

Honduras: Anti-Chavez ‘free speech’ warriors linked to coup

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The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) is well-known for its mission to expose the Venezuelan government of President Hugo Chavez as a threat to free speech “all over the continent”.

These brave free speech warriors made a big deal this year about how they “dared” to hold a meeting in the Venezuelan capital, “defying” the repression of Chavez’s dictatorial regime.

It turns out that the IAPA has found little to condemn in regards to the dictatorship that has installed itself by military force in Honduras.

This regime has closed many media outlets, threatened and detained journalists, suspended constitutional rights, imposed nation-wide curfews and expelled the broadcasting teams of Latin America-wide station Telesur and Venezuelan state TV channel VTV from Honduras at gunpoint.

While it “condemns” some of the attacks on freedom of speech, it has little to say about the coup regime itself.

This is because, for the IAPA, there was no coup.

Its July 14 statement said the democratically elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was simply “stood down” — not kidnapped and dumped in a different country by balaclava-clad soldiers.

And if anyone can recognise a dictatorship, it is the IAPA. After all, as it points out, the IAPA has been fighting off dictatorships “for a long time” — in the form of the Chavez administration.

Ironically, the only time in Venezuela that a TV channel was taken off air, constitutional rights suspended, and journalists arrested and assaulted since Chavez’s 1998 election was during the two days when he was removed from power in a short-lived coup in April 2002.

Rather than wait for the IAPA freedom fighters to save them, the Venezuelan people took to the streets, and together with most of the military, defeated the coup regime and restored Chavez to office.

So why are these free speech crusaders so soft on the coup regime in Honduras?

Probably because IAPA representatives in Honduras have been central to the coup.

For instance, Roberto Micheletti, who was installed by the coup as de facto president, is the owner of various companies, including the newspaper *La Tribuna*.

One of his associates at the newspaper is Edgardo Dumas Rodriguez, a Honduran representative to the IAPA.

Then there is Jorge Canahuati. Two of the most pro-coup newspapers are *La Prensa* and *El Heraldo*. Together, they control 80% of newspaper circulation.

Both are majority owned by Canahuati, also president of the IAPA international commission.

So it is no surprise that Dumas Rodriguez told Venezuelan newspaper *El Universal* on July 5 that “no military coup has occurred” in Honduras.

Not that he is unconcerned with democracy. Dumas Rodriguez said he had information of a lawsuit being filed against a threat to Honduran sovereignty — not his friend and military-installed dictator Micheletti, but Chavez “for the crimes he has committed by intervening in the internal affairs of Honduras and for threatening to overthrow the existing government”!

For this free speech crusader, the real criminal is Chavez and not the coup plotters that overthrew an elected government and suspended all democratic rights — including free speech.

Asked why the IAPA was not criticising Honduran media outlets openly supporting a regime that crushes free speech, IAPA president Enrique Santos said on July 4 that while there may “possibly be newspapers that have been partisans of the change of government”, this was no reason for IAPA to “tell them what to think ... IAPA is not a monolithic organisation, where all partners have to have the same political criteria.”

Within the broad church that is IAPA, fascist coup plotters are more than welcome.

Keep this practice in mind next time the IAPA issues a blistering denunciation of the Venezuelan “dictatorship” — which has closed not one media outlet and where the large majority of the media are vehemently anti-government.

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