

Rights Action

DAY 63 – HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE = HONDURAS' AMAZING PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

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HONDURAS' HISTORIC TWO MONTHS

By Jennifer Moore (in Honduras), August 28, 2009,

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Also, watch 10 minute news piece (REALnews) contrasting the weak and complicit role the "international community" with the inspiring Honduran people's movement ... even in the face of daily and often brutal military repression:

http://therealnews.com/t/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=4149

AT BOTTOM:

to donate tax-deductible funds to the people's peaceful pro-democracy movement in Honduras

more information & what to do?

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HONDURAS' HISTORIC TWO MONTHS

By Jennifer Moore (in Honduras), August 28, 2009,

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Two months to the day after President Manuel Zelaya was ousted from power by the Honduran military and shipped off to Costa Rica in his pyjamas, the resilience and vitality of popular opposition to the coup is making history in this Central American society of economic extremes.

Since June 28th when Hondurans were denied the opportunity to participate in a mere opinion poll that had nothing to do with extending Zelaya's term, thousands have been arbitrarily detained, dozens beaten and at least ten people killed by repressive state forces while press freedoms continue to be seriously curtailed.

Despite this - or rather as a direct outcome - day after day people keep turning out to marches, caravans, concerts, religious masses and meetings in order to demand an immediate return to constitutional order, the restitution of their democratically-elected president and renewed efforts toward greater equality and inclusion beginning with constitutional reforms.

During the 61st march yesterday, sandwiched between competing speaker systems belting out songs calling for Zelaya's return, Bertha Cáceres from the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) and a leader in the National Front Against the Coup emphasized that the current pro-democracy struggle is an unprecedented achievement that has both surprised and impressed her.

Cáceres highlighted the strong and creative participation of women, youth, artists, indigenous and Afro-Hondurans which she indicates has been central to the momentum they have generated. She also comments on the extent of activity taking place around the country, observing "people of faith meeting for mass who are challenging the hierarchy of the Catholic and Evangelical churches ," as well as residents of marginal neighbourhoods who are meeting to analyze the coup in community centres or within their water services committees.

Whatever the outcome, she says, "It's important to believe in this force, in this capacity and desire for liberation from the yoke of dictatorship."

Perceiving that Hondurans have taken a step forward toward greater political maturity and awareness, she says, "This is not about a dispute between leaders, it is a struggle between poor and rich. With or without the President, we see the potential and capacity to keep moving forward according our rights as Hondurans to create a society that is more just and more human."

She reiterated their determination to start with constitutional reforms that would recognize women and the rights of indigenous peoples that are currently left out of the country's foundational document. She adds that they would like to see the armed forces abolished, water rights included, and the right to free health care and education. "We dream of a

constitution that will contribute to the dismantling of these forms of domination. This is really what were afraid of and why the idea of a popular consultation struck terror into them.”

HONDURANS DON'T OWE OBEDIENCE TO USURPERS

Hondurans already have the right to rise up against public officials who have taken control by force. Inscribed in Article 3 of their current 1982 political constitution, last week it was my turn to be surprised when a nine-year old boy recited this clause to me by heart.

We were both attending a gathering called by a delegation from the Inter American Human Rights Commission which was hearing testimonies from recent victims of violent repression at a motel in the city of Comayagua, northwest of the capital.

Word for word, in a steady voice he quoted as I recorded, “No one owes obedience to a government which usurps power nor those who assume public functions or employment through the use of arms or through means or processes that break or fail to recognize what the constitution and laws establish. The verified acts of such authorities are null. The people have the right to recur to insurrection in defence of constitutional order.”(1)

“Compañera,” the boy continued, “We've been called to acts of resistance across the area and we are loyal witnesses to the abuses that this civilian-military dictatorship financed by the ten putrefied families of the country has submitted the people to. The coup leader Micheletti is no more than a political ranger who does not care if he kills in order to get his own way.”

“Sirs,” he urged looking into the windsock of my microphone beyond which he envisioned an international audience, “we need the immediate return of constitutional order through the restitution of our President José Manuel Zelaya to the Presidency of the Republic. Please, representatives of other countries, help us. We want a different Honduras. Thank you.”

The Inter American Human Rights Commission released a declaration the following day, based upon hundreds of testimonies, that affirms the importance of Zelaya's reinstatement. It concludes that “only a return to democratic order will allow the conditions to be created for the effective protection of the human rights of all residents of Honduras.”

SUFFERING, ONCE AND FOR ALL

During the march in Tegucigalpa yesterday, a 36-year old mental health worker carrying a red flag with a lithographed image of Che Guevara struck up another conversation with me in the hope of sending a message abroad as deliberations take place over the possibility of stronger sanctions.

He told me that it was his 61st march and said he is motivated by terrible conditions in the psychiatric hospital where he works. He is also worried about corruption and politicians who have greater allegiance to their financiers than to their electorate. "Those of us in the streets are aware of the social classes," he says, "whereas the coup leaders don't care about poverty." "We want constitutional order, but we're not 'Zelaya followers' or 'zelayistas'."

Wrapping up our conversation, he leaned into the mic and said, "I'm asking the international community to take more drastic measures. We will have to suffer, but it will just be for once. If the international community squeezes this de facto government, we might have to go hungry for a couple of months, but we will have paid the real price so that this country can be free."

In recent days, the US government suspended non-immigrant and non-emergency travel from Honduras and has indicated that it is considering escalating sanctions. The President of the Dominican Republic has also recommended that Honduras be suspended from the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Only Canada has explicitly said that it is not considering sanctions.

Until Zelaya is restituted, the National Front Against the Coup is also calling upon the international community to not recognize the rapidly approaching election campaign nor any of its results. They further urge the United Nations to withdraw technical assistance and support for the Electoral Tribunal saying that "general elections without the restitution of constitutional order would be the legalization of military violence against the state."

NOT AN ISOLATED ISSUE

Looking back over the past two months, Bertha Cáceres is ultimately unsure of what to expect in terms of Zelaya's return although she is convinced that their struggle will continue one way or the other.

Given the intransigence of the coup regime and the tardiness of the international community to consider sanctions, she thinks it is possible that Honduras could even “disappear from the international stage and be viewed as a far away issue.” If this takes place, she thinks it would be very short-sighted.

“The business class does not act in isolation. This is an international effort from the right that would promote a tendency toward coups in the style of the last century.” She sees processes of regional integration like the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which Honduras signed onto only a year ago, and Venezuela as principal targets. She also believes that greater concessions for multinational companies are a central goal whether for oil, water, lumber, or healthcare and education contracts.

She adds that the coup government cannot stand on its own. Pointing out backing from particular groups in the US and business interests in Guatemala, she says, “without their support would have fallen in the first week. But they are propped up by a strong economic sector that has influence over the policies in Honduras, even though they might not be from here.”

As a consequence she concludes that the OAS, “Should assume a role that is more coherent with its discourse of democracy building, and not just make declarations.” But even if such formal institutions look the other way, she has confidence in other expressions of international solidarity.

“We have already called for the creation of Committees of Solidarity with Honduras,” she says. “This is important because, regardless of whether or not Zelaya returns, this struggle will continue.” They hope that such committees will help to involve Honduran migrant communities abroad, as well as to provide material support, accompaniment, and to work in the area of communications and translation in order “to raise our voices so that they are understood in other parts of the world.”

Returning to the responsibility that broad popular sectors of Honduras assumed two months ago, she says that ultimately it is Hondurans who have taken centre stage. “We want to be leaders, so we will continue in this struggle to overthrow this dictatorship with creativity and wisdom of the Honduran people that has been very dignified and very heroic.”

(1) My translation. Original Spanish: “Nadie debe obediencia a un gobierno usurpador ni a quienes asuman funciones o empleos públicos por la fuerza de las armas o usando medios o procedimientos que

quebranten o desconozcan lo que esta Constitución y las leyes establecen. Los actos verificados por tales autoridades son nulos. El pueblo tiene derecho a recurrir a la insurrección en defensa del orden constitucional.”

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WHAT TO DO

AMERICANS & CANADIANS should contact our members of congress, senators & members of parliament every day, day after day, send copies of this information, and demand:

- unequivocal denunciation of the military coup
- no recognition of this military coup and the ‘de facto’ government of Roberto Micheletti
- an end to police, army and para-military repression and respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- no recognition of the November 2009 elections, that candidates are campaigning for, even as the country is militarized and repression is widespread
- unconditional return of the entire constitutional government of President Zelaya
- concrete and targeted economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup plotters and perpetrators
- application of international and national justice against the coup plotters and perpetrators
- reparations to the victims for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this illegal coup

TO DONATE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE FUNDS to the peaceful, people's pro-democracy movement in honduras, make 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 (upon request) provide a full proposal of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & TO GET INVOLVED:

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See Rights Action's previous Honduras Coup Alerts: www.rightsaction.org