

Statement of Pax Christi International Delegation to Honduras

March 25-31, 2010

1. A Pax Christi International delegation visited Honduras from March 25-31, 2010 to listen and learn about the present situation and to express solidarity with people struggling for justice and for an end to human rights violations. This is the second visit of Pax Christi to Honduras since the June 28, 2009 coup d'état. The most recent delegation included Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International (USA); Claudette Werleigh, Secretary General (Haiti); Martha Inés Romero (Colombia) and Jef Felix (Belgium), members of the Executive Committee; Christine Klissenbauer (Germany); José Henriquez (El Salvador) and Fr. Paul Lansu of the International Secretariat (Belgium).
2. We met with many different church leaders and communities, human rights and other civil society organizations, as well as international representatives in Tegucigalpa, El Progreso, San Pedro Sula, Santa Rosa de Copán and Siguatepeque. What we have seen and heard here has inspired and impressed us, as we have met many people deeply committed to the common good, justice and human rights. But deeply troubling are reports of ongoing, targeted human rights violations, fear and divisions in society, endemic corruption and serious drug-related violence.
3. We saw evidence of a vast non-violent, popular movement in opposition to the coup and especially to the continuation of social, political and economic structures that exclude a large majority of the Honduran people. This Resistance, organized in a visible way as the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular – FNRP (National Front of Popular Resistance), is an impressive and diverse movement that includes a broad array of popular Honduran organizations and ordinary people. Together they have organized many creative, nonviolent actions against the coup and for a “new Honduras” - from long marches and caravans to music and poetry. Pax Christi applauds the commitment to nonviolence of the Resistance, whether it is principled or strategic or both.
4. We urge the government of Honduras to respect the existence of this movement and to give political space for all Hondurans to freely and safely express their opinions as fundamental to a functional democracy. From Catholic social teaching, we believe that people have a right to participate in important decisions that affect their lives. We encourage the Resistance movement in their discernment of nonviolent ways to give voice to Hondurans seeking a change from the status quo.
5. We heard repeatedly about serious, very recent human rights violations, including the assassination inside the Public Institute of San José del Pedregal of teacher Manuel Flores Arguijo, a member of the Resistance; the assassination of five journalists known to be sympathetic to the Resistance; and the assassination of Francisco Castillo, a member of the Resistance from Bajo Aguán, who was already under the preventive protection of the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission. Immediately after we left Honduras we received word about another assassination in

Bajo Aguan - of Miguel Alonso Oliva - and about well-founded fear of increased repression in that area against *campesinos*, who are immersed in a conflict over land with some of Honduras' most powerful businessmen.

6. As a movement founded on the principle of reconciliation, we are convinced that concrete steps in that direction are necessary in a tragically divided country, but we know that reconciliation can only be built on justice and the rule of law applied to all. We urge an immediate and impartial investigation of a series of human rights violations against members of the FNRP to determine whether they are politically motivated. But we also urge the government to take bold steps in order to strengthen the juridical system and to put an end to rampant impunity.
7. We believe that the State is responsible for protecting the lives and basic rights of the Honduran people. In particular we urge that the Truth Commission be shaped in such a way as to be completely credible in composition and function and that it make recommendations for judicial reform essential to the strengthening of Honduran democracy. Given what we have heard, we also urge the United Nations to consider sending a Special Human Rights Rapporteur to Honduras to observe this process.
8. We remain convinced that the conflict in Honduras is not only political and are deeply concerned about the abuse of military and, especially, of economic power that are driving the current crisis.
9. The United Nations, the Organization of American States, the European Union, and many individual countries around the world denounced the coup in June and took strong measures to isolate the illegitimate government. Since the November elections, these same organizations and countries are faced with difficult decisions about whether or not to normalize relations with the current government. A desire to reinstate aid out of concern for the suffering caused by its suspension is understandable, but we are convinced that next steps must keep in mind fundamental principles, including concern for the poor, a commitment to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law, and an end to impunity.
10. The Gospel and Catholic social teaching clearly articulate the values, principles and priorities that should offer a framework for the Church's engagement with Honduran society at this painful moment. In particular, our basic respect for human life, the preferential option for the poor, and the virtue of solidarity should place the Church clearly on the side of Hondurans whose basic dignity is now being abused.
11. We met and heard about many courageous people – lay, women and man, women religious and priests - accompanying people from all walks of life whose rights are being violated, and who are trying to support the development of a just and democratic society. Many of these pastoral workers have been threatened and attacked as well. Efforts by Pastoral Social/Caritas to denounce human rights violations and, particularly at a diocesan level, to promote dialogue and to educate about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, appeared to us to be worthwhile and important. Since the coup d'état, Jesuits, Franciscans and other communities have spoken out in defense of human rights. Remembering Archbishop Romero, whose 30th Anniversary of

martyrdom we had just commemorated in El Salvador, we believe that *everyone who struggles for justice, everyone who makes just claims in unjust surroundings, is working for God's reign* and we honour this difficult work.

12. Again on this visit we heard from many people about the hurt, anger and loss of credibility occasioned by the silence of the Honduran Bishops' Conference about serious violations of human rights. We were saddened by personalized attacks against the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa and we met with the Archbishop, the Bishops of San Pedro Sula and the Bishop of Santa Rosa de Copán to hear their perspectives on this and try to understand the hierarchy's words and actions, or lack thereof, that have created such an intense reaction. We know that the Bishops' Conference has called for reconciliation, but we believe deeply that the Catholic Church in Honduras at the highest level will further the possibility of national dialogue by listening with care to the pain of those who have been violated and who feel abandoned and by speaking out forcefully and repeatedly in defense of human rights.
13. We urge the Catholic community worldwide and all people of good will to sustain and strengthen international solidarity with the Honduran people, accompanying those whose basic human rights are being violated; advocating for truth, justice and democratic participation; and addressing the many ways in which international greed for minerals and markets, wealth, power and control provide fertile ground for the suffering in Honduras. We believe that long-term peace and stability depend on ensuring that poor and marginalized sectors be included in the economic and political life of the country.
14. As Pax Christi International we commit ourselves to supporting this endeavour and to animate action in our global network in solidarity with the people of Honduras. The delegation will issue a full report promptly and will initiate systematic advocacy towards Churches, concerned governments, the Organisation of American States, the United Nations and the European Union. Pax Christi International hopes to establish particular and sustainable relationships with sectors of Honduran civil society, including communities of faith. Our movement commits itself to act on the conclusions and recommendations of this visit to Honduras. We ask our individual members and Pax Christi communities to keep the people of Honduras in their prayers.

Tegucigalpa, 31 March 2010.
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