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Honduras: Resistance Group Aims To Change Country

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Hondurans in resistance first against last year's coup d'etat (NotiCen, July 2, 2009) and now against what they describe as the continuity of the de facto regime are set on refounding their country.

A decisive step toward this goal was taken March 12-14, when the Segundo Encuentro Nacional por la Refundación de Honduras was held in the southwestern city of La Esperanza, some 200 km northwest of Tegucigalpa, the nation's capital.

Twenty simultaneous assemblies attended by more than 1,000 delegates of the popular movements from the country's 18 departments (provinces) produced wide-ranging proposals to be discussed by a future Asamblea Nacional Constituyente Popular (popular constituent assembly).

The first Encuentro had taken place in May 2009, almost a year before the country's constitutional order was broken, a gathering then held by the Consejo de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH), which has for years promoted constitutional reform.

The second and broader meeting's decisions ran along three basic lines the refounding, the Constituent Assembly, and building people's power.

Bertha Cáceres, a member of COPINH's Consejo Cívico and one of the country's top indigenous and human rights leaders, said, "Despite the repression, the system of siege, murder, persecution, torture...and terrorism in Honduras, which remains today in a regime that is the continuity of the coup and which we don't recognize, despite this situation that is adverse to the Honduran people, the resistance has kept growing and taking mature steps and definitions."

Among the latter, she mentioned, "for example, defining the Frente [Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular] as a social and political force that clearly senses what refounding Honduras is about."

"The resistance is a complexity, a diversity of the Honduran people's richness, of an organizational setup, not very visible but nevertheless existing, which was coming along and which, with the coup, surfaced with awesome strength, and which today takes on this organizational, formative, and mobilizing task as it constructs its own communication strategies," she added during a lengthy interview with NotiCen.

In so doing, the Frente holds assemblies attended by representatives of the popular movements on a nationwide basis, she explained. Within this framework, the second Encuentro was held in Cáceres' hometown of La Esperanza, a city whose name means "hope."

Regarding the main lines of debate in the gathering, on the issue of refounding Honduras, Cáceres said, "It goes beyond a good Constitution drawn up by the people." It implies "complex transformations, taking more time, touching even daily life, touching and calling into question all forms of domination at home, on the street, within the very organizations or institutions or whatever," she explained.
Call for refounding, not reform

"So, we included this topic as one of the key ones what is refounding? and the people debated what they understood by refounding, and we asked ourselves as Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular, what are we aiming at, refounding or reform?" said the indigenous leader.

"One of this event's major conclusions was that the Honduran people, the resistance, does not aim at reform, it wants refounding, and that brings all the domination structures into question," Cáceres stressed.

The second major topic the Constituent Assembly dealt with questions such as what type of assembly is would be and "how to guarantee that the people's representation is actually there," said the activist, adding that the people's dream is to have, "for the first time in history, the Honduran people's voice in a Constituent Assembly."

"The first thing is to guarantee that the majority voice will be that of the people, the popular movements, the resistance," because "the point is not that the people are going to be watching the debate but they're going to be participating directly in that Constituent Assembly," while keeping up mobilization, she explained.

The idea is that the base tells its representatives what to say and what to do.

Another aspect of this topic dealt with "the big issues in the debate on refounding and the Constituent Assembly," such as "autonomy, sovereignty, self-determination, which become the principle...the struggle against racism...the whole issue of women's rights economic, political, social...in the face of the dominant culture...sexual and reproductive rights," Cáceres pointed out.

Regarding national security, the gathering rejected "any project imposed...or coming from the imperialist logic," because "we want to build our own national-security project," which includes "things such as: 'we don't want an army, we want the armed forces to disappear,' and 'if there's to be a police it should be a police of the people,'" she added.

Cáceres said that the other central topic was "how to build people's power," since "it isn't enough to say, 'We're going to take over power,' no."

The debate dealt with the fact that "power must be constructed and that it is constructed from the neighborhood, from the communities, from the home, from urban and rural areas, and this must be done under...concepts built by the Honduran people in resistance," she said.

The gathering included a rehearsal for the election of the Constituent Assembly, and the choices reflected rejection of the country's traditional political bipartisan setup, said Cáceres.

Those voted for in the exercise were a woman who is a veteran human rights activist, an elderly indigenous woman who can neither read nor write—"but who has knowledge, wisdom," Cáceres pointed out—a young gay community member, and a local teachers-union leader, and the delegates agreed that no less that 50% of assembly members must be women.

Cáceres underlined the fact that, as she put it, "this is important because it reflects what the Honduran people in resistance are building."
On the Frente’s future, delegates decided that "it is a social and political movement, they don’t want it to be a political party," she said, adding that within the movement there could be "a strategy of a political-electoral branch, but without turning the Frente into a party." This eventual branch "is not to impose on the Frente" which is "always to keep its autonomy and independence," Cáceres explained.

The challenges for all this are many, "because we’re doing it in the midst of repression," in "a very difficult situation," she pointed out.

New US base in Honduras
"In Honduras, there’s a regime that keeps violating human rights...which is responsible for the murder of fellow resistance members, for torture, persecution, increasing militarization, the increase and strengthening of death squads, for actions by mercenary killers of Israel’s Mossad, Colombian paramilitaries, CIA agents, US troops," Cáceres warned.

"'Gringos [US troops] and Israelis were responsible for aggression," as recently as last month, she said, adding, "We’ve seen the presence of those guys in green uniforms, and we know they’re not Hondurans."

The human rights activist said "the ‘gringos’ have stepped up their presence....Their military presence has increased with a second [military] base at Barra de Caratasca," in indigenous Miskito territory, 300 km northeast of Tegucigalpa, on the Caribbean coast in the eastern Gracias a Dios province which borders Nicaragua.

The new military installation recently opened by Honduran President Porfirio Lobo and US Ambassador to Honduras Hugo Llorens follows the Coronel José Enrique Soto Cano Air Base, also known as Palmerola, on the outskirts of the southern city of Comayagua, 97 km northwest of Tegucigalpa, operational since 1981 and where US Joint Task Force Bravo is headquartered.

"So, despite all that, we’re in the struggle, and the Honduran people move on," Cáceres assured.