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Americas - Honduras

Justice or “normalization”

Concern about future of civil liberties, human rights after OAS readmits Honduras

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The Latin America and Caribbean division of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC-ALC) and Reporters Without Borders were not surprised by last week’s readmission of Honduras to the Organization of American States in return for ousted President Manuel “Mel” Zelaya’s return but they are concerned about what will follow this deal, the subject of much criticism within Honduras, and will monitor developments closely.

The OAS, which had suspended Honduras for deposing Zelaya and sending him into exile in a June 2009 coup d’état, voted almost unanimously to readmit Honduras at a special meeting in Washington on 1 June, four days after Zelaya was allowed to return. Only Ecuador opposed its readmission.

“Virtually all the OAS members states agreed to this but not the citizens of Honduras and still less the media, journalists and human rights organization we have been supporting for the past two years,” AMARC-ALC and Reporters Without Borders said. “Our organizations had repeatedly called for [significant concessions](#) from Honduras in return for its readmission to the OAS.”

In particular, they had called for:

- ▶ An end to impunity for crimes against journalists, human rights activists and others, for the attacks and acts of sabotage against news media, and for the closures of media. And the restoration of broadcast frequencies that have been suspended or withdrawn. A total of 11 journalists and one media owner have been killed since 2010. Four other journalists and a media owner have survived [targeted attacks since the start of 2011](#).
- ▶ The reform of broadcasting and telecommunications legislation, which has become obsolete and makes no provision for community and social media, although this is required by Inter-American legal standards.
- ▶ The access to state information about responsibility for the most serious human rights violations that have taken place since the coup.

“In our view, these points should have been a condition for Honduras’ readmission and it is important that they should be quickly taken into consideration now,” AMARC-ALC and Reporters Without Borders said.

“The agreement that Zelaya and President Porfirio Lobo reached in Cartagena on 22 May – with the support of the Colombian and Venezuelan governments – obtained only one of the four pre-conditions that were needed, Zelaya’s return. But political normalization does not mean justice. This does nothing to guarantee the real restoration of civil liberties, pluralism and the rule of law.”

Protests

Several Honduran civil society and community organizations have gone to San Salvador, where a three-day OAS general assembly began yesterday, to demonstrate against the decision the OAS took in Washington on 1 June. They include the Civic Council of Honduran Popular and Indigenous Organizations (COPINH), two of whose affiliated radio stations, *Guarajambala* and *La Voz Lenca*, were silenced last January.

They also include the Association of Zacate Grande Peninsula Residents (ADEPZA), whose community radio station, [La Voz de Zacate Grande](#), has been persecuted by local landowners ever since its creation. **Ismael Moreno** of [Radio Progreso](#) has also gone to San Salvador to cover the protests.

The Honduran organizations that are in San Salvador criticize Honduras' readmission to the OAS because it "legitimizes" the government that resulted from the coup. Their complaints include the complete impunity enjoyed by the coup's main authors such as Gen. Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, who was put in charge of the Honduran telecommunications company Hondutel on 8 March 2010 after retiring from the army.

"The Cartagena accords, Mel Zelaya's return, readmission to the OAS, international recognition and the 'turning of the page' have not meant that social peace and calm have returned," *Radio Progreso* pointed out in a statement posted on its website on 3 June.

The message that the Honduran organizations in San Salvador are sending is that normalization without justice falls far short of the reconciliation that the OAS had hoped to achieve by readmitting Honduras without sufficient guarantees for respect for human rights.
