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PRESS RELEASE

## Honduras: The Crisis for Freedom of Expression Deepens

**Since the military coup on 28 June against the democratically-elected government of Manuel Zelaya, Honduras has sunk into the worst political crisis that Central America has seen for many years. Following the flawed elections of November 29<sup>th</sup>, the Honduras Congress further entrenched the crisis by denying Zelaya the right to serve the last weeks of his presidential term.**

On 29 November Honduras held general elections which saw Porfirio Lobo, from the centre-right National party, declared the winner with 56 per cent of the votes cast. As highlighted by ARTICLE 19 in previous statements, the conditions for free, fair and democratic elections were simply not met in Honduras. The elections have been promoted by the *de facto* government as the solution to the current conflict. But the serious allegations of human rights violations and the systematic censorship of voices of dissent, coupled with the lack of media diversity and independence, undermine their legitimacy. The vast majority of governments within and outside of Latin America, with the notable exception of the USA, have rejected the results of the elections.

On 1 December, a majority of members of the Honduran Congress agreed to reject President Zelaya's return to serve out the last few weeks of his presidential term.

*“The Congress’ decision in effect extends political censorship in the country: it denies President Zelaya the possibility of finishing the presidential term for which he had been democratically elected,”* says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“The Congress decision amounts to further denying equality of representation, respect and voice between citizens, and popular control. Taking place after elections that were deeply flawed, this decision further entrenches the political crisis and the attacks against freedom of expression in the country.”*

ARTICLE 19 recommendations:

1. ARTICLE 19 calls on the international community to continue to exercise all pressures necessary on all parties to the conflict to ensure that freedom of expression, including political expression, freedom of the media, and the free flow of information, be respected by all
2. In the short term, all sides to the conflict must refrain from targeting and threatening journalists and human rights defenders

3. Effective systems must be established and implemented to prevent threats and attacks against the media, human rights defenders and others exercising their right to freedom of expression, and to investigate all attacks which have occurred since 28 June, bringing those responsible to justice and compensating the victims
4. All legislation, decrees and executive orders issued by the *de facto* authorities which violate freedom of expression, freedom of movement or freedom of assembly must be repealed
5. The crisis has highlighted deeply seated problems within the media landscape of the country, including media concentration, political ownership and control, absence of diversity and independence. These problems must be identified, and a Plan of Action to strengthen Media diversity and independence must be developed and implemented as part of any long-term solution and way forward.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- To read the Mission Statement, visit: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/honduras-elections-without-democracy.pdf>
- For more information please contact: Dr. Agnes Callamard, Executive Director, +44 20 7324 2500.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.