

# *Latin American Leaders Condemn Persecution of ex- Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo*

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Montevideo, December 22 (RHC)-- Political leaders from across Latin America and the Caribbean have denounced attempts to block Paraguayan "Bishop of the Poor" from running for president in 2018.

The largest forum of political parties in the region, COPPPAL, has denounced a ruling preventing ousted Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo from running in the next election as part of the so-called Plan Atlanta, a campaign by Latin America's resurgent right wing targeting democratically elected leftist leaders.

"The restoration of conservative forces, through parliamentary coups, always preceded by media harassment, as was also the case with Fernando Lugo and Manuel Zelaya, has had its successes, but will not succeed because our peoples will resist the dismantling of their victories," said the statement, signed by COPPPAL President Manolo Pichardo of the Dominican.

In a ruling last week Paraguay's right-wing dominated election tribunal, TSJE, declared that Lugo, who was ousted in what many describe as a parliamentary coup in 2012 which signaled the first of many legalistic attacks on democratically elected left-wing governments, is ineligible to run for President in 2018.

COPPPAL -- made up of left-leaning political parties in 29 countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean -- said that the ruling was part of a "political prosecution" of the former Roman Catholic "Bishop of the poor" and popular progressive president, who currently sits as a senator.

Lugo and legal representative of the left-wing coalition Guasu Front called the FSJE ruling "illegal" saying that only the Supreme Court can rule on the constitutionality of his candidacy.

"We always said that it will be the Court that in the end will have the final say on whether our candidature is constitutional," said Lugo in a statement released after the ruling.

The ruling comes months after current Paraguayan president, right-wing tobacco mogul Horacio Cartes of the Colorado Party, announced his intention to change the constitution in order to allow him to run again in 2018.

In announcing his bid for the Presidency in 2018 Lugo said: "The Front Guasu entered the political arena to stay, we did not come to do a fashion show or exhibitionism in Paraguayan politics, we came to stay and transform our history."

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