

Canada and the Military Coup in Honduras: Fact Sheet

Basic statistics:

- **Population:** 7.2 million (UN, 2008)
- **Capital:** Tegucigalpa
- **Area:** 112,492 sq km (43,433 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Spanish, indigenous languages, English
- **Life expectancy:** 67 years (men), 74 years (women) (UN)
- **Main exports:** Coffee, bananas, shellfish, meat, timber, gold and other minerals
- **GNI per capita:** US\$1,600 (World Bank, 2007)
- **Population earning less than \$2 a day** (UN HDR, 2007/08) - 35.7
- **Poverty rate:** 50.7 %
- **Human development index ranking:** 117th of 179 countries (2006)
- **Political system:** President, unicameral, 128-member congress and municipal authorities are elected every 4 years. At the time of the June 28 coup, the Liberal Party of Honduras held 62 seats, the National Party 55, the left-leaning Democratic Unification party (UD) 5, the Christian Democrats (centre-right) 4 and the PINU (centrist) 2. Since the transition to civilian rule in 1982, the executive, legislative and judiciary branches have been controlled by the centre-right Liberal and the right-wing National parties.

Prelude to the coup

Those who perpetrated the June 28th coup argue that President Manuel Zelaya was legally removed from power by the other branches of the State (legislature and judiciary) after violating the Honduran constitution and defying a Supreme Court order not to hold a public consultation on constitutional reform.

At issue are stipulations in the current Honduran constitution that prohibit the reform or modification of certain key clauses in the constitution, including one that limits presidents from serving more than one 4-year term.

President Zelaya had organized for June 28, 2009 a non-binding plebiscite asking Hondurans if they were in favour of adding to the November 29 general election a referendum question asking voters if they supported holding elections for a Constituent Assembly that would develop a new constitution for the country. Once developed, the new constitution would then need to be ratified in a national referendum.

The current Honduran constitution, the sixteenth since independence from Spain, was developed by a Constituent Assembly that had been created under the military junta of General Policarpo Paz García. It entered into force on January 20, 1982 just a week after Honduras ended ten years of military rule.

Since a Constituent Assembly could conceivably propose changes that would allow presidential re-election, the Supreme Court ruled that Zelaya's June 28 poll was illegal.

The current Supreme Court was selected in the fall of 2008 by a committee dominated by the Honduran business sector and the National and Liberal parties, and assumed office in January 2009. During the selection process Bertha Oliva, the civil society representative on the committee withdrew her participation because, "it became obvious that the magistrates were being selected with the political aim of blocking President Zelaya."

While Zelaya's June 28 public consultation provided Zelaya's opponents with a date for the coup, there were a number of other factors that led to tensions between Zelaya and the political, economic, church and military elites in the country. These include:

1. Raising the minimum wage by 60% from about \$6 to \$9.60 a day.
2. Honduras entry into ALBA in August, 2008.
3. Zelaya's support for a initiative by the Honduran women's movement to legalize the "morning after" pill.
4. The entry of Honduras into Petro Caribe (Breaking the monopoly of existing oil refineries in the country)
5. Zelaya's call for a new constitution.

Of the above, it is likely the new constitution that those opposed to Zelaya most feared. In other Latin American countries where constituent assemblies have been held in the past decade (Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia), the new constitutions arising from the process have strengthened the role of poor and marginalized groups at the expense of transnational corporations and these countries' traditional elites.

International Response to the Coup

Within days of the June 28th coup, emergency sessions were convened by the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA, a regional cooperation agreement of 9 Latin American and Caribbean nations), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations General Assembly. All these sessions unanimously approved motions condemning the coup and calling for the reinstatement of President Zelaya. The OAS voted to suspend Honduras membership in the organization pending the reinstatement of president Zelaya.

Since then, most countries of the Western Hemisphere have suspended diplomatic relations with the de facto government (notable exceptions are Canada and the US). The US, the European Union, and the countries of Latin America have suspended most bilateral aid and military assistance to the de facto government. The World Bank, Interamerican Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund have also suspended credits amounting to about USD \$500 million destined for Honduras.

When the de facto government of Roberto Micheletti rejected OAS attempts to establish a dialogue that would lead to the reinstatement of President Zelaya, the US launched an initiative brokered by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias that led to the "San José "Accords." This proposed agreement would reinstate Zelaya as president in a "unity" government of both Zelaya supporters and people named by the de facto regime. The agreement also includes an amnesty for both Zelaya and the perpetrators of the coup, moves up the date of the national elections to Oct 28, transfers the command of the armed forces to the Supreme Court, and requires Zelaya to "abstain from calling for the convening of a National Constitutional Assembly."

While Zelaya's representatives signed the accords, the de facto regime has so far refused to do so. It should be noted also, that most social organizations in Honduras also reject the accords because they block the convening of a constituent assembly. The constituent assembly has become the principal demand of the Honduran pro-democracy movement, which hopes that a new constitution will reduce the influence of the country's economic, and political elites who carried out the coup.

To date, only Panama has said that it will recognize the results of the November 29 elections if the de facto regime does not relinquish power before then. Canada remains silent on this issue.

Rights Violations since the coup:

There are no up-to-date statistics available regarding the number of human rights violations that have taken place since June 28. The Honduran Human Rights group COFADEH (Families of the Disappeared) documented 1155 violations during the first 2 weeks of the coup, including 1046 illegal detentions, 3 extra-judicial executions and 65 beatings. While it does not provide exact figures, the preliminary report of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights mission to Honduras (August 17-21, 2009) confirmed "a pattern of disproportionate use of public force, arbitrary detentions, and the control of information aimed at limiting political participation by a sector of the citizenry. The Commission confirmed the use of repression against demonstrations through the placement of military roadblocks; the arbitrary enforcement of curfews; the detentions of thousands of people; cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; and poor detention conditions. The control of information has been implemented through the temporary shutdown of some media outlets; a ban on the transmission of signals of certain cable television stations that were reporting on the coup d'état; the selective use of power outages to affect the transmission by audiovisual media reporting on the coup; and attacks and threats against journalists from media outlets with editorial positions opposed to the coup d'état."

According to reports from COFADEH, the Honduran Human Rights Committee (CODEH) and other sources, there have been at least 10 extrajudicial killings related to the coup. This figure does not include those killed in the ongoing military and police crackdown since the September 21 return to Honduras of President Zelaya.

Canada's Role

Canada is the second largest foreign investor in Honduras and Canada is negotiating a free trade agreement with Honduras as part of a broader trade pact that would include Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. Bilateral trade between Canada and Honduras reached \$238.3 million in 2008, up 35.4 percent from a year earlier. Much of the Canadian private sector investment is mining exploration and the maquiladora assembly for export plants.

Meanwhile, Honduras is the largest recipient of Canadian foreign aid in Central America. Additionally, Honduras was named one of [20 countries](#) that will be targeted as priorities in Canada's newly reshaped international development efforts.

According to the most recent figures from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), foreign aid to Honduras totaled a \$16.4 million in 2006-2007, the greatest in Central America. (Source: Christopher Mason, Governance village.)

While the Canadian government condemned the coup, it maintains diplomatic relations, bilateral aid and a small military training program with the de facto government. Public

statements by Canadian representatives have argued that Zelaya holds some responsibility for the coup, and appear to blame both sides for the violence and rights violations committed by the de facto government's security forces.