

Honduras political crisis



The situation


After more than 27 years of democratic rule, Honduras was thrown into political turmoil following the removal of President Manuel Zelaya by the military in the early hours of 28 June 2009. Zelaya's ousting and subsequent exile were sparked by his attempt to push forward with a controversial referendum which would have allowed him to change the constitution and extend his term in office. A few hours after the apparent coup, the Honduran congress speaker, Roberto Micheletti, was sworn in as interim president with the support of the legislature, the courts and the military.

These political changes led to substantial tension; pro- and anti-Zelaya protests were held in a number of towns and cities and some turned violent. The situation was particularly acute in the capital, Tegucigalpa. Violent confrontations were focused on the presidential palace and later the international airport, and riot police used teargas and water cannon to disperse hundreds of angry demonstrators. Due to the increased violence and uncertainty, red24 raised the political risk rating for Honduras and advised clients to defer travel to the country. Those who were in Honduras or planning to travel there were assisted by red24 in a number of ways.

red24's response


1. Proactive warning system

Our team of regional analysts tracked political developments in Honduras and notified red24 clients ahead of time that violence was possible.

 *Demonstrators gathered in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, yesterday, ahead of a controversial referendum to be held on 28 June.... Travellers are advised to exercise caution, monitor local developments and avoid all large public gatherings due to the potential for violent civil unrest.*


2. Crisis management planning

Once it was clear to our crisis management team that the security situation was deteriorating, a meeting was convened to determine a strategy to support clients in Honduras and those who planned to travel there.

 *red24 assistance in the Honduras crisis: red24's Crisis Response Management Centre is actively monitoring developments in Honduras. We currently have security consultants on the ground who are aiding clients in the country. Should you require assistance, please do not hesitate to contact red24.*

3. Travel and security alerts – Email and SMS (text) notification

Email and SMS alerts were sent to subscribers whenever there was a significant security development in Honduras. Using this information, clients could avoid potentially dangerous areas and follow the advice provided to keep safe.

 *Honduras: Thousands of people have gathered at Toncontin International Airport, situated just outside the capital, Tegucigalpa, ahead of ousted president Zelaya's expected arrival. Reports suggest he will be landing at the airport between 18:00 and 21:00 GMT on 5 July. All activities at the airport have reportedly been suspended. Non-essential travel to the country should be avoided due to current political tensions. Travellers already in the country are advised to exercise extreme caution at this time and to avoid the affected areas and large gatherings due to the potential for violent civil unrest.*

4. red24 Daily News

Clients and their families (or employees) were also kept abreast of security-related events and developments in Honduras via our Daily News product. Subscribers to the Daily News receive a brief round-up of regional security-related news each business day.



Several injured in Honduras protests

Several people were injured yesterday after supporters of ousted president Manuel Zelaya clashed with security forces in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa....

5. Ongoing security analysis

An up-to-date situation report was compiled and made available on the red24 website. Clients in Honduras were also sent detailed reports that were specific to their itinerary and needs.



In an effort to reclaim his position in the country, Zelaya attempted to enter Honduras on 5 July. His return was blocked by the local authorities who shut down Toncontin International Airport in the capital, Tegucigalpa, and instructed authorities at other Honduran international airports, including in San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba and Roatan Island, not to allow the plane to land. Zelaya's plane was forced to divert to nearby El Salvador. Thousands of pro-Zelaya supporters had gathered at Toncontin airport on 5 July to welcome the ousted president home, when approximately 100 youths began tearing down a barricade between the crowd and security forces. The security forces responded with teargas and baton charges, resulting in at least two deaths and numerous injuries. The violence is the most serious since the arrest of Zelaya on 28 June.

6. Reactive crisis management

red24's team of security specialists assisted three different groups stranded in Honduras during the crisis.

Case study 1

red24 was contacted by an American client that had seven employees located in Centro Shalom El-Hatillo, Honduras, 45 minutes north of the capital, Tegucigalpa. The employees were concerned for their safety and wanted to leave Honduras as soon as possible; however, they had only been able to book transport for a week later. We were able to arrange new flights that left in 48 hours and, given the volatile nature of the situation, we deployed a consultant to remain with the group to ensure their safety. In order to be as close to the airport as possible until the flight departed, the consultant moved the group to a nearby hotel.

Information was then received which confirmed that ousted president Manuel Zelaya was scheduled to return to the country on the same day as the group's planned departure. This was likely to increase tensions in Honduras and even lead to an escalation in violence. We therefore came up with a back-up plan to drive the group across the border to a place of safety, should this be necessary. In addition, daily situational briefs were provided to both the client in America and the employees in Honduras. All members were also signed up to receive red24 alerts.

On the day of the flight, the risks were assessed and it was decided that the team would be able to reach the airport

safely. We travel-tracked our consultant and the employees en route to Toncontin airport. Everyone arrived safely at the airport and was able to return to America.

Case study 2

red24 remotely assisted another group that was based in Copan, Honduras. They were in a safe location but did not want to travel to Tegucigalpa to catch their flight out of the country, as they were concerned about the risk of violence and roadblocks along the route to the airport. Our team of specialists was able to arrange for them to travel by land across the border into Guatemala and to fly home from there. They were travel-tracked to the airport and all departed safely.

Case study 3

red24 was contacted by an insurance provider who had policy holders in Honduras and was concerned for their safety. The group consisted of 21 missionaries volunteering in Trujillo, Honduras. Given the volatility of the situation in Honduras at the time, it was decided that the group should be evacuated. A consultant escorted the group to a hotel near the airport in Tegucigalpa to await their flight. However, the situation deteriorated overnight and some flights from the capital were cancelled. In addition, the protests near the airport escalated, and numerous injuries and deaths were reported. As a result, the decision was taken to escort the group by land across the border into El Salvador.

A vehicle was sent in advance to survey the road quality and the security situation en route. Additional vehicles and consultants were also brought on board to ensure the safety of such a large group. While en route, the consultants liaised with the United Nations to ensure that customs and border control would allow safe passage to El Salvador. This was done successfully and just in time – once across the border, the team was informed that the Honduran army had subsequently taken control of that particular border crossing. The team then travelled to a local airport and was able to fly back to the United States safely.

Advice for those in Honduras at the time included:

- Keep abreast of local news or arrange for red24 to contact you regularly with updates.
- Remain indoors where possible.
- Do not be afraid to leave your environment if you feel uncomfortable or suspicious.
- Avoid politically motivated gatherings.
- Prepare a grab bag.
- If you hear gunfire or explosions outside, stay away from the windows.