

## **MSN's Backgrounder on fraudulent electoral process – January 10 2018**

On November 27, twenty-four hours after the polls closed, when over 57% of the ballots had been counted, opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla had held a five-point lead. Then, a series of anomalies in the vote count occurred, including an alleged computer crash and the suspension of the count for a day and a half, raising suspicions that electoral fraud was being committed.

Shortly after the vote count resumed, the incumbent president of the right-wing National Party, Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH), was declared in the lead. In an appeal to the Organization of American States (OAS), the centre-left opposition alliance called for a recount of the votes with the presence of international observers.

In response to growing protests, a 6:00 pm to 6:00 am curfew was imposed, militarization increased, and people's constitutional rights were suspended. According to a December 15 letter from Jesuit Conference of Latin American Provinces (CPAL) to the OAS, the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the European Union, since the crackdown began, the response from the government has been nothing short of repression including persecution and deaths. Over 800 protesters have reportedly been detained, and at least three international journalists attempting to cover the crisis have been deported by Honduran authorities.

On December 3, tens of thousands of Hondurans defied the authorities and took to the streets in peaceful protests demanding a full and impartial recount or new elections. On December 4, election officials reported that Hernandez had won the election; however, the opposition still had time to appeal those results before a December 23 deadline when the president elect would be announced.

On the same day, members of the National Police, including hundreds of riot police known as the Cobras, took the unprecedented step of publicly declaring that they would not take sides in a political dispute and would refuse orders to repress the people. Some of the police have reportedly joined the protests. Police who had walked off the job, returned to work on December 5, but continued to pledge that they will not be used to repress the people.

MSN Coordinator Lynda Yanz was in San Pedro Sula, Honduras at the time of the December 3 protests. She reports that the curfew and suspension of civil liberties is having an enormous impact on the lives of the labour rights organizations MSN works with, and on maquila workers whose ability to travel to and from work is now greatly restricted, and in some cases impossible.

In response to a call from the OAS for a recount of the vote in three states, the electoral tribunal conducted a recount of 4,753 ballot boxes that arrived after the 36-hour pause in the original count. However, on December 7, Nasralla publicly objected to the agreement struck between Orlando Hernandez and the OAS for only a partial recount and filed an appeal requesting the annulment of the results of the vote.

On December 17, after completing the partial recount, the Honduran electoral tribunal declared Hernandez the president-elect. However, the OAS criticized the tribunal for that decision and called for a new general election, pointing to "deliberate human intrusions in the computer

system, intentional elimination of digital traces, the impossibility of knowing the number of opportunities in which the system was violated, pouches of votes open or lacking votes, the extreme statistical improbability with respect to participation levels within the same department, recently printed ballots and additional irregularities....” The social movement coalition, called the Convergence Against Continuing Rule, also called for new elections with international supervision.

In the midst of the vote count, the US State Department had announced that it was certifying Honduras for further aid, citing improvements in human rights and anti-corruption measures. On December 22, the US recognized Juan Orlando Hernandez as the elected president of Honduras.

While the Canadian government’s response has been extremely weak and contradictory and its ongoing silence amidst the persistent repression and violence against peaceful protestors is nothing short of disturbing. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland issued two statements on December 2 and 10 stating Canada’s support for the work of the Organization of American States (OAS) and European Union electoral observer missions and calling on the Honduran authorities to “reinstate constitutional rights and guarantees.” However, twelve days later, under the radar of most Canadians preparing for the holiday season, the Canadian embassy responsible for Honduras sent out a tweet recognizing JOH as the president elect, in direct contradiction of the stated recommendations of the OAS.

Over the past several months, concern has been raised repeatedly by national and international civil society, and religious and human rights organizations about the increased militarization in an already highly militarized state, growing human rights abuses, and the suspension of civil liberties and associated violence.

In a December 30 statement released by the National Catholic Reporter, the Conference of Provincials in Latin America and the Caribbean compared the death threats being launched against Fr. Ismael Moreno Coto – known widely as Padre Melo – to those that were “circulated in El Salvador before the murder of Jesuit Fr. Rutilio Grande,” a Jesuit priest murdered in 1977.

The violence has continued since the election results were originally announced. Between November 26 and December 26, at least 30 people were killed in relation to the political crisis. This compares to the 5 political killings that occurred during the same time period following the 2009 coup. In his January 6 speech to the crowd in San Pedro Sula, former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya called for a national strike “blocking all the main public highways, seaports, airports, until the will of the people is respected.”

A central concern of many civil society organizations in Honduras continues to be Orlando Hernandez’s participation in the electoral process in the first place. According to Human Rights Watch, he relied on a “far-fetched interpretation” of the law, which enabled him to ignore the country’s single-term limit and run again. In so doing, he has done precisely what Manuel Zelaya was accused of planning to do prior to his violent expatriation during the 2009 coup that brought Orlando Hernandez to power.