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CRS Report for Congress

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Synopsis

On June 28, 2009, the Honduran military detained President Manuel Zelaya and flew him to exile in Costa Rica, ending 27 years of uninterrupted democratic, constitutional governance. Honduran governmental institutions had become increasingly polarized in the preceding months as a result of ZelayaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s intention to hold a non-binding referendum and eventually amend the constitution. After the ouster, the Honduran Supreme Court asserted that an arrest warrant had been issued for Zelaya as a result of his noncompliance with judicial decisions that had declared the non-binding referendum unconstitutional. However, the militaryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s actions halted the judicial process before a trial could be held. The Honduran National Congress then adopted a resolution to replace Zelaya with the President of Congress, Roberto Micheletti.Micheletti insisted that he took power through a Ã¢â ¬Å“constitutional successionÃ¢â ¬Â• throughout the seven months between ZelayaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s forced removal and the inauguration of new President Porfirio Ã¢â ¬Å“PepeÃ¢â ¬Â• Lobo Sosa. He also maintained tight control of Honduran society, severely restricting political activity that opposed his government. President Lobo, who won a November 2009 election that had been scheduled prior to the ouster, took office on January 27, 2010. Some Hondurans declared the election illegitimate, however, as a result of the conditions in the country at the time it was held. The political crisis has left Lobo with a number of challenges, including considerable domestic political polarization, a lack of international recognition, and a faltering economy.The United States and the rest of the international community universally condemned ZelayaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s ouster. They leveled a series of diplomatic and economic sanctions against the Micheletti government and pushed for a negotiated agreement to end the crisis. Although an accord was signed roughly one month before the November 2009 election, it quickly fell apart. The unity of the international community crumbled along with the agreement, as some countriesÃ¢â ¬â •such as the United StatesÃ¢â ¬â •agreed to recognize the results of the election despite Zelaya never being restored to office, while others refused to do so.Members demonstrated considerable interest in the Honduran political crisis during the first session of the 111th Congress. A number of resolutions were introduced regarding the situation. On July 8, 2009, H.Res. 619 (Mack) and H.Res. 620 (Serrano) were introduced in the House. H.Res. 619 condemned Zelaya for his Ã¢â ¬Å“unconstitutional and illegalÃ¢â ¬Â• actions and called for a peaceful resolution. H.Res. 620 called upon the Micheletti government to end its Ã¢â ¬Å“illegal seizure of power.Ã¢â ¬Â• On July 10, 2009, H.Res. 630 (Delahunt) was introduced in the House. It condemned the Ã¢â ¬Å“coup dÃ¢â ¬â„¢Ã©tatÃ¢â ¬Â• in Honduras; refused to recognize the Micheletti government; urged the Obama Administration to suspend non-humanitarian aid; and called for international observation of

the November 2009 elections. On September 17, 2009, H.Res. 749 (Ros-Lehtinen) was introduced in the House. It called for the Secretary of State to work with Honduran authorities to ensure free and fair elections and for President Obama to recognize the November elections Ã¢â ¬Å“as an important step in the consolidation of democracy and rule of law in Honduras.Ã¢â ¬Â•This report examines the political crisis in Honduras, with specific focus on the events between June 2009 and January 2010. It concludes with the inauguration of President Lobo. For more information on the current political situation in Honduras, see CRS Report RL34027, Honduran- U.S. Relations.

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