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I have returned, says ousted President

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Tegucigalpa Manuel Zelaya, the ousted President, announced that he had returned to Honduras almost three months after he was toppled in a coup, but the country's de facto ruler denied that he had arrived.

"I am here in Tegucigalpa. I am here for the restoration of democracy, to call for dialogue," Mr Zelaya told the Honduran Canal 36 television network. An aide said that Mr Zelaya, a close ally of Venezuela's socialist President Chávez, was in a UN building in Tegucigalpa, the capital.

Roberto Micheletti, a bitter rival of Mr Zelaya who has run Honduras since the coup on June 28, denied that the former President had returned, saying that he was still in exile in neighbouring Nicaragua.

The new rulers of Honduras, led by Mr Micheletti, have vowed to arrest Mr Zelaya if he returns to the Central American country.

Soldiers toppled Mr Zelaya and sent him into exile after he upset conservative opponents, who accused him of wanting to change the Constitution to allow presidents to seek re-election. The Honduran Supreme Court had ordered Mr Zelaya's arrest and Congress backed the new Government, but the coup was condemned by the US.

But Juan Carlos Hidalgo, project coordinator for Latin America at the libertarian Cato Institute, said Zelaya should expect to be jailed.

"The moment that his location is discovered or that he publicly comes out of the trees where he's hiding, he's going to be arrested for sure," he said. (Reuters)

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