

## **Q&A: Political crisis in Honduras** 13 July 2011



Mr Zelaya (R) and Mr Lobo agreed a deal to try to end the crisis

**In June 2009, Honduras was thrown into political crisis when President Manuel Zelaya was sent into exile amid a power struggle over his plans for constitutional change.**

The Central American nation was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) and many countries cut ties.

On 28 May 2011, Mr Zelaya returned to Honduras, following an agreement with current President Porfirio Lobo.

In July 2011, a commission set up to investigate the events of 2009 concluded that it was a coup but that Mr Zelaya's actions helped precipitate the crisis.

### **What happened in June 2009?**

At dawn on 28 June, between 200 and 300 troops came to Mr Zelaya's home, and, in his own words, told him to surrender or they would shoot him.

He was driven to the airport and put on a flight to Costa Rica. Later the same day, the speaker of Congress, Roberto

Micheletti, constitutionally second-in-line to the presidency, was sworn in as interim leader.

### **What led to this?**

Mr Zelaya planned to hold a non-binding public consultation on 28 June to ask people whether they supported moves to change the constitution.

The Supreme Court ruled that the consultation was illegal and ordered him to cancel it but he refused.

His critics said he wanted to remove the one-term limit on serving as president, so paving the way for his possible re-election.

Mr Zelaya repeatedly denied this.

### **Was his removal a surprise?**

Tension had been brewing in Honduras in the months leading up to Mr Zelaya's removal. He sacked the head of the armed forces, who refused to give logistical support for the 28 June vote. The Supreme Court overruled him, saying the army chief should be reinstated.

When Mr Zelaya insisted the consultation would go ahead, Congress voted to remove him for what it called "repeated violations of the constitution and the law", and the Supreme Court said it had ordered the president to be removed from office to protect law and order.

### **Why were relations between the president and the other institutions so strained?**

Honduras is a poor country beset by corruption, with a huge wealth gap and widespread gang violence. However, it had been politically stable since the 1980s.

Mr Zelaya, who came to office in 2006, had been moving the country steadily leftwards, enjoying the support of Venezuelan

President Hugo Chavez and other left-wing leaders in the region.

This appears to have alarmed certain sectors in Honduras.

### **What happened after Mr Zelaya was ousted?**

In Honduras, there were demonstrations for and against him. Mr Zelaya tried twice to return before he managed to get back to the capital, Tegucigalpa, and take refuge in the Brazilian embassy.

Internationally, condemnation was swift and the OAS expelled the country.

The US stressed that Mr Zelaya was the democratically elected president and cut non-humanitarian aid. But the Obama administration also called for dialogue to resolve the crisis peacefully.

### **What happened after Porfirio Lobo won the November 2009 election?**

Several nations, including Brazil, refused to recognise the result. The US, however, accepted the outcome, arguing the poll had been scheduled long before Mr Zelaya was ousted.

Mr Lobo signed an agreement with President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic to give Mr Zelaya safe passage to leave Honduras and fly there.

The Supreme Court cleared military commanders of abusing their power when they ordered their troops to send Mr Zelaya into exile.

Congress also voted to approve an amnesty for all those involved in the crisis, including the military and Mr Zelaya, who had faced charges of treason.

### **Why did Mr Zelaya return home in May 2011?**

There were two key developments. Firstly, the Honduran courts dropped corruption charges and an arrest warrant against Mr Zelaya. Then Mr Zelaya and Mr Lobo signed a deal negotiated by Colombia and Venezuela allowing him to return.

### **What were the key findings of the Honduras Truth and Reconciliation Commission?**

It concluded that Mr Zelaya's removal from office was a coup against the executive. It also said that Mr Zelaya violated "several laws, thereby exacerbating tensions with the Supreme Court and Congress. Both sides bore responsibility for the crisis, the commission said.

### **So is the long-standing crisis over?**

In some ways yes. Mr Zelaya has returned and Honduras is being readmitted to the international fold.

However, the country went through nearly two years of upheaval.

There were numerous reports of abuses at the height of the crisis. Killings and intimidation have continued, according to Human Rights Watch, **which documented 18 killings of journalists, opponents of the coup and human rights activists in 2010.**

While some may have been victims of common crime, HRW said several victims were likely to have been targeted because of their political views.

On a wider level, Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

It also has one of the highest murder rates in the world, put at 66 per 100,000, and is facing an increasing challenge from the presence of Mexican drug gangs on its territory.