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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, September 24, 2009 1:18 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: They're torturing me, Zelaya claims

From: Greene, Malcolm
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: NEWS-WHA; SES-Line_UNGA; M_SpecialAssistants; SES-O_SWO-Only
Sent: Thu Sep 24 01:14:47 2009
Subject: FW: They're torturing me, Zelaya claims

From: Rathod, Rona R
Sent: Thursday, September 24, 2009 1:05 AM
To: Task Force Honduras
Cc: SES-O_Shift-I
Subject: They're torturing me, Zelaya claims

BY FRANCES ROBLES
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It's been 89 days since Manuel Zelaya was booted from power. He's sleeping on chairs, and he claims his throat is sore from toxic gases and "Israeli mercenaries" are torturing him with high-frequency radiation.

"We are being threatened with death," he said in an interview with The Miami Herald, adding that mercenaries were likely to storm the embassy where he has been holed up since Monday and assassinate him.

"I prefer to march on my feet than to live on my knees before a military dictatorship," Zelaya said in a series of back-to-back interviews.

Zelaya was deposed at gunpoint on June 28 and slipped back into his country on Monday, just two days before he was scheduled to speak before the United Nations. He sought refuge at the Brazilian Embassy, where Zelaya said he is being subjected to toxic gases and radiation that alter his physical and mental state.

Witnesses said that for a short time Tuesday morning, soldiers used a device that looked like a large satellite dish to emit a loud shrill noise.

Honduran police spokesman Orlin Cerrato said he knew nothing of any radiation devices being used against the former president.

"He says there are mercenaries against him? Using some kind of apparatus?" Cerrato said. "No, no, no, no. Sincerely: no. The only elements surrounding that embassy are police and military, and they have no such apparatus."

Police responded to reports of looting throughout the city Tuesday night. Civil disturbances subsided Wednesday afternoon, when a crush of people rushed grocery stores and gas stations in the capital.

Israeli government sources in Miami said they could not confirm the presence of any "Israelis mercenaries" in Honduras.

Zelaya, 56, is at the embassy with his family and other supporters, without a change of clothes or toothpaste. The power and water were turned back on, and the U.N. brought in some food. Photos showed Zelaya, his trademark cowboy hat across his face, napping on a few chairs he had pushed together.

"Look at the shape he's in -- sleeping on chairs," de facto President Roberto Micheletti told a local TV news station.

Micheletti took Zelaya's place after the military, executing a Supreme Court arrest warrant, burst into Zelaya's house and forced him into exile. The country's military, congress, Supreme Court and economic leaders have backed the ouster, arguing that Zelaya was bent on conducting an illegal plebiscite that they feared would ultimately lead to his reelection.

Micheletti said he was prepared to meet with Zelaya and a delegation from the Organization of American States, but only to discuss one topic: November elections.

On Wednesday, the U.N. cut off all technical aid that would have supported and given credibility to that presidential race. Conditions do not exist for credible elections, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said.

"I proposed dialogue, and they answered with bullets, bombs, a state of siege and by closing the airport," Zelaya said.

Zelaya told The Herald that Washington should be taking a stronger stance against the elite economic interests that "financed and benefited" from the coup that ousted him three months ago.

If President Barack Obama hit Honduras with commercial sanctions or suspended free-trade agreements, the coup "would last just five minutes."

The Obama administration suspended economic aid to Honduras and withdrew the visas of members of the current administration.

About 75 percent of Honduras' commerce depends on the United States, Zelaya said. And because powerful economic forces were behind Zelaya's ouster, Obama should hit those forces where it hurts most, Zelaya said.

"I have told this to Obama, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to the U.S. Embassy here and anyone else who will listen," Zelaya said. "They know how to act. Until now, they have been very prudent."

With Micheletti showing a new willingness to talk with the OAS, and the U.N. Security Council set to meet to discuss the embassy situation soon, it isn't the moment for more penalties, the U.S. State Department said.

“Right now, when there are openings for dialogue, is not the time to announce new sanctions,” a State Department official said.

Dates for the OAS visit, which could include emissaries from 10 countries, are being worked out, the official said.

Spokesman Ian Kelly said the U.N. Security Council meeting came at the request of the Brazilian government. No date has been set for the meeting.

“In general, we continue to work with our partners in the U.N. and the OAS to come up with means to promote a dialogue and defuse the tensions, of course with the ultimate goal of resolving the crisis,” State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said at a media briefing in Washington. “And we’re continuing our consultations with our partners in the region, and enlisting wherever we can their assistance in this process.”

The U.S. Embassy here spent the day denying rumors that Zelaya planned to move to American grounds. The rumor may have started because U.S. Embassy vehicles were used to evacuate Zelaya supporters who left the Brazilian Embassy willingly Tuesday.

“The embassy has been turned into a bunker for Zelaya,” Assistant Foreign Minister Martha Lorena Alvarado de Casco told The Herald. “He’s turned it into his headquarters, and he is using it to call for insurrection.”

Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim told CNN en Español that his government asked Zelaya to tone down his rhetoric while he remains an embassy guest.

“The word ‘death’ should not even be mentioned,” he said.

Rioting broke out in various parts of the capital Tuesday night, and lines hundreds deep formed at supermarkets when desperate shoppers scrambled to buy food after a round-the-clock curfew was briefly lifted.

“I have no food in my house,” said Patti Vásquez, a housewife who, after two hours, still had not reached the front doors of a supermarket in an upscale shopping mall. “I need to get milk and juice and eggs.”

Zelaya says he has no plans to leave the embassy anytime soon.

“I am the president the people of Honduras chose,” Zelaya said. “A country can’t have two presidents -- just one.”

Miami Herald staff writer Jim Wyss and special correspondent Stewart Stogel contributed to this report.