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Honduras: Human Rights Violations Persist In New Administration

by George Rodriguez
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The coup that toppled then Honduran President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya on June 28, 2009 (NotiCen, July 02, 2009), set off an escalation of human rights violations in this Central American nation historically torn by right-wing military dictatorships. Far from coming to an end as the government that succeeded the de facto regime was set up on Jan. 27, after last November's election, the abuse is ongoing, particularly against opposition leaders and members, and takes the form of murders, attacks, abductions, arrests, and harassment.

In this violent context, journalists have been killed, as well as leaders and members of the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP) and of indigenous and campesino communities and organizations.

Other grassroots organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), several directly affected by the situation, have consistently been reporting that such incidents continue, despite statements by President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo upon taking office, such as "If there's something very important for Honduras it is for peace to come to the nation (NotiCen, February 04, 2010)."

"Nothing is more important to Honduras than peace. Honduras is all of us, and we must all reconcile, because internal confrontation harms us internationally," he added, immediately after taking the presidential oath.

In his first speech as head of state, "Pepe" Lobo, as the new president is popularly known in Honduras, also said, "We wish national reconciliation to extend to reconciliation with the international community. It is not possible to go forward into the future without first healing the wounds of the past."

Resistance group says Lobo's actions don't match words

On the opposition's side, Juan Barahona, coordinator of the FNRP – formerly the Frente Nacional de Resistencia contra el Golpe de Estado (NotiCen, August 08, 2009) – described Lobo's administration as the "continuation of the golpistas [coup leaders and supporters], the continuation of the business people's policy, and the oligarchy in control of power."

"There won't be any change, the resistance will be a force facing this government....We will fight for our country's interests," he warned.

Almost three months into the new president's four-year term, human rights organizations such as the Comite de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH) have their hands full.
"State terrorism implemented on June 28 against the Honduran people continues in the selective nature of crimes, political persecution, and other human rights violations, which contradict the reconciliation speech," stated COFADEH in a Feb. 5 communique.

The committee added that it sees "double moral standards in the present regime, which seeks to clean an image flooded by blood and terror, in order to portray itself before the international community as a government of conciliation. However, reality is otherwise....There is abduction, murder, and fine-tuning of perverse strategies to dismantle the resistance," a popular movement that "has been kept up since the very day of the coup d'etat."

"Everything is aimed at whitewashing the coup," including the amnesty passed at the end of January, a hideous thing aimed at covering up crimes committed by those who violate human rights," the committee pointed out.

"There is a most serious situation of human rights violations," an "emergency we are living with regard to respect for fundamental rights."

Citing "but a sample" in this sense, COFADEH then listed some of the hundreds of cases reported to it up to Feb. 5. Cases include the temporary abduction, on Feb. 2, of two television news crew members by a police commando dressed in civilian clothes and of two other men—one a victim of an attempted kidnapping by army troops and heavily armed men dressed as civilians in downtown Tegucigalpa.

The following day, a nurse who was an active member of the FNRP and a union leader of the Instituto Hondureno de Seguridad Social (IHSS) was found murdered after having disappeared 24 hours earlier.

Leaders and other members of indigenous and campesino communities in rural Honduras have been murdered and harassed, according to COFADEH's accounts of events for the first nine days of Lobo's tenure in the country's presidency.

**March communique brings additional allegation of abuse**

"Selective attacks on members of the Resistencia, both women and men, are at their peak right now, as part of the strategy to dismantle the...FNRP, just as Oscar Alvarez announced on his first day as the regime's security minister," the committee reported in a later communique issued March 5.

"These perverse actions carried out in broad daylight and in the darkness of night support a regime that arrived to stay and whose main purpose is to soften the Honduran people...with clubs, bullets, and a misinformation strategy through the golpista media," COFADEH pointed out. "Repression has stepped up against people with the resistance, but in the past days it has focused on relatives closest to the FNRP's operational leadership in order to attack both physically and psychologically those who remain active."
"Selective repression patterns aim at wiping out the Honduran state's participation...with a different modus operandi in which paramilitary personnel are used to commit human rights violations," it explained. "Added to this, it is necessary to point out the US intervention is brazen, no different than it was during the Cold War, when serious human rights violations were committed leaving more than 184 people forcefully disappeared...while their repressors still stain the motherland with blood."

Events following Lobo's swearing-in "reveal that respect for human rights is not an item on his agenda, while he is exporting a conciliatory speech of reconciliation, within the framework of a change of image, to gain international financial support," the human rights group said. "COFADEH has registered no less than 250 human rights violations so far in this regime, which ironically calls for a 'dialogue' that cannot coexist with the atmosphere of repression and terror against the resistance, and the establishment of citizen insecurity to the limit which seems to be created by those who seek to maintain a coup that brought down whatever little progress had been made toward a state of law.

On March 4, eight days after Lobo took office, the FNRP called on Latin American heads of state and governments of the Rio Group, meeting in Cancun, Mexico, to not recognize the new Honduran administration "while constitutional democratic order is not restored and until human rights violations stop."

The resistance front also said then, "We shall continue our struggle regardless of terror actions by the state controlled by the golpistas. (Sources: excerpts from Honduran President Porfirio Lobo's inaugural speech, statements by FNRP leader Juan Barahona, statements issued by COFADEH and the FNRP)

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