

Rights Action
May 23, 2011

Honduras' Ousted Leader, Successor Sign Accord

by Pedro Mendoza, Associated Press

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HONDURAS' OUSTED LEADER, SUCCESSOR SIGN ACCORD

by Pedro Mendoza, Associated Press, 5/22/11

CARTAGENA, Colombia – Ousted Honduran leader Manuel Zelaya signed an accord with his successor Sunday that will permit Zelaya's return to his homeland and the country's re-entry into the Organization of American States.

Shaking hands with smiles, Zelaya and current President Porfirio Lobo sat down in this Caribbean port to sign an agreement that was worked out by Presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia.

The goal is to end the political crisis caused by the June 2009 coup that sent Zelaya into exile and caused the OAS to suspend Honduras as a member.

The agreement "strengthens the American system ... and there is peace and freedom in a brotherly country like Honduras," Santos said.

Earlier, the Colombian leader said by Twitter that the agreement "implies the return of Zelaya to Honduras and its return to the OAS."

Chavez promised to make sure the accord's terms are respected.

"We will be monitoring very closely that the agreement is fulfilled because we know there will be forces inside and outside Honduras who are going to try to boycott the accord," Chavez said from Caracas, Venezuela.

The deal calls for an end to the persecution of Zelaya and his supporters and his safe return to Honduras; a national plebiscite on reforming fundamental laws; respect for human rights and the investigation of possible violations; and a guarantee that Zelaya supporters can participate in Honduras' political life and in 2014 elections as a political party.

"I am pleased to come to sign a reconciliation agreement for the democracy of the Honduran people ... Do not be afraid of democracy," said Zelaya, who was ousted after he

ignored a court order to cancel a national referendum asking if Honduras should change its constitution. His foes accused him of wanting to get around a provision limiting presidents to a single term, a charge he denied.

Lobo called the signing "a very important day for Honduras" and urged his countrymen to recognize that it will be good for the country for Zelaya to return home. He said the ousted leader will get the respect due any former president.

Santos attended the signing of the "Cartagena Accord" and Chavez, who is recovering from a knee injury, was represented by Venezuelan Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro.

Zelaya attended even though a spokesman for Lobo had said the former leader would not be in Cartagena, but rather sign the agreement later in the day at a forum in Managua, Nicaragua, with Presidents Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, Mauricio Funes of El Salvador and Alvaro Colom of Guatemala.

A Honduran government statement said that with the accord, Lobo has fulfilled the electoral mandate given him to "achieve national reconciliation and unity."

Lobo was is scheduled to meet later with Ortega, Funes and Colom in Managua to discuss regional security issues and the re-entry of Honduras.

"Zelaya will be given the security and treatment of a former president because he deserves our respect and consideration," Lobo said at a news conference Saturday.

Zelaya, who has been living in exile in the Dominican Republic, said last week that he plans to return to his Central American homeland May 28.

After Zelaya was overthrown by the military and hustled out of Honduras almost two years ago, international sanctions and months of negotiations led by the U.S. and the OAS failed to persuade an interim government to restore him to power.

Honduras went ahead with November 2009 elections that had been scheduled before the coup and Lobo was voted to office. The U.S. and other countries restored ties shortly after Lobo took power in January 2010.

But Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua and Ecuador opposed restoring Honduras to the OAS unless Zelaya could return from exile without facing the threat of prison.

Honduras' courts recently dropped corruption charges and arrest warrants pending against Zelaya, paving the way for the country's restoration as an OAS member.

OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza issued a statement saying the accord "opens the way to return Honduras to the hemispheric organization." He said it would be presented to the OAS's permanent council Monday.

Honduras' return to the OAS is expected to be made official during the organization's general assembly in El Salvador June 5-7.

[Associated Press writer Freddy Cuevas in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, contributed to this report. http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110522/ap_on_re_la_am_ca/lt_honduras_coup]

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Rights Action invites you to join an

**EMERGENCY DELEGATION TO HONDURAS, MAY 27-30, 2011
PRESIDENT MANUEL ZELAYA RETURNS TO HONDURAS!**

Join a Rights Action delegation to Honduras, May 27-30, 2011, during a national mobilization to celebrate the return of Honduras' last legitimate president, Manuel Zelaya. The Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular, FNRP, announced earlier this week that on May 28, 2011, President Mel Zelaya will return to Honduras.

After the June 28, 2009 military coup, when masked soldiers forced Zelaya into an airplane at gunpoint in the early morning hours, Zelaya and other members of his administration were prevented from returning to Honduras through fraudulent legal charges brought against him by Honduran public prosecutors, and it was clear that if they returned to Honduras they would be imprisoned. Since that time, Honduras has been one of the most repressive countries in the Americas.

Throughout the almost two years since the military coup, diplomatic efforts, many led by the Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General Insulza, have failed to achieve the return of Zelaya to Honduras. Zelaya's return was a condition many South American nations demanded before considering lifting the suspension of Honduras from the OAS. Finally in April 2011 a dialog between de facto regime leader President Pepe Lobo and Zelaya emerged, with the assistance of, and formally mediated by the Venezuelan and Colombian governments.

On May 2, 2011 charges against Zelaya were suspended, bettering conditions for his potential return to Honduras. However, the charges have not been definitively dropped - it is possible cases against him could be reopened when he enters the country.

There are many expectations surrounding Zelaya's return to Honduras, and the US has made it clear that it expects Zelaya's return to lead to the readmission of Honduras to the OAS. However a series of conditions were set out by Zelaya and by the Latin American nations that oppose lifting the suspension, most of which are still being debated.

WHAT WILL DELEGATION DO?

During this delegation, we will observe the pro-democracy people's movement welcome President Manuel Zelaya, speak with human rights organizations about the ongoing human rights crisis and the political persecution of the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular, speak with organizations preparing for the June 28, 2011 launch of the self-convoked national constituent assembly.

WHO LEADS THE DELEGATION?

Led by Annie Bird of Rights Action (co-director since 1995), this trip will enable participants to learn first-hand about the struggle for real democracy in Honduras, about the US and Canadian role in perpetuating the lack of democracy, and about how North Americans can be involved in activism and organizing to support democracy in the hemisphere.

COST: US\$425

This fee covers: 5 nights of hotel; 2 meals a day, for 4 days; transportation in-country; trip organization, guiding, translation; honorariums for some people we meet with; etc. Participants pay for their own travel to and from Honduras.

DATES?

Arrive in Tegucigalpa on Thursday, May 26; depart on Tuesday, May 31. There are no delegation activities planned for these dates.

FOR INFORMATION:

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