

# The Destabilization of Paraguay: A Coup to the Democratic Process

By [Javiera Manuela Rulli](#) and [Reto Sonderegger](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, June 26, 2012

26 June 2012

English translation Lilian Joensen, Grupo de Reflexión Rural)

Friday night June 22, 2012

*Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo has just been removed from office by Congress through political impeachment, an express trial that lasted only 24 hours. This manoeuvre must be seen as a coup to the democratic process started in 2008. Social movements are protesting in front of Congress as well as in various parts of the country.*

This plot by the major Paraguayan political parties has to be interpreted as the last step of a process of political destabilization in the country started with the massacre of Curuguaty last June 15th.

The facts from Curuguaty seem to show a high-level plot and operation by the opposition. The massacre that occurred in a camp of the landless peasants during a police operation left a toll of 17 dead, 11 peasants and 6 police officers, and 80 wounded. There are 54 people arrested facing very serious charges.

We will try to explain now the chain of events that have shaken the country from the Curuguaty deaths to Lugo's overthrow today.

## Background to the Curuguaty events

The Canindeyú department in the northeast part of Paraguay is a border region with Brazil with a high concentration of land in the hands of soy agribusinesses, marijuana cultivation and drugs and weapons smuggling.

Blas N. Riquelme is one of the richest people in the country, former Colorado Senator, large landowner with supermarket chains and many other food companies. Blas N. Riquelme was fraudulently given 50 thousand hectares of land, which were meant for poor peasants of the agrarian reform, during the Stroessner Dictatorship in 1969. This case of ill-gotten land was reported in the Report of the Truth and Justice Commission in 2008.

Since the fall of the Dictatorship in 1989, local peasants have been fighting to get these lands back. Two months ago a group of 60 landless peasants occupied two thousand hectares of the lands in an area called Marina Cue. These people did not belong to any specific peasant organization.

## The Curuguaty massacre

On Friday June 15, two groups of law enforcement officers, the GEO Special forces and the police, entered Marina Cue with only a search warrant. The first group went to the camp to talk with the peasants. The police group suspiciously positioned itself behind. Surprisingly, in a confused event, long distance shots were fired. The first persons to fall were the chief and the deputy chief of the GEO forces.

During the ensuing battle, helicopters with reinforcements from the Special Operations Forces arrived and dispersed the peasants with flamethrowers and tear gas. The result of the battle was 11 peasants and 6 policemen dead.

In the first 24 hours after these events, police and soldiers surrounded and closed the area not letting anybody in. A first group of human rights advocates from Asuncion was detained by the police for several hours. In the Capital peasant leaders remained on alert, and in Curuguaty locals complained of law enforcement hunting down all survivors of the gunfight and any peasant activists in the area. Police burned the camp, erasing all evidence. During this period no prosecutors entered the area to observe what happened and collect evidence. It is assumed that during this time the police removed dead bodies and destroyed any proof.

Injured people, who went to health centers, were detained and placed in isolation cells in police stations. Some relatives and local people, who went to the health centers or to the police stations in order to get information on the victims, were also arrested. Lawyers and human rights organizations were not allowed access.

On Saturday, 16 family members, activists and media members crossed the police cordon and entered the peasant camp to search for survivors and wounded who might still be hiding. Indigenous people from the area helped with the search operation. Throughout the weekend there was heavy rain which made the operation almost impossible; regardless, they found 2 peasant bodies. According to information provided by human rights and peasant organizations: "these bodies were moved from where they were killed because there was no blood in the vicinity. They were also dressed as alleged guerilla-snipers and showed signs of recent torture and execution, with fresh blood and bullet wounds in the head and neck, and the weapons that are beside them are shotguns that could not have been used, since they are short distance weapons that shoot pellets, that do not match the long-distance wounds of the dead policemen."

The search committee found traces of weapons of war, weapons which are not used by peasants. The suspicion is that, besides the landless peasant group, there was another infiltrated group which ambushed and killed the police. Peasant witnesses confirm this information, reporting that another group of men had camped nearby during the previous days, carrying heavy weapons and that these were the shooters. Their actions do not correspond to the methods used by peasants in their struggle for land. Questions arise about who these people might be: Could they be thugs tied to Blas Riquelme, border mafia, paramilitaries, or guerrillas? What seems to be clear is that they are not among those killed, detained or charged. Much of the evidence that could have helped identify them has also been eliminated.

Meanwhile, the prosecution presents charges against 54 people. Most are members of peasant organizations and relatives of the deceased who were not in the peasant camp at the time of the massacre. The charges are every serious, such as aggravated homicide and intentional murder, in addition to charges of invasion of private property, which carry

sentences of up to 30 years in prison.

Only 12 people are currently arrested and charged, several of them are in jail. There are several minors, including a 16-year-old wounded girl and her infant child. The detainees have signs of torture, and several were arrested when they went to the police inquiring on friends and relatives. The situation of helplessness and defenselessness makes the locals dare not leave their homes. There is a non-declared state of siege in Curuguaty.

### **The prisoners are kidnapped by the police**

On Sunday June 17th, Presidential Cabinet Secretary Miguel Angel Lopez Perito and Health Minister Esperanza Martinez went to Curuguaty to personally evaluate the matter. Previously, the police moved the detainees out of the police stations to other detention centers, so that the two Ministers could not see them. The detainees were literally kidnapped by the police.

Assembly meetings are held between civil servants (funcionarios?), family and social movements where they present their demands, which are:

1. End to the persecution and release of all prisoners;
2. Compensation for the families of the victims,
3. Recovery of ill-gotten lands of Marina Cue for the creation of a model peasant settlement

At a conference on June 19th, Emilio Camacho, auditor of the Paraguayan Land Institute (INDERT), confirmed that Blas Riquelme did not have the title to the 2,000 hectares; the ongoing ownership trial is still unresolved. This makes evident the irregularity and partiality (to landed interests) of the Paraguayan judiciary system: search warrants and eviction orders are signed without land titles.

### **Lugo hands over the repressive apparatus to the Colorados**

Because of what happened in Curuguaty, Lugo replaced Interior Minister Carlos Filizzola naming as his replacement the former Attorney General, Candia Amarilla. During his tenure as State Prosecutor, Amarilla was characterized by his persecution and criminalization of social sectors.

Amarilla was trained in Colombia and is one of the promoters of the implementation of Plan Colombia in Paraguay. He is also a member of the Colorado Party. To make matters worse, Lugo replaced the National Director of Police and put in his place the chief who was in charge of the police operation in Curuguaty, the Commissioner Moran Arnaldo Sanabria. Both officials are publicly rejected by the social movements and several political sectors. Amarilla announced the end of the "protocol" in eviction operations, implemented by the previous Minister, consisting of dialogue with civil society organizations prior to operations. Amarilla states that his mandate will be the enforcement of the law with a strong arm.

With these two appointments, Lugo hands over the repressive apparatus into the hands of the Colorado Party. It is evident that he negotiated these nominations to avoid political impeachment. However, by doing this, he got the Liberal Party against him, which in turn negotiated with the Colorado Party and the Oviedistas to carry out the political impeachment.

On Thursday June 21st, a popular mobilization was called in front of the lands of Marina Cue. Over a thousand people were present with the objective of re-occupying the property until the detained people are freed and the land of Marine Cue returned to its rightful owners, landless peasants.

That same morning, the Colorado and Liberal parties suddenly agreed with the Oviedistas to impeach Lugo. In a few hours the impeachment process was set in motion by both houses, giving the president two hours on Friday to defend himself.

On Thursday, social movements called for mass mobilization in front of the Congress. Thursday night, 2000 people slept in the square in front of the Congress and people from all over the country started arriving in Asuncion. In several parts of the country, peasant organizations blocked roads.

On Friday afternoon, after an absurd and circus-like session in the Senate, Lugo is impeached. Paraguayan parliamentarians finally destroyed the democratization process that started with the electoral victory of Lugo. Upon hearing the verdict the first wave of repression started in the square outside the Congress. It marks only the beginning of what is being orchestrated against social movements and especially the peasant movement.

International solidarity can play a crucial role in the defense of Human Rights of the popular sectors in Paraguay. We call on all social organizations to be on alert to the situation in this country.

The original source of this article is Global Research

Copyright © [Javiera Manuela Rulli](#) and [Reto Sonderegger](#), Global Research, 2012

---

**[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)**

**[Become a Member of Global Research](#)**

Articles by: [Javiera Manuela Rulli](#) and [Reto Sonderegger](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)