

Report of Global Exchange Delegation to Honduras

August 7-15, 2009

Purpose and itinerary of delegation

Members went to witness, accompany the daily protests to help prevent violations of human rights, and report back on the current situation in Honduras since the coup of June 28, 2009. The delegation's itinerary included meetings with:

- Berta Oliva of the Committee of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras (COFADEH), a leading human rights organization
- Leaders of the Frente Nacional Contra El Golpe de Estado en Honduras (National Front Against the Coup in Honduras) including Rafael Alegria (Via Campesina), Juan Barahona (Bloque Popular), Eulogio Chaves (COPEMH), Israel Salinas (CUTH) and Porfirio Ponce (STIBYS)
- Worker and *campesino* union leaders in both Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, including leaders of the STIBYS (Bottlers Union) and a maquiladora union
- Father Andrés Tamayo
- Mrs. Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, First Lady of Honduras
- Carlos H. Reyes, Independent Presidential candidate November 2009 elections
- U.S. Ambassador Hugo Llorens
- Jari Dixon and others from the Lawyers Front Against the Coup
- Dr. Juan Almdares and Alba Mejia, Center for Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and their families (CPTRT)
- Gilda Rivera, Women's Rights Center (CDM)
- Gustavo Ramos, Radio Globo
- Dozens of rank and file protestors
- Many people on the street and service workers in hotels, taxis, and restaurants.

The coordinator of the delegation was Andrés Thomas Conteris, Director of the Program on the Americas of Nonviolence International. He was assisted by Joseph Shansky and Tamar Sharabi.

Members of delegation

- Maria Robinson, Tiburon, California -- from Marin Interfaith Task Force
- Alice Kitchen, Kansas City Missouri – Social Worker
- Allan Fisher, San Francisco, CA --



(L to R) Maria Robinson, Judy Ancel, Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, Alice Kitchen, Allan Fisher

- representing its Labor Council & Bay Area Labor Committee for Peace & Justice
- Judy Ancel, Kansas City, Kansas -- representing the Cross Border Network for Justice and Solidarity

Background on Honduras

Honduras has a population of 7.8 million, two million of whom live in the cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Hondurans are 90% *mestizo*. Life expectancy is 66 years, and GDP per capita is only \$2,600 per year. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Central America with 51% of the population below the poverty line and 25% earning less than one dollar a day. An oligarchy made up of some ten families control most of the wealth. Remittances from Hondurans living abroad represent over a quarter of GDP. Apparel, bananas, shrimp, and coffee are major exports, 69% of which go to the U.S. Honduras has a history of frequent coups and military rule. In the 1980s Honduras became a staging ground for the US war against the Contras in Nicaragua which spilled over in harsh repression, torture and many disappearances of citizens. The Constitution of 1982 provides for a strong executive, a unicameral National Congress, and a judiciary appointed by the National Congress. The president is directly elected to a single 4-year term by popular vote. He cannot succeed himself. The two major political parties are the Liberal Party and the National Party with three smaller registered parties.

Observations and Findings

1. A military *coup d'etat* took place in Honduras on June 28, 2009. Although the *de facto* regime currently in power claims that the Honduran Congress and Supreme Court legally removed President Manuel Zelaya from office, the delegation affirmed that in fact Zelaya was kidnapped by the armed forces and forcibly expatriated. Without these actions by the military and their continued support of the civilian coup leaders, they would not be in power. Their legal justification for the coup appears to be riddled with problems.¹ The current government is supported by members of the ruling political parties, a coalition of business leaders representing the biggest business interests, and the armed forces along with Billy Joya, a key security adviser to the Micheletti



Wall of 1980s disappeared at COFADEH

¹ The delegation met with Mrs. Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, wife of the deposed President, Jari Dixon from the Committee of Lawyers against the coup, the U.S. Ambassador Hugo Llorens, all of whom testified to the facts or legal arguments supporting the conclusion that it was a military coup. Media reports depicted the coup leaders' legal justifications.

regime, is accused of being a 1980s death squad member. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church is widely perceived to be a coup supporter and has not condemned it or the ensuing repression of some of its own priests.

2. Many citizens with whom we talked are deeply upset about the violations of the Constitution; many lament the disruption and decline of economic activity. A large group of citizens is passive and uninvolved and has not taken sides. For those who have taken sides, the divisive issues include constitutional and legal matters, policies of Zelaya's administration such as a minimum wage increase of more than 50%, proposals for land reform and provision of school breakfasts to elementary students, geopolitical considerations involving Honduras's membership in the ALBA² and Zelaya's relationship with Hugo Chavez. The delegation was told that the major support for the coup comes from the national business elite. Many stated with no proof, except past history, that they suspected that the coup was approved by the US embassy before it happened.
3. The international corporate media is largely absent, and reporting we've seen by them is often inaccurate and cursory. CNN En Español bears a heavy responsibility for accuracy and neutrality because many Hondurans considered it to be the truth. Unfortunately their coverage of the August 11th demonstration adopted the coup regime's point of view and assumed that post-rally vandalism was caused by demonstrators. An overwhelming number of the national and local media are biased, inflammatory, and favor the coup and its backers,³ and there have been a number of reports that journalists from opposition media have been targeted for repression.
4. The resistance to the coup is large, diverse and appears to be growing after 48 days since the coup. It includes working people, professionals, *campesinos/as*, public employees, elderly, indigenous,



A part of the August 11th march came from Olancho, a six-day walk.

² The ALBA or Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America is an international cooperation agreement of countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for social, economic and political integration which is not based on free trade but on a vision of social welfare, sustainability and cooperation. Its inspiration comes from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

³ We saw no major newspapers that were opposed to the coup, and only one radio (Radio Globo) and two TV stations (Channels 36 and 50) which are opposed. We visited the office of the monthly newspaper Libertador which opposes the coup (on the web: <http://www.ellibertador.hn>). Major media coverage locally and internationally of the August 11th demonstrations in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula focused almost exclusively on post demonstration violence and made the dubious assumption that it was instigated by protestors.



The most popular slogan of the marches was “Nos tienen miedo porque no tenemos miedo” –“They are afraid of us because we are not afraid.”

women, and students. The daily demonstrations we attended were well-organized, completely peaceful, through conscious design, entertaining, inspiring, and huge. Demonstrators were from all over Honduras and were well-informed. The movement against the coup appears to be unified among groups that were known for squabbling in the past. The resistance is made up of people who are

making extraordinary sacrifices. *Campesino/as* marched as much as eight days to converge in the two August 11 demonstrations in Tegucigalpa and

San Pedro Sula. They slept in churches, schools, NGOs and union halls, and some were subject to fierce repression.

5. We personally witnessed severe repression on the part of the police and military including unprovoked tear gassing, arbitrary arrest, beatings, theft of property from demonstrators and their organizations, and possible use of provocateurs.⁴ All this was in spite of the peaceful nature of the protests. Victims of this seem to have no recourse except to file reports with government prosecutors and with human rights organizations. However they have very low expectations that the government will do anything. We did not see a consistent presence by any of the best-known international human rights representatives while we were there, and the dedicated local human rights organizations have very limited resources.



6. Many Hondurans look at U.S. reaction to the coup as being two-faced and lukewarm because of its contradictory statements about whether the coup was a “military coup” thus invoking Section 7008 of the FY2009 US Foreign Operations Law requiring the U.S. to cut all aid except humanitarian aid.⁵ We as well as many Hondurans are dismayed that the

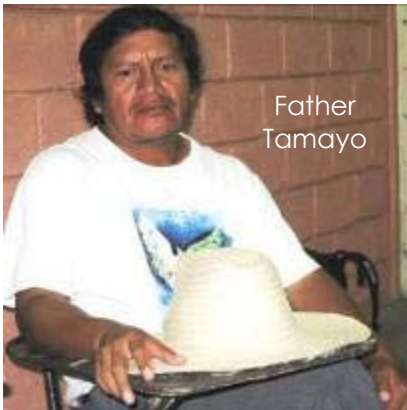
⁴ See testimonies of Edgardo Napoleon Valeriano and Noemy Lizeth Carias Jiron in the appendix.

⁵ Economic aid continues under the Millennium Challenge Fund, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the continued training at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas). See

U.S. and Japan are the only two countries that have not withdrawn their ambassadors. We are concerned about the U.S. government's adoption of a wait-and-see attitude toward the coup leaders' failure to accept the return of President Zelaya, as stipulated by the initial resolution of the Organization of American States.

6. The Ambassador told us he is waiting for the visit (presumably around August 24) of several foreign ministers of members of the Organization of American States. Also, the promise of the U.S. Embassy to a previous delegation and to us to publicize ongoing human rights violations on their web page is as yet unfulfilled⁶ although the Ambassador assured us that they are reporting on human rights violations to the State Department. Finally, we are puzzled by the embassy's canceling of only four diplomatic visas of coup leaders and their failure to cancel the visa of Armed Forces head and School of the Americas graduate General Romeo Vasquez Velazquez who is a coup leader.

7. The coup has been endorsed by the leaders of Honduras's evangelical churches, and Catholic Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez failed to condemn the coup. Instead he issued a statement discouraging President Zelaya from returning; arguing that violence would break out and lives would be lost. His actions were perceived by many as support for the coup. Several priests resist the coup, most notably Father Andrés Tamayo, an indigenous Salvadoran who became a Honduran citizen. He speaks out for the poor and for the restoration of democracy. We attended an outdoor Mass on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa on the eve of the big August 11th march and rally where Padre Tamayo urged both tolerance and disciplined nonviolent resistance to injustice. Tamayo has received many threats and must operate with extreme caution. We are deeply concerned for his safety.



8. We were pleased to see broad representation of women in leadership of NGOs, some unions and the resistance despite the perpetuation of great gender-based inequality. We met with Zelaya's Minister of Labor and

<http://www.narconews.com/Issue59/article3767.html> for a report on our meeting with the U.S. Ambassador on these issues.

⁶ The only reference to human rights violations we could find is in a July 3rd press release on the US Embassy web page available only in Spanish. It says that the embassy does express its "profound disturbance about restrictions imposed by the authorities on certain fundamental civil rights and about reports of intimidation and censure of certain individuals and media centers."

Social Security, Mayra Mejia, one of a number of women in his government. We also interviewed Doris Garcia, Minister of the National Institute of Women who spoke very favorably of the commitment to erasing economic and social inequality. Gilda Rivera from the Center for Women's Rights spoke to us about the role of women in the resistance. In the marches women of all ages, from girls to grandmothers, were strong participants. Women, unfortunately, are also among the victims of beatings and arbitrary arrests.



Fabia Gutierrez, maquiladora union leader and daughter

9. There is a *de facto* state of siege and frequent curfews. Many citizens told us that the rule of law no longer exists and that the separation of powers under the Constitution has been erased. The *de facto* government is preoccupied with military and police control of the streets, targeting key figures of the resistance and the Zelaya government and putting out propaganda accusing those in opposition of corruption or of being foreigners. They have been unable to consolidate control because of mass strikes and firings and resistance from within key government departments like Education and Public Health.
10. We met at the home of Carlos H Reyes and witnessed his wounds from the brutal police beatings during a recent demonstration. Carlos was eager to support solidarity initiatives with U.S. unions and efforts to make the struggle more visible in the U.S.
11. Finally, it appears to us that the situation in Honduras is becoming more dangerous by the day. As the resistance to the coup grows, so does the repression, and many people expressed their fear to us of a civil war. The failure of coup leaders to engage in serious negotiations, stalling by the U.S., and their unwillingness to act in concert with the other nations of the Americas all increase the likelihood that there will be a boycott of the November elections extending the crisis into next year and beyond.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for more international solidarity delegations. We congratulate Global Exchange, Code Pink, Nonviolence International, the Quixote Center, the Hemispheric Social Alliance, for their support for such delegations and urge anyone considering such a trip to do so as soon as possible.

2. International human rights organizations must make Honduras a priority. Grant-making institutions should be encouraged to provide needed funds to support local human rights organizations like COFADEH, and individuals are encouraged to give funds as well. Tax deductible donations can be given via Nonviolence International at https://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5904/shop/custom.jsp?donate_page_KEY=959 ... Please specify that the donation is for Honduras where it says "Program you wish to support".
3. We urge individuals and organizations to contact President Obama, the State Department and their Congressional representatives about the urgent need for the United States to take stronger measures against the coup regime and speak out forcefully against the ongoing and serious human rights abuses being perpetrated against people opposed to the coup.
4. The U.S. government should legally declare that a military coup has taken place in accord with section 7008 of the FY2009 Foreign Operations law and cut off all non-humanitarian aid immediately including that of the Millennium Challenge Fund and the National Endowment for Democracy. It should freeze the assets in the U.S. and deny diplomatic and tourist visas for all coup leaders and advisers as requested by President Manuel Zelaya. The Pentagon must immediately end training for all members of the Honduran military, including those currently being trained at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas). Finally, the U.S. government should not support or recognize elections in Honduras if they take place under the coup regime.⁷
5. We call on CNN en Español especially as well as CNN, National Public Radio, and other U.S. news outlets to increase their coverage of the coup and of the resistance to it. Every attempt to balance coverage by broadening sources should be made.
6. We encourage more solidarity actions by unions in the U.S. and Honduras which could make an economic impact and, along with many leaders of the National Front Against the Coup, encourage support for the International Fast for Nonviolent Insurrection in Honduras which is currently being planned.
7. In order to help the grass roots movement in Honduras document the human rights violations and their actions against the coup, we propose collecting video cameras that can be sent to Honduras and request that

⁷ President Zelaya has said that he will not recognize the results of the November elections if he is not reinstated by September 1st (Interview by David Romero with Enrique Flores Lanza, Zelaya's Chief of Staff - Radio Globo, August 18, 2009)

independent media in Honduras help train activists to use them. Contact Joseph Shansky (fallow3@gmail.com)

8. Thanks to our guides and all the Hondurans and Americans who gave their time to inform us. We are in awe of their courage and commitment to democracy.

For more information about delegations, contact Andrés Thomas Conteris, andres@nvintl.net or call 202-232-1999.



The contact people for the delegation are: Judy Ancel, 816-835-4745 jancel@igc.org and Maria Robinson 415-250-8880 mariarobinson1@earthlink.net⁸

**Photos from August 11
Mass Demonstration**



**Allan, Andrés, and Joe
meet Carlos H. Reyes,
union leader and
candidate**

⁸ Most of the delegation paid their own expenses for the trip. Allan Fischer was in part supported by the San Francisco Labor Council.

Testimony of Dr. Edgardo Napoleon Valeriano - August 14, 2009

Dr. Valeriano is 55 years old. He is a medical doctor from San Pedro Sula.

On Thursday August 13 I went to the 2:30 rally against the coup at the Plaza Central. A brigade of police was stationed nearby. As people were leaving, the police chased them. I was chased as well and ran until I could go no farther. The police caught up with me, and five policemen beat me with their clubs. At the end a soldier hit me on the back with a chain.

As they beat me they asked how much I was being paid to demonstrate. They asked if I was Venezuelan or Nicaraguan, or Cuban. They stole my watch, my cell phone, and my glasses.

They then took me to the police station. I was covered with blood, was still bleeding, and felt like I couldn't breathe and asked to be taken to the hospital. The patrol took me and later came back to take me back to jail, but the nurses refused to release me.

In the hospital I saw about twenty people who had been beaten. I also saw a man who hadn't even been demonstrating who was about 60 years old. He had been beaten badly, worse than me across his back.

Many people were in pain, but the hospital had no pain medication.

I also saw Salvador, the young man who had been shot by police on August 11. He needed an operation but there were not enough operating rooms or medicine.

I was in Paraiso two weeks ago when a man was stabbed a number of times, and his body was left by the police for others to see.

transcript and translation by Judy Ancel, jancel@igc.org

Photos of Dr Valeriano's injuries





Testimony of Noemy Lizeth Carias Jiron, August 14, 2009

Noemy Lizeth Carias Jiron is a teacher of electronics at the Institute Saul Zelaya Jimenez.

Several weeks ago about July 24 I went to the area near the border with Nicaragua to join the group that was supporting the return of President Zelaya in Alauca el Paraiso. We were about 15-20,000 people and were surrounded by soldiers and police. Both began shooting tear gas bombs at very close range. I was shot in the side of my leg near the knee from just a couple of feet away. When I turned I was shot again in the back of my leg. This caused deep bruises and damage to the ligaments so that I must keep it wrapped with a support bandage and walk with a cane.

The army and police treated us very badly. We were encircled for three days and refused any water and food, having only what we had brought with us. Finally they allowed us to leave, but not by the highway, but walking through the mountains. I don't know how many died.

On Tuesday August 11th I was at the Pedagogic (Teachers) University in Tegucigalpa when police gassed us from late afternoon until early morning. Many people were vomiting from the gas.

Afterwards we collected remains of 25 tear gas bombs, some of which had been dropped from a helicopter, and about 40 pieces of wood (wooden bullets) that they were shooting at us. We put it all on display on a desk at the university. We had also confiscated bombs from infiltrators. On Wednesday morning we notified the prosecutor (Fiscal) and COFADEH (Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared) about this collection.

Then on Wednesday August 12 I was at the Pedagogic University where they were preparing food to serve to the people. Soldiers entered the building from the back guns drawn and shooting bullets. They entered the storage area where we were and told us to all get down on the floor and show our hands. They pointed their rifles at our chests, backs and heads. I have problems with my back and can't lie flat on the floor. A soldier threatened to kill me.

When they entered they shot off the locks. They took all our cell phones and wallets, first from the men, then from the women. They only returned some of



Noemy Lizeth Carias Jiron

them. I didn't have anything on me. They took all the evidence we had inventoried and shown to the prosecutor. We were keeping it for COFADEH. They put it all on the floor added Molotov cocktails and dynamite of their own and told us they were going to charge us with terrorism for manufacturing bombs. They said they would arrest all forty of us. The penalty for this would be five years in prison.

We asked that the human rights people be called. There were army, Preventative Police, and the National Office of Criminal Investigation (DNIC) there with us. They tried to separate us but we wouldn't let them. Some of us were injured. Finally the Red Cross arrived and wanted them to send the injured to the hospital but the soldiers wouldn't let people leave, even the wounded. One girl was vomiting and another had been beaten. We were held three hours. In all eight were wounded of the forty of us they were holding. I was hurt.



When COFADEH and a women's organization arrived they told the soldiers that the "evidence" had already been registered and couldn't be used against us.*

The prosecutors came (fiscal) and let the injured leave. I was taken to the hospital. The soldiers followed us into the emergency room and had to be thrown out.

They let everybody go about 8pm but before that they took photos and videos of everyone

even though we asked them not to since we weren't criminals or charged with anything. They took them anyway. They showed people some steel tubes and said that if they didn't shut up they would shut them up. We had no water during that time, even for people who needed to take medicine. Only after the human rights people arrived did they let anyone go to the bathroom accompanied by a soldier.

When they finally left they took cell phones, the food we had prepared and all the rest of the food.

At the end of the interview Noemy began to cry. She was obviously very traumatized by this ordeal and her injuries. She said, "Please don't forget us. We need your help."

Transcript and translation by Judy Ancel (jancel@igc.org)

* Our group picked up a spent tear gas canister near the Pedagogic University which was made in Pennsylvania.