

## Rights Action

**MEDIA RELEASE, December 4, 2009**

**Rights Action disputes statements made by Canadian Minister Peter Kent concerning repression during Honduras' undemocratic elections on November 29<sup>th</sup>**

By Grahame Russell

BELOW:

- Media release by other Canadian organizations/ individuals who were in Honduras

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### **CANADA PARTICIPATING IN A COVER-UP OF REPRESSION & NON-DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS**

(December 4, 2009, by Grahame Russell, a non-practising lawyer, director of Rights Action (Canada) and co-director of Rights Action (USA); 860-352-2448, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org))

The government of Canada has released a statement about the November 29 “elections” in Honduras that is disceptive in general and, in part, appears to intentionally mislead the media and public about the “electoral process” and “elections” in Honduras. On December 1, Peter Kent, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), (“Canada Congratulates Honduran People on Elections”, No. 364 - complete version below),

“congratulates the Honduran people for the relatively peaceful and orderly manner in which the country’s elections were conducted. While Sunday’s elections were not monitored by international organizations such as the Organization of American States, we are encouraged by reports from civil society organizations that there was a strong turnout for the elections, that they appear to have been run freely and fairly, and that there was no major violence.”

#### **“REPORTS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY”**

What “civil society organizations” is Mr. Kent referring to? He should be asked to produce a list of who he is in contact with, that are helping him form his opinions. Without doubt, Mr. Kent and other Canadian government officials are ignoring widespread reports by Honduran and international – including Canadian – “civil society” organizations.

Since the June 28 military coup against the government of President Zelaya, Rights Action (Canada & USA) have published over 100 “Honduras Coup Alerts” documenting systematic repression and human rights violations used by the coup regime to try (unsuccessfully) to quell and silence the pro-democracy, anti-coup movement. Other Canadian civil society organizations and media outlets (Common Frontiers - [www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca), CoDevelopment Canada - [www.codev.org](http://www.codev.org), The Dominion - [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca)) have been active and reporting on the same.

Under the boot of the illegal military-oligarchic regime, there have been no conditions, whatsoever, in which to conduct a free and fair electoral process, let alone actual elections. This is why none of the following sent election observer missions: Organization of American States, United Nations, the European Community; the Carter Center; all governments of the Americas, except for the United States and Panama.

Over the past week, Rights Action (USA and Canada) coordinated a human rights observer mission in Honduras. Our work overlapped with that of other delegations, including the U.S.-based Quixote Center, School of the Americas Watch, National Lawyers Guild, and Canada-based groups like Common Frontiers, Breaking the Silence, the BC Federation of Teachers, the Ontario Federation of Teachers.

Participants published a regular flow of eye-witness reports of repression occurring in Tegucigalpa (capital city) and throughout Honduras, in the days leading up to and on the day of the “elections”. Rights Action published our reports and those of other groups on our listserv, available at [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org). On November 27, the CCIC (Canadian Council on International Cooperation – [www.ccic.ca](http://www.ccic.ca)) circulated a press release “Canada urged to reject 'controversial elections' in Honduras”.

In Tegucigalpa, some Canadian representatives met with Neil Reeder, Canada’s Ambassador to Costa Rica and Honduras ([sjcra@international.gc.ca](mailto:sjcra@international.gc.ca), [506] 2242-4400, [www.costarica.gc.ca](http://www.costarica.gc.ca)), and Karim Amegan (political counselor from Canada’s embassy in Mexico, 504-232-4551x3320, [karim.amegan@international.gc.ca](mailto:karim.amegan@international.gc.ca), [www.honduras.gc.ca](http://www.honduras.gc.ca)).

On behalf of Rights Action (Canada), I met with Karim Amegan and Leonard Beaulne (political counselor from Canada’s embassy in Costa Rica, 506-2242-4450, [Leonard.beaulne@international.gc.ca](mailto:Leonard.beaulne@international.gc.ca), [www.costarica.gc.ca](http://www.costarica.gc.ca)). We discussed the state of militarization and repression since June 28, and I gave examples of State brutality and repression happening in the days leading up to the elections. I emailed them documented cases of military shootings of innocent civilians, illegal military raids, searches and seizures into Honduran civil society organizations, and more.

There is no doubt the Canadian government is aware there are well documented cases of serious repression – over the past 5 months, and right through to election day.

### **“NO MAJOR VIOLENCE”**

Peter Kent’s statement “there was no major violence” is false. Canadian officials are aware that on “election” day, a contingent of Honduran soldiers and police, supported by armoured tanks that shoot hi-pressure water and tear-gas, attacked a peaceful protest of 100s of pro-democracy, anti-coup people in San Pedro Sula, the second largest city in Honduras. This was widely reported on in Honduras and internationally.

Watch a 13-minute news report, made by Canadian journalist Jesse Freeston ([jfreeston@gmail.com](mailto:jfreeston@gmail.com), [www.therealnews.com](http://www.therealnews.com)) "Elections validated through blood and repression" ([http://therealnews.com/t/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=4550](http://therealnews.com/t/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=4550)).

Some Canadians, who were human rights observers posted to San Pedro Sula for “election” day, were eye-witnesses to the violence. (Irene Lanzinger, president of the BC Teacher’s Federation; Domenic Bellissimo, OSSTF – Ont. Secondary School Teacher’s Federation, [bellisd@osstf.on.ca](mailto:bellisd@osstf.on.ca), 416-751-8300; Scott Marshall, [marshas@osstf.on.ca](mailto:marshas@osstf.on.ca)) They reported back to the Canadian ambassador about what happened in San Pedro Sula.

While San Pedro Sula was the biggest example of violent state repression, on “election” day, there were other cases of state repression during the militarized election process.

### **THE “ELECTORAL PROCESS” & “ELECTION” SHAM**

The problems with Honduras’ “elections” are not just the militarization and repression on November 29th, but more importantly the past 5 months of nation-wide militarization and repression.

On November 27, the Canadian government released another misleading statement (“Canadian Minister of State Kent calls for peaceful elections in Honduras”, No. 360 - November 27, 2009 - 8:45 p.m. EST). The title is disingenuous. As far as I know, the Canadian government has not once denounced the well documented repression committed systematically by the military regime since the June 28 coup.

In the Statement, Mr. Kent said: "Canada is disappointed with the lack of progress on the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord, signed by both parties on October 30. Unfortunately, this has meant that Canada could not provide support for the electoral process." This ambiguous comment ignores what has been the one main problem with all the "negotiations". The "lack of

progress on the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord" (as well as all previous "negotiations") is due to the refusal of the coup-regime, headed by Roberto Micheletti/ General Romeo Vasquez, to relinquish power and enable the return of the constitutional order (that they broke) by refusing to allow President Zelaya and his government to return to power.

Mr. Kent goes on: "Although the elections will be watched closely by the international community and members of civil society, there will be no formal observation missions from the Organization of American States or the UN." True. Moreover, the following have not sent election observers: European Community; the Carter Center; all governments of the Americas, except for the United States and Panama. All of the above, including the OAS and the UN, did not send election observers precisely because they recognized there were no conditions to hold free and fair elections.

"The peaceful conduct of the November 29 elections will be an important step in moving out of the current political impasse. For the sake of all Hondurans, we urge that they be run freely and fairly, in a safe and secure environment. Although the circumstances under which elections will take place are less than ideal, Canada calls strongly for a peaceful electoral process free from violence."

The simple repetition of this mantra - "elections will be an important step in moving out of the current political impasse" - will not and cannot make it happen. It bears repetition: -a- Since June 28, Honduras is controlled by an illegal military regime that has used systematic repression throughout the country; -b- since June 28, the legal/constitutional order of Honduras has been broken. A country cannot hold legal elections, let alone "peaceful elections" under the boots of a repressive, illegal regime; -c- the holding of these illegal elections, in conditions of on-going repression, moves Honduras further away from a peaceful, law-based solution of this so-called "political impasse" (ie, the country is under the control of a an illegal, repressive coup regime).

Mr. Kent also says: "Once the elections have taken place, I urge all parties in Honduras to focus anew on the full implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord to enable Honduras to return to democratic rule and constitutional order."

This again distorts what is happening and what has happened since June 28. All the "negotiation" efforts - from the OAS efforts that called, on July 2nd, for the "immediate and unconditional" return of President Zelaya and his government, to the San Jose Accords, to the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accords – were premised on the return of President Zelaya and his government to full power. This had to happen before the "elections".

Recognition of these elections will simply legitimize the coup - and effectively justify 5 months of repression - and do nothing to restore the constitutional, legal and democratic order.

## **CANADA SUPPORTS THE COUP REGIME & THESE “ELECTIONS” AT ITS OWN PERIL**

The Canadian public, media and other politicians should publicly hold Mr. Kent and the government to account for their statements and positions on the “elections”. But, what is going on here?

Canada supports these illegitimate elections, and the coup regime itself, at the risk of further damaging Canada’s reputation and short and long term interests in Latin America.

Over the past few years, Canada’s reputation in Latin America has taken a serious hit due to environmental and health harms and human rights violations caused by Canadian mining companies in many Latin American countries. In 2004, Canada – along with the USA and France – were instrumental in the second coup against the government of President Aristide in Haiti, that resulted in widespread repression against the Haitian people by the post-coup regime and United Nations “peace-keeping” force.

Now, Canada is openly aligning itself with a minority of countries in the Americas (USA, Panama, Costa Rica) in an effort to try and legitimize the unlegitimizable.

What is happening in Honduras is not only a Honduran story. It is being closely watched by governments and – more importantly – civil society across the Americas. At its own long term peril does Canada continue to align itself with undemocratic, oligarchic sectors in Honduras and elsewhere in the Americas.

### **WHAT TO DO?**

Just as it is the Honduran people that are organized and struggling in defense of their democracy, constitutional order and human rights, it is up to the Canadian people, media and opposition politicians, to hold our government accountable for its untenable and unjust position with respect to the military coup regime in Honduras.

(Grahame Russell, a non-practising lawyer, is director of Rights Action (Canada) and co-director of Rights Action (USA); 860-352-2448, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org))

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### **FULL STATEMENT BY PETER KENT:**

#### **“CANADA CONGRATULATES HONDURAN PEOPLE ON ELECTIONS”**

<http://www.international.gc.ca/media/state-etat/news-communicues/2009/364.aspx>

(No. 364 - December 1, 2009 - 10:45 a.m. EST) The Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), today issued the following

statement congratulating the people of Honduras on the country's presidential and legislative elections last Sunday:

"Canada congratulates the Honduran people for the relatively peaceful and orderly manner in which the country's elections were conducted. While Sunday's elections were not monitored by international organizations such as the Organization of American States, we are encouraged by reports from civil society organizations that there was a strong turnout for the elections, that they appear to have been run freely and fairly, and that there was no major violence.

"The election results make it more important than ever for the parties to refocus their attention on implementing the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord. We call for strong political leadership on the part of Porfirio Lobo in forming a government of national unity to help Honduras move out of this lengthy political impasse and enable a speedy return to democratic rule and constitutional order.

"Canada calls on all Honduran stakeholders, including all branches of government, the private sector and civil society, to work together in a spirit of constructive reconciliation."

For more information, please visit Elections in Honduras.

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For further information, media representatives may contact:

Eleanor Johnston, Senior Special Assistant (Communications), Office of the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), 613-947-8981

Foreign Affairs Media Relations Office, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 613-995-1874

<http://www.international.gc.ca/media/state-etat/news-communicues/2009/364.aspx>

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#### **MEDIA RELEASE:**

#### **CANADIAN EYE-WITNESSES DISPUTE CLAIMS BY MINISTER KENT REGARDING VIOLENCE IN HONDURAN ELECTIONS**

For Immediate Release: Thursday, 03 December, 2009

A delegation of Canadians who witnessed the recent elections in Honduras disputes the account of events in the recent media statement by the Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs (Americas).

Minister Peter Kent said in the Canadian government's December 1 Statement that "we are encouraged by reports from civil society organizations that there was a strong turnout for the elections, that they appear to have been run freely and fairly, and that there was no major violence."

A group of five Canadians, including representatives from the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, and the Atlantic Region Solidarity Network were part of 20-person bi-national Human

Rights Observation Delegation co-organized by US based Quixote Centre and Common Frontiers-Canada, from November 25 – December 2. The delegation team observed a low turnout at the polling stations that they visited in the departments of Colon, Tegucigalpa and Santa Rosa de Copan, and witnessed violence and oppression against civilians in the city of San Pedro Sula. "We witnessed tear gas used on peaceful protesters, citizens being chased through the streets by police in riot gear," reported Irene Lanzinger, President of the BC Teachers' Federation. Delegates photographed protestors who had been beaten by police. "While standing peacefully outside of our hotel we were also tear-gassed by the police" said Lanzinger.

The delegation also witnessed strong military and police presence inside of polling stations, unmarked cars patrolling the streets in the days leading up to the elections, and several raids and detentions. "These events contributed to a climate of fear in which citizens did not feel free to participate in the elections, contrary to Mr. Kent's report," said Jackie McVicar, member of the Atlantic Region Solidarity Network.

Members of the Canadian delegation met with Canada's Ambassador to Honduras, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, Neil Reeder, prior to the November 29 elections. The delegation subsequently relayed an account of events they witnessed on Election Day to the Canadian Embassy, all in advance of Minister Kent's December 1st statement. Unfortunately, Minister Kent appears to have ignored these eyewitness accounts from Canadian human rights observers.

The delegates are surprised as well as disappointed by Mr. Kent's December 1st Statement and would ask the Minister to set the record straight by clarifying which were the 'civil society organizations' he consulted that he says reported peaceful and fair elections.

#### MEDIA CONTACTS

Canadian Human Rights Delegation to Honduras - delegate contacts:  
Irene Lanzinger, President of the British Columbia Teachers Union (BCTF) – in Vancouver (604) 871-1881  
Scott Marshall, Executive Officer of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) – in Toronto (416) 751-8300  
Jackie McVicar, Member of Atlantic Region Solidarity Network (ARSN) – currently in Guatemala (502) 407-47677

Canadian networks behind the Nov. 25 – Dec 2, 2009 Delegation to Honduras - contacts:

Rick Arnold, Coordinator of Common Frontiers-Canada – (905)352-2430  
Caitlin Power Hancey, Member of ARSN - 902-495-7497

TO VIEW REPORTS AND PHOTOS FROM CANADIAN EYE WITNESSES IN HONDURAS – please go to [www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca)

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## **FUNDS NEEDED**

Since the day of the coup, June 28, Rights Action has been providing funds to organizations working in the pro-democracy, anti-coup movement, and to victims of repression and family members of victims of repression. To support this on-going work and struggle, make your tax-deductible 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 provide a Proposal-Report of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

## **WRITE OR CALL**

**ANY RECOGNITION OF THE HONDURAN ELECTIONS  
EQUALS LEGITIMIZATION OF THE MILITARY COUP & JUSTIFICATION OF  
THE REPRESSION**

For reasons set out in this alert (and previous Alerts found at [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)), a majority of Hondurans and most of the international community have concluded the November 29th elections (for President, Congress members, and Mayors) are neither free nor fair in any way. Please contact your own politicians (members of parliament, congress members and senators) and insist on:

- No recognition of the November 29 elections
- The unconditional return of President Zelaya and his government to full constitutional power and authority
- Justice for the plotters and perpetrators of the military coup, and
- Reparations for the victims of the regime repression

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**FOR MORE INFO:** Annie Bird, 1-202-680-3002, [annie@rightsaction.org](mailto:annie@rightsaction.org);  
Grahame Russell, 1-860-352-2448, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org).