

1-8-2004

Honduran Withdrawal From Parlacen Looms

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Honduran Withdrawal From Parlacen Looms." (2004). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9159>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Honduran Withdrawal From Parlacen Looms

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Honduras

Published: 2004-01-08

Honduras has threatened to withdraw from Parlacen, the Central American Parliament, picking the scab from the regional sore. Outgoing President of Guatemala Alfonso Portillo made a similar threat three years ago, when he was still years away from becoming an ex-officio member of the widely scorned body (see NotiCen, 2000-08-10). The latest functionary to label the regional legislature dysfunctional was Honduran Attorney General Sergio Zavala.

Zavala told reporters that the government of Honduras had the political will to retire from the institution and from the Corte Centroamericana de Justicia (CCJ) as well. "It is painful to pay so much money to be a member of these regional institutions." Each of the six member countries pays a reported US\$1.7 million annually to support them, and gets precious little in return, according to the attorney general. Member countries are not obligated to comply with any act or decision of Parlacen.

Even the threatened departure of one of its member states fails to rattle implacable supporters of the institution: "These commentaries bother us insofar as they affect Central American integration, but this doesn't mean that the organization per se is going to die," said Eduardo Calix, vice minister of foreign relations of El Salvador. He and some Salvadoran Parlacen deputies tried to make the case to the media that, during its sixteen years of life, the organization has done things to merit its continuation, but they were hard pressed to come up with specifics. Rather, they spoke generally of fostering closeness among the countries, and political tranquility.

Lorena Pena, Faribundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) Parlacen deputy, offered, "All the donations from the European Union (EU) come because of the lobbying that Parlacen does; the cooperation that the region receives is several hundreds of millions of dollars, so more is received than is spent."

None of this was enough for Zavala. "At the highest levels of government there is political will to retire Honduras from Parlacen and the CCJ, and this will be done on the basis of the Convencion de Viena de 1989 (sic)," he said, referring to the convention of the UN International Law Commission that governs sovereign countries' affiliations with international organizations. He added, "They are white elephants that have done nothing positive for the progress of Central America."

The Honduran dissatisfaction with the CCJ stems from the disposition of a 1999 bank-fraud case in which, said the AG, the CCJ "subjugated the law of Honduras and denied us due process." The case was against a Honduran deputy, Victor Bendeck, indicted in Honduras in connection with the dissolution of Banco Corporativo. Honduran authorities are seeking Bendeck and 25 other fugitive bankers for having defrauded depositors of US\$264 million. The case eventually led to the breakup of three banks and four private financial houses.

In August 2003, the CCJ ordered Honduras to suspend the arrest order against Bendeck and demanded that President Ricardo Maduro appear personally before it in connection with the matter. "This is inappropriate because it concerns a financial crime committed in Honduras, which is a sovereign state," said Zavala.

Other irksome Parlacen-related issues include: - The arrest of Honduran Parlacen Deputy Cesar A. Diaz Flores in Nicaragua with 7.2 kilos of heroin. - The arrest of Jorge A. Caceres, a Parlacen functionary, for trafficking in cocaine at Parlacen's Honduras facility. - The sentencing of former Nicaraguan President Arnaldo Aleman to a 20-year term for money laundering and fraud. Aleman's immunity from prosecution as an ex-officio Parlacen member figured prominently in the case, protracting it for years. - The indictment in Panama of Deputy Bernardo Diaz De Icaza on domestic violence and child abuse charges. - The investigation of Panamanian ex-President Ernesto Perez Balladares (1994-1999), another deputy by virtue of past presidency, for illicit enrichment. He remains shielded by his immunity.

Presidents opine

Ricardo Maduro of Honduras, on the occasion of the arrest of Diaz Flores, called for the reform of Parlacen immunity statutes. El Salvador's Francisco Flores has said that, if the governments of the isthmus don't make a serious commitment to Parlacen, it would be better to shut it down. Portillo of Guatemala, on his way out and now entitled to the immunity perk, nevertheless said three years ago that Parlacen, which is headquartered in his country, ought to be closed because it doesn't provide practical solutions for Central American development, but rather imposes high costs on member countries that would be better spent on more pressing social problems.

Parlacen's own president has, predictably, another view. Mario Facusse Handal sees the constituent dissatisfaction as an organized campaign to malign an institution dedicated to Central American integration along with regional social, political, and economic development. He denies that Parlacen shields the criminality of members. Other Parlacen defenders have pointed out that the institution does not function as a shield for criminals and that, in the case of Diaz Flores, it stripped him of his immunity, so that he is now serving 20 years, having been subsequently convicted.

Panamanian Parlacen Deputy Elsy B. de McKay defended the regional body's action in the Perez Balladares case, contending that, without instruction from the CCJ, there was no solid evidence against the ex-president and therefore no basis for lifting his immunity. Having said that, however, she called upon the Panamanian electorate to be careful whom they elect to the organization in 2004. "Let them be irreproachable, without records of corruption, and desirous of working for the growth of the region," she said.

Not all Central American ex-presidents are eager to cover themselves with the mantle of immunity. Panama's Guillermo Endara (1989-1994) did not accept his seat because, he said, he did not want the protection. "I opted not to enjoy immunity, so that whoever had any question about my administration could investigate it without any impediment." Endara has said that, as long as there is no real Central American integration, Parlacen will be like the "fifth paw of the cat." Of the

Panamanian delegation he said, "The only Panamanian delegate who believes in Central America is Mckay, and all the others are there to collect their US\$4,000 [monthly salary]."

Among the presidents who do need the wall of immunity is Parlacen president Facusse Handal. He is accused of malfeasance in a scandal involving the undervaluation and sale of state-owned lands in Honduras. Facusse bought them, and the government wants them back. The lands had been slated for use in housing projects for the poor. Facusse has called the legal action filed against him a smokescreen for the government's wrongdoing, and an excuse for Honduras to withdraw from Parlacen. The sale allegedly occurred ten years ago, and a statute of limitations was about to fall due when Zavala brought the case on Dec. 30, 2003. The complaint alleges a number of crimes culminating in Facusse having received lands through a scheme by which they were undervalued by millions of dollars.

If a fed up Honduras does withdraw from Parlacen because of the malfeasance of its officers or members, or because of its failure to function effectively in its intended regional role, the implacable institution has a backup; the Dominican Republic is about to become a full member.

-- End --