

2-8-2018

Honduras President Begins Second Term Amid Controversy

George Rodr guez

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

Recommended Citation

Rodr guez, George. "Honduras President Begins Second Term Amid Controversy." (2018). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/10494>

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.

Honduras President Begins Second Term Amid Controversy

by *George Rodríguez*

Category/Department: Honduras

Published: 2018-02-08

As if following a script, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández's swearing-in for his second term in office took place on Jan. 27 in a militarized setting, with thousands of cheering sympathizers, while soldiers and police gassed opposition demonstrators nearby.

The ceremony at the Tiburcio Carías Andino Stadium, named after the military dictator who ruled this country for 16 years between 1933 and 1949, took place in the midst of a political crisis unleashed by the results of the presidential vote in the Nov. 26 general elections, which Hernández won, according to the results released by the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (TSE) ([NotiCen, Dec. 7, 2017](#)).

The center-left opposition alliance, the Alianza de Oposición Contra la Dictadura, rejected the official figures and accused the TSE of having committed election fraud in favor of the incumbent, Hernández, who heads the ruling Partido Nacional (National Party, PN) ([NotiCen, Jan. 11, 2018](#)).

During the campaign, the Alianza had also challenged the legitimacy of a ruling by the constitutional chamber of the country's highest court, the Corte Suprema de Justicia, that lifted the so-called iron-clad constitutional ban on presidential reelection.

Knowing Hernández's second consecutive swearing-in would be marked by a massive protest, the stadium in Tegucigalpa, the country's capital, was protected by a major-scale security operation, with hundreds of troops from the military and the police.

Traffic was not allowed for blocks around the stadium, and the only people permitted inside the sports center were hundreds of duly identified, slogan-chanting, flag-waving PN militants, known as cachurecos.

Tear gas against protesters

Meanwhile, an opposition march, headed by Salvador Nasralla, the losing presidential candidate, and by the Alianza's coordinator, former Honduran President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya (2006-2009), tried to reach the stadium and prevent Hernández's swearing in. The demonstrators were tear-gassed by military and police personnel.

"The policemen and the soldiers are not to blame," Nasralla said of the police action. "They've only received orders, after receiving money to charge against the people." But he called the Honduran Army "cowardly."

Hernández, for his part, struck a highly optimistic note. Shrugging off the opposition alliance's accusations of fraud and illegitimacy, he delivered an inaugural speech that highlighted his accomplishments, which include, he said, having reached his security and social goals.

Repeatedly cheered by the crowd at the stadium, he committed himself to re-uniting the deeply polarized Honduran society, offering "un nuevo trato" ("a new deal") as a means to agree on economic and social changes to benefit the population. At the same time, he announced the creation

of task forces to promote new jobs and opportunities and to ensure food production. Both task forces were charged with submitting a progress report within seven days of the announcement, he said.

Hernández also promised to strengthen the fight against crime and the defense of human rights, and to work on preventing gender and family violence.

“Before the people, I commit myself to developing a reconciliation process in our nation, brothers with brothers, families, social organizations, and political institutions,” he said. “I’m conscious there are political differences about which we must sit down and talk in order to find the best way out.”

He pledged to hold an open dialogue, without obstacles.

“We will ask no one to abandon their beliefs, or their ideas, or their dreams and hopes for this country,” he said. “I want to make a call for us all to understand that political differences can never be justified with violence, with destruction of property ... It’s not fair for our population to be fearful; it’s not fair that we damage the country’s image.”

The presidente expressed confidence that “with work, work, and more work,” Hondurans would build the king of society the country needs.

“I want this new government to establish a new relationship with social and economic sectors,” he said. “I’m inviting all sectors, all citizens, to take part in what I call ‘a new deal’ that will allow us to agree on social and economic reforms that will benefit the entire population, including the middle class.”

He described this plan as “a pact for development and for creating jobs and opportunities ... a new deal to create jobs and prosperity.”

A new social security project

Hernández also touched on a highly sensitive issue, social security.

“We will set up a good Seguro de Atención de la Salud (health care insurance) for all those insured, present and future,” he said, adding that his new administration would transform the current health care system by implementing a new comprehensive health care network that he called the Red Integral de Servicios de Salud.

“Sisters and brothers, let’s build together ... a Honduras where the health system can tend to the needs of each Honduran with an inclusive social security for all sectors,” he said.

The president did not touch on the US\$300 million corruption scandal that bankrupted the old social security agency, the Instituto Hondureño de Seguridad Social (IHSS), in 2016, and sent thousands of angry Hondurans to the streets in cities and towns nationwide demanding Hernández’s resignation. Sources reported then that around US\$90 million of the amount pillaged from the IHSS had gone to Hernández’s first successful presidential campaign two years before ([NotiCen, Feb. 18, 2016](#)).

That year, Hernández’s turned to the Organization of American States (OAS) for help. The OAS, with full support from OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, created the Misión de Acompañamiento contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras (Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, MACCIH) ([NotiCen, May 26, 2016](#)).

Minutes before his address, Hernández, with wife Ana García and mother Elvira Alvarado standing next to him, took the presidential oath, promising “to be loyal to the republic, to comply with and enforce the Constitution and the laws.”

For the second time in Hernández’s political career, reelected congressional president and PN legislator Mauricio Oliva replied: “You are in possession of your post, and may God bless you.”

Meanwhile, the opposition promised to continue its hard line against Hernández.

Shortly before joining one of the demonstrations close to the stadium, Zelaya wrote on social media: “The Alianza declares itself insurreccional throughout the country ... The [opposition] bloc is on the streets, mobilized with the people. We swear to get [Hernández] off the presidency.”

-- End --