

Rights Action
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MEL ZELAYA’S HOMECOMING - A RESISTANCE CELEBRATION “THEY ARE AFRAID OF US BECAUSE WE ARE NOT AFRAID”

By Annie Bird, May 28, 2011

On Sunday, May 28, Manuel Zelaya, the president of Honduras deposed in a military coup, returned to his nation welcomed by a massive congregation of his supporters that organizers estimated numbered over 1.2 million people.

Saturday afternoon Hondurans began arrive in the “Plaza Isis Obed Murrillo” behind the Toncontin airport. It looked like a fair, with an atmosphere of tremendous celebration, many camped out in tents to spend the night. Hours before Zelaya’s 11am scheduled arrival, the Plaza and all the streets leading into the Plaza were filled with people, many of whom had traveled on buses from the wee hours of the morning, even overnight, from all parts of Honduras. Though there were reports of buses’ being stopped and police posts stopping those trying to arrive, there was not massive repression seen in other moments.

The airport has played an important role in the resistance movement, a movement born on June 28, 2009 when Zelaya was taken from his home

at gunpoint and with gunfire by a group of masked military, and forced onto a plane bound for Costa Rica, with a stop in the Palmerola military base, the home of the US Southern Command's Joint Task Force Bravo.

Then on July 5, 2009 Hondurans massively marched on the airport in the hope of welcoming their president in his first frustrated attempt to return to Honduras after the coup. His plane was blocked from landing by military vehicles on the runway. There was a brief moment of hope when the national police stepped down, but military quickly filled the void.

A young protester was shot and killed by the military, and the place where he was killed has been popularly renamed in his honor, the "Plaza Isis Obed Murillo."

On January 27, 2010 hundreds of thousands marched to the airport to say goodbye to Zelaya after he had negotiated his safe exit from Honduras after being under siege in the Brazilian embassy for four months, his second failed return to Honduras.

On Sunday May 28, 2011, Zelaya's plane landed at 2:30pm, over three hours late. The expectant crowd, under alternating beating sun and light rain, waited motivated by music and commentary from the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP), cheering occasionally as planes approached we thought to be Mel's.

The organizers explained there were last minute logistical problems. In the evening after the event, rumors circulated that the military had at the last minute attempted to take over the role of providing security for Zelaya and his ministers, despite carefully crafted security agreement which did not include the military. The Human Rights Commission that had expected to receive Zelaya and the other exiles after landing was prevented from entering. Some wondered if the plane had been intentionally been delayed to discourage his supporters.

Mel addressed the crowd accompanied by his wife, Xiomara, who read the text of the Cartagena agreement and daughter Pichu, who sang an anthem of the resistance, "They are Afraid of Us Because We Are Not Afraid." Both Xiomara and Pichu have become especially beloved by the resistance for their active participation in the marches and presence

throughout the country during Zelaya's exile, despite constant threats of violence against them.

Many expected Zelaya to profile a clear line of action for the process he will lead. Instead his comments were very general, mentioning the importance of wide range of actors, elements within the Resistance and international, thanking Colombia and Venezuela for their role in negotiating his return, recognizing the diversity and strength of the Resistance, and the importance of the international community in the struggle to confront the coup.

He asked the government of the United States to let the people of the Honduras construct its democracy and development without intervention, and condemned the United States for the failure of the San Jose accords.

Arturo Corrales, Minister of Planning, represented the Lobo administration in publically welcoming Zelaya. The Foreign Ministers of Venezuela, received by enthusiastic applause, and Colombia spoke, and many in the exhausted crowd began to disperse. They had seen Mel arrive in Honduras.

Zelaya proceeded to a meeting in the National Palace with de facto president Pepe Lobo, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States Jose Insulza, and other key diplomatic actors, leaving the impression that negotiations continue. He drove a car with his family, slowly navigating through the jubilant crowd that literally threw themselves at the car.

In his speech he referenced the need to define a strategy from town to town. It is understood he will visit towns across the country, engaging in a dialog, listening to the demands and experiences of the nation still amidst a military coup, making the path to national transformation by walking it. This, as many are extremely concerned for the safety of Zelaya and his ministers, reactionary forces behind the coup know the central role he plays in the massive resistance movement.

All afternoon, the callers to Radio Globo, the channel in which the Resistance radio program is aired, expressed their happiness, the sense of victory in the return of Zelaya (Si Se Pudo), debated the content of Zelaya's speech, analyzed the events of the day, in the open, analytical,

heartfelt, and growing public debate that has been the hallmark of the Resistance movement in Honduras.

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HONDURAS: Zelaya Says Coup Was International Conspiracy

By Thelma Mejía

TEGUCIGALPA, May 30, 2011 (IPS) - After his return to Honduras put an end to two years of exile, former President Manuel Zelaya said the coup in which he was removed on Jun. 28, 2009 was the work of an "international conspiracy" that should be investigated.

In a press conference Sunday, he said General Romeo Vásquez, head of the joint chiefs of staff at the time of the coup, had told him that some of the people plotting his overthrow wanted him killed. "He told me: some day you will understand what happened. I can't tell you, but the people who planned it discussed having you killed during the assault on your house, but the armed forces were totally opposed to your assassination," said the former president, who returned to a hero's welcome Saturday from the Dominican Republic.

Zelaya said Vásquez told him the coup plotters, angry at the military's refusal to kill him, threatened to hire paramilitaries to do the job. But the armed forces said they would not allow that to happen either, and that they would remove him from his home and take him to Costa Rica.

"The question is: who are they?" the former president said, calling for an investigation into the coup, which he said involved "actors from different sectors of society."

Zelaya was removed from his home by the military at gunpoint, still in his pyjamas, and put on a plane for Costa Rica, after he tried to organise a non-binding referendum asking voters if they wanted to rewrite the

constitution – an initiative that had been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

His return was the last condition for Honduras' readmission to the Organisation of American States (OAS), from which it was cast out after the coup. The resumption of the country's participation in the regional body is expected to be formalised next weekend, despite the opposition of Ecuador, which argues that those responsible for the coup should first be brought to justice.

The agreement for Zelaya's return was brokered by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. The deal, known as the Cartagena Accord, included the dropping of the fraud charges and arrest warrants faced by the former president. It also recognises the right of Hondurans to call for a public vote on eventual constitutional reforms.

Honduras' readmission to the OAS "cannot be delayed, because the country has met all of the requirements set by the international community and the Cartagena Accord," said international jurist Roberto Herrera.

He said the country's return to the regional body is based on "a gentleman's agreement that cannot be subject to new conditions added within the OAS, as Ecuador is demanding."

Zelaya's arrival in Honduras "opens a new chapter in the country, and his presence will mark the domestic political scene, but for the OAS and the international community, the last chapter is closed. The organisation's (Inter-American) Democratic Charter should now be reviewed, because the crisis in Honduras was handled poorly," Herrera told IPS.

The Cartagena Accord also included recognition of the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP) – the broad popular movement that emerged to protest the coup – as a political party, to be led by Zelaya.

The former president's wife Xiomara Castro, who became one of the leaders of the protest marches after her husband was removed from the country in the coup, has announced that she will run for president in 2013.

Civil society organisations say the Cartagena Accord has left many doubts unresolved, especially in the area of human rights. Activists say the rights abuses committed during the political crisis triggered by the coup should not go unpunished.

Bertha Oliva of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) welcomed Zelaya's return, but said she had "a bitter taste" in her mouth. "We do not see any indications of how and when those responsible for the crimes against humanity committed during and after the coup will be punished," she told IPS.

COFADEH and 20 other Honduran and international human rights organisations sent a message to the members of the OAS asking them not to approve Honduras' readmission on the argument that "the conditions are not in place."

They also announced protests and other measures to fight the impunity surrounding the human rights abuses.

More than 4,000 cases of violations of fundamental human rights were documented between June 2009 and late 2010, ranging from censorship and the closure of media outlets to brutal crackdowns on protesters, curfews, and reports of torture, rape and politically-motivated killings, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

On his return to the country, Zelaya was accompanied by former Panamanian President Martín Torrijos, former Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba, and representatives of humanitarian and political delegations from Latin America and Europe.

The FNRP held a vigil starting on Friday night, and organised cultural activities in the "Isis Obed" plaza, named after one of the "martyrs of the coup," who was killed Jul. 5, 2009 when Zelaya made an unsuccessful attempt to return to Tegucigalpa by plane.

Protest music, faces painted with the image of Argentine-Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Ché" Guevara and black and red flags, gave colour and warmth to the welcome, amidst a heavy police and military presence requested by the organisers.

Zelaya told the crowd: "I am here thanks to all of you, to your struggle and your effort, but also at the will of President (Porfirio) Lobo and the international community, because if the political will had been absent, this would not be possible, and I recognise that.

"I come full of optimism and hope, to search for solutions to the crisis generated by the coup, without forgetting the martyrs who fell in the crisis," he said, after highlighting the mediation by Colombia and Venezuela.

"We are on a crusade to organise ourselves politically at the head of the resistance front, and to wage a political battle to return to power and transform Honduras," added Zelaya, who enjoys broad popular support.

The former president then headed to the government palace, where he was met by Lobo, who came to power in January after elections organised by the coup government, and OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza.

"Today is the start of a new chapter, which repositions Zelaya's leadership, but it is not the solution to the country's crisis. Other battles lie ahead, but in the sphere of political proposals and debate," political analyst Raúl Pineda told IPS. (END)

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Gracias a la vida
Thank-you all very much