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Canadian Human Rights Observers in Honduras witness violence and intimidation during the controversial Nov. 29 elections

Canadian human rights observers are in Honduras to witness the tense situation facing the civilian population at this time of elections. They are part of a bi-national delegation organized by Common Frontiers-Canada and the Quixote Centre from the United States.

The Canadian and US observers have traveled throughout Honduras over the past 3 days to cities and communities such as Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Tocoa, Santa Rosa de Copán, Choluteca, Comayagua, Siguatepeque y Puerto Grande. In addition, they have visited police stations, hospitals and jails.

While staying in the town of Tocoa, some 8 hours from the capital Tegucigalpa, Larry Kuehn, Research Director for the British Columbia Teachers Union, in talking about the tense situation on the streets just prior to the controversial elections observed that "... paramilitaries are driving vehicles with no license plates. As we walked around the city in the afternoon, we saw a number of vehicles, mostly with blacked out windows that were without license plates. A police and military checkpoint by the central park was stopping all the cars to check them out. When the vehicles with no license came by, they simply waved them on without stopping them..."

In each of these communities the bi-national delegation members have observed the systematic abuse of human rights as evidenced by raids, detentions, threats, physical abuse, intimidation and persecution on the part of state security agents. These actions have been mostly directed against those citizens identified with the Resistance.

On election day a peaceful protest in the northern Honduran city of San Pedro Sula was attacked by the authorities. Canadian delegate Scott Marshall, from the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation, who was an eye-witness to these events, explained that "The protesters faced the police and water cannon and sat down peacefully singing their anthems. The climate was tense; the police then fired tear gas into the crowd and advanced with the water cannon, chasing the protesters through the streets".

The Canadian delegation met with the Canadian Ambassador to Honduras to insist that conditions are not right for holding free and fair elections, and that Canada should join the vast majority of countries in the Americas in not recognizing them. Canada should call for the immediate restitution of elected President Zelaya, overthrown by a military-backed coup on June 28, 2009. With Zelaya back in office a new three month timetable for fresh elections could be drawn up, and the military sent back to their barracks.

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For more information and/or to set up an interview with a member of this delegation contact Rick Arnold, coordinator for Common Frontiers-Canada at tel. # 905-352-2430