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Massive Opposition Group to 2009 Coup Evolves into Political Organization

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It began as the immediate, massive opposition movement spurred by the June 2009 coup d’etat that toppled then Honduran President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya (NotiCen, July 2, 2009) and (April 22, 2010). In the days that followed the bloody military-civilian conspiracy, the thousands of people opposed to the coup became the more-organized and more-structured Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP).

In its early stages, the movement was made up mainly of Zelaya supporters opposed to the coup because their leader had been the victim of a practice that was thought to have been left behind in Latin America’s coup-laden history. They demanded Zelaya’s immediate return to the presidential chair and were the target of military and police repression.

As the days went by, other Hondurans joined the movement, including many who had opposed Zelaya but who would not back the golpistas (leaders and supporters of the coup). They also demanded Zelaya’s return, because, in their view—unlike his forced replacement de facto President Roberto Micheletti—he was the constitutional head of state and, as a basic principle of democracy, had to be reinstated.

They also were targets of military and police persecution, which included both massive and selective repression in street attacks on nationwide anti-golpista demonstrators as well as killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and the disappearance of opposition leaders and other militants.

As the coup consolidated via the stubborn de facto regime, and actions such as Honduras' expulsion from the Organization of American States (OAS) and short-lived mediation moves by then Costa Rican President Óscar Arias (1986-1990, 2006-2010) at the behest of the US failed to revert the de facto situation, the FNRP grew in ranks, increased its political space, and began to be considered a political option in this Central American nation’s near future (NotiCen, June 24, 2010).

The massively questioned elections in November 2009, five months after the coup and within its framework, opened the way for a new government to take over a year ago—the administration headed by President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo, described by the FNRP as nothing but the continuation of the coup, with golpistas in key posts (NotiCen, Feb. 24, 2010).

Also last year, Zelaya—in exile mainly in the Dominican Republic since Lobo was sworn in and immediately saw him off to his forced Caribbean destination—became, by unanimous decision, the FNRP’s general coordinator.

Presiding over a meeting of the FNRP Comité Ejecutivo Nacional in Managua, Nicaragua, a frequent center for his political activity since the coup, Zelaya—who leads a splinter sector of the traditional Partido Liberal (PL) known as Zelayismo—referred to what he described as the Honduran people’s growth in organization and ideology, reflected by the FNRP’s growing strength.
Jorge Coronado, head of the Costa Rican Comisión Nacional de Enlace, a member organization of the Alianza Social Continental (ASC), a network of Latin American social-sector movements, calls Zelaya’s election as the FNRP’s general coordinator "a very wise, very correct political decision, because of two things."

"One," he told NotiCen, "because, in effect, it maintains Mel’s political validity within the resistance, his acknowledgement, and, two, because Mel continues to be a cohesion factor for all the grassroots liberal sector—the liberal people, so to speak—which continues to see him as a leader or their leader or their main leader in a period of total debacle in the PL—where there’s no leadership—split between golpista liberalism and antigolpista liberalism."

At the same time, union and Bloque Popular leader Juan Barahona, who until Zelaya’s appointment was the FNRP’s coordinator, became the movement’s second in command.

"That was played out with one thought: as the coordinator, Mel, at the head of the resistance, maintains the front’s international action," Coronado explained. "Thus, Mel coordinates all the international domain and Juan the internal domain," and also, within the FNRP leadership, "[opposition] political actors are reflected by Mel...and social actors...are reflected by Juan Barahona."

"Here are two of the front’s dimensions, which are its strength," said the Costa Rican civil-society leader with a strong connection to the antigolpista camp.

Coronado says that Zelaya’s presence in the FNRP leadership "guarantees a balance" between "party passions, vis-à-vis social movements and social organizations and vis-à-vis many people who are neither in the social movement nor in the Partido Liberal."

"In communiqüés and open letters, Mel even faced up to attempts by internal Partido Liberal sectors, within the FNRP, who wanted to take it over to make it an appendage [of the party]," said Coronado, adding, "I believe he understood this role, and he has been trying to develop this role."

In Coronado’s view, the FNRP has developed, mainly last year, its own institutional setup, avoiding the phenomenon of caudillismo [authoritarian leadership], a historic trademark of Latin American politics. Its Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, delegates’ assemblies, and regional assemblies have been instrumental in this, he said.

"So, [the structure] has been formalized...in terms of giving it organic coherence," and that has made it possible to "even overcome contradictions that existed in Liberal sectors, which had assumed that the FNRP had to be a party arm or that of the Partido Liberal’s restructuring" after the coup, Coronado explained.

In a New Year’s message to Hondurans, issued from exile in the Dominican Republic capital Santo Domingo, Zelaya wrote that, "during all these months, we have waged a struggle of ideas, of convictions, of principles. They were not able to take away our slogans or our banners."

"Let no one doubt that 2011 will mark the end of political persecution, my return [to Honduras], and the consolidation of our project of Refounding Honduras together with the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular and all the forces that make it up, the liberal party in resistance...and many other organizations," Zelaya said. "Honduras...today knows how to defend its rights and will never again bow its head before anyone."
In closing his message, Zelaya wrote, "Fellow Hondurans, let the new year be one of reflection, commitment, and struggle."

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