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Elsa Chanduvá Jaña

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No Honeymoon for Peru’s New Government

by Elsa Chanduví Jaña

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Despite the dirty war unleashed against him, in which the major media outlets played an important role, Ollanta Humala of the Gana Perú alliance won the June 5 runoff in Peru’s presidential elections.

Official results, which gave Humala 51.44% of the valid votes and his opponent Keiko Fujimori, of Fuerza 2011, 48.55%—a difference of 2.89%—mirrored the 2006 elections in which outgoing President Alan García beat Humala (NotiSur, June 16, 2006). Five years ago, 15 of the 24 departments backed Humala; this time, 19 did so.

During the campaign, Humala had to contend with the negative campaign waged by the press, which left its informational role to dedicate itself to using headlines pointing out the danger that Humala would pose for democracy and economic growth and promoting Fujimori’s candidacy. Six journalists from Lima and the provinces lost their jobs for not supporting Fujimori; three were fired and the others resigned.

Some analysts said that the exaggerated partiality of most of the media toward Fujimori’s candidacy backfired by turning Humala into a victim in the eyes of the public.

Also contributing to Humala’s victory was his move toward increasingly moderate discourse, which included releasing two new documents detailing and explaining his original government plan. Humala presented the last document, “Lineamientos centrales de política económica y social,” as the roadmap for his government plan, which included the gradual changes that his administration will carry out to achieve economic growth with social inclusion.

In a gesture unprecedented in the country’s electoral processes, two weeks before the balloting, Humala publically took an oath to respect democracy, in which he highlighted his commitment to not remain in office “even one minute more than the five-year presidential term.

Mario Vargas Llosa, winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize in literature, came out after the first round in favor of Humala to “defend democracy in Peru and avoid the shame of a new dictatorship.” On the occasion of Humala’s oath, Vargas Llosa repeated—in a video—his call to vote for Humala, and he expressed his confidence that the nationalist candidate was “not going to destroy the economic system, the market economy, the support for investment, the respect for private property, which have brought such important benefits to Peru.

Atypical pressure

The campaign of the right, of the “Fujimontesinismo,” against Humala did not stop when the results were announced. On June 6, just after the partial results made it clear that Humala was the winner, stock-market speculation produced a 12.5% drop in the Bolsa de Valores in Lima, and voices on the right were raised asking that Humala—“to calm the market”—as quickly as possible announce the names of those who would head the Ministerio del Economía y Finanzas (MEF), the Banco Central de Reserva del Perú (BCRP), and the Cabinet. The next day, the market rose five points, to stabilize in the next few days.
The first to ask Humala to name those who would be in charge of economic policy in his administration was Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, former candidate for the Alianza por el Gran Cambio and a Fujimori ally. Neoliberal economist Jorge Chávez, former director of the BCRP, suggested names for the positions.

I call on the country to remain calm. We are doing our best, and we must continue to work,” the president-elect told the press. “We are looking for people who have moral substance, who are committed to economic change but with social inclusion, whose names we will announce in due course.”

Former President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), also a candidate in the first round of these elections and who supported Humala in the runoff, called on investors to let the president-elect work with calm. “Signs of trust are not only demanded, they also are given. Investors, work calmly for the country and let the president-elect do the same. Without pressure or tension.”

This has never happened in Peru. This pressure coming from adversaries is atypical,” Kurt Burneo, spokesperson for economic issues for Gana Perú, told the press.

Through meetings with representatives of the Confederación de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas (CONFIEP) and the Sociedad Nacional de Industrias (SIN), Humala dispelled the doubts of business people and industrialists.

We are going to look forward, help him, and work. I think that we should not worry because we are going to continue growing, but with greater social inclusion, which is what Peru deserves,” Humberto Speziani, president of CONFIEP, told the press.

On June 11, the president-elect began a five-day trip to Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Chile to underscore Peru’s integrationist commitment with the countries in the region.

It has been important for us to meet with the heads of state; we have made significant progress on the issue of the bilateral agendas and a series of proposals that we are bringing,” Humala said on his return. He later announced that he would continue his trip through Latin America visiting Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Bolivia. He also announced that he would visit the US before taking office on July 28.

Meanwhile, on June 15, the formal transfer of power began, consisting of gathering information on the assets and liabilities of the García administration.

The first vice president-elect, Marisol Espinoza, told the press that the members of the transition team will not necessarily be named ministers. Humala has said he will announce his Cabinet at the end of June.

Promises that will have to be kept
Humala made numerous promises during his campaign, and beginning July 28 he will have to fulfill them.

Among the first measures that Humala will have to address will be to reduce the price of gas and increase the monthly minimum wage from 600 soles (US$218) to 750 soles (US$272). He will also have to implement the new social programs he promised, such as Pensión 65, which will provide a monthly pension of 250 soles (US$90) to all poor persons 65 years of age and older; Cuna Más,
a system of day nurseries for working mothers; and the Sistema de Atención Médica de Urgencia (SAMU), which are mobile hospitals.

“[Cuna Más] will allow the creation of infant-care centers run by the state. We will begin in the 600 poorest districts in the country. We will have professional women specialists in caring for children from birth to 3 years, where diapers and milk will be free, where the mothers will be able to leave their children confident that they will be cared for,” said Humala before the elections.

Humala also promised to increase the Juntos program, which pays a monthly stipend of 100 soles (US$36) to poor families. For students, the administration is going to create Beca 18, so that their studies are assured.

These programs will begin in the poorest regions and will be financed with a windfall-profits tax on mining and with a program to fight tax evasion.

However, Humala will have to remember that half the country did not vote for him and that some 20% of the votes he obtained on June 5 were those of Peruvians who voted for him to keep Fujimori from winning. Furthermore, the vast majority of those who voted for him did so because they considered that a change was necessary, that the benefits of economic growth should be for all and not just for the few.

No sector will give Humala a honeymoon; he will have to demonstrate that the change he talked about is real, that he is not going to change the economic model but that he will look for greater social inclusion.

And he will not have it easy in a country with a growing number of social conflicts. More than half the 227 social conflicts registered by the Defensoría del Pueblo in May were related to socioeconomic issues, such as those caused by mining (Notisur, May 27, 2011).

The most recent of these conflicts almost resulted in elections not being held in Puno, where Humala obtained 80% of the valid votes. The Aymara population of this highland department is asking that mining concessions in the area be cancelled. The people of Puno went on an indefinite strike just days before the election but they resumed work two days later.

Walter Aduviri, president of the Comité de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales de la Zona Sur de Puno, told RPP Noticias that it appeared that García wanted to leave office carrying bodies. “The problem is with the present administration, Alan García has to solve the problem. He cannot wash his hands [of it] and say that the next administration will solve it,” he said.

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