

## ***A military coup in Honduras !***

On June 28, 2009, a military coup in Honduras removed democratically elected President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya from power. He was sent out of the country while the military government of Robert Micheletti, Speaker of the House and "provisional president" seized power.

The Honduran constitution allows the president only a single four year term in office. The overturned president, Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, was seeking to hold what he called a "non-binding" public poll to ask Hondurans whether they would agree to add a referendum question in the upcoming Presidential elections in November 2009. The question would be regarding a change to the constitution to allow a President more than one four-year term in office.

Opponents, including the military, interpreted this as an attempt to follow the example set by Chavez in Venezuela to remain in office for an extended period of time. They argued that only the Supreme Court has the authority to initiate such a referendum. Both the Supreme Court and the Congress opposed the referendum. When the military expressed their disapproval of Zelaya's proposed referendum, he dismissed the top General. That was probably a decisive factor in setting off the coup. A statement from the country's Supreme Court said that the military was acting in accordance with the court's instruction that the referendum not take place.

North American media have identified Zelaya as a "leftist" although when he was elected as president he was seen as a center-right candidate. Two diametrically opposed views underscore the deep divisions and simmering anger evident in Honduras, where those who support Zelaya are generally poor and those who oppose him tend to come from the middle and upper classes. The de facto government and its supporters say Zelaya's populist measures were designed to build support so he could manipulate the constitution and remain in power.

The acting government in Honduras has put restrictions on news coverage of the situation but information that has leaked out reports use of force by the police against demonstrators opposing the coup. Public sector unions in the country and several popular movements, including a network of Women's organizations called for a general strike.

There is a class "divide" between those most eager to be rid of Zelaya (including business leaders and the military) and those opposed to the way the military has acted.

Honduras is one of the poorest and most inequitable countries in Latin America. A 2008 U.N. report on poverty and social exclusion in Latin America said seven of 10 Hondurans were living in poverty; the highest poverty rate among the 18 countries surveyed.

To many poor Hondurans, deposed president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya was a trailblazing ally who scrapped school tuition fees, significantly raised the minimum wage, and took on "big business". *"He met with us -- the taxi drivers could go to the presidency and talk to him, the poor farmers, the women's groups,"* said Berta Cáceres, 38, an Indigenous rights activist who has been organizing pro-Zelaya rallies since his ousting last month.

The Organization of American States has stated that it would keep pressure on coup leaders that ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya last month, while supporting dialogue to end the crisis. Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza said the OAS would continue to apply "strong sanctions" on the interim government led by Roberto Micheletti and support mediation brokered by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias.

The Americas Policy Group of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, of which YMCA Canada and the YMCAs of Quebec are members, wrote to Prime Minister Harper on July 22, 2009. The following are excerpts from that letter:

*"We urge the Canadian government to take immediate steps and use all of the leverage at its disposal to ensure that the democratic order, respect for human rights and rule of law are restored in Honduras. Specifically, Canada must send a much stronger message, backed by concrete actions, to signal its commitment to the restoration of the elected president Manuel Zelaya to complete his mandate until January 2010..."*

*The current crisis in Honduras represents an important challenge for the Canadian government to stand by the stated values that underpin Canada's reengagement in the Americas.*

Canada's support for the OAS Resolution of July 4th, 2009 - resulting in the suspension of Honduras from the OAS - was an important first step.

*We urge Canada to follow the lead of the US Government, the European Union, the World Bank, the Inter American Development Bank, the Central American Bank of Economic Integration, among others, all of which have "paused" programs, transfers, budgetary support and new loans to Honduras. We also ask that you:*

*~ Immediately enforce a mandatory embargo on all funds and transfers to the Military training assistance program, and suspend any other promised funds to Honduran security forces, military or police;*

*In light of the pervasive culture of impunity which has allowed such a coup to unfold, we urge Canada to:*

*~ Call on the defacto regime to cease human rights violations and restore human rights protections to all Hondurans. In particular, Canada should demand that the Honduran authorities immediately release any government officials, and political activists who may be currently detained and refrain from further arbitrary detentions; and guarantee the right to freedom of expression so that supporters of the democratically-elected President, human rights defenders, and journalists are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal;*

*~ Support the application of international law and national justice against the coup perpetrators, and call for reparations for the illegal actions and rights violations committed;*

*~ Act urgently in a way which will dissuade or circumvent Canadian investors or business leaders who may be providing support to the coup and countering the OAS resolve to increase the pressure on the regime."*

One pro-Zelaya rally had tragic consequences and has saddened YMCAs around the world. Isy Obed Murillo Mencias died on the 5th July as a result of injuries sustained whilst participating in a peaceful demonstration near the Tocontin airport in Tegucigalpa. Isy was a participant in the Honduras YMCA's international cooperation program "Entra 21", which supports young people through digital media.

His sister, Rebeca Murillo, 22, said that she and her siblings saw the possibility of a new beginning with Zelaya -- and that that is why she, Isy and two other brothers went to the airport to rally for him. Gunfire then rang out, she said, and the next thing she recalls was seeing Isy's lifeless body.

In a letter of condolence to the National General Secretary of the Honduran YMCA, the Secretary General of the World Alliance of YMCAs, Dr Bart Shaha said: *"On behalf of the World Alliance of YMCAs I would like to express our deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Isis Obed. We too are shocked and angered by the senseless killing of innocent civilians like Isis and pray with you for peace and justice. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all."*

We in the YMCAs of Quebec add our thoughts and prayers for our friends and colleagues of the YMCA of Honduras - and for all the people of Honduras - at this time of crisis.

## ***The ACJ Honduras in transition***

While the eyes and ears of the world have been turned towards Honduras and the tense situation there since President Zelaya was deposed in a coup, there have been great changes happening as well within the "world" of the Honduras YMCA.

This past year brought interesting opportunities for the YMCA in Honduras to move towards financial sustainability; namely the construction of an addition to its head office in Tegucigalpa to house a fitness centre, and the funding to construct a new YMCA program building in Taulabé, and the approval of the project submitted to Cyclo Nord-sud, as well as confirmation of a new 5 year contract with the YMCAs of Québec and Canada East, and the Canadian International Development Agency.

However, the past year also brought growing problems in the relationship between the Board of Directors and the Secretary-General of the ACJ. As a result, Marco Antonio Perez, the Secretary-General, submitted his resignation to the Board of Directors, and it was accepted, effective July 15, 2009.

The ACJ's international partners, including the YMCAs of Québec and Canada East are, and will continue to be, in direct contact with the Darwin Alvarez, the President of the Board of Directors and the two senior ACJ staff members now responsible for managing the programs and projects of the ACJ during this time of transition.

Our thoughts are with the ACJ staff, volunteers and youth participants regarding the tense situation within their country and the challenges they now face as a YMCA.



***Marco Antonio Perez***



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