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Readmission to Regional
Body Bolsters Honduran
Government's Legitimacy

Honduras - Latin America: Readmission to Regional Body Bolsters Honduran Government's Legitimacy

One year after the military coup in Honduras, the Central American Integration System (SICA) has confirmed the legitimacy of President Porfirio Lobo's government by fully admitting Honduras to the regional body and urging the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) to follow its example, backing up Lobo's successful efforts to re-establish the rule of law.

IHS Global Insight Perspective	
Significance	The Central American Integration System (SICA)'s decision to reinstate Honduras as a member has served to confirm the legitimacy of President Porfirio Lobo's government, and the regional body has urged the Organization of American States (OAS), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and other Latin American countries to follow its example.
Implications	One year after the military coup that ousted then-president Manuel Zelaya, the decision reveals the dominant thinking among the different regional bodies that Honduras should be fully reincorporated as a member and that the country's international relations should be normalised thanks to Lobo's efforts to re-establish the rule of law there.
Outlook	Honduras will continue on its path towards rehabilitation, guided by Lobo's successful efforts. The next OAS meeting will be key in determining when Honduras will finally play a full part in the regional body; nevertheless, despite problems that could yet hobble the process of normalisation of international relations, given the weakening resistance from other governments it does nonetheless seem that Honduras will be accepted into the OAS once more before long.

SICA Recognition

On Tuesday (20 July) Central American heads of states and government met in San Salvador, El Salvador's capital, for the extraordinary meeting of the Central American Integration System (SICA). At the meeting, a statement was released confirming that Honduras has been fully admitted to the regional body. SICA also urged the Organization of American States (OAS) to welcome Honduras as a full member again. The statement was released to relaunch the process of Central American integration. Salvadoran president Mauricio Funes explained that the declaration fully re-establishes Honduras as a member of the regional body, with all the rights and duties that that entails. Funes did not miss the opportunity to highlight that the statement also urges members of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and other Latin American countries to follow SICA's example and fully recognise the legitimacy of President Porfirio Lobo's government. SICA had announced on 30 June, in a meeting held in Panama, that Honduras would be allowed to join and participate in the forums organised by the intergovernmental body, but had stressed that the recognition of the legitimacy of the Honduran government would still depend on each of its member countries.

Manuel Zelaya was ousted from his position as Honduras's president following an institutional crisis triggered by corruption allegations and exacerbated by his attempts to change the constitution to enable his re-election. The Supreme Court of Justice issued a warrant for his arrest and he was expelled from the country by the armed forces, events that were interpreted internationally as a military coup. Roberto Micheletti, the president of Congress, was appointed as provisional president until an election was held and organised by the interim government—an election that was boycotted by Zelaya's supporters. President Porfirio Lobo won, and has since made significant efforts to re-establish the rule of law, restore damaged international relations, and reunify the country, including attempts to effect Zelaya's return. Nevertheless, although Lobo has sought to present a good international image, doubts still linger among the opposition over his democratic credentials. Some of the top commanders who participated in the military coup remain in their posts and recently General Romero Vasquez, one of the leaders of the coup, was appointed to lead state telecommunications company Hondutel, despite minimal experience in the sector. Violence and threats against journalists and opposition leaders are meanwhile reported to have increased dramatically since last year's coup.

Nicaragua's Ortega Still Opposed

The SICA extraordinary meeting was attended by all Central American presidents except for Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega. In June's SICA meeting, Ortega had stated that his country would wait until Honduras was fully re-established in the Organization of American States (OAS) before making the decision to accept the legitimacy of its government. Funes said that Ortega should explain his decision to neither attend nor send a Nicaraguan representative to Tuesday's meeting, stressing that the presidents in attendance were all committed to Central America's integration, keeping time with the

current rhythm of regional circumstances. Nevertheless, Funes added, Ortega's absence should not be interpreted as opposition to Central American integration per se.

Return to Political Normalisation

Lobo's significant efforts to normalise international relations can be evidenced not only by the SICA decision but also by the fact that a significant number of Latin American nations, along with the United States, Spain, and other European countries, have also already resumed diplomatic relations with Honduras. The U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton said on 7 June that "it is time for the hemisphere as a whole to move forward and welcome Honduras back into the inter-American community". She stressed that the United States had condemned the coup but that "those interruptions of democracy should be relegated to the past" as the hemisphere "saw the free and fair election of President Lobo" and how he has "fulfilled his obligations under the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord—including forming a government of national reconciliation and a truth commission". Nonetheless, there are still those reluctant to recognise the government—Brazil, Argentina, and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) members such as Nicaragua, Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela among them.

OAS Investigates

Last month the OAS sent a high-level commission to determine the conditions for Honduras's eventual reincorporation into the inter-American system and to assess the country's current political and legal situation (see **Honduras: 9 June 2010: OAS Mission to Travel to Honduras**). The announcement of the mission, during the OAS's 40th General Assembly in Lima (Peru) was a positive step, and the fact that the issue was considered of such importance at the meeting is testament to Lobo's efforts. Nonetheless, there is still significant international pressure to condition Honduras's reincorporation into the OAS on Zelaya being allowed to return without threat of retaliation. The OAS Commission will be required to assess the situation of the pending arrest order against him. The political barrier appears to have been overcome, as Lobo has already stated that Zelaya is free to return and has even proposed to escort him. The current problem appears to be a legal issue, since some of the pending charges against Zelaya cannot be easily withdrawn—they are not only political, but also include alleged civil crimes committed during his administration, such as misappropriation of public funds, theft, and corruption.

Outlook and Implications

While Honduras was never really formally expelled from SICA, the regional body had strongly condemned the military coup and promoted a boycott against president Roberto Micheletti's interim de facto government. SICA's decision now to accept Honduras as a full member is a very positive event for the country, and represents backing for Lobo's efforts to normalise Honduras's international relations and rejoin the regional bodies, specifically SICA and the OAS. Still, much more needs to be done for the full re-establishment of international relations following the military coup. Continuing problems, including violence against journalists, may yet hobble the process. As far as Central America is concerned, Nicaragua, a member of the Venezuelan-sponsored ALBA, still remains reluctant to recognise the legitimacy of Lobo's government. Meanwhile, the OAS Commission will be assessing the pending arrest warrant against Zelaya. The next OAS meeting will no doubt be essential in determining when Honduras is to become a full participating member of the Inter-American system again. Nonetheless, given the weakening resistance from other governments to opposing its legitimacy, and Lobo's efforts, it seems that Honduras will, before too long, be part of the OAS once more.

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