

NATIONAL MEETING TO FOUND A NEW HONDURAN STATE

“Installation of the first Popular Constituent Assembly”

Translated for Rights Action by

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“I am appealing to our youth, who are called to give life to this country that has fallen into anarchy. I want you to follow my example, to resolve not to die and leave our country in the disorder in which it unfortunately finds itself today.” Francisco Morazán

BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

Honduras is calling us again, we are called to raise our voices and defend our most just, pure, ideas, in all their diversity, ideas that belong to all of us. We are called to take up the struggle, the struggles from before, the eternal struggles and those that will come in the future: for participatory direct, democracy, sovereignty, self-determination, justice, liberty and dignity.

We are once again invited to construct our utopias, think about who we are, come together and see ourselves as profoundly equal and diverse, as we try to make these dreams come true: the construction and exercise of popular power, water for everyone, respect for land and territory, the value of ancestral cultures, the wisdom of biodiversity, a common good, based on fundamental rights, the dignity of a full life for women, recognition of youth as a force of rebellion and of its contributions and proposals, the importance of a secular political military, the necessity of providing a happy childhood for our children.

Brothers and Sisters: The time has come. This is why we are all called upon to relaunch our hearts, our ideas, our struggles, our dreams.

You are cordially invited to debate, reflect, dream, put forth ideas, and fight for a new Honduran state. We will keep up our rebellion, rethink our proposals, share them and find ways to make them successful. We will go down a road of transformation

that will allow us to put an end to forms of domination that plunder, exploit and oppress us.

WHEN: March 12 – 14

WHERE: La Esperanza, Honduras.

Here, we will engage in the enthusiastic mission to construct a People's Assembly in which the ideas and dreams that have been waiting for centuries will come together. In the Assembly, we will debate how we will share in the future. Our voices will raise together and we will become one voice.

The people of Honduras will practice their Constituent People's Power. The Assembly will therefore have to speak for the voice of the absent. We hope that their words will be brought in written form so they are not forgotten or silenced.

The people will meet in great solidarity on the road to La Esperanza but, as well, they should bring as much solidarity in their sack of dreams.

Bring anything you can: water, beans, blankets, corn, rice, and sugar to share these days; as our country is calling us.

At this meeting in la Esperanza, thugs and low-lives, the unpatriotic, non-citizens, the corrupt or any form of golpistas are not welcome. And neither are opportunists, party members, those who go begging to the empire, murderers, filibusters, oligarchy supporters and swindlers, narco-politicians, drug traffickers, paramilitaries, nor para-civilians linked to the government.

Please be informed that the above exclusions will be enforced at the entrance gate.

Those who want to establish a new Honduran state have a blind date with destiny. It is our sons and daughters who will see the fruit of this meeting of love for our unfinished homeland that is yet to be born.

I salute you, brothers and sisters of the people of Honduras.

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WHY WE WANT A NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Interview with Berta Caceres Flores,
November 2009, Tegucigalpa

Transcribed by Yakira Teitel
who joined a Rights Action delegation to Honduras in November 2009

Good morning compañeras, compañeros. I think you have already heard other people speak about the general situation in this country, and I'm glad to be able to speak about a topic that gives us more hope, and not just to be talking about human rights violations given that today is November 25th, the International Day Against Violence Towards Women.

As COPINH (Counsel of Popular & Indigenous Organizations in Honduras), we have had this idea for a while, the idea of building up from the collectives. Actually, long before the coup happened we were interested in promoting a participatory, democratic Constituent Assembly to move us towards re-founding this country.

We think that the debate in the Constituent Assembly should be an open, horizontal, participatory and collective debate that comes out of the historical demands of the Honduran people, and we think should be very inclusive.

Two months before the [June 28, 2009] coup, we held in La Esperanza the first conference on the re-founding of Honduras, in which more than 400 delegates participated. We were also able to bring people from Ecuador and Bolivia to this discussion to hear about their experiences.

There, debates arose around topics such as the concept that we have of a National Constituent Assembly, what would the nature of this assembly be, what major goals should be addressed. For example, we decided that, in a national constituent assembly, representatives from social movements, indigenous communities and small towns should predominate and that it also should be inclusive, to represent all of the diversity there is in our country. This is something very important because otherwise we will just be repeating the same story of exclusion as always.

A National Constituent Assembly will give a new aspect to the Honduran state. And we don't want it to just form a legal basis that will affect all other laws, but also, above all, we want it to be a political and social starting point. For us, it is more important

that it give us a political and social basis rather than just a legal one.

We also began to debate topics such as justice, equality, democracy – which is a pretty messed up topic. We wanted to create our own concepts of what these topics meant to us.

For instance, the word “democracy” has become so trite, so overused and misused by the right, by colonialists, by the oligarchy, and by forces of imperialism that use it to justify invading countries.

LAND & ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Our idea is also to revisit the topic of rescuing the sovereignty of this country, rescuing what has been plundered for 500 years. For instance, land and territory is one of the most difficult topics to address in this country. Lands, cultures, identities; all of this is important because, as you all know, our country has practically been completely handed over to multinational interests. The same people who orchestrated the coup are taking over all of the wealth in our communities. There are many strategically important sources of wealth: oil, water, biodiversity. There is also cultural wealth, ancient knowledge. Then there is the mineral and metal wealth, over 30 percent of which is now in the hands of multinational corporations.

Another theme is land and the autonomy, self-determination and land/cultural rights of indigenous peoples. In this new constitution, we must posit indigenous languages as official languages, recognizing that this country is diverse and multilingual; this is also very important. Currently, the constitution does not recognize this at all.

Another theme is environmental justice. In this new legal-political pact, there should be a new commitment – given natural disasters and climate change – in this new constitution to speak about the issue of environmental justice.

MILITARY OCCUPATION

The constitution should also address the removal of foreign military bases from our country, particularly those belonging to the United States. And it’s not just about removing the bases

(well, it depends whether we can even achieve that – as you can see, we've been working on that for a while now).

A military occupation is not just a base installed in a particular physical location, but also includes mobile troops and operations, both military and civic-military operations. Most importantly, it shapes a culture; we are seeing an imposition of a militarized culture, from video games to the hi-tech tanks the coup regime has recently purchased from the US to use in neighborhoods that are resisting.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE

We have seen a general pollution of Honduran society as the result of this coup d'état, but there is one theme that has come up very strongly and around which we have regressed: the secularity of the Honduran state. There has been a lot of backwards progress in terms of this issue following the coup. Today, the economically powerful groups among the elite are also fundamentalists, with very retrograde beliefs and a predominant Opus Dei presence. This is a threat to the right to have a secular state.

HUMAN & ECONOMIC RIGHTS

The issue of human rights also needs to be restated as something more far-reaching, as something inalienable and a set of rights belonging to everyone that should not be seen just in institutional terms but also in practice. Included within this issue is the right to have a popular referendum, which is what was going to happen on June 28th. The people have taken to the streets to say that this public dialog had to be part of the new constituent assembly and the new constitution. This theme of human rights is probably the most difficult to address; the human rights of women in particular are a very difficult topic.

Speaking of women's rights, we hope to demand and bring to the debate the economic, social and cultural rights of women. Also, sexual and reproductive rights must be addressed; the autonomy a woman has over her own body is once again a complicated topic.

Another theme is the issue of economics. We think a fundamental achievement of this process, as we walk towards this dream, must be to repeal the free trade agreements. This is fundamental if we want to have a legal foundation that actually takes into account the economic rights of the Honduran people. So we put forth this idea of building a different economy, one based on solidarity, cooperation and horizontality; a communal economy to help communities survive and control their own development given the voracity of predatory and unsustainable capitalism.

RESOURCES: WATER, ENERGY AND AGRARIAN REFORM

There are also other issues that have been important struggles for the Honduran people, include the issue of water. The issue of water cannot be diluted or undervalued because it is important as life itself and water must be considered an unalienable human right, a common good. The privatization of water should be prohibited.

The issue of water intersects with many other topics, such as the issue of energy. This is a fundamental issue, and one that has led to coups d'état. In this sense, we must bring to the debate the control of rivers, lakes and subterranean water sources. The coup regime has already approved a disgusting law called the General Water Law, which is intended to privatize water including rainfall. We had never before heard of such a thing. The law privatizes every form of water that exists in our country – wetlands, everything – and aims to concession everything, which for us means privatization.

Another issue is oil, and all of the business and importation involved in bringing in oil. But there is also oil in Honduras and – I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing – but it is located in indigenous regions, in La Mosquitia and also where we are from. In addition to that, US troops have recently arrived in these areas to establish military bases. The previous administration granted five oil concessions to Honduras-Texas Oil, and you should know even better than we do who the investors are in that enterprise.

There is also the issue of integral agrarian reform, which is a controversial issue and something the campesino community strongly desires. It is an historic demand, and the struggle for integral agrarian reform has led to conflict, murders and

repression. This issue is the basis of other issues that exist in our country.

HEALTH & EDUCATION

Other issues that are very important include health care, education and worker's rights, all of which have suffered setbacks under neoliberalism. There has been aggression around these issues. This coup has been a disaster in this sense, which we can see in the fact that these "gorillas" have spent \$12 million dollars each on new tanks, while our hospitals don't even have aspirin. I spoke with a few Cuban doctors, who told me about the difficulties they are facing in the hospitals here.

Education is something that is also being pushed down the path of free trade. They call it "free trade" but there is nothing "free" about it. They are moving towards privatization of education, and the investors in the companies aiming to privatize education are the same members of the oligarchy and Opus Dei.

MEDIA

Another issue, which was probably another of the causes that led to the coup, is control of the radio waves and media in the country. In this dream of ours, we believe that the radio and all media outlets should be in the hands of the Honduran people, not in the hands of Ferrar, Canahuati, etc. . The media should serve the people; we want to strengthen popular, community and alternative media and communication outlets. The Honduran people can build our strength through this tool, which is vital for democracy itself. We want this to take place through a democratic process, to democratize media and communication.

LEGAL SYSTEM

Another issue that we hope this new sociopolitical pact will address is the re-founding of the legal establishment, with a new structure and a new way of functioning that truly serves to administer what it is supposed to – justice.

Today we have a legal system that administers corruption and caters to drug traffickers, politicians involved in the drug trade,

the oligarchy and multinational corporations, while at the same time, a poor person who perhaps steals a hen may spend 10 or 30 years in jail and may stay there until being completely invisible. That is why the jails and prisons in this country are full of poor people; it just reflects a very unjust system.

ARMED FORCES

Another major issue around which people have been resisting has been to call for the dissolution of the armed forces. Why should we maintain the armed forces when they have only been trained to repress, to torture, to kill? They have never done anything good for the people, but instead have allowed four other armies to come in and occupy this country, this territory; they have not done anything with respect to defending our sovereignty. All they know how to do is mount coups. Given this, the people are demanding that the armed forces be disbanded, or debating whether to construct a military of the people.

ROLE OF THE OLIGARCHY & IMPERIALIST FORCES

This entire process of moving towards a more just and more humane society is not easy. The powerful, the oligarchy, the imperial forces all react and we have now seen how they react. We think that this oligarchy and these imperial forces are involved in this coup in Honduras. They have participated in the coup, financed it and overseen it.

They have reacted to basic things such as a public poll in a way that is so aggressive that it doesn't permit anything to challenge the formal democracy behind capitalism. Take the president, who came from a traditional party and had never participated in the people's movements up until this moment, who wasn't someone who came from the left, but rather from a family of landowners in Olancho. If they wouldn't even permit this person anything, we can imagine what their response was when the people started to fight back, to take back what is ours, to begin a deep, historic and also necessary struggle.

IMAGINING THE NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The Honduran people have changed a lot since June 28th and, although it has been difficult because of the situation we are experiencing, which will only become more difficult, the Honduran people are ready to bet on this dream, which is difficult but not impossible. These are processes that are sometimes painful and there has been a decision made to continue to deepen the struggle. Various spaces for debate and analysis have opened up to continue addressing the idea of a National Constituent Assembly.

We even need to talk about the profile of the people who will take part in the Constituent Assembly. It won't be just a nest of men, because if that is the case the women will be screwed. The diversity of gender and sexualities should be represented because I think this is an area where there is the most terrorism, in the area of gender and sexual diversity.

This fight that we are beginning is not just aiming to take down this system of death, destruction and predatory capitalism, but also other dominant forces in addition to capitalism, such as patriarchy and racism.

It's not as though just holding a National Constituent Assembly will resolve all the country's problems. This is just one element of the entire process of liberation. This is just one element because, in reality, producing the new society that we want must also involve changes around all of our misogynistic, patriarchal, and racist cultural patterns. This is a cultural revolution.

We are not just saying, "We'll re-found this nation with a new constitution in hand." That is good, and important, but it is just the beginning. It is an entire process, which is heavy and will take a long time and a lot of work.

We have said, as the National Front Against the Coup, that we are not just fighting to get President Zelaya reinstated, but for a National Constituent Assembly. And we do not want just any constituent assembly, because if we let that happen, Carlos Flores Facussé will take over; we want it to be popular and democratic. I think this will be the fundamental pillar on which we can stand during the next phase of struggle, after the elections.

FUTURE OF THE MOVEMENT

Obviously, the person who wins the elections on November 29

[2009] will be in charge of a weakened government and will face a tremendous lack of governability. And there will not just be a political crisis, but also an economic crisis as well, which has been deepening in a terrible fashion across the country. So I think that the popular movement needs to refresh itself, to re-launch and to re-adapt to this new phase of struggle that, underneath it all, is the same as it has always been. This struggle is one caused by historical causes, which are the reasons behind the coup.

The Front Against the Coup should continue; it will not lost its validity after the electoral farce or after the new coup government takes power. It will be a coup government, just with a new face. There is a big opportunity for the popular movement re-launch, strengthen and build towards the joining of forces, because we need that to be very strong for the Constituent Assembly.

I think that the popular movement will continue to suffer repression and violence. We have to fight hard to once again quiet the armed forces somewhat, which has happened in the past. There have been important movements in the past, such as the women and youth in 1992 who succeeded in getting rid of obligatory military service. Right now there are many forms of coercion trying to get young people to join the troops.

I say all this because I think we will stop being a topic of discussion in the media. It has cost us a lot to get the world to turn its eyes towards Honduras. I think the only times we have been noticed have been for our counter-insurgency military bases [in the 1980s] and for Hurricane Mitch [1998].

Today, our nation is in a painful situation, but we are also a people with a lot of dignity, a history of resistance, and a historical memory, which is fundamental to recover and maintain. I think we are entering a very difficult period, in which social movements will be further criminalized.

So compañeras, compañeros, that's where we'll end.