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PRESS RELEASE

Honduras: Freedom of Expression Under Threat Following Weekend Coup

The ousting of the democratically elected Honduran President, Manuel Zelaya, in a military coup on Saturday 28 June is a blow for democracy and a direct threat against the rights of citizens to express their political will through democratic means. ARTICLE 19 joins the international community in condemning the coup, which also negatively impacts the media and other avenues for free expression. In particular, A19 expresses its concerns about the arrests and intimidation of journalists by military forces and the temporary suspension of radio and television broadcasts in the country.

There has been a severe clampdown on the media since the weekend. On 29 June, Adriana Sívori, María José Díaz and Larry Sánchez from the Venezuelan TV station *Telesur* were arrested during a live broadcast from Honduras.

Speaking to ARTICLE 19 after their release, Sívori commented, *“They arrested us without any provocation and provided no explanation; it felt like we were back in the dictatorships of the eighties.”*

Under the state of emergency, the National Telecommunications Commission has banned cable television transmissions and blocked transmissions of regional and international broadcasters, including CNN, *Español*, *Telesur* and *Cubavisión Internacional*.

Journalists, students and union leaders are also reportedly being harassed and at least seven media workers are now missing. These include: Mónica Ceoane of *Telesur*; cartoonist Allan McDonald; Esdras Amado Lopez of television station *Canal 36*; Patricia Arias of television station *Canal 8*; and Martinez and Aníbal Barrow of television station *Hondured*. Gustavo López, a journalist from the C-Libre Centre for Information, has also been threatened.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the interim Honduran government to fully protect the right to freedom of expression and to ensure the free flow of information. This includes respect for the Honduran people’s political expression and for the rule of law, and for the media to report freely on unfolding events.

“The current situation in Honduras constitutes a grave threat to human rights, including the right to freedom of expression,” states ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard. “This is a serious setback for democracy in Latin America.”

ARTICLE 19 calls on those in power to guarantee the safety of media workers and journalists, to respect the right to freedom of expression, and to protect the free flow of information both into and out of Honduras.

ARTICLE 19 reminds the interim government of Honduras that the Preamble of the Inter-American Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expressions states:

Freedom of the press is essential for the full and effective exercise of freedom of expression and an indispensable instrument for the functioning of representative democracy, through which individuals exercise their right to receive, impart and seek information.

“It is of the utmost importance that the current situation be addressed through peaceful means, respectful of, and based on, freedom of expression and the free flow of information,” says Callamard. “History has shown us the importance of free and independent reporting to expose abuses and chronicle events, and it is a vital tool in strengthening democracy and the rule of law.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information please contact: Ricardo González, Official of Program for Freedom Expression at ricardo@article19.org or +52 55 1054 6500.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.