

# Nicaragua Serves As Base for International Opposition to Coup

At a press conference in Managua the night of July 19, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya said that he was preparing for his return to Honduras. Zelaya who was overthrown in a military coup d'état on June 28, made his announcement after coup President Roberto Micheletti refused the mediation terms put forward by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. Zelaya said, "We are going to go back with intelligence, with strategy.... We are beginning to do all the internal organizing for my return to the country and we hope that all the members of the media who are here will accompany me."

Throughout the period following the coup, Nicaragua has been Zelaya's base and a base for international opposition to the overthrow of constitutional order in Honduras. On June 28 itself, at least 15 Latin American leaders gathered in Managua for meetings of the System of Central American Integration (SICA), the Bolivarian Alliance the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA) and the Rio Group, where they denounced the coup against Zelaya.



*ALBA held an emergency meeting about the coup in Managua the night of June 28. Left to right, Presidents Zelaya, Ortega, Chavez and Correa.*

The SICA meeting was attended by the presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, President Zelaya of Honduras, and Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza of the Organization of American States (OAS). The SICA member states voted to suspend all cooperation with the coup government including political, financial, cultural, and tourism. The Central American countries which border Honduras—Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador—said that they would close those borders for 48 hours and, if the coup was not reversed, would impede trade between their countries and Honduras. [After closing for a number of hours on June 29, the borders between Central American countries

and Honduras were reopened after a legal analysis concluded that a blockade of commerce was in violation of the Central American Integration Accord.] Loans from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration were to be put on hold. The final declaration was read by Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega as chair for this period of the SICA.

The ALBA also met in special session in Managua late that night. The meeting was attended by Zelaya, Ortega, Cuban President Raul Castro, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Ecuadoran President Rafael Corea, Bolivian President Evo Morales, among others, who strategized about how to return President Zelaya to office. The presidents said in a statement that they would maintain themselves in permanent session to evaluate joint actions that would enable them to "accompany the Honduran people in the re-establishment of legality and the restitution of President Manuel Zelaya." Castro said, "I believe in the sincerity of President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but they have to demonstrate it with actions, not just words."

Zelaya tried unsuccessfully on July 5 to return to Honduras with his Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas and U.N. General Assembly President and former Nicaraguan foreign minister Fr. Miguel D'Escoto. They flew to Tegucigalpa, where tens of thousands of people awaited them, and attempted to land but the military blockaded the runway with vehicles and the plane had to fly instead to Managua. There, Zelaya was met by President Daniel Ortega with whom he had a brief conversation while his plane refueled before taking off for San Salvador. Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), and the presidents of Argentina, Ecuador and El Salvador had flown there directly from an OAS meeting on the situation in Honduras in Washington, DC.

The Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) released a statement which called on the Organization of American States (OAS) to again take up the efforts to find a non-violent solution to the crisis. CENIDH condemned the repression of Honduran citizens by that country's army saying that July 5 attacks on the airport protesters were

carried out “with disproportionate violence causing the deaths of the two young people Isis Obed Murillo and Darwin Antonio Lagos and injuring dozens of demonstrators.” The statement demanded that those responsible for the deaths and injuries be brought to justice.

Meanwhile, all was quiet on Nicaragua’s northern border after Micheletti accused the Nicaraguans of massing troops on that country’s border with Honduras. “We have been notified that in Nicaragua they are moving troops toward the border,” Micheletti said in a radio and TV broadcast. Ortega responded by saying, “Nicaragua is not moving troops to Honduran territory. Nicaragua is keeping its troops in their normal positions where they have

always been to guard the sovereignty of our country.”

Reporters for El Nuevo Diario said that under drizzling rain, three soldiers kept watch at the El Guasaule Bridge at the border. Notably, at the border station at Las Manos, communication had slowed between officers of the Nicaraguan and Honduran armies, who usually are in regular contact over issues of organized crime and drug trafficking. But no soldiers from the Second Army Battalion stationed in Ocotal had been seen moving toward the border.

In related news, Foreign Minister Samuel Santos said Nicaragua was making every effort to achieve the freedom of around 100 Nicaraguans who have been detained by the Honduran police for participating in the demonstrations supporting



*A group of Nicaraguan rural women express their support for the women of Honduras “in their struggle to restore democracy.”*

Zelaya. A spokesperson for the Honduran police said that there were 70 Nicaraguans who had been arrested in the Department of Choluteca and the rest had been arrested in other regions including ten in Tegucigalpa who the spokesperson said were encouraging residents of poor neighborhoods to participate in the demonstrations.

On July 7, nine Nicaraguans were expelled from Honduras, accused by the coup government of working in support of the return of President Zelaya. They had been detained on July 3 without warrants and were interrogated by authorities. Several of the men had been working in Honduras for more than ten years. Others were travelling businessmen. They were told they could not return to Honduras.

Meanwhile, National Assembly deputies of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) on July 1 introduced in the Assembly a resolution that condemned Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez for his intervention in Central America “with the intention of installing totalitarian regimes that deny democratic freedoms and practices among our peoples.” The resolution denounced “the ambitions to continue in office that ‘Chavism’ promotes in his [Chavez] disciples who try to change the constitutions of the region in violation of democratic principles.” It did not appear that the resolution was going to garner wider support.

Zelaya had said in Managua on July 13 that if the new phase of mediation in San Jose, Costa Rica, made no progress in restoring constitutional order in his country, he would turn toward “other measures.” When reporters asked what those other measures might include, Zelaya read an article from the Constitution of Honduras which stated that no one owed obedience to a “usurper government” and that “the people have the right to resort to insurrection in defense of constitutional order.”

Zelaya read an ultimatum in which he denounced the violence against the people carried out by the coup government of Micheletti and thanked President Arias for his mediation. He said the mediation is taking place on the premise that the coup government “must restore constitutional order and guarantee the immediate, safe and unconditional return of your servant the constitutional President of the Republic.” He said that he would not meet personally with Micheletti.

Travel between Nicaragua and El Salvador has been affected by the coup. Each bus that makes the trip must now pay US\$50 for an official of the Honduran authorities to accompany the vehicle, making sure that no one gets off inside Honduran territory. Control is particularly strict for Nicaraguan travelers who must have their pictures taken

at the border as well as provide copies of their identification cards. Sixteen Nicaraguan construction workers who were working on an international bridge in El Salvador were detained by Honduran authorities. Money changers, pedicab drivers, and others who earn their livelihoods at the border all complained of a drastic slowdown in business.

On July 18, Adolfo Zepeda, spokesman for the Nicaraguan Army, denied rumors that 500 Venezuelan troops had landed at Managua's international airport. Zepeda said that for foreign troops to enter the country, the National Assembly must first approve their arrival. He called the rumor part of a psychological game being played by the coup government.

The Alliance for Global Justice, which Nicaragua Network is part of, dropped all other work on Sunday, July 28 to mobilize opposition to the coup in the U.S. We got out the first action alert to activists in the US that same day and have issued five alerts since then. Check our web page at [www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org) for new alerts on the Honduran coup and other issues.