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**Honduras: Are We Going to Make Concessions  
To Those Who Perpetrate Coups?**

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Now that the legitimate President of Honduras, Manuel Zeleya, is sequestered in "negotiations" in Costa Rica with Roberto Micheletti, the very man, who ordered his kidnapping at gun point and removal from the country, we can ask: what does it mean to "negotiate" with the perpetrators of a coup?

The President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, is supposed to be mediating some kind of compromise. Is Zelaya himself, the legitimately elected President, expected to compromise? Is Micheletti somehow Zelaya's equal here? What, exactly is up for negotiation?

Although many on the far right are crying out that Zelaya himself was trying to subvert the Honduran constitution-- which he wasn't -- it is certainly clear that Micheletti and his oligarchs could have followed a legal procedure had that been the case. The Honduran constitution allows for impeachment, as well as a precise legal structure in which an official can be officially charged and allowed to defend himself. Micheletti and General Romeo Vasquez, by contrast, with the support of the Honduran Supreme Court and most of Congress, completely subverted the rule of law and occupied the country militarily.

Since the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced last Wednesday that Arias would mediate a potential solution, Honduran trade unionists, human rights groups and scholars have expressed alarm about the very concept of negotiating with those who perpetrate coups. We can join them in underscoring the danger of making concessions to those who launched, supported and carried out a military coup, and the potential for setting a dangerous precedent in doing so.

As German Zepeda, president of the Coalition of Honduran Banana and Agroindustrial Unions, noted on Wednesday: "Does this mean that in any country in the region, you

can launch a coup d'etat and you'll be rewarded with negotiation?" As he points out, the U.S. initiative in setting up mediation "could convert itself into the norm for future politics in the region."

Leticia Salomon, a prominent Honduran sociologist and economist, in an extended analysis released on July 3, underscores the key elements necessary in any solution to the conflict: not only the restitution of President Zelaya to office, but a removal from power of all those who violated the law in supporting the coup -- including the highly politicized judges of the Supreme Court, the military, and those in Congress who voted to support the bogus presidency of Micheletti, and who falsified documents in which Zelaya supposedly renounced his office.

"Human Rights Are Not Negotiable," declared the Center for Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights ([CIPRODEH](#)) of Honduras -- an independent civil society group, not to be confused with the pro-coup human rights office of Micheletti's false government. In a letter released on July 8, they note that we cannot accept impunity for those who have violated human rights throughout Honduras in the past 10 days through kidnapping, torture, illegal detentions, repression of demonstrations and murder.

They specify a set of minimal demands which begin with the immediate demilitarization of the country. Many outside Honduras are not aware that from the moment the coup began, the army occupied all government facilities in the entire country. Police forces were subsumed under military control. Civil liberties, including the right to freedom of expression and travel and against home searches, have been suspended.

Second, they demand an end to the use of chemical and lethal weapons to repress demonstrations, and the removal of the Armed Forces from responsibility for managing public demonstrations. They also call for the return to civil control of all public services, electric power, telecommunications, hospitals, and other bodies, which are currently being controlled by the military.

Given the involvement of so many key political actors in the coup, the situation is extremely difficult. In imagining a solution, it's nonetheless essential to eschew a scenario in which concessions are made to those who perpetrated the coup, in some kind of "compromise" in which the generals, justices, and members of Congress who perpetrated this are allowed to continue in office. As Salomon underscores, it will be necessary to draw on judges from outside the country to bring justice to the situation.

Nor should the coup lead to concessions to U.S. power. When Jean Bertrand Aristide, president of Haiti, was overthrown in a 1991 coup, the U.S. flew him back on a plane and restored him to power, but with a price: that Aristide support the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which notoriously led to even worse poverty and a second coup. In Honduras today, Greg Grandin cautions in *The Nation*, "Washington should follow the lead of the rest of the Americas and resist the temptation to attach conditions to its support for his return to office."

Any solution to the coup must take into account the very conditions that led to it, not just the now-famous mass poverty in Honduras, but the lockdown on the political process by the two ruling parties and a handful of oligarchs, who have run Honduras for decades, with armed support from the U.S. government at Soto Cano (Palmerola) Air Force Base.

In the United States, we hear a lot about "no concessions to terrorists." As we move

forward in what we hope is a new political era, we must also avoid giving concessions to those who perpetrate coups -- especially in Latin America, where the United States still needs to prove that it is unequivocally opposed to military coups and will not use them to its strategic advantage.

*Note: More than 35 scholars and experts on Latin America have sent an [open letter](#) to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urging against the idea of early elections in Honduras as a possible resolution of the current crisis resulting from the June 28 military coup d'etat. New American Media ([NAM](#)) contributor, University of California, Santa Cruz Professor Dana Frank is among them.*

*This commentary originally appeared in New American Media ([NAM](#)).*

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