

Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • July 2009

Military Coup in Honduras – June 28, 2009

Dear friends,

Three weeks ago, we were about to publish our latest newsletter, when on June 28, the Honduran military and the economic elite overthrew the government of President Zelaya. This newsletter is dedicated to informing about the situation in Honduras and to raising funds for the pro-democracy movement.

Since our 1998 relief work in response to Hurricane Mitch (which killed over 30,000 and left hundreds of thousands homeless), Rights Action has continued to support grassroots and indigenous organizations in Honduras. We have also remained involved in projects related to the environmental and health hazards and human rights violations caused by Goldcorp Inc's open-pit, cyanide leaching gold mine.

Since the coup, Rights Action has had two staff working full time in Honduras with the pro-democracy movement:

- 1 reporting on all aspects of the coup (at www.rightsaction.org, read our series of "Honduras Coup Alerts");

- 2 providing human rights accompaniment to Honduran social movement leaders who have been targets of repression;
- 3 providing emergency funding to victims of repression and to groups involved in the pro-democracy movement.

Send us your questions and suggestions about this newsletter or our work in general. Make copies and share this information widely with family, friends and other interested folks.

We are thankful to do this work with your trust and financial support. ***Another world is possible, and necessary, and we are doing our best to make it happen.***

Annie Bird & Grahame Russell (co-directors); Ruben Dominguez, Rosario Martinez, Martha Garcia, Francois Guindon & Karen Spring (Guatemala); Freddie Schrider & Matt Simpson (part-time, Washington & Toronto)

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Make checks payable to "Rights Action" and mail to the appropriate US or Canadian office. **For donations of stock, contact:** Grahame Russell at info@rightsaction.org

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Jim Schrider
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Alert #4 • June 29

Rights Action Commentary

As this terrible, typical story unfolds in Honduras, keep in mind:

- the fear of the Honduran oligarchy and military is real participatory democracy
- the oligarchy and military that have orchestrated the coup are the same people that have long had and continue to have extensive military ties to the USA (go to School of the Americas Watch website for extensive background info), and extensive business and financial ties with the USA and Canada
- for decades, they have tightly controlled an effectively non-democratic, two-party state that defends their interests, on the backs of and at the expense of the human rights and well-being of their own population, Honduras being one of the most impoverished and exploited countries in the Americas
- their fear is not the non-binding, June 28th opinion poll, that President Zelaya was enabling, but the ground-swell movement of Honduran people and community based organizations that were pushing for and participating in this process
- since Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras, Nicaragua and parts of Guatemala in 1998, Rights Action has supported a number of amazing grassroots campesino and indigenous organizations that continue to work tirelessly for real democracy in Honduras. Leaders of these groups, like COPINH and OFRANEH, are now being targeted for repression
- this struggle for real democracy in Honduras is not over by a long shot

* * *

Alert #5 • June 30

Black and White, Not Grey

Rights Action calls on Canadians and Americans to directly and repeatedly contact your media and politicians and demand that the US and Canadian governments unequivocally denounce the military coup, denounce the 'de facto' government, and break all political, military & economic ties with Honduras until the democratic government is restored and there is a reconciliation and justice process in place.

The governments of the United States and Canada denounced the coup – the United States with more clarity, Canada with a muddled approach -, but then instead of demanding a return of the democratic government and trials for the coup plotters and implementers, both governments have called for discussions between all the parties (including, of course, the coup plotters and the military regime now in place).

IMAGINE: An organized gang of wealthy, well-armed criminals plan their crime ahead of time, break into your home; steal your property; kill and/or physically abuse some of your family members; prevent you from communicating your situation to anyone, including the media and the legal and political authorities; ... and then imagine that other people come and say the solution is for you to sit down and talk with the criminals and solve your problems peacefully with them.

This is our issue. Historically, and on-going today, the Canadian and particularly US governments, and both our private sectors – including mining companies, sweatshops,

fruit companies, etc - have had extensive economic and military relations with the Honduran oligarchies, militaries and their governments.

The Honduran oligarchy and military are carrying out this coup to maintain in place an unjust, exploitative and often repressive status quo – one that has also benefited US and Canadian investors, businesses and consumers. It is this unjust status quo that the people of Honduras are trying to change, via opinion polls and ballot boxes, to possibly form a National Constituent Assembly that might lead to popular participation in a process of serious constitutional reform.

Once the coup and repression have ended, once the legitimate government has been restored, once the coup conspirators have been identified and put on trial, then, and only then, there will be many 'grey' issues for Hondurans to sit down discuss and resolve peacefully, politically, respecting the rule of law.

But, there is nothing 'grey' to discuss or resolve about the illegal and brutal coup.

* * *

Alert #16 • July 5

Tear-Gas, M-16 Bullets and the Dead

By Grahame Russell, at the Tegucigalpa "Toncontin" airport

At 3pm, Honduran soldiers opened fire with M-16s machineguns on an unarmed crowd. At least 2 are dead, and four wounded. One week after the military coup overthrew the government of President Zelaya, the military-oligarchic regime has furthered hardened its position against the pro-democracy movement.

As on Saturday, today, 100,000 or more pro-democracy Hondurans marched to the airport to welcome home President Zelaya. 1000s of heavily armed soldiers and police have militarized the airport – were waiting.

The Honduran army placed military trucks all over the run way. Protesters watched as the plane Zelaya was in flew around the airport, trying to land; they watched as the Honduran air force sent a fighter jet to shadow the plane; they watched as Zelaya's plane flew away.

EMERSON

Emerson is a student leader and member of the protest discipline committee. (Due to repression, we do not use his name or show his photo. We are maintaining contact with Emerson) At 4pm, we spoke on the second floor of the shot out Popeyes fast-food chicken restaurant.



Top: Every window on the airport side of Popeyes was shot out.



Soldiers grabbed Emerson, put him face down on the ground, fired off rounds of live bullets all around him, terrorizing him, and kicked him in the ribs.

Around 3pm, Emerson was eating chicken and fries on the second floor of Popeyes, across from the army-guarded airport, when the soldiers began firing tear gas into the protesters. He ran out and across the road to the front of crowd, trying to control the anti-coup protesters. Tear gas canisters were thrown back into the soldiers; then they opened fire.

With people fleeing in all directions, soldiers grabbed Emerson, put him face down on the ground, fired off rounds of live bullets all around him, terrorizing him, and kicked him in the ribs.

40 minutes later, he found me on the 2nd floor of Popeyes, riddled with M-16 bullet holes and broken glass. He sat at the same table he had been at when the shooting began and all the patrons fled. Still hungry, he proceeded to finish eating his chicken and fries.



Top: Looking out the second floor window of Popeyes, back across to the soldiers and police guarding the airport runway. Right: Emerson's hand, with some of the bullet shells he collected that soldiers had fired all around him.



When he saw the little boy, who was struck in the head with a bullet ... he picked him up, hoping to carry him to safety ... the little boy died, leaving his blood on Juan Angel's clothes.

Left: Juan Angel Antunes Antunes, with his identity card; a supporter carries a bullet shell.



Cesar Silva picked up a teenager who had been shot in the head. He carried him to a vehicle ... and this youth died.



On July 11, 2009, thousands marched to and gathered at the spot where the young man was killed. Later, it was confirmed that his name is Isis Obed Murillo Mencia. The banner reads: "Isis Obed Murillo, You Are here! In the liberation of the country". Below that, on the wall: "Plaza Obed Murillo and Alex Zavala" – Alex is the 8-year old who was shot and killed.

A 73 YEAR OLD CAMPESINO FROM OLANCHO

Sitting near Emerson in Popeyes, before the tear-gas and shooting, had been a mother and her little boy. They too had fled, when the bullets began flying through the windows and walls. Not long after, that 8 year old boy was cut down by an M-16 bullet in the head.

I spoke with Juan Angel Antunes Antunes, a 73 year old campesino from Olancho. He was here protesting, as well, when the soldiers opened fire. When he saw the little boy, who had just been eating in Popeyes and was struck in the head while fleeing, he picked him up to carry him to safety ... the little boy died, leaving his blood on Juan Angel's clothes.

TRIED TO SAVE A TEENAGER

Just down the road from Juan Angel, 50 yards from the airport, I came across Cesar Silva, a journalist from Channel 8. He had picked up a teenager who had been shot in the head. He carried him to a vehicle ... and this youth died.

* * *

Another corner has been turned by the military / coup regime. They are defying international law; they have militarized their country; they are using live bullets against their own people.

The Honduran people are clear in their resolve. They absolutely need the support and resolve of all other people and governments in the Americas.

FUNDING NEEDS

SHORT-TERM GOAL: \$75,000

Funds will be [and are being] used as follows:

- support of our partner groups for continued work in defense of democracy, the rule of law and human rights: **\$50,000**
- emergency funds for 'at risk' leaders being targeted by the military regime: **\$5,000**
- legal defense funds for people illegally detained by the regime: **\$5,000**
- funds for communications, transportation and food related to defense of democracy and rule of law: **\$10,000**
- funds for delegations of human rights defenders from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua to come to Honduras to accompany the Honduran people: **\$5,000**

BASIC DEMANDS OF THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

- unequivocal denunciation of the military coup
- no recognition of the military/ de facto regime of Roberto Michelletti
- the unconditional return of the entire constitutional government
- increasing economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup regime
- respect for safety and human rights of all Hondurans
- the application of international and national justice against the coup plotters, and
- reparations for victims of the violations committed during this illegal coup

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