

Response To CBC Interview With Peter Kent, Canadian Minister For Global Affairs, About Canada's Complicit Role In Honduras

By Grahame Russell, August 2, 2009

On July 29, The Current radio program, of the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), aired a 2-part discussion about "Canada's role in Honduras": part one with Grahame Russell of Rights Action; part two with Peter Kent, Canada's Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas.

- To listen: <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2009/200907/20090729.html>

As Peter Kent spoke second, and responded to points Grahame made, we publish this in response to comments made by Mr. Kent.

GENERAL COMMENT: BODY COUNT RISING

Honduran teacher Roger Abraham Vallejo died in hospital on Saturday, August 1, two days after he was shot point-blank in the head by a police officer during a peaceful protest.

As one listens to the 2-part CBC interview and reads the comments below, keep in mind that Mr. Kent represents the government of Canada. He is not speaking in his personal capacity. Keep in mind, also, that the OAS (Organization of American States), one month ago, unequivocally called for the "the immediate and unconditional return" of President Zelaya and his government – "immediate" and "unconditional".

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IN RESPONSE TO MR. PETER KENT: CANADA'S INCREASINGLY COMPLICIT ROLE IN HONDURAS

By Grahame Russell, co-director of Rights Action

(To listen: <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2009/200907/20090729.html>)

Mr. Kent said that after the July 4 emergency meeting of the OAS (Organization of American States), a call was made "for calm and non-provocative actions by all parties." On a number of occasions in this interview, and on other occasions, Mr. Kent has made this "call" to "all parties", giving the idea that in Honduras there are two sides in conflict.

This is a mid-leading "call". There is one side using provocation and violence. The illegal coup regime, on a daily basis, is using the army, police and para-military forces in civilian clothing to carry out repression against Honduran civilians who are, on a daily basis, protesting peacefully, demanding an end to the illegal, repressive regime, and a return of President Zelaya and his government.

Surely, Mr. Kent is not characterizing those promoting the OAS position through peaceful demonstrations as being “provocative”?

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Mr. Kent states: “The Supreme Court and the Congress of Honduras had acted within the constitutional framework of that country up to the moment that the army actually arrested and expelled President Zelaya ...”.

This is an inappropriate and disturbing assertion for the Canadian government to make and repeat.

Inappropriate: Mr. Kent is parroting the highly questionable position of the coup planners and perpetrators: that the Congress and Supreme Court were acting properly. At a bare minimum, Mr. Kent should not take this openly partisan position on such a debated and sensitive point.

Disturbing assertion: But, the problem goes further. Representing the Canadian government, just how did Mr Kent arrive at the conclusion that the political systems (Congress, etc) and the administration of justice in Honduras were acting in adherence to the principles of democracy and the rule of law? There have been no such findings in Honduras. There has been no due process. He certainly did not seek the opinion of the ousted President Zelaya and his entire government, and numerous members of Congress, on this issue.

In the name of the Canadian government, Mr. Kent is seemingly washing clean the hands of the coup supporters - including some in the judiciary, legislature and executive branches whose American visas have now been revoked - on the untenable argument that they themselves did not remove the president at gunpoint. The absurdity of this argument is patent. It is an attempt to give legitimacy to those who plotted and carried out the coup based on what their intentions might have been before the coup. This argument does not work any better here than it would in a criminal court of law.

The Canadian government's use of this argument undermines the principled position of the OAS - calling for the "the immediate and unconditional return" of President Zelaya and his government.

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Mr. Kent says: “We urge restraint. We view his initial and subsequent attempts to re-enter the country as very unhelpful to the situation.”

It is disturbing, but not surprising – given other comments by Mr. Kent – that the victims of the coup and repression, the Honduran people, are here blamed for protesting

against the coup and repression. The right to free movement, opinion and expression are guaranteed in Honduras and in international human rights law, but are presented as “unhelpful” in Mr. Kent's view.

On July 5th, President Zelaya made his first attempt to return to Honduras. Over 100,000 Hondurans marched peacefully to the Toncontin airport in Tegucigalpa to await his arrival. He made this attempt, by air, after the first round of negotiations in Costa Rica fell apart because the military ‘de facto’ regime refused to discuss any of the points that Oscar Arias had presented to them.

Now, more than a month has gone by, the body and repression count is rising, and still the Canadian government seemingly faults the legitimate President and the Honduran people for their peaceful actions.

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Mr. Kent acknowledges that the first set of proposals, as presented by Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, were rejected outright by the illegal coup regime.

Why, at this point, did Canada not take concrete military, economic and diplomatic actions against the coup planners and perpetrators?

Why does the illegal regime get to dictate what terms they will accept or not?

Furthermore, to raise a point that did not come up in the CBC interview, why are Mr. Kent and Canada supporting the “negotiation” point of providing amnesty for Zelaya for alleged legal and political problems before the military coup?

I refer again to comments made above, about Mr. Kent blindly accepting and repeating the mantra, used daily by the pro-coup sectors, that the “Supreme Court and the Congress of Honduras acted within the constitutional framework up to the moment that the army actually arrested and expelled President Zelaya ...”.

These are unproven allegations, made by coup supporters to justify the coup. At a bare minimum, the Canadian government should stay completely away from giving an opinion about these matters.

In contrast, why is Mr Kent not demanding, as a point of “negotiation”, legal trials against the coup planners and perpetrators?

Mr. Kent represents a biased position of the Canadian government by giving weight and importance to internal legal and political issues as alleged by the coup planners and perpetrators, while providing no weight to demanding that justice be done for the coup and for over a month’s worth of quite brutal repression.

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In discussing Oscar Arias' latest negotiation plan, Mr. Kent mentions how it is being reviewed by the "legally elected Congress" of Honduras.

This is a questionable point, in straight legal terms, given that the entire constitutional framework of Honduras has been uprooted. There is no constitutional government in Honduras right now; there is an illegal, military supported 'de facto' regime.

Mr. Kent is again taking pains to legitimize and praise the Honduran Congress - the very Congress that legitimized the illegal coup and militarization of the country and that is effectively supporting the repression that has gone on for over one month, with no end in sight.

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In passing, Mr. Kent commented that: "Canadians should be proud of Goldcorp ..."

Since 2003, Rights Action has worked closely with the Goldcorp mine affected communities of Honduras (and Guatemala). At www.rightsaction.org, one can find links to reports, articles and films documenting a wide range of health and environmental harms and human rights violations that Hondurans, in the mine affected communities, have suffered.

On many occasions, Goldcorp has responded to these reports, denying their veracity, claiming fabrication of false accusations, and the like.

The narrow point here is that Mr. Kent is again taking an openly partisan position, this time in favour of Goldcorp, while giving no credence to serious allegations of health and environmental harms and human rights violations being caused by a Canadian mining company.

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Mr. Kent criticizes President Zelaya for camping out on the Nicaragua-Honduran border, blaming him for interrupting millions of dollars in Central American commerce, including shirts made by low-paid wage-earners in garment factories owned by the Montreal based Gildan company.

Thus, while the Canadian government steadfastly refuses to take any actions – diplomatic, economic or military – against the military backed 'de facto' regime that is carrying out a campaign of brutal repression, he takes the time to criticize the militarily deposed President (Zelaya) for blocking commerce!

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Mr. Kent finishes off: "This crisis needs to be resolved quickly and non-violently and we continue to call on all parties to work to that end."

This is one more example of the explicit and, I believe, complicit bias of the Canadian government. There is one side using violence - M-16 weapons, rubber bullets, tear-gas, wooden clubs, illegal detentions, death threats, mid-night beatings, etc, - against the other side, the civilian population that is peacefully protesting against the illegal, military regime.

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As the body count rises in Honduras, Canada's position passes from being equivocally ambiguous to being one of indirect complicity with the military coup regime.

We urge Canadians to pressure their own politicians and government to implement direct military and diplomatic sanctions on the Honduran regime, and to implement economic sanctions on the coup plotters and perpetrators.

By Grahame Russell, co-director of Rights Action, info@rightsaction.org

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WHAT TO DO

AMERICANS AND CANADIANS SHOULD CONTACT YOUR OWN MEDIA, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, SENATORS & MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, EVERY DAY, DAY AFTER DAY, TO DEMAND:

an end to police, army and para-military repression
respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
unequivocal denunciation of the military coup
no recognition of this military coup and the 'de facto' government of Roberto Micheletti
unconditional return of the entire constitutional government
concrete and targeted economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup plotters and perpetrators
application of international and national justice against the coup plotters
reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

TO DONATE FUNDS TO PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS, MAKE TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS 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>

Upon request, Rights Action can provide a proposal of which organizations and people, in Honduras, we are channeling your funds to and supporting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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