvaro Vargas Llosa, who claimed that the most unfortunate aspect of the coup is not that it derailed Honduran democracy but--wait for it--that it has allowed Chávez to defend democracy and thus claim the "moral high ground."

Vargas Llosa describes Zelaya as a man of privilege, an "heir to the family fortune" who had "devoted decades to his agriculture and forestry enterprises" and who had run for president on a conservative platform that included supporting CAFTA.

Misleadingly, Vargas Llosa attributes Zelaya's political turn not to the absolute failure of CAFTA and the fiasco of the "war on drugs" but to Chávez's seductions. The US media have also falsely yet unanimously presented Zelaya's moves as a power grab, an effort to end term limits to allow him to run for re-election.

But the referendum Zelaya was pushing--which prompted the coup—asked citizens only if there should be a vote on "whether to hold a Constituent National Assembly that will approve a new political Constitution." In other words, Hondurans weren't being asked to vote on term limits or even on revising the Constitution. They were simply being asked to vote on whether or not to have a vote on revising the Constitution, with the terms of that revision being left to an elected assembly.

Latin America has demonstrated a remarkable degree of unanimity in condemning the coup and demanding Zelaya's return to power. "We cannot accept or recognize any new government other than President Zelaya," said Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The Organization of American States has stated that it will refuse to make any concessions to the coup plotters and that it will be open only to dialogue that would facilitate the "return of President Zelaya to his legitimate position."

Other Central American nations have recalled their ambassadors from Honduras and have taken steps to isolate the country until democracy is restored. Barack Obama, too, has issued strong words against Zelaya's overthrow: "I think it would be a terrible precedent if we start moving backwards into the era in which we are seeing military coups as a means of political transition, rather than democratic elections," he said. "The region has made enormous progress over the past twenty years in establishing democratic traditions in Central America and Latin America. We don't want to go back to a dark past."

The State Department, though, has been more circumspect. At first it was reluctant to use the word "coup" to describe Zelaya's overthrow, since to do so would trigger automatic sanctions, including the suspension of foreign aid and the withdrawal of US troops.

Honduras hosts Soto Cano Air Force Base, the main US military base in the region, and Washington is concerned with keeping that installation fully operational. Likewise, according to John Negroponte--who as ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s was implicated in the cover-up of hundreds of death-squad executions--Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is working to "preserve some leverage to try and get Zelaya to back down from his insistence on a referendum" and presumably from his other populist policies.

It seems like what the United States might be angling for in Honduras could be the "Haiti Option." In 1994 Bill Clinton worked to restore Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide after he was deposed in a coup, but only on the condition that Aristide would support IMF and World Bank policies.

The result was a disaster, leading to deepening poverty, escalating polarization and, in 2004, a second coup against Aristide, this one fully backed by the Bush White House.

Though there is no indication that the United States is considering using military force to restore Zelaya--as Clinton did for Aristide in 1994--Washington should follow the lead of the rest of the Americas and resist the temptation to attach conditions to its support for his return to office.

Last week, during a meeting with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, a reporter asked Obama if he would apologize for America's role in the 1973 coup that brought Augusto Pinochet to power (and led to the torture of Bachelet and her father, who died as a result). Obama demurred and said that he was "interested in going forward, not looking backward."

As Honduras teeters on the brink--as of this writing, the new regime has cracked down on the media and instituted a curfew, with reports of escalating repression by security forces against Zelaya supporters--one way to move forward would be to provide unconditional support for Zelaya's immediate return.

"This is a golden opportunity," Costa Rica's former vice president, Kevin Casas-Zamora said, for Obama "to make a clear break with the past and show that he is unequivocally siding with democracy, even if don't necessarily like the guy."

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### **FUNDS ARE NEEDED FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN HONDURAS**

Funds are being sent to Honduras and used by community development and human rights organizations for: food and shelter, transportation and communication costs, urgent action outreach and human rights accompaniment work.

Make tax deductible donations to Rights Action and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

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### **CONTACT YOUR OWN MEDIA, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, SENATORS, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, TO DEMAND:**

- a return of the constitutional government
- no recognition of this military coup and the 'de facto' government of Roberto Michelletti
- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- justice and reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup