

For Immediate Release – June 24, 2010

International Delegation to Conduct Human Rights Accompaniment and Observation in Lead-Up to the 1-year Anniversary of the Coup d'État in Honduras

Representatives of Canadian Human Rights Groups available for interviews from Honduras, June 24-July 1

Halifax/Toronto/Vancouver & Tegucigalpa, Honduras – A bi-national delegation of Canadian and US representatives from labour, human rights, and faith-based organizations will be in Honduras from June 24 to July 1, to conduct human rights accompaniment and observation around the one-year anniversary of the coup d'état on June 28. The delegation's members hope that their presence will mitigate human rights violations by the Honduran military and police, and that they will be able to document any violations that occur.

“By providing witness in Honduras, by being there in the presence of people peacefully demonstrating for human rights and a return to democracy, we hope we can dissuade further repression and violence,” said Tom Loudon, Co-Director of the US based Quixote Center, who will be helping to lead the delegation.

Various international organizations, have documented grave human rights violations that have occurred since the coup on June 28, 2009—particularly against human rights defenders and journalists.¹ These violations have continued since Porfirio Lobo was named President in January 2010, following widely contested elections held in November 2009 under the coup regime. The Committee of Families of Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) has documented 710 human rights violations during the first few months of the Lobo regime alone (January 28 through April 10), including 43 confirmed political murders before March 1. The Canadian government, meanwhile, has congratulated the Lobo government on restoring democracy in Honduras and restored full economic and military cooperation.

Minister of State (Americas) Peter Kent recognized last year's broadly-contested elections as “relatively free and fair”²—though held under the auspices of the coup regime without the reinstatement of democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya or the implementation of the San José Accords, negotiated by the Organization of American States (OAS), which has still not recognized the current Honduran regime. Some unofficial international observers (the EU and the OAS declined to send observers), on the other hand, noted “low turnout” and a “strong military and police presence” at the polling stations that they visited. The election day was also marked by violence against demonstrators, including in the second-largest city, San Pedro Sula, and raided the offices of various groups opposed to the coup.³ Amnesty International denounced police detentions under a decree prohibiting gatherings of more than four people.⁴

Canada and the US support the government-sponsored Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations that have taken place. This initiative is strongly criticized by the Honduran

¹ Preliminary Observations Of The Inter-American Commission On Human Rights on its visit to Honduras, May 15 to 18, 2010 http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Honduras10eng/Honduras10TOC_eng.htm;

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the violations of human rights in Honduras since the coup d'état on 28 June 2009. <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/9224379.06265259.html>;

² Meeting No. 25 FAAE - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Thursday, Jun 17, 2010,

<http://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Parlvu/ContentEntityDetailView.aspx?ContentEntityId=6447>

³ http://www.commonfrontiers.ca/Honduras/Release_Dec03_09.html

⁴ Amnesty International, “Honduras: Authorities must reveal identities and whereabouts of people detained today”, press release. November 30, 2009. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGPRES200911301429&lang=e>

Platform for Human Rights, a coalition including representation from each of Honduras' key human rights organizations. The Platform asserts "conditions for such a commission do not exist," given that, among other reasons; violations continue to be perpetrated against those who condemn the coup d'état, and state officials implicated in human rights violations continue to hold office and could therefore influence the investigation process.⁵

"With a toothless mandate and suspect commissioners, the legitimacy of the Lobo Truth Commission is questioned both in Honduras and internationally. In an effort to ensure that the voices of those affected by the ongoing violence will be heard, Honduran human rights organizations will hold the inaugural meeting of the yearlong alternative people's Truth Commission on June 28th in Tegucigalpa. Canada will be well represented on this people's commission by York University law professor Craig Scott,"⁶ says Rick Arnold of Common Frontiers Canada.

The international human rights accompaniment delegation will observe this inauguration.⁷ While in Honduras, the members of the delegation also plan to meet with various civil society organizations and to observe a public presentation of the results of a National Consultation on the need for a Constituent Assembly, organized by the broad-based National Front for Popular Resistance (FNRP).

The following delegation members will be reachable via cell phone in Honduras from June 24-July 1:

Caitlin Power Hancey, capoha@gmail.com, +504-8814-3553 (cell phone in Honduras)

Caitlin has been a member of the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN) since 2005 and is from Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has worked as an international human rights accompanier in Guatemala and has been involved in human rights and community development in Nova Scotia, Guatemala, and Honduras for over 10 years.

Susan Lambert slamber@tbctf.ca, +504-8814-3553 (cell phone in Honduras)

President elect of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, representing the 41 000 public school teachers of British Columbia, Canada. The BCTF has worked on international human rights projects in Africa, Central and South America for many years and is committed to international solidarity focused on social justice, equity and civil society issues.

Tom Loudon, toml@quixote.org, +504-9801-5913 (cell phone in Honduras)

Tom is Co-Director of the Quixote Center, based in Maryland, USA Tom has lived in Central America for fifteen of the past twenty years. He worked for two years with Witness for Peace, and subsequently worked in war zones to resettle internally displaced communities. As a regional representative for the American Friends Service Committee, he supported regional and hemispheric-wide initiatives to resist and promote alternatives to neoliberal economic policies in the Americas through the Hemispheric Social Alliance.

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For additional information:

Rick Arnold, Common Frontiers Canada www.commonfrontiers.ca, Toronto, 905-373-8792, from June 24-26

Jenny Atlee, Quixote Centre www.quixote.org, Maryland, USA, 301-699-0042 or 301-614-9549

Emma Feltes, Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network <http://arsncanada.blogspot.com>, Halifax, 902-877-9628

⁵ http://quixote.org/sites/quixote.org/files/PLATAFORMA%20press%20release%202.18.10%20English_0.pdf

⁶ Craig Scott is a full Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, the Director of the Nathanson Centre on Transnational Human Rights, Crime and Security at York University, and a founding editor of "Transnational Legal Theory: A Quarterly Journal".

⁷ Canadian Michael Kergin, former diplomat and lawyer with Bennett Jones LLP, a law firm that works with Canadian mining companies active in Honduras, has been appointed to the government-sponsored Truth Commission. Canadian mining and textile companies are very active in Honduras and are reported to have benefited from the 2009 coup, which some argue relieved them from proposed economic, legal and land reforms proposed by the Zelaya administration.