

Clinton, Arias Call for Calm, Talks Among Honduran Leaders

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.

Staff Writer

Washington-. Now is the moment for Honduran President Manuel Zelaya and the leaders of the de facto Honduras government to reach an agreement for the benefit of the people, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said September 21.

"We just want to see this matter resolved peacefully, with an understanding that there will be the remainder of President Zelaya's term to be respected, that the elections can go on, that there will be a peaceful transfer of power," Clinton said at a press briefing.

"I think everyone knows what the milestones need to be. It's just a question of persuading and convincing and using our best efforts to try to get both sides to reach that point," she said.

Clinton met for talks with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and Foreign Minister Bruno Stagno Ugarte in New York before general debate begins at the United Nations later in the week.

Now that Zelaya has returned to Honduras, Arias said, talks between the two groups can begin.

Arias helped broker the San Jose Accord, which is designed to restore Zelaya to the presidency, foster presidential elections, and maintain and restore democratic order.

"I think this is the best opportunity, the best time, now that Zelaya is back in his country, to sign the San Jose Accord," Arias said.

Zelaya returned to the Honduran capital city, Tegucigalpa, September 21. He is staying at the Brazilian Embassy to avoid potential arrest from the de facto government, which had threatened to arrest him if he returned to the country. He has called for a meeting with interim President Roberto Micheletti and the leaders of the de facto government. The government imposed a 26-hour curfew on the capital, closed the airport to all flights indefinitely and set up checkpoints on highways leading into the city.

Clinton said the United States has communicated its expectations that there will be order and no provocation on either side. "Now is the moment for the two sides to try to work out an agreement to the benefit of the people of Honduras," she said. "The important thing is that they begin the dialogue."

Under the terms of the San Jose Accord moderated by Arias, Zelaya would be reinstated for the remainder of his term of office, which ends in January 2010, with limited powers; a general amnesty would be issued for crimes before and after June 28 when Zelaya was ousted by the army; a government of national unity and conciliation would be created; international economic sanctions would be lifted; general elections would be held; and the Honduran armed forces would be placed under the authority of the national electoral commission one month before the elections. The presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for November 29.

The United Nations, Organization of American States, European Union and international community have urged acceptance of the accord worked out by Arias, a Noble Peace Prize laureate.

OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza called for calm and urged Honduran officials not to violate the Brazilian diplomatic mission. The Brazilian government and OAS said they had no involvement in Zelaya's return to Tegucigalpa.

Zelaya, who was democratically elected in 2006, was ousted June 28 and flown by the Honduran military to Costa Rica. The United States, which is a member of the Organization of American States, voted with the rest of the organization, 33 to 0, on July 4 to suspend Honduras from the organization.

The United States halted nonhumanitarian aid to Honduras until the mediation process is completed and there is a resolution of the critical issues.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog Obama Today (<http://blogs.america.gov/obama/>).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)