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Mexican challenger plans own government, capital

By Mark Stevenson

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MEXICO CITY — Andrés Manuel López Obrador has given up efforts to have himself declared winner of Mexico's presidential race, but he still plans a parallel government to cater to the poor and keep alive his fight against the president-elect, a party spokesman said Friday.

Since Mexico's top electoral court rejected López Obrador's allegations of widespread fraud in the July 2 vote, he has focused on a convention Sept. 16 — Mexico's Independence Day — at which supporters will declare him leader of a resistance government.

The plan is to block President-elect Felipe Calderón at every step, including his Dec. 1 inauguration.

"We are not going to let him take office," said Gerardo Fernandez, the spokesman for López Obrador's Democratic Revolution Party, or PRD. "I don't see the usurper government ... lasting for six years."

Fernandez said the parallel government will fight for recognition in international forums and launch street protests against free trade reforms and privatization of government enterprises.

It also will set up a still-unspecified capital, form a Cabinet and set policy.

Some followers have urged López Obrador to set up a treasury and have followers pay taxes to him. But Fernandez said there were no plans to do that, apparently to avoid legal problems.

López Obrador plans his own inauguration, complete with a presidential sash presented by his supporters. He has warned followers that such moves may draw ridicule, telling them: "They will make fun of us."

He also has drawn criticism for comparing himself to national heroes such as Benito Juárez, who led a parallel government during the 1862-67 French invasion.

Though the French-backed Emperor Maximilian controlled the country, Juárez maintained a wandering resistance government until his forces were able to expel the invaders.

Many see the comparison as ridiculous because Calderón won what most observers called a fair election.

"A crazy man"

"What are we supposed to do with a crazy man who wants the whole country to capitulate to his whims?" wrote columnist Enrique Canales in the newspaper El Universal.

Others think it's not so crazy. López Obrador's convention is modeled on similar events convened near the end of the 1910-17 Revolution to end the chaos and create a government and a constitution.

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