



General Assembly of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) in Tegucigalpa. The T-shirt reads "Now or never."

Honduras: an urgent need for a new social pact

By Patricio Zamorano

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Introduction

The reporting contained in this paper took place during several trips to Honduras, including a fact-finding trip from February 5-8, 2011 – at a time when President Porfirio Lobo’s administration was reaching its first year in power – and a subsequent visit at the first General Assembly of the National Front of Popular Resistance (*Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular*, FNRP) from February 25 – March 1, 2011. This paper documents what transpired during this historic meeting, and also offers a broad overview of the current political situation in post-coup Honduras. Against great odds and organizational obstacles, in a nation with large, powerful and established political actors, in a climate of repression, violence, and fear; the fact that this assembly took place is itself a formidable accomplishment.

Several new developments have taken place that could deeply change the political situation in Honduras and affect its return to the Organization of American States (OAS). The two legal charges brought against ousted president Manuel Zelaya, after the coup d’état that expelled him from the country, [were recently dropped](#) by the Appeals Court created by the Supreme Court. The [OAS](#) and the [U.S. government](#) promptly concluded that Honduras has now fulfilled the conditions to return to that international organization. For his part, Mr. Zelaya, has warned that although the current charges were dropped, the court’s decision does not prevent future charges from being brought against him. Consequently, Zelaya aims to discuss his immunity as an ousted president and his legal situation within the framework of the recently-created Verification Commission, an essential part of the mediation efforts that are now taking place by the governments of Venezuela and Colombia.

However, quite apart from the outcome of these latest developments – the possible return of Zelaya and the reintegration of Honduras into the OAS – this report finds that Honduras’ main historical challenges will remain unsolved. The possible reintegration of Honduras into the OAS could partially solve the current internal political crisis in the short term, and strengthen the external legitimacy of Lobo’s presidency, but it will not solve the issues that sparked the coup, the political polarization that rents Honduras, or the serious violations of human rights that continue to take place.

What this reports points out is that due to the historical and the critical socio-economic situation of the country, as well as the lack of broad political participation and real democratization, Honduras excludes various sectors of the population, and this needs to be addressed. Extreme poverty is only one of the causes of this situation. Traditionally, the nation’s economic and political power has been held by a group of conservative elites that are in the minority; their political power has gone unchallenged for years, influencing all fundamental state institutions, including Congress, the Supreme Court, the Armed Forces and the Presidency.

Zelaya’s government created high degrees of political and social mobilization, and the subsequent coup empowered this development. Most of the emerging grass-roots groups have joined established civil society organizations, unions, and political parties to create the so-called “resistance movement;” and a wide variety of these groups have organized themselves at a national level around the FNRP. The demands made by these groups go beyond political normalization; they call for deep political reforms to ensure more participation and power-sharing. They also demand a new Constitution and a new social contract between the State and citizens.

For its part, U.S. influence within Honduras is also vast and, until the arrival of *chavismo* (the movement associated with Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez) it went unchallenged. This international influence, if channeled in a constructive way, will be fundamental in the creation of a new social pact within Honduras, especially because the creation of broader spaces for participation and inclusion will necessitate the elite relinquishing its traditional privileges and extensive quotas of power. This is not an easy challenge to overcome, but the current political crisis and the consequences of the 2009 coup present a historic opportunity to launch a new kind of political dialogue that has not been seen before in the deeply polarized and unequal Honduran society.

Zelaya's government and the Resistance Movement that emerged after the coup have created high expectations among poor communities, the working class, indigenous peoples, and minorities. A failure to

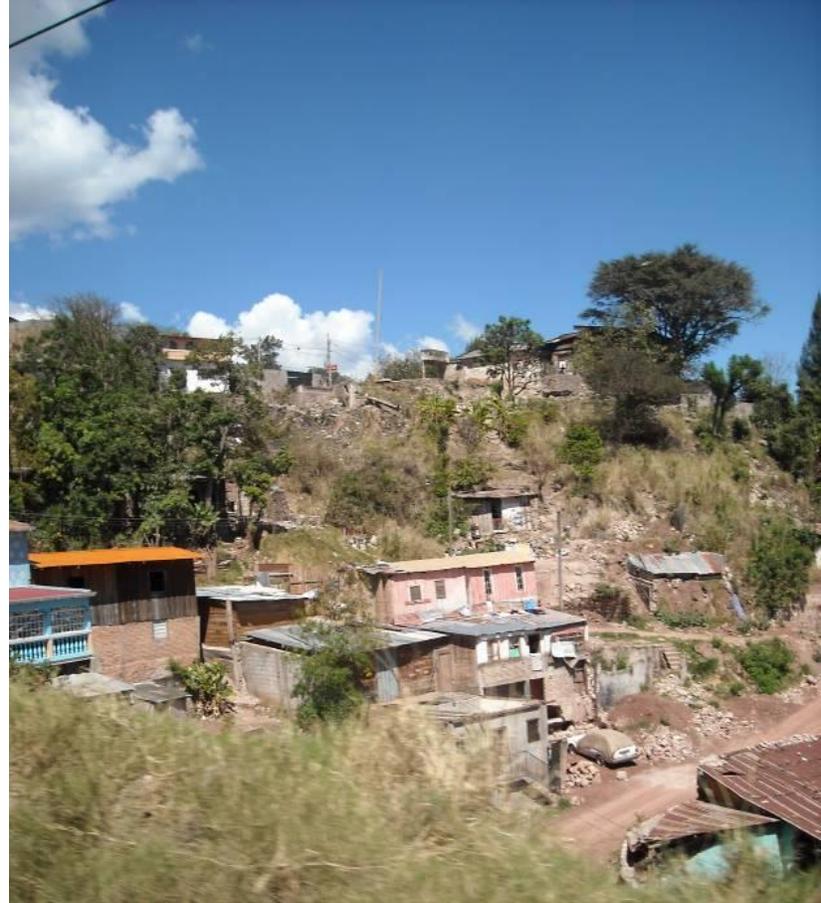
recognize these new actors and/or to generate spaces of real representation and political recognition will keep Honduras under the continued threat of democratic breakdown and social unrest. The creation of a mediation effort by the governments of Colombia and Venezuela, located on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, could be the first step toward achieving a new era of internal dialogue in Honduras. The U.S. could also play an important role as a facilitator, if it succeeds in inviting all actors to the table to discuss a common goal: a more integrated and democratic Honduras.

A divided country

The subject of legitimacy is fundamental to understanding the current challenges for Honduras. None of the factions that were aligned in favor of or against the coup enjoys complete institutional legitimacy. Here we consider just two: the Lobo administration and the resistance.

In the case of the Lobo administration, this is due to the continued participation in government by leaders who were involved in the coup and now occupy high positions, including General Romeo Vásquez who was named to head the national telecommunications firm, Hondutel. Vásquez is not the only representative of the armed forces involved in the coup who now holds a position of power within Honduras' government. Other branches of the state, including immigration, the merchant marine, civil aviation, and even the Honduran Institute of Agricultural Marketing, are all directed by former high-ranking military officials. The new head of the Honduran Armed Forces, former School of the Americas student, [René Osorio](#), is also considered to have a close relationship with Romeo Vásquez according to some media reports.

The issue of human rights also immensely weakens the government's status within the international community. To date, no convictions have been handed down for state officials allegedly involved in repressive acts, including assassinations.



The FNRP does not enjoy complete legitimacy either before the eyes of some domestic and international actors, mainly because the Front does not recognize Lobo's government (though some countries consider Lobo's election legitimate), avoids meeting publicly with certain political actors (for example, representatives of the U.S. administration), and has decided not to participate in elections.

Maintaining this position has left the FNRP without a formal institutional and legislative role or an avenue to communicate with the government or the Truth Commission formed by the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord¹. Despite this lack of institutional participation, the FNRP has maintained an unwavering call for nationwide peaceful mobilization, employing methods such as street protests, communication through anti-coup media, popular assemblies, and cultural events. In the most recent letter sent by former [President Zelaya to the FNRP on April 24](#), he insists on following a peaceful political path and mobilizing to achieve the desired reforms and a new Constitutional Assembly.

The FNRP fights for recognition as an emerging group representing an extensive variety of social groups. The demand for this political recognition has been included among the four conditions that frame the recently-launched negotiation effort sponsored by the government of Colombia and Venezuela (more details follow). The view of the FNRP as an unorganized entity that emerged solely as a response to the 2009 coup is inaccurate; and it seems that any effort launched by the international community, the U.S., the OAS and so on, should include the FNRP in order to ensure real reconciliation is achieved. As the head of one Honduran NGO said, "the emergence of civil society organizations began after Hurricane Mitch hit in 1998, from all sort of areas, feminists, environmentalists, a wide range of organizations. After Mitch, the society was different, a more complex reality, more complicated, and traditional politicians thought that it was the same, and continued doing politics as usual ... Political parties then became empty bottles losing legitimacy, and Zelaya, without maybe noticing it at the beginning, stimulated social inclusion. The 2009 coup sent to the streets all this post-Mitch generation." The source concludes that "this is why the current political class and certain international actors don't understand the FNRP and the rest of the mobilized groups. They are the sum of the post-Mitch and post-coup events."

Honduras' drama, however, is still being played out by the military and business elites who defend the *status quo*; the administration of President Porfirio Lobo, which is seeking international legitimacy in its foreign policy and a deliberate approach in the direction of domestic reconciliation; and groups, including the Resistance as well as mainstream political parties that participate in elections, and want political reform at a much faster pace.

However, recent events have opened new opportunities for movement. As previously mentioned, on April 9th a [negotiation effort](#) was convened by the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez and President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia, to facilitate the dialogue between President Porfirio Lobo of Honduras and ousted president Manuel Zelaya. The meeting took place in Cartagena, Colombia, and Zelaya joined them by phone from Venezuela. Santos and Chávez formally announced the launch of mediation efforts to create conditions for the return of Zelaya and the subsequent reintegration of Honduras into the OAS during the next General Assembly that will take place in El Salvador in June 2011.

The unannounced meeting surprised the international and Honduran community. Shortly after, the decision by President Chávez to meet with President Lobo was strongly criticized by members of the FNRP, which was not

¹ More details about the accord: <http://www.hondurasnews.com/tegucigalpa-san-jose-accord/>

informed of the meeting in advance, producing tensions among their membership. An article published in Honduras by a [member of the FNRP](#) summarizes the Front's position: "This disdainful attitude toward the FNRP can be expected from a U.S. puppet government, like the Colombian one, but it has been difficult to swallow when it comes from the Hugo Chávez government, which supposedly was our ally."

In fact, Chávez met with Lobo without ever recognizing his government; and the FNRP has kept its position of not recognizing the Lobo government as legitimate, which it reinforced during its General Assembly. Zelaya quickly released a [public statement](#) after the meeting, assuring his supporters that the negotiation process would be transparent. "We will remain vigilant during the development of this process, which has misinterpretations that we hope to overcome and so as to make from it a real opportunity to restore the country's institutional order and to put a definitive halt in the name of Honduras," said the former president.

In a quick reaction, trying to overcome the consequences of such an unprecedented meeting, Chávez invited Juan Barahona, Sub-coordinator of the FNRP, to meet with him and Zelaya in Caracas on April 16, 2011. At that meeting, Barahona presented a document that summarizes the FNRP's position on the situation in Honduras.

After the meeting in Cartagena, Lobo made public [four conditions Zelaya laid out](#) to be part of the discussions: the dropping of the legal charges against him (which actually took place on May 2nd), improvement of the human rights situation, the return of the exiles, and support for a Constitutional Assembly. In the later meeting in Caracas with President Chávez, Barahona introduced a new element: the demand that Lobo's government recognize the FNRP as a political force. This represents a delicate challenge. The General Assembly of the resistance group around the FNRP sent a strong message against electoral participation and insisted on not recognizing Lobo's government. Given that reality, the effort launched by Santos and Chávez adds an element of tension to the FNRP, because it is not clear how their political bases will react to this new scenario. The invitation extended to Barahona to meet directly with Chávez was also intended to ease tensions with the leaders of the FNRP, but it is not clear if all groups agree with a negotiation initiated by President Santos and legitimized by President Chávez.

In the meantime, Barahona confirmed that [Zelaya may return](#) to Honduras before June, with the goal of facilitating the [reintegration of Honduras into the OAS](#) during the General Assembly in El Salvador, if all conditions are fulfilled. Dropping all charges against Zelaya was a necessary precondition to facilitate the return of Honduras into the OAS. The international organization is also committed to this new scenario of negotiations, as Secretary General José Insulza expressed his "[satisfaction](#)" about the current efforts. The head of the OAS-sponsored Honduran Truth Commission, Eduardo Stein, publicly announced that its final report will be released one or two weeks after the OAS General Assembly to "[avoid interfering](#)" with the on-going negotiation process.

There is also a pragmatic economic incentive to move this process forward which has political consequences. [President Lobo himself revealed](#) that, during the Cartagena meeting, the expansion of PetroCaribe -Venezuela's preferential oil program- for Honduras was also discussed. In that context, the stressed Honduran economy would get some relief, and Venezuela would expand once again its influence within the country, paradoxically with the support of conservative businessmen who now [welcome](#) the expansion of the program. Adolfo Facussé,² president of the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI), publicly recommended to President Lobo through the media the re-launch of PetroCaribe due to high oil prices. He [said](#) that ideological differences should be "put aside" and that Chávez wants to benefit poor countries like Honduras. [Congressmen from all parties](#) also supported the reintegration into PetroCaribe.

An important question remains unanswered: in this new scenario, where Chávez, Zelaya and even Barahona have agreed to start a negotiation process that could lead to the reintegration of Honduras into the OAS, will the human rights situation in Honduras be affected for the better, even more if Honduras reenters the Inter-American system without having to offer actual guaranties for the improvement of human rights? The international community and the U.S. government should keep the pressure on Lobo's government especially under this new scenario, where most of the actors, including Zelaya himself and the FRNP leadership, seem to be participating in a mediation process for the return of Honduras into the OAS based on specific conditions.

Beyond the possible reinstatement of Honduras in the OAS, the challenge for Lobo's legitimacy, FNRP's strategic decisions, the role of the U.S., and the rest of the key actors in this story, the real question is whether the historic Honduran political and social struggles will be changed by these developments. The reintegration of Honduras partially resolves the political crisis produced by the 2009 coup, but does not resolve key issues of Honduran history, among them the extreme poverty, democratic instability, and lack of social and political inclusion.

Looking for reforms

The current movement for political reform was empowered by the Zelaya administration when it embarked on a campaign to create a new constitution, taking the first step through the so-called "fourth ballot box."³ Almost



² It is also important to mention that Adolfo Facussé is identified as a supporter of the 2009 coup. His U.S. visa was revoked due to his involvement. More info: <http://www.hondurasnews.com/adolfo-facusse-deported-from-us/>

³ The "fourth ballot box" (*la cuarta urna*) was one of the fundamental factors used by coup plotters as a justification to organize the overthrow of president Zelaya. The former president was trying to add a four ballot box where voters would be asked whether they would support a call for a Constitutional Assembly to the presidential, legislative, and mayoral elections that were going to take place in November 2009. Despite fierce opposition from the conservative business community, the Supreme Court, the military, and within Congress, President Zelaya insisted on the legality of a non-

A street mural depicts former Honduran presidents.



two years after the coup, recent polls show that more than half the population still supports the creation of a Constitutional Assembly to address these issues.⁴ A former Zelaya adviser points out that “according to polls before the coup, 82% of those surveyed supported the fourth ballot box, but 60% didn’t understand what this was about. They just knew that this had to do with their right to participate.”⁵ The political reform movement has maintained its momentum and continued to advance under

the Lobo administration. The discussion about a Constitutional Assembly has permeated all sectors, with people in support and in opposition to the idea, but it is undoubtedly a fundamental part of the debate about the future of the country.

The FNRP’s recent National Assembly made it clear that, for many, superficial changes will not be sufficient; they want deep electoral reforms, a new Constitution and a change in the current party structure. They are asking for a complete revamping of the country’s political and social system.

The coup and its aftermath reveal the high degree of polarization that characterizes Honduras, and the high social inequality that compromises its democratic stability.

The interviews conducted for this report also show how Lobo’s legitimacy has deteriorated not only within the left, but also among some leaders of the conservative business community that supported the coup and Lobo. While an important businessman said that Lobo and his decisions seem “too close” to what Zelaya was doing and that this has created a “climate of distrust,” another source criticized the reforms that Lobo supported that expanded the referendum.⁶

The new law can even modify the “set-in-stone” articles or create a new Constitution. Some of these conservative leaders compare that reform to what Zelaya was trying to do when the coup took place. Others

binding referendum to ask the population about the inclusion of that ballot box. The referendum would have taken place on June 28, 2009. On that morning, President Zelaya was kidnapped by military personnel from his house, taken to a military base, and expelled from the country on an Air Force plane bound for Costa Rica.

⁴ According to a poll released by IUDOP in January 2011, 56.4% of respondents strongly or somewhat agree with a Constitutional Assembly, versus 40.5% that strongly or somewhat disagree with it. A 40.4% strongly agree with a new Constitution, and only 3.3% do not respond – demonstrating that Hondurans are not indifferent to the issue. More info: http://democracyinamericas.org/pdfs/IUDOP_Poll_Jan_2011.pdf

⁵ Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 2011.

⁶ Personal interviews, Tegucigalpa, Honduras February 2011.

Sculpture made of paper, displayed during the FNRP General Assembly.

still support President Lobo and his efforts to reintegrate Honduras into the OAS and restore economic links with the international community.

In the center-left, the same contradictory positions coexist. While the Liberals in Resistance (“Liberales en Resistencia”), the Liberal Party faction that supports Zelaya, keep an open dialogue with Lobo and are willing to compete electorally, the FNRP avoids any political gesture that could be read as legitimization of the current government.



A new social pact

These confrontational views demonstrate that real reconciliation is key for a stable future in Honduras – that the country must come together around a “Social Pact,” expressing a common desire for reform and inclusion, especially involving those sectors that have traditionally controlled political and economic power. This social pact could present a solution to the problematic history of Honduras. Its combined elements must go beyond the demands of the FNRP itself, as this new compact would include *all* sectors of society and would necessitate a relinquishing of power and privileges from the actors who have dominated the government, Congress, the armed forces and political parties of Honduras from the moment of the nation’s inception, while giving more political space to other sectors of society.

The new social compact would reform the electoral laws by breaking from the two-party system that has dominated Honduran politics, and opening the arena to a diverse community of political parties and social groups. It would end the use of the state as the (legal or illegal) sources of funding for the party in power and create a more diverse and multi-party Congress, with a high level of transparency. The armed forces would also be reformed in order to create a military that is not based on political ideology, is decidedly non-interventionist, and respectful of civil authority. A reformed justice system would be fundamental in this new social pact, as it would provide protection to all political and social groups and create equality under the law, independent of the political or economic power held by citizens. A new judicial system should, in addition, improve the administration of justice to the population and in this way actively participate in solving the current critical public security crisis.

Through this pact, a unified Honduras would be more tolerant of the organized mobilization of the nation’s poorest sectors and the labor movement as they fight for higher levels of representation and quality of life in one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. The new social contract, in cooperation with historically dominant players on the national stage, should address expectations of more opportunity for expression and participation through institutional and non-violent means. The stifling of the legitimate demands of large sectors of the population for greater inclusion could force these sectors into extra-institutional courses of action that would only deepen the current crisis in Honduras.

This brings forward fundamental questions. Is Honduran society ready to create a new social pact? Are privileged sectors of society prepared to cede part of their socioeconomic and political power to sectors that

have been historically excluded? Will the U.S., with its indisputable influence over Honduran society, be prepared to support constructively this process of true social and political democratization?

These questions are not easy to answer because they address a historical reality of inequality that has existed in Honduras since the country's origin. The political will of the elite, generalized mobilization of civil society, and international support are all fundamental factors in taking the first step toward change. Given its substantial influence, especially among the Honduran elite, the U.S. could play an important constructive role in this process of reform and social integration.

The failure of the Tegucigalpa-San José accord

More than a year into President Lobo's term, Honduras still suffers from the consequences of the June 2009 coup, primarily in the political arena. Both the government and the FNRP defend their own legitimacy, domestically and internationally. The FNRP leaders have a common view of Lobo, claiming that he represents the continuation of the coup. Some members of the resistance outside the FNRP also have divergent views. As a former Zelaya minister told us, "Lobo is neither a good man nor a bad man, he is basically a victim of the circumstances. He is not exactly the continuity of the coup, but he is not breaking away from the coup either: he is rather a consequence of the coup, his government was born already contaminated by the coup."⁷

Honduras has not achieved internal reconciliation. In this sense, the Tegucigalpa-San José Accord has so far been a failure. The accord did not create a unified national structure of government. Zelaya remains in exile. The main goal of the OAS-sponsored Verification Commission – to assure the accord's mandates are enforced – has not been fulfilled thus far. The Truth Commission mandated by the accord is not recognized by the FNRP, human rights organizations or former President Zelaya, and has repeatedly delayed the release of its report and recommendations. Also, the active members of the FNRP still feel excluded and denounce the existence of systematic persecution by the government and/or its security forces. The human rights violations under the administration of President Lobo are still of great concern.

Coup and mobilization empowerment

Despite the fact that levels of social and political exclusion have, for the most part, remained constant, the 2009 political crisis did have an unforeseen consequence: the coup d'état created an unprecedented socio-political mobilization in Honduras, strongest in the poorest and majority working-class sectors of society and in conjunction with the existing, albeit underdeveloped, framework of organized civil society groups. This mobilization was energized by Zelaya's agenda of socio-economic and political rights, but the coup and subsequent political repression have strengthened the organizational impulse mainly represented by the FNRP, an organization that emerged from the groups that had traditionally fought for union, labor, gender and human rights, from the environmental movement to sexual minorities, from teachers to youth organizations.

The coup and its aftermath, combined with the self-exclusion of FNRP groups from the political-electoral arena, have created an alternative space for internal political development and a rich discussion despite internal tensions. At some point, however, the FNRP will have to define a way to participate politically and electorally if the deep reforms they demand do not otherwise take place. The recent General Assembly showed a good degree of organizational strength, representation from across Honduras, and rich diversity; but

⁷ Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 2011.

the wide variety of groups that form the FNRP have not reached a clear consensus about the way to enter the political arena and achieve legislative representation.

Getting consensus within the FNRP is challenging. While some leaders would prefer a more pragmatic approach to elections and politics, important factions of the Front do not trust the current institutional system and advocate for deep electoral and political reforms in order to create better conditions for real inclusion. They do not want to become a political party because they aim to avoid falling into the practices of the current political system, often referencing the existence of corruption generated within the prevalent two-party system led by the National and Liberal parties. They also consider the current political party system a threat to the diversity of the social movement and a tool to strengthen the neo-liberal economic system that they oppose.⁸

The elusive concept of reconciliation

So, will these developments and factors lead to the reconciliation of Honduras, or to further polarization and paralysis? The outlook for normalization is complex and multi-faceted. Upon speaking with interested parties, a lack of consensus regarding how to define “reconciliation” becomes evident. For those who promoted and supported the 2009 coup (leaders of the armed forces, Members of Congress, the conservative business community, the Supreme Court, etc.), “reconciliation” implies a return to the pre-Zelaya political and social context. As a political leader on the right put it, “on June 28 of 2009 people defended democracy and the middle class.”⁹

In the eyes of the most conservative military and business sectors, Zelaya’s attempted political reforms, under the shadow of *chavismo*, affected national coexistence and the “social peace.” In practice, Zelaya represented a shift from the dependence on and leadership of the U.S. – the traditional way of doing politics – toward “*chavismo*,” and Chavez’ 21st Century Socialism is still perceived as a threat by some economic groups and conservative politicians.

For the Lobo Administration, reconciliation means institutional recognition and legitimacy for the November 2009 post-coup elections which brought him to power, the reconstruction of the party system, and the recovery of investments, access to loans, etc. – in other words, institutional normalization. This reconciliation concept depends on Zelaya’s return to the country to ensure the reintegration of Honduras into the OAS. An agenda of reform as defined by the FNRP was not considered part of Lobo’s strategy. But throughout the last year, the government has, in fact, approved several important laws with congressional support, which are analyzed further later on this report. Even the deep reform that the FNRP demands, at a Constitutional level, has recently become part of President Lobo’s agenda. This is likely in response to opinion polls that show popular support for a new Constitutional Assembly and also an attempt to decrease tensions between the government and the FNRP and weaken its demands. This, especially since the FNRP continues to effectively keep pressure on the government in the form of street protests and through advocacy efforts at the international level.

For the large portion of the population that identifies loosely as the resistance without belonging to the FNRP itself, and particularly for those within the FNRP, the concept of reconciliation continues to evolve.

⁸ Bertha Cáceres, member of the FNRP and founding leader of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras. Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, February 2011.

⁹ Personal Interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 2011.

Immediately following the coup, reconciliation implied a regrouping of Zelaya's base of supporters and the President's return to power, at the very least temporarily through the formation of a National Unity government that would assume power and pass it on constitutionally to the next president after a few months. This scenario would follow some of the points outlined in the Tegucigalpa-San José accord.

Additionally, under the resistance's concept of reconciliation, the expulsion of coup plotters from the Executive Branch would be followed by criminal trials for crimes against humanity committed by officials of the State, especially members of the armed forces and police. Once the Lobo administration took power and reinstating Zelaya proved an impossibility, reconciliation for the FNRP was no longer focused on the return to power of the former President, but rather on the concept of the "re-creation of the State," the reform of the institutional and party structure, the redesign of the current market system, and, in general, a new move away from the traditional socio-political model.

Clearly, there is not a consensus on the definition of reconciliation. It has evolved from the concept of "democratic normalization" to expectations for institutional reform on all levels, guaranteeing wider spaces of participation. This lack of consensus about what reconciliation even means for the country further complicates the current polarization.

A precedent for the future

Regionally, the precedent set by the resolution of this Honduran crisis will be fundamental for the Democratic Charter, the Inter-American System, and the political balance of the continent. The key actors in this drama – the White House, the most conservative Republican elements in Congress who supported the coup, the State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and Washington analysts, as well as the OAS and the Lobo administration – know this well.

The equation is of immense complexity, and is inversely proportional to the size of the country in question. The attempted coup in Ecuador further increased fears over what the near future may hold, depending on how the Honduran crisis is resolved. The situation in Honduras, therefore, cannot be considered a small issue. In fact, this is the same issue that for months blocked the nomination of Arturo Valenzuela to be Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs due to pressure by Senator Jim DeMint, a coup supporter.

The OAS and its Secretary General face a complex situation that has provoked its own internal crisis, with constant questioning from some countries about the measures put in place to deal with Honduras after the coup, while others continue to pressure to keep Honduras out the OAS. The Honduran crisis put the OAS on high alert, paradoxically, shortly after the organization lifted a ban on Cuba's participation that dated back to the 1960s. That vote also took place in Honduras, during the General Assembly the first week of June in 2009, in San Pedro Sula. Just three weeks later, a coup overthrew President Zelaya, host of that continental summit.





Banner from a US-based FNRP group, during the FNRP's General Assembly in Tegucigalpa

The new “neo-Cold War” limbo

Honduras remains in limbo as a country in what could be qualified as a “neo-Cold War” dilemma. The restoration of the old system of north-south political alignment (the U.S. and its range of influence in Latin America) is reinforced by new East-West tensions. The Cold War mentality of “Soviet communism versus the Western World” no longer makes sense; but those who supported the coup (the most conservative wing of the Liberal Party, the armed forces, business interests and, in the U.S., many Republican members of Congress who are most active on issues

pertaining to Latin America) have replaced the dissolved Soviet Bloc with the “red threat” of Hugo Chávez and the regional Bolivarian movement.

The growth of Bolivarianism is identified by these conservative groups as a threat against the traditional representative model, and a challenge to U.S. influence within the region. As a conservative Honduran leader that participated personally in the coup efforts told us, “Chávez’ visit to Honduras didn’t do any good for Zelaya ... It was a challenge to Hondurans because his messages did not respect the Honduran idiosyncrasy.” Chávez’ influence as a justification for launching the coup against Zelaya “was enormous ... At the same time Zelaya was developing these policies that showed he was not going to leave power, with this violent discourse. Zelaya did not handle the Chávez theme in a smart way, he should have managed the situation better.” The same source also added more factors outside politics to justify the coup, which shows the degree of animosity against the Venezuela president: “This is a Catholic country, and Chávez had insulted Cardinal Rodríguez, and that is not a good thing to do, to insult these countries.”¹⁰

The case of Honduras is also important because it tests the institutional and symbolic capacity of the continent to refute the logic of this “new Cold War” and respond to its manifestations. These manifestations include the validation of coup d’états like the one that affected the Central American country and, in general, the support of potential conservative dictators like the ones who dominated the continent for decades at an enormous cost to human rights. It is not a coincidence that the three major military interventions of the past decade have occurred in countries under the influence of Bolivarianism: Venezuela, Ecuador and Honduras. While this certainly reflects institutional weaknesses in these countries as they struggle to maintain stability as they decide their own internal issues, it also represents the strong opposition of domestic and external conservative groups that identify chavismo as a concrete threat that must be deterred, even by force, as was the case in Honduras.

Reform of Article 5

Currently, both the FNRP and the government are pushing for reforms in several areas, although they differ in their strategy, legitimacy, and institutional power to carry them out. The government of President Lobo has

¹⁰ Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 2011.

advocated in the last few months for a series of reforms that would – in a great political paradox – put back on the table some of the same policies proposed by ex-President Manuel Zelaya which caused his ouster.

The most important of these is the reform of Article 5 of the Constitution, ratified by Congress in February 2011, which increases and facilitates the ability of citizens to call for a referendum without limit to the subjects that it may address.¹¹

In practice, such a referendum would even open for reform the so-called “set-in-stone” articles of the Constitution that ban presidential reelection and establish as unalterable the representative and political structure – articles that have remained untouched since their inception. It is important to remember that, ironically, the coup was justified by its supporters due to Zelaya’s plan to reform the same “set-in-stone” articles that are now open to modification with this new reform. According to leaders of the Liberals in Resistance group, within the Liberal Party, President Lobo is pushing the expansion of referendum allowances because he “is watching the polls, and he knows he needs to make changes to stay in power. They feel obligated.”¹²

Lobo’s actions, however, are not an exact duplication of Zelaya’s project. The newly-ratified amendment states that, in the case of constitutional reforms, the Congress must previously authorize that referendum with a commanding two-thirds approval. This point is fundamental in understanding the FNRP’s rejection of the reform. They consider it a political trap to feign access for the Honduran people to pursue constitutional reforms, including a Constitutional Assembly, while the law itself requires an additional legislative step before such a plebiscite be enacted, even if the necessary signatures are collected.

The FNRP has its own reform demands. This movement advocates similar changes to those of the Lobo administration – for constitutional reform and an increase in popular power through referendum. However, the FNRP differs greatly in its “founding” goal – creating fundamental change that stems directly from the Honduran people.

The FNRP wants a new Constitution initiated by citizens; one that includes previously excluded populations. It is unclear how such a Constitution, generated and written “by the people”, could achieve legitimacy in Honduran society, especially from the armed forces and business sector. Groups critical of the FNRP, including the center-left Liberals in Resistance, accuse the FNRP of not being realistic in its aspiration for a new Constitution, claiming that a self-invoked Constitutional Assembly will not obtain general legitimacy, especially from those who supported or orchestrated the coup.

Our conversations with some FNRP leaders show that they are aware of the limitations of this self-invoked Constitutional Assembly, but they argue that national legitimacy is not necessarily the goal, but rather a process of widespread participation and discussion in every corner of the country, in order to create a communal document that could be presented to the country as part of a national debate.

¹¹ The reform to Article 5 laid out by the Executive branch was widely supported by Congress. Two percent of the electoral census is necessary to present a request for a referendum. Ten congressmen or the President of the Republic can also present proposals for a referendum. However, if the reform is for ordinary laws, Congress has to approve the referendum request by 50% of members, and by two thirds in the case of constitutional reforms. If Congress approves, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal will take on the role of carrying out the referendum. The referendum is valid if at least 51% of all participants in the prior election vote. It has to be approved by 50.1% of valid votes.

¹² Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 2011.



General view of the main hall of the FNRP General Assembly.

Historic Assembly

The FNRP is conscious of the need to discuss its isolation from state institutions; and it is debating the best strategy to begin demanding space while avoiding legitimization of the Lobo government. When it convened the first National Assembly of the FNRP in Tegucigalpa on February 26th and 27th, 2011, this discussion was one of the focal points. In a huge organizing effort, bringing together 1,500 delegates from all corners of the country (there had never been such an extensive demonstration of popular organized representation and mobilization) the questions were clear:

- 1) Should the FNRP form a political party, create a parallel political organization, or keep its status as an organized social movement?
- 2) If the FNRP decides to become an official political party, should it then begin its electoral campaign for the general elections of 2013, or not participate in that election in order to avoid legitimizing the Lobo government in the current context?

A musical band performs outside the main hall of the FNRP General Assembly.



- 3) In either of these two scenarios, should the FNRP remain an independent organization or create a broad base that integrates other anti-coup groups like the Liberals in Resistance, Democratic Unification (*Unificación Democrática, UD*), and similar organizations that do interact with the Lobo government and attempt to move forward within the current institutional system?

At the historic assembly, delegates voted that the FNRP would not participate in the electoral process without conditions that would guarantee a transparent process, demanding electoral reform and the restructuring of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. The leadership of Manuel Zelaya as coordinator of the FNRP and Juan Barahona as sub-coordinator were also reaffirmed. They also demanded Zelaya's unconditional return to the country. The idea of creating a political extension of the FNRP that could become a party was also rejected, as was the formation of a formal political coalition with groups like the Liberals in Resistance, although the planning of concrete actions in conjunction with groups within the general resistance movement was not rejected.

February's National Assembly symbolized the advancements in internal development and organization that the FNRP has achieved over the past months. The highly-organized event was attended by delegates from all 18 regions of the country, as well as a delegation of Hondurans living abroad (known as "Department 19"). Independent observers were invited from Spain, Sweden, the U.S., Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Canada, Australia and Ecuador, among others. The logistics for the high number of attendees were organized through various subcommittees, including ones for discipline, food, security, accreditation, communications, etc. The agenda of the Assembly was executed within formal structures for debate including mechanisms for public voting. The positions and conclusions of departmental assemblies held leading up to National Assembly were disseminated throughout the weekend, and culminated in day-end votes on strategic issues.

Aside from its findings and resolutions, the first FNRP National Assembly was deemed successful in consolidating the institutionalization of the FNRP as a nationwide organization with territorial representation. It also brought the FNRP closer to a formal party structure, demonstrating what appeared to be a high capacity to reach consensus despite internal disagreements, and the ability to effectively mobilize its base. Also, it demonstrated the urgent need for channels of expression and representation of dozens of civil society groups from a wide variety of backgrounds – groups that have found in the FNRP a space for participation, consolidation of ideas, and common projects for inclusion. All of these factors were amplified by the 2009 coup, which has served as a unifying factor for all these organizations.

What is the Resistance?

The complexity of the so-called "resistance" is not well known in the international community or the U.S., and the concept of the widely-defined "resistance movement" is often confused with the organized FNRP. There is a lack of news about the activities, political positions, and agenda of the FNRP. What little is known about the



Main stage of the FNRP General Assembly. From left to right, farmers leader Rafael Alegría, and Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, former first lady. Fourth from the left, Juan Barahona, sub-coordinator of the FNRP.

resistance movement is communicated through the voices of established actors in the political and economic system, biased media coverage, or analysis based on these partial sources.

The so-called “resistance movement” is diverse and non-organic with a common principle of opposition to the 2009 coup, but all factions do not necessarily recognize Zelaya as their leader, nor is there any consensus on electoral-political strategy. It is composed, however, of groups that have been established and well-grounded for years, which have been joined by new emerging

organizations. Two main groups can be identified despite the existence of wide diversity of organizations: on one side, there are the Liberals in Resistance, on the other side, the FNRP.

The Liberals in Resistance belong to the Liberal Party of President Zelaya and are composed of leaders from the traditional political class. This group is experiencing its own internal debate as it is forced to choose between seceding from the Liberal Party and creating a parallel structure or fighting internally for control of the organization and for the isolation of rightist Micheletti supporters.¹³ To date, the Liberals in Resistance have opted for remaining within the Party and fighting to control its leadership, asking for new internal elections (the current leadership has not agreed to move them forward) with their eyes on the horizon of the 2013 national elections.

The Liberals in Resistance recognize the legitimacy of President Lobo, and they dialogue and negotiate openly with the Presidency. The group argues that this political space must not be abandoned, and that the recently-ratified reforms to Article 5, though not perfect, represent an advance that should be appreciated as a step toward deeper reform. They also believe in electoral participation, and will compete in 2013 for greater representation in the Congress. In this sense, they criticize the FNRP’s position of not participating in elections, including their boycott of the 2009 elections, because they believe that this cedes legislative space to the sectors involved in the coup.

There is a split between those groups closest to the traditional political parties and others that support the FNRP. The FNRP does not recognize the legitimacy of the Lobo government, and, contrary to the Liberals in Resistance, will not engage in formal dialogue with the government or structures emanating from it, including the Truth Commission. The FNRP views the Commission as fundamentally flawed, originating from a government that emerged from illegitimate elections held under the civil-military control of Micheletti’s military coup, without broad international oversight and amid high levels of political persecution and censorship.

¹³ Roberto Micheletti, senator of the Liberal Party, former president of Congress. He was declared President of the Republic by the Honduran Congress after President Zelaya was overthrown by the military. He represents the most conservative tendency within the Liberal Party. Paradoxically, Micheletti used to be a close ally of president Zelaya, and the former president supported Micheletti’s failed candidacy to the 2008 presidential primaries of the Liberal Party. More info: <http://www.diariocritico.com/mexico/2008/Diciembre/noticias/114441/zelaya-derrotado-de-primarias-en-su-partido.html>

Banner that promotes the demand for a Constitutional Assembly.

Another difficult issue for the resistance movement is the lack of clarity between the various factions (mainly the FNRP and the Liberals in Resistance), on the subject of Zelaya's strategy. There is no doubt that the voice of the former president commands a high level of influence within the FNRP, as was witnessed throughout its National Assembly. His letters were read aloud line by line, his ideas were discussed, and his suggestions were listened to. However, Zelaya appears to be simultaneously supporting the divergent strategies of two groups who are politically on the same side.

Zelaya calls on the FNRP to not participate in the elections to avoid divisions within the Front, not take part in a political process that lacks appropriate guarantees, and avoid legitimizing the Lobo government. But at the same time, the Liberals in Resistance are ready to start their electoral campaign. They engage in active dialogue with the government, and have elected deputies. Many in the FNRP expected that, before the National Assembly, Zelaya would call on his supporters to leave the Liberal Part; but this did not happen, nor did the Liberals in Resistance attend the FNRP's National Assembly.

The fact that this divergence does not threaten a total breakdown in the widely-defined resistance movement can be explained by Zelaya's coalescing presence. Neither side possesses an alternative leader with the reach of the former president. Zelaya is, in fact, the perfect symbolic leader for the anti-coup movement given that he was the first victim of the 2009 coup, having been kidnapped and forced into exile by military forces. Zelaya has been careful to frame his political discourse in a way that meets the expectations and agendas of all groups that support him. Faced with Zelaya's evident self-contradictions, the resistance groups have remained tolerant in order to maintain the unity vital to counter the strong political power and effective communication ability of the seated government, Congress, the Supreme Court, the National Party, the armed forces and other state institutions. In a way, this pragmatic unity benefits everyone in opposition to the current government, the coup, and its aftermath.

As noted above, the "resistance movement" is constantly confused with the FNRP in the international debate, and the FNRP coalition in itself provides its own complexities. It is composed of dozens of small political organizations, and also civil society groups, workers and trade unions, internationally recognized human rights defenders, environmental activists, as well as women, LGBT, indigenous and Afro-Honduran groups. A key organization within the FNRP base is the Popular Bloc, headed by its founding leader Juan Barahona who emerged as a national leader in Zelaya's absence. The FNRP, contrary to widely-held international belief, possesses a formal organizational structure, a political committee, a general coordinator (Manuel Zelaya), and a sub-national coordinator (Juan Barahona). Its national structure is present in all departments and municipalities down to the neighborhood level and has several topic-focused internal committees that address the issues also covered by civil society. The FNRP has limited access to national media and works to keep the public informed of its activities through the few TV channels and radio stations that provide them with coverage, as well as through their [multilingual official website](#) and affiliated groups, like Los Necios. The mass media outlets with the widest reach remain in the hands of politically and economically conservative groups, which censor or openly criticize anything relating to the FNRP.



System used to count votes from 1,500 delegates, at the FNRP Assembly.



Despite the lack of formal data, sources within the FNRP estimate that a large percentage of the base groups and FNRP leaders are under 35 years of age – a reflection of Honduras’ young population (according to official data, 42% of the population is less than 15 years old).¹⁴ The diversity and high levels of participation by groups previously considered marginalized – youth, women, the LGBT community, peasants, indigenous groups and Afro-Hondurans – was evident at the National Assembly, with all of these groups demanding greater presence and requirements for minimum levels of representation in the leadership of the FNRP.

Constitutional Assembly and the FNRP

The need for a Constitutional Assembly, a fundamental issue raised by the "fourth ballot box" has maintained momentum and become a major political goal of the FNRP. It has also permeated the traditional political arena, where politicians have aligned themselves supporting or rejecting the idea, adding a wide variety of positions on its potential date, scope, and the mechanisms by which it should be convened. It is now a demand included as a precondition in the negotiation process launched by Presidents Santos and Chávez.

Lobo himself has moved the subject forward, but still faces mistrust from both the FNRP and the elite and coup-sponsoring groups that support his presidency.

A Constitutional Assembly, if created in a democratic manner and incorporating all sectors of the population, could alleviate the current institutional crisis, at least in part. It would theoretically resolve some political debates, but many questions arise:

- 1) What could persuade the country’s conservative elite and business class to enact deep changes toward the historically excluded, including the poor majority in Honduras?
- 2) What would happen if the FNRP were to use the reform of Article 5 to gather the necessary signatures for a referendum, but the Congress rejects it?
- 3) How would those who led the coup react if voters approve the formation of a Constitutional Assembly and the majority of the seats are won by the center-left?

Also, if a new Constitution were drafted, fundamental questions remain to be answered, especially if this Constitution were to call for new congressional and presidential elections. It is difficult, maybe impossible, to predict the reaction of powerful groups to the complex and hypothetical chain of events necessary to reform Honduras’ political system. Analyzing these scenarios, and considering the 2009 coup, it is evident that any

¹⁴ “Estado de la población en Honduras”, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, November 2003. More info, http://poblacion.rds.hn/analisis_investigaciones/Estado_de_la_Poblacion.pdf

deep change in the Constitution would need to receive widespread support from all sectors of Honduran society. It is hard to imagine a negotiable solution if the economic and political elites, together with the coup plotters, do not agree on the necessity to open up the political arena to solutions like a Constitutional Assembly. Widespread peaceful mobilization, an awareness that Honduras will not develop with existing levels of exclusion, and the positive influence of the international community, especially the U.S., will play significant roles at this crossroads. Will the armed forces and coup-supporting sectors that currently participate in Lobo's government recognize and accept the benefits of ceding part of their power in order to align themselves with the demands of the population?

The National Assembly determined that the FNRP will convene its own Constitutional Assembly and appointed a commission of 16 members to begin the work of reaching a consensus for the text of a new Constitution. A general meeting will take place on June 28, 2011 (the second anniversary of the coup) to discuss the subject of a Constitutional Assembly and define timing and strategy. The advancement of this goal through utilization of a referendum, as outlined in the reform of Article 5, has not been ruled out.

New laws approved by the Lobo administration

Another issue that affects Honduras's path to reconciliation and has gone unnoticed by the international community is the group of reformist initiatives put forward by Honduras' President and Congress. These initiatives have been strongly criticized by civil society groups and the resistance movement. In the last year, the government has approved major reforms to labor laws, weakening benefits that union members and labor groups consider essential. The cost of not participating in elections has become evident to the groups now organized under the FNRP, as they have no direct legislative representation to protect their interests.

For union groups, the most worrying reform has been the change to the workday schedule, allowing the hiring of temporary and part-time workers which, in practice, allows the contracting of Honduran workers without respect to minimum wage and workday laws. According to labor advocacy groups, this could have major repercussions for vacation time, annual bonuses, paid leave before and after childbirth, as well as collective bargaining rights. The government counters criticisms arguing that the measures give more flexibility to the labor market and employers, and will positively affect employment.

Other laws have affected teachers, who have mobilized opposing what they claim to be threats to their labor benefits and the possible privatization of part of the public education system. Teachers recently organized several weeks of strikes, which produced the [highest level of street violence and police repression](#) since Lobo took power. One teacher, [Ilse Velásquez](#), died during these street demonstrations. And President Lobo threatened to fire teachers if they didn't go back to their posts. After one month of strike, the teachers and government [agreed on a process of dialogue](#), although the employees warned that they may go back to the streets if their demands are not met.

Moreover, the use of some water sources has been conceded to private businesses despite opposition from farmer organizations. The subjects of water and land rights have increased tension in rural areas, especially in the area of [Bajo Aguán](#) where several farmers and activists have been killed in confrontations with police and private security forces.

Additionally, an antiterrorism law was approved. NGOs claim that this law could be used politically against non-profit institutions that the government perceives as adversaries, severely limiting these organizations' financing from abroad. Another controversial initiative creates "model cities" – autonomous industrial centers

that, according to opponents, will generate extraterritorial entities for the sole benefit of offshore foreign investors – with their own tax laws and legal jurisdiction. The government argues that the country urgently needs these “model cities” to attract foreign investment. In fact, the Law of Special Development Areas creates a special jurisdiction for these industrial cities, with their own judges, government, and legal regulations. They can even sign international trade agreements and acquire domestic and foreign debt. However, these parallel regulations fall under congressional approval, and the article itself makes it clear that their sovereignty is still governed by Honduran constitutional norms. Groups opposed to these new regional entities argue that they threaten national sovereignty in order to support private foreign companies.

Human Rights

The level of impunity for human rights crimes is at a critical level in Honduras. Nearly two years have passed since the 2009 coup, and there has not been a single conviction against state agents involved in cases including abuse of authority, torture, and extrajudicial killings. On the other hand, hundreds of activists and participants in public protests have been arrested or detained. One symbolic case – the death of 19-year-old protester [Isis Obed Murillo](#) – is still pending in court, almost two years after his death on July 5, 2009. This specific case symbolizes the incompetence of the judicial system, including the National Prosecuting Authority (*Fiscalía General*) and its human rights office, to solve and prosecute such crimes.

Isis Obed Murillo was fatally wounded when protesters awaiting Zelaya’s return were fired upon by military forces controlling the Tegucigalpa airport, preventing the aircraft carrying the President from landing. Almost two years after Obed Murillo’s murder, the ballistic analysis necessary to identify from among the soldiers present that day the specific weapon that struck the young man in the head has yet to be completed.

The number of human rights violations against political activists, human rights defenders, members of the LGBT community, journalists, and the general population continues to increase, with no concrete action from the National Prosecuting Authority. A series of directed assassinations, like those suffered by the LGBT community and journalists, have received international and local coverage. However, the majority of human rights violations, particularly mass killings in rural areas like [Bajo Aguán](#), has received no media coverage and remains in a state of complete judicial impunity. Hondurans continue to flee into exile. A recent example is that of Héctor Soto, the young director of the Civil Society Group, a nonprofit organization combating poverty. Constant death threats and harassment recently caused him to leave the country. Several cases are also being processed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

The Truth Commission continues to gather information for a report that has generated high expectations from the government and interest groups, as well as indifference from both the right-wing groups closest to the coup as well as human rights organizations that do not recognize the Commission due to its association with the Lobo government. According to preliminary data, the report may include reporting on approximately 60



political killings since the coup; and the Commission has already collected testimony from over 200 victims of human rights violations. The recommendations that the Commission releases in its final report will undoubtedly stir controversy. Members of the Commission have acknowledged concern from various parties over the content of the report due to its political implications for the Lobo administration, the reconciliation efforts, and the potential reintegration of Honduras into the OAS.¹⁵ As mentioned, the Truth Commission has announced that it will release its report after the General Assembly of the OAS takes place, the first week of June, in order to facilitate the negotiation process led by the governments of Colombia and Venezuela.

The OAS, the U.S., and human rights

The fact that Honduras is no longer integrated into the OAS has had an impact on the country's income and the interests of the business elite. As the government undergoes the slow process of achieving recognition from more countries, economic and political external pressures may decrease.¹⁶ If economic pressure does not exist to necessitate the negotiation and creation of a new social pact, what will force the conservative elite to sit down at the table? What would it mean for potential negotiations if Honduras is reintegrated into the OAS in its current political state?

The OAS and the U.S. should be very conscious of these questions. The return of Honduras to the international community does not offer a solution to the problem that started this crisis: the need to deeply reform Honduran institutions in order to generate real change in the Constitution and in the social and political culture of the country.

The reintegration of Honduras into the OAS under current circumstances is a subject of critical importance. The OAS insists that it can help Honduras more, especially on the subject of human rights, if the country is part of the organization. On the other hand, the U.S. government does not consider human rights essential for reintegration. As then [Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Philip J. Crowley](#) said in October 2010 when asked for comments on the [letter sent by 30 congressmen](#) to Secretary Clinton requesting a suspension of U.S. aid to Honduras' government, "I think where we disagree with our congressional colleagues is that they conditioned progress on the human rights as a precondition for the return of Honduras to the OAS." During a visit by the Honduran Human Rights Platform to Washington D.C. in 2010, where they were recognized with the [Letelier-Moffitt Award](#), the OAS position was made clear in multiple meetings attended by its leaders. The human rights organizations also demand the U.S. Administration to stop military aid to the Honduran armed forces and police, indicating that those funds may be been used in the repression against the population.

The position of the human rights leaders of the FNRP is the opposite of that of the OAS and the U.S. The gesture of reintegrating Lobo's government into the OAS without substantive action concerning the protection of human rights will, they warn, send a clear message of impunity to the coup plotters, as many of those who participated in Zelaya's removal from office are part of the current government. They also argue that there will no longer be a way to exert diplomatic, political, or economic pressure if Honduras is welcomed back into the international community without preconditions.

¹⁵ Personal interview, Tegucigalpa, February 2011.

¹⁶ For instance, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) held its meeting of governors for Central America in Tegucigalpa the first week of March 2011. Still, fiscal revenues have plummeted due to the economic crisis, international isolation and lack of fresh investments; this has affected social expenditure and increased social unrest even more.



View of Tegucigalpa from the hills that surround the city.

That reality is fundamental in understanding the current political positions of different groups. A large portion of the Human Rights Platform and the FNRP-resistance movement will not legitimize the actions of the Lobo government due to the strong links they perceive between the government and the organizers of the coup. The Human Rights Platform and the FNRP see the effort of the OAS to assimilate Honduras into the organization as contributing to the impunity surrounding the coup's aftermath.

Conclusion: the future of reconciliation and the needed new social pact

Whatever situation that may emerge in the immediate future, one factor is clear: the 2009 coup provoked the emergence of a historic level of political mobilization that had not been witnessed in Honduras' recent past. The leaders of the FNRP and the Human Rights Platform believe that this level of mobilization and popular organization underscores their importance as actors that must be taken seriously. Political reconciliation cannot take place in Honduras simply by supporting the Lobo government, nor will it be accomplished through negotiations with only the conservative elite, or with the unconditional reintegration of the country into the OAS. If all actors are not seated at the table, recognizing the voices of those who have been excluded until now, these agreements will not enjoy legitimacy in Honduras or serve as sustainable changes in the balance of power, nor will they concretely eliminate social and political instability or the threat of a new coup in coming years.

The coup did not eliminate the necessity for a process of reform; rather, it moved it forward. The process will advance if the momentum from the grassroots or political groups continues to grow. Not recognizing these emergent political actors in Honduras, along with their platforms based on peaceful mobilization and the historic need for change in the balance of power, would be a critical error by the powerful in Washington or by actors in the region.

In this sense, the level of influence that the U.S. possesses could be enormously positive. But Washington

needs to channel its power within Honduras in a constructive way by facilitating dialogue among all sectors and rebuilding the confidence of the resistance, FNRP, and the people who, due to their support for Zelaya's expulsion, have been hindered by the measures put into practice by the Obama administration after the coup. The process of reconciliation will not be promoted by simply relying on the Lobo government because many actors across the political spectrum, from both the resistance and the right, do not feel represented by the current administration.

To achieve real reconciliation, the first objective should be a new social pact. The key to the Honduran struggle is in the enormous misery on the streets, the deep inequalities, and a political, economic, and military class that controls state funds in order to maintain its privileges. "Chavismo" could have never penetrated Honduran politics without the existence of a population exasperated with empty answers to their own social and political marginalization. If minimal conditions for participation and progressive reforms to address these needs had existed, there would have never been a "fourth ballot box" or a coup.

If there are no short term advances toward the construction of a new social pact, which is necessary for Honduras to progress equitably as a nation, the political conditions for a deep change will weaken as the campaign begins in preparation for the 2013 elections. The elections, which are already around the corner by Honduran standards, will divert the long-term programmatic debate, but not enough to eliminate the necessity for deeper reforms in order to achieve a more integrated and truly democratic country.
