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Honduras Under Siege

Brussels, 23 September 2009 (ITUC OnLine): The legitimate president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, has made a surprise return to Honduras, where he has taken refuge in the Brazilian embassy. The army has reacted with brutal aggressiveness, using violence and teargas to disperse crowds demonstrating in support of Zelaya. The government of Roberto Micheletti also ordered that the water and electricity supply be cut off at the embassy, leaving all of its occupants in a precarious situation. The building is being surrounded by hooded soldiers, who are also taking position in houses neighbouring the embassy.

In an interview given to TV station Tele Sur, Israel Salinas, general secretary of CUTH, affiliated to the ITUC, stated that Honduras is under a state of siege. The ITUC's Honduran affiliates have confirmed that the curfew established by the coup government brought the transport system and the majority of other services to a halt in the capital, Tegucigalpa.

"The country is going through a profound crisis and the only way out of it is a return to constitutional rule," said Salinas, reaffirming the Honduran trade union movement's support for Manuel Zelaya. "We have reached day 87 of the fight being waged by the Resistance Front against the Coup in Honduras and the nation is backing the legitimate president."

The CUTH leader confirmed that thousands of demonstrators had been violently dispersed on Wednesday morning in the streets surrounding the Brazilian Embassy, but was not able to give details regarding any deaths. A report by Radio Progreso in Honduras has, however, confirmed the killing of a trade unionist from the National Agrarian Institute. Unofficial reports speak of 40 deaths.

According to other reports, the police and army are said to have converted two sports stadiums, Villa Olímpica and Estadio Chochi Sosa, into prison camps where torture is being used. On Tuesday, teargas bombs were thrown at the headquarters of the committee for the families of detained and disappeared persons in Honduras, COFADEH, where 80 people who had been taking part in the demonstration, including many women and children, had taken refuge.

Since the staging of the coup on 28 June, the ITUC has been supporting its Honduran affiliates, CUTH, CGT and CTH, in the fight for a return to constitutional rule in Honduras. Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC, has strongly urged the government of Micheletti "to enter into dialogue with President Zelaya, with a view to reaching a prompt solution and avoiding a worsening of the situation".

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 157 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates.
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