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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vancouver Rights Observer Detained by Honduran Security Forces

After arriving back at his hotel following a 7-hour ordeal CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) Program Director, Steve Stewart, said he felt relieved to be safe, nervous of potential continued threat while still in Honduras, and grateful to the resistance for working to secure his release.

Vancouver, BC, 23 Sept 2009 – CoDev program director, Steve Stewart, got a firsthand taste of the current wave of repression in Honduras when he was arbitrarily detained by Honduran Security Forces when returning from a recent human rights delegation.

Since the June 28th coup d'état, human rights organizations report thousands of people detained, wounded or tortured. These figures do not include at least a dozen deaths, as well as the hundreds detained and beaten following the restrictive measures imposed by the de facto government this week in response to democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya's return to Honduras.

Mr. Stewart coordinated a 9-member international (including three Canadians) human rights delegation to visit with one of CoDev's education partners and meet community groups to hear reports of their experiences since the coup. The delegation centered on documenting rights violations against the Honduran social sectors with which CoDev works, primarily teachers and students.

When attempting to leave Honduras Mr. Stewart's briefcase containing documentation gathered during the delegation was stolen at the airport. Upon going to security to report the theft, he and delegation colleague Guillermo Baquero were detained by INTERPOL, which *already* had possession of his missing bag. The two were then turned over to Honduran Security Forces and taken to a local police station. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Baquero were questioned by agents of the Honduran Special Intelligence Forces (COBRAS) who confiscated their passports and insisted on taking them to their base for further questioning. Through a combination of luck, quick thinking, and a little subterfuge, a Honduran citizen present at the police headquarters managed to smuggle their names and nationalities out of the station and contact a lawyer working for the Honduran Resistance Movement.

The timely intervention of the lawyer prevented the transfer of Stewart and Baquero to the COBRA base, and eventually won their release. Mr. Stewart reflected that "through a chance encounter we were able to access a lawyer and leave the country, but there are thousands of Hondurans who have been illegally detained and suffered a worse fate."

During the delegation, the group heard numerous testimonies from students, teachers, community groups, and local media of the beatings and arrests they have suffered under the de facto government, and why they support the reinstatement of President Manuel Zelaya.

Mr. Stewart is available for interviews and will also be sharing a first-hand account of his experience of arbitrary detention and the context of repression occurring in Honduras at a free public event on Monday, September 28th at 7:00pm in the Learning Resource Centre at Britannia Community Centre (1661 Napier St, Vancouver).

Contacts

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