

Press Release

WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

Promoting Human Rights, Democracy, and Social and Economic Justice in Latin America

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**WOLA Condemns Coup in Honduras;
Supports Multi-Lateral Efforts to Restore Democracy;
Expresses Concern for Human Rights Situation**

WOLA condemns the coup carried out yesterday against Jose Manuel Zelaya, the elected President of Honduras. WOLA is pleased that the international community has united in condemning the coup and in calling for the return of President Zelaya and the restoration of a constitutional process. While pressure builds on those who initiated and supported the coup, WOLA expresses concern about the safety of civil society leaders – trade union and *campesino* activists, opposition politicians, and others.

"There was a serious political disagreement between President Zelaya, the Congress, and the Supreme Court in Honduras. Instead of resolving the conflict through dialogue, or established political channels, the military was sent to his house, he was forcibly removed, and flown out of the country. This de facto coup should be reversed," said Joy Olson, Executive Director of the Washington Office on Latin America, who lived in Honduras for a number of years.

"WOLA is pleased to see the united response from the international community. Governments across the political spectrum have condemned the coup, and joined together in calling for Zelaya's return. The entire region has opposed the coup, meaning that the U.S., Brazil, Venezuela, and Ecuador are all on the same page," said Olson. "What this shows is that the issue isn't about Venezuela, or about the United States. It's about democracy and the rule of law."

President Zelaya's return will not, by itself, solve the political crisis in Honduras. Dialogue will be needed to resolve conflicts over whether and how to revise the constitution and to strengthen a more participatory political process. The poverty and marginalization that underlie all the political dynamics in Honduras, and that have stoked unrest, must be addressed. Zelaya's return is only a first step in a much bigger and more long-term process in the country.

WOLA is in close contact with counterparts in Honduras, including activists in community organizations and church groups, and with political analysts. We remain concerned about the security of social and political activists, including trade union leaders, heads of organizations of small farmers and the rural poor, indigenous leaders, opposition politicians, and others. We have been told that some leaders, fearing arrest, are in hiding. Yesterday, many media outlets were shuttered. WOLA calls on Honduran military and security forces to respect human rights and basic freedoms, including freedom of the press, for all citizens.

The Washington Office on Latin America promotes human rights, democracy and social and economic justice in Latin America since 1974. WOLA has played a key role in all major Washington policy debates over human rights in Latin America.